

Spanish Echoes of The New Typography

Andreu Balus

Spanish Avant-Garde in Context

Spain experienced a period of social and political changes during the first decades of the 20th century. After the colonial crisis caused by the Spanish-American War and the consequent loss of Cuba in 1898, Spain was involved in an ideological struggle between those who intended to recover the prestige of the extinguished Spanish “empire”, and those who sought to build a national consciousness from a more modern and liberal perspective in the manner of other European nations. Different forms of government would alternate throughout the first half of the 20th century: the monarchy of King Alfonso XIII, the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, the proclamation of the Second Republic, the Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship of General Franco.

In the artistic field, this was manifested in a debate between the traditionalists and the artists who embraced the new artistic movements from Europe. *Modernismo* was a local style, framed within the aesthetics of European Art Nouveau, which had a huge degree of acceptance by the flourishing bourgeoisie, especially in Catalonia, and covered all artistic areas, from fine arts and crafts practices to emerging commercial graphic art.

In Spain, although away from many currents of European intellectual life, the artistic avant-garde had its echo or equivalence. The neutrality of Spain in World War I favoured the arrival of artists such as Francis Picabia, Serge Charchoune, Arthur Cravan, Sonia and Robert Delaunay among others, who together with local artists such as Picasso, Dalí, Miró, Joan Salvat-Papasseit, Ramón Gómez de la Serna and Luis Buñuel contributed to the introduction of the new ideas of the avant-garde movements. These included Dadaism, Futurism, Cubism, Constructivism and Surrealism, in many different aesthetic forms. The tenets of the avant-garde were disseminated through the publication of magazines and literary meetings organised in cafes. Rather than an avant-garde movement, there were independent artists who were not necessarily connected, but embraced these new aesthetic ideas.

With the establishment of the Second Republic in 1931, intellectuals and artists took a more engaged political position. A debate opened about the role of the artist within a society in full transformation. The Second Republic meant a transformation and modernisation of the Spanish institutions, and Catalonia recovered its self-government. The ideas of modernity fit well in that moment of change within the country. Thus, many artists embraced and spread those ideas as an attitude in front of the nostalgic past – monarchy and dictatorship – in favour of the construction of a “New Spain”. Nevertheless, political instability caused this enthusiasm to

be short-lived: the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) put an end to these airs of modernity and aesthetic freedom.

Modern Ideas in Typography

The establishment of the Republic encouraged the spread of new ideas in Spain. Some intellectuals and artists believed that the ideas of the avant-garde movements could modernise what they considered a backward country compared to other European nations. This aim for modernity and transformation was particularly reflected in architecture and design. The ability to influence design in all areas of the public sphere led to the appearance of a new aesthetics that had its origins in Central European trends.

According to the graphic designer Enric Satué, there were two main factors behind the qualitative change in graphic communication in Spain: first, the adoption of the new visual languages of typography and photography in the work of younger professionals, and second, the presence of foreign professionals fleeing from the rise of German nationalism.¹ Designers and commercial artists such as Josep Renau, Luis Seoane, Mauricio Amster, Mariano Rawicz, Enric Crous-Vidal, Karel Cerny, Pere Català Pic and Josep Sala, among others, contributed to the graphic aesthetics that shaped the modern image of Republican Spain.

Of course, the most radical aesthetic trends were not blindly accepted at the printing houses, but they influenced the general current of the moment and were widely accepted by a more socially committed audience. The use of photography, photo-collage, and photo-montage along with non-traditional typographic compositions, began to conquer the daily graphic language, from posters to book covers. But the most interesting examples can be found in advertising and magazine design. The idea of rationality was introduced into advertising by Pedro Prat Gaballí, who brought the scientific aspects of advertising through articles and books such as *Publicidad Racional* (Rational Advertising, 1934), which became one of the most rigorous advertising manuals published in Spain to date.

Magazine design assumed some of the aesthetic proposals derived from the New Typography principles. One of the most emblematic was *Gaceta de Arte*, an art magazine founded by Eduardo Westerdahl in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands, a province capital on the periphery of the country's important economic and cultural centres, in 1932. **(figs 109–110)** Westerdahl was one of the best internationally connected people on the Spanish scene of his time.² He had been stirred into publishing an art magazine by the cultural life of the cities he visited during a journey through Europe in the summer of 1931. On that trip, he visited the Bauhaus in Dessau. He also studied first-hand the works of the most outstanding artists and creators. Through the pages of the *Gaceta de Arte*, he disseminated the works of the main avant-garde artists and the ideas of Central European Rationalism. For instance, the header of the monthly magazine was designed using modular geometric elements that built up the letters of the magazine's name in the style of the Bauhaus stencil lettering system (Kombinations-Schrift) created by

Josef Albers in 1926–1928, and in issue 37, Westerdahl praised Jan Tschichold's latest book, *Typogra-*

¹ Satué 1997: 240.

² Bonet 2017: 169.



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fig. 109 Page 1 of the first issue of *Gaceta de Arte*, 1 February 1932.



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fig. 110 Leaflet inserted in the first issue of *Gaceta de Arte*, 1 February 1932. The leaflet translates the text published in Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold's *Foto-Auge* (Wedekind, 1929) about the use of lower case.

phische Gestaltung (1935), as well as reviewed Tschichold and Roh's *Foto-Auge* (Photo-Eye, 1929).³

Westerdahl's interest in finding a new aesthetics for his magazine made him follow the guidelines set by Tschichold in his *Die neue Typographie*, such as the use of sans serif typefaces exclusively used in lower case. The four pages were designed employing a tabloid newspaper layout, where the text was arranged in four justified columns and typeset in a Roman font for the main text and Futura for the titles. A printed note included in the first issue of the magazine and justifying the use of lower-case letters demonstrated the direct influence of Tschichold's ideas. Perhaps because of the confusion it created for readers, capital letters started to be added in the January–February issue 23 (1934). Nevertheless, titles would continue to be typeset in lower case Futura Bold only. From issue number 27 (June 1934), Futura would be used for the main text too.⁴

Another magazine that followed rational aesthetic guidelines was *A.C. Documentos de Actividad Contemporánea*, an architecture and urbanism magazine edited in Barcelona by the GATEPAC group (Grupo de Artistas y Técnicos Españoles para el Progreso de la Arquitectura Contemporánea, or Group of Spanish Artists and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture) between 1931 and 1937. (**fig. 111**) The magazine was directed by the architects José Luis Sert and Josep Torres Clavé and became a catalyst of Spanish and Catalan avant-garde architecture. Through articles on architecture, art, cinema, photography and design they intended to provide a unitary vision of the latest developments.

The layout was based on a squared format following a grid adapted to the same square. The text was laid out using a simple column grid with a fully justified composition and the exclusive use of Futura typeface in most issues. The overall design was inspired by that of *Das neue Frankfurt* magazine (1926–1933), used as a reference.

A.C. served as a platform for the expression and dissemination of

Rational modern architecture and other concerns of the GATEPAC group. It paid special attention to the socio-cultural dimension of architecture and urbanism. For Juan Manuel Bonet, *A.C.* magazine is one of the best examples of functionalist typography in Spain.⁵ In addition to the magazine and other activities, the GATEPAC group organised the visit to Spain of Le Corbusier, Gropius and Van Doesburg, giving direct access to the most innovative voices of European modernity.

Another publication worth highlighting was the cultural magazine *D'Ací i d'Allà*. Although it was a somewhat conventional magazine, where the aesthetics followed a more traditional model, from 1925 a new stage began characterised by the search

3 "Uno de los libros de mayor carácter positivo para la evolución de la tipografía moderna. Jan Tschichold, ayer en Alemania, hoy en Suiza, al frente de sus gabinetes, es la más firme garantía de un nuevo orden tipográfico. Tschichold trabajó junto a Franz Roh el libro *Foto-Auge*, en el que se recogían todos los últimos ensayos, que tenían que partir precisamente de manos de la afición, según ellos mismos reconocían. A base de aquella labor experimental (fotomontaje, fotogramas, negativos fotográficos, aplicaciones tipográficas, etc.), se iría formando una conciencia tipográfica que delataba un nuevo tiempo. Andaba mezclando en todo esto el movimiento constructivista alemán y las realizaciones se orientarían hacia una seguridad geométrica y una ordenación de ritmos matemáticos: como la misma arquitectura". *Gaceta de Arte* 1936.

4 The Futura typeface became characteristic of most magazines that sought new ways to master their content. The Neufville Type Foundry associated with the Bauersche Giesserei to distribute Futura in Spain shortly after its launch in Germany by the latter. It became very popular as a highlight of modern typography.

5 Bonet 2009: 157.

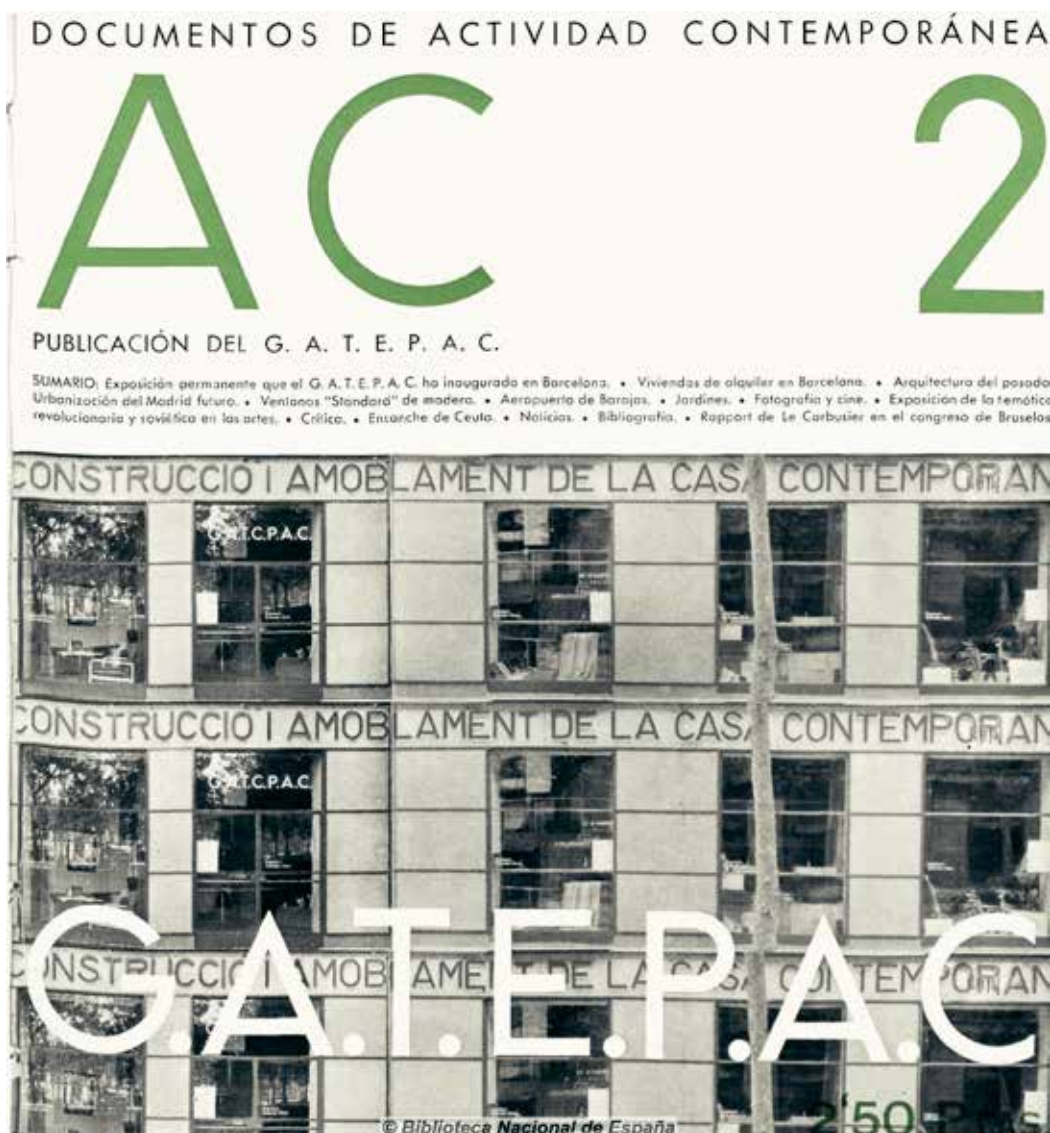


fig. 111

Cover of *A.C. Documentos de Actividad Contemporánea* (magazine published by GATEPAC, Grupo de Artistas y Técnicos Españoles para el Progreso de la Arquitectura Contemporánea), 2 (Second Quarter) 1931.

for modernity. **(figs. 112–113)** Carles Soldevila, responsible for the publication until its end in 1936, promoted a significant modernisation in contents, edition and aesthetics together with Josep Sala, who oversaw the art direction from 1932 to 1936. During this period, *D'Ací i d'Allà* became a milestone of printed modernity in Spain. It was one of the most important avant-garde publications of the first third of the 20th century. Although its contents were written in Catalan, the themes were highly topical and its design followed the latest trends of European currents. In its pages, creative photography was put into practice, and the use of sans serif typefaces and justified text compositions determined an austere and rational appearance of white space. The special Christmas issue, directly supervised by Joan Prats and Josep Lluís Sert and with the participation of Joan Miró (179, vol. 22, December 1934), dedicated to 20th century art, was the most representative publication of that period. The result of this joint effort was much more than a mere review of contemporary visual arts; it became a guide to the latest trends and avant-garde aesthetics, providing information on both the world of art and the latest advances in the field of housing and construction.

The case of *Gaceta de Arte* is not unique. The concerns of a small group of motivated young artists made possible the publication of another magazine using design to echo modernity in Lleida, a rural town in the middle of the countryside: the magazine *Art. Revista Internacional de les Arts* (Art. International Review of the Arts) was published under the artistic and literary direction of Enric Crous-Vidal, between 1933 and 1934. The ten issues of *Art* were another remarkable example of typographic modernity, which followed the model of the aforementioned magazines, although limited to the typographic possibilities of the local workshop where it was printed.

Other magazines that emerged during the period of the Spanish Republic that are worth mentioning, and followed a renovating aesthetics were *Brisas*, published between 1934 and 1936 in Palma de Mallorca; the film magazine *Nuestro Cinema*, printed in Seville, Barcelona and Madrid between 1932 and 1935, and edited in Paris; and the politically committed magazines *Octubre* and *Orto*. The latter, designed by Josep Renau and published in Valencia between 1932 and 1934, was a good example of a cultural magazine of the Spanish anarcho-sindicalist labour movement. This magazine hosted some of the most interesting debates in the libertarian culture of the time. Instead, *Octubre* was a more literary magazine founded by Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León and published in Madrid between 1933 and 1934. It was related to the Communist Party of Spain, although it did not depend directly on it.

The aesthetics that emerged and were in use during the period of the Second Republic culminated – and reached its end – in the Spanish Civil War, where the emergency of taking sides reinforced visual ideas. The war confrontation, with all its radicalism, is what allowed aesthetics to be one of the conduits to disseminate a conception of Spain opposed to that of the insurgent fascist side.

One of the later examples of modern typography that better represents the aesthetics of republican policy was *Nova Iberia*, published by the Comissariat de Propaganda de la Generalitat de Catalunya (Commission for Propaganda of the Government of Catalonia). Only four issues could be carefully edited between January and April 1937, showing how modern visual aesthetics was also used as political propaganda. **(fig. 114)**

Modern Type Design

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Spanish typographic industry was led by two major foundries: the Fundición Tipográfica Neufville, established in Barcelona and linked to the German Bauersche Giesserei in Frankfurt, and the Richard Gans Type Foundry, also of German origin and located in Madrid. Both type foundries, with offices all over the country, contributed a good part of the typographic and printing material distributed in Spain. Therefore, most typographic novelties came from abroad through these major foundries, before the smaller local companies followed the trends marked by the larger ones.

By the end of the 1920s, the José Irazo Type Foundry, a small foundry established in Barcelona, published, with the help of the printer Esteban Trochut, a series of geometric figures (circles, triangles, squared shapes, line blocks) – the so-called *Figuras geométricas*. (**figs. 115–116**) Those movable type shapes were units of auxiliary typographic material with a decorative purpose which had their references in similar material published by the Bauersche Giesserei, such as Futura Schmuck (1927). Those geometric shapes allowed, through their combination, the construction of geometric Decó style letters and decorative geometric elements that had become fashionable earlier in the decade. They became very popular among printers as they allowed them to solve small lettering jobs and construct letterforms from modular geometric shapes. The resulting geometric alphabets built up from these movable metal type blocks found their referents in Josef Albers' *Kombinations-Schrift* (Stencil Lettering System, 1926–1928) and Jan Tschichold's later *Transito* (1931) typeface. Those designs reduced the shapes of the alphabet to a combination of simple basic geometric modules. The search for simplicity and rationality ultimately led to the destruction of the established form of the letter to find its basic compositional and structural elements. (**fig. 117**)

Samples of works done with those geometric figures could be seen in the type specimens published by José Irazo Type Foundry and in the ADAM⁶ albums that Esteban Trochut, who was especially concerned about the dignity and quality of small printed matters, personally edited to demonstrate the use of type from a practical perspective. These ADAM albums – and later NOV-ADAM albums – published in Spanish and French, focused on the letter as the main decorative element, and were conceived, in the words of Trochut “for the study and rational modernisation of typographic art”.⁷ Although in these words we could see the spirit and influence of the New Typography, the ADAM and NOVADAM albums were not so much theoretical as practical manuals.

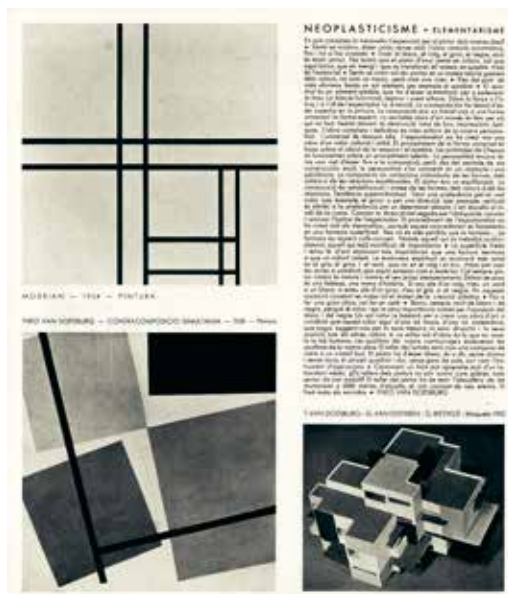
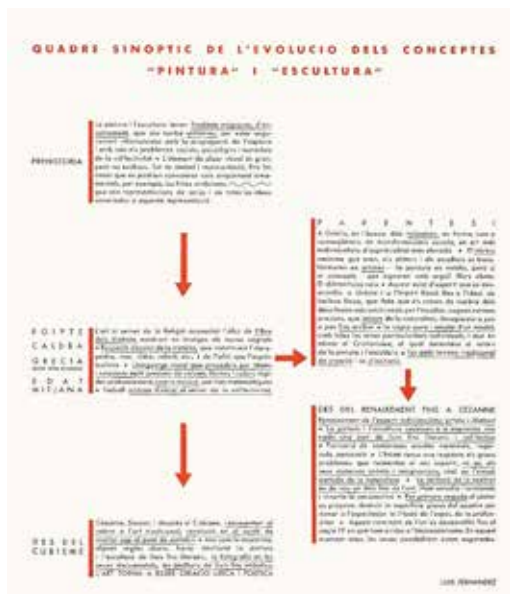
With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), the cultural wealth generated during the Republic years vanished, and the traditional and reactionary currents, relying on ideological confrontation, once again im-

posed a dark environment on Spanish culture. The forced exile brought artists and intellectuals to other countries, mainly to Latin America (Mexico, Argentina, Chile), where they would continue spreading their knowledge and design practices.⁸ However, despite the difficult times, other designers less committed po-

6 ADAM stands for Archivo Documentario de Arte Moderno (Documentary Archive of Modern Art).

7 Trochut 1942: 1.

8 A separate chapter would be necessary to deal with the repercussions of this Spanish exile in Latin America. It is important to emphasise the consequences of the presence of designers such as Mauricio Amster and Mariano Rawicz in Chile or Miguel Prieto and Josep Renau in Mexico.





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fig. 114 Page 40 of Nova Iberia, 3–4, 1937.

figs. 115–116 *Figuras geométricas*, type specimen brochure by Fundición Tipográfica José Iruzo S.A., type foundry, Barcelona, cover and inside pages.



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fig. 117

Promotional leaflet for Super Tipo Veloz, Fundición Tipográfica José Iranzo S.A., type foundry, Barcelona.

litically decided to remain within the country and swim against the current to bring light to a grey and bleak landscape. The typographers Ricard Giralt Miracle and Joan Trochut Blanchard were formed during the Second Republic and became the carriers of the renovation ideas in typography in these dark times of dictatorship.

Shortly after finishing the Civil War and faced with moments of great precariousness and economic scarcity, Joan Trochut Blanchard – Esteban Trochut's son – created Super Tipo Veloz, a typographic solution for the improvement of ordinary commercial printed matter. It was a modular system of combinable movable type produced by the aforementioned José Iranzo Type Foundry, to offer a quick and economical response to the difficulties of the small printer faced with the demands of modern printed material. But far from being just a useful tool for small printers, it could be considered one of the most interesting experiments in modern type design in the first half of the 20th century in Spain and a link to the typographical experiments of the previous decades. Although its commercial launch took place in 1942, Joan Trochut had already worked on his project previously. He might have considered those experimental typefaces derived from the Bauhaus years that were in use before the war. With the Super Tipo Veloz, he mixed functional architectural thinking with a personal taste for ornament.

The typeface was distributed in a series of different collections in two point-sizes (72- and 36-points sizes). It featured more than three hundred metal pieces, including calligraphic swashes, geometric shapes, and curly lines, which could be combined in countless manners. To facilitate the use and learning of this complex system, several albums were published – the NOVADAM albums – where the possibilities of Super Tipo Veloz were displayed through printed samples. In those albums, lavishly printed and spiral bound, Esteban and Joan Trochut wrote articles about the practice of the profession to stimulate and promote the creative use of typography among professionals. They were not just promoting their own designs, but offering creative solutions to printers and typographers.

The versatility of this modular system allowed printers to create lettering for logos and trademarks, and even create artwork without the limitations of lead type and at costs commensurate with their budgets. In the presentation of the second NOVADAM album, Esteban Trochut wrote:

Our readers will find numerous pages that catch their gaze and speak to their mind, without using drawings or photogravure. In all of them, the letter is dominant; and if the part occupied by the illustration is covered, the reader may be convinced that the set formed by the text forms a complete whole. The illustration is secondary. The typography remains the leading character of the pages. Also, we have been careful to get away from bare graphics and annoying ornamentation.⁹

9 “Nuestros lectores encontrarán, en consecuencia, y como respuesta a los deseos que nos han manifestado, numerosas páginas que atraen la vista y hablan a la mente, sin recurrir al dibujo y al fotograbado. En todas ellas, la letra queda como soberana, y se cubre la parte ocupada por la ilustración podrá convencerse el lector que el conjunto formado por el texto forma un todo completo. La ilustración es secundaria. La tipografía queda dueña y señora de las páginas. Hemos tenido, además, muy especial cuidado en alejarnos tanto de los grafismos desnudos como de las ornamentaciones molestas”. Trochut 1942: 5–6.

Through these procedures, they reached what they called “Total Typography”. A concept in which the functional aspects of typography are combined with the type as an element with expressive value,

without the use of another complementary element. It is the supremacy of the typeface over any other element on the page. Joan Trochut defined his Super Tipo Veloz typographic system as “a rigorously integral type”, and defended the use of typography as a decorative element within the page:

Today, however, in order to conform to the typographic doctrine, all ornaments are eliminated; even capital letters have been removed from titles, which are all composed in lower case. One merely takes note of these changes, without being able to explain what is gained by doing so, or simply where the elements to replace the eliminated ornamentation are to be found.¹⁰

Though Trochut's words contain some reproaches to Tschichold's principles, the rationality of the Super Tipo Veloz modular system nevertheless owes to modern typography. With his modular system, Joan Trochut tried to reconcile the ornament, as a characteristic of what he considered a peculiarity of the Mediterranean spirit, with those ideas of rationality that represented the air of change and transformation that the Spanish society longed for. This idea would be further developed in the 1950s, in the so-called *Grafía Latina* (La Graphie Latine) movement, which would face the Swiss International Style in type design.

As a Final Thought

Tschichold's theories were not translated into Spanish,¹¹ nor did they arrive directly. Rather, they were assumed in their practical and aesthetic aspects through the printed samples that came from abroad, or through professionals who had travelled and had contact with other European colleagues. According to Patricia Córdoba, “it was more a subsequent assimilation than an active participation in the development of this movement”.¹²

Some of the publications printed in Spain incorporated the elements of the New Typography as echoes in the distance, as a result of aesthetic trends, rather than as a conscious adoption of Tschichold's ideas. Only Eduardo Westerdahl at the *Gaceta de Arte* shows a direct influence of Tschichold's statements within its pages. Certainly, the renovating spirit that conforms to the contents of all these artistic, cultural and political magazines was accompanied by a graphic design that fulfilled a modernising function.

In the local printing workshops, more attached to traditional ty-

graphy, the radical use of lower case was not seen as a good practice. Nevertheless, the texts and printed samples published in Trochut's NOVADAM albums make us notice that they were aware of New Typography principles and that those ideas were spread among printers and graphic artists who were committed to their time.

The publishing projects that multiplied during the period of the

10 “Hoy, no obstante, para ser conforme con la doctrina tipográfica se suprimen todos los adornos; se ha llegado incluso a la supresión de las versales en títulos compuestos todos ellos en caja baja. No hacemos más que anotar esas destrucciones, sin poder explicarnos qué se ha ganado con ello o simplemente en dónde están los elementos que reemplazan a la ornamentación arrinconada”. *Ibid.*: 22.

11 Tschichold's *Die neue Typographie* was translated into Spanish for the first time and published by the publishing house Campgràfic in 2003 (Tschichold 2003).

12 Córdoba 2008: 81.

Second Republic, as well as during the Civil War, reflected the evolving of modern spirit through the design of their pages. Some might have imitated the graphic style of others. Perhaps the important thing was not to respond, consciously or unconsciously, to certain principles. The important thing is that modern typography was assimilated to meet the aesthetic needs of an era.

Digital Archives

BNE

Fondo Biblioteca Nacional de España. Hemeroteca Digital, AC. *Documentos de actividad contemporánea*, hemerotecadigital.bne.es/hd/es/results?parent=890150f0-c8d9-4559-9ead-8a4b8b03e4d5&t=alt-asc&s=0 (accessed 15 April 2023).

ULPGC

Fondo Universidad Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. *Jable. Archivo de Prensa Digital*, jable.ulpgc.es/gacetaarte (accessed 5 February 2023).

ARCA

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Tschichold 2003

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