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## ‘Une page est une image’: Text as Image in *Arts et métiers graphiques*

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# ‘Une page est une image’: Text as Image in *Arts et métiers graphiques*<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*Arts et métiers graphiques* (1927–39) was a French graphic arts periodical published by type founder Charles Peignot. It tried to address all aspects of graphic design and the art of the book in articles written by prominent art critics, graphic designers, book historians, and literary authors. These contents were presented curiously: on fine paper with an intricate page layout and multiple fonts, and with offset inserts serving as illustrations or samples of technical innovations such as colour printing, all of which would please the bibliophile readership. Apart from advocating the renaissance of the *beau livre* and bibliophilism, *Arts et métiers graphiques* tried to redefine or adjust the traditional view of the literary text. A literary text was not only a thing to be read, it was also a visual and material object, hence the editors’ virtually exclusive focus on material aspects of the books they discussed. In doing so, they wanted to broaden the scope of literary criticism to include such aspects. After a historical overview of the magazine and a discussion of the editors’ views on bibliophilism, this article aims to investigate the visual and material conception of the text in *Arts et métiers graphiques*.

## KEYWORDS

French typography, modernist magazine, French literature, bibliophilism

1 This article originally appeared in Dutch as “‘Une page est une image’: Tekst als beeld in *Arts et métiers graphiques*”, *TS: Tijdschrift voor tijdschriftstudies*, no. 35 (2014), 5–21, and was translated and slightly revised by the author. All in-text translations are also by the author.

Charles Peignot has sent type specimens and letters, noble materials without which all of this would not exist and which in their raw state still have their touching grandeur. We are not in the least exaggerating. Just ask a bibliophile or a writer to tell you of the strange charms that catalogues of printers and type founders emit.<sup>2</sup>

It may come across as slightly surprising that letters can provoke such reactions. When one reads a text, one often does so without looking at it. We see signs and translate them into words, phrases, and texts, without dwelling too long on their visual dimension (the selection of the typeface, type size, layout, etc.), the paper on which they are printed, or the book volume in which they are included. Nevertheless, we can see letters before we are able to read them, and — together with other visual and material dimensions of the text — they are capable of provoking an aesthetic reaction, as the words quoted above show. These words are taken from the French periodical *Arts et métiers graphiques* (henceforth abbreviated as *AMG*),<sup>3</sup> which in its form and content explicitly sought to cater to bibliophiles, but also critically questioned the state of contemporary bibliophilism. The magazine aspired to be a monument to the art of printing and typography: the periodical had a luxurious layout and addressed all dimensions of graphic design. It included technical and historical contributions on book design, articles on illustrators, advertising design, and photography. These texts were written by prominent artists, printers, authors, and critics, both from France and abroad. The majority of the articles, especially book reviews, focused on the visual and material dimensions of the texts. As such, the magazine was primarily concerned with critical discussions of the typographic dimensions of a text — a practice called *typocritique* or typocriticism — rather than literary criticism. To the editors, a literary text was never just content, but rather also an image and an object. It was, in short, a symbiosis of form and content. The editors wanted to adjust the traditional view of the literary text and to expand the scope of literary criticism to include attention to the visual and material aspects of the text. In the following essay, I will first briefly present the magazine and its history and discuss its position on contemporary bibliophilism. Then, I will elaborate on its treatment of the text as a visual object. This is an aspect of texts that is (still) all too often forgotten, but it strongly influences the way we experience a text.

## The Magazine

In the modernist period, magazines were important carriers of innovations that promoted and supported modernism and the avant-gardes. The book, which was bound by its two covers and contained seemingly definitive values, was less suited to report on an ever-changing modern reality than periodicals, which could be produced and spread more quickly and more frequently, and at a lower cost.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, magazines were an international phenomenon almost by definition: they were either multilingual or

- 2 'Charles Peignot a envoyé des Alphabets et des Lettres, nobles matériaux sans quoi tout ceci n'existerait pas et qui ainsi à l'état brut conservent intacte leur grandeur émouvante. Nous n'exagérons rien. Demandez seulement à un Bibliophile, à un écrivain de vous parler de l'étrange charme qui se dégage d'un catalogue d'imprimeur et de fondeur.' Louis Cheronnet, 'Le 4<sup>ème</sup> Salon de l'U.A.M.', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 36 (15 July 1933), 49–51 (p. 51).
- 3 For more on the magazine, see Françoise Denoyelle, 'Arts et métiers graphiques: Histoire d'images d'une revue de caractère', *La Recherche photographique*, no. 3 (December 1987), 7–17; Hélène Dufour, 'Arts et métiers graphiques 1927–1939', *Art & Métiers du Livre*, no. 188 (November–December 1994), 3–31; Amelia Hugill-Fontanel, 'Arts et métiers graphiques: The Graphic Design Magazine of the Deberny et Peignot Type Foundry', *Printing History*, no. 49 (2006), 20–41.
- 4 Michel Melot, 'Introduction: L'Image et les périodiques en Europe entre deux siècles (1880–1920)', in *L'Europe des revues (1880–1920): Estampes, photographies, illustrations*, ed. by Evaghélia Stead and Hélène Védrine (Paris: PUPS, 2008), pp. 13–19 (p. 18).

contained translated articles, they featured authors from different national backgrounds, and were read all across Europe. This made periodicals one of the preferred tools for avant-garde movements to spread their ideas. ‘Little’ magazines such as *BLAST*, *Cabaret Voltaire*, or *Littérature* are inextricably linked to Vorticism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, respectively. At the same time, there were magazines that had a broader readership and helped to disseminate modernist culture, such as *La Nouvelle Revue française*.<sup>5</sup> Such periodicals often found themselves in between little magazines and the mass press, and favoured less radically innovative aesthetics. Equally, the domain of typography, which received a strong innovative impetus with the Central European New Typographers, included both avant-garde magazines and periodicals that wanted to spread these innovations among a wider public. *Das neue Frankfurt*, discussing architecture, design, film, theater, fashion, and photography, can be considered part of that first tendency, while a lifestyle magazine such as *die neue linie* addressed a larger audience and acquainted them with Bauhaus innovations.<sup>6</sup> *AMG* could also be considered part of that second tendency: in between the avant-gardes and the masses, it was an intermediary that spread innovations in typography, design, and aesthetics more generally among a broader readership.

*Arts et métiers graphiques* was published in Paris and appeared from 1927 to 1939, running for 68 issues. The owner and *directeur* of the magazine was Charles Peignot, creative director of the Parisian Deberny et Peignot type foundry. The founding committee further consisted of H.-L. Motti, the owner of the Vaugirard printing office (where *AMG* was printed); Léon Pichon, a printer, publisher, and type designer; Walter Seymour Maas, an advertising agent; and Lucien Vogel, an experienced magazine publisher who would go on to create *Vu* (a famous photographically illustrated news periodical and a forerunner of *Life*) in 1928. It may have been Vogel who incited Peignot to start publishing *AMG*.<sup>7</sup> The magazine’s editors-in-chief were Marcel Astruc (issues 2–3), François Haab (issues 4–41), and André Lejard (issues 42–68). Publisher and typographer Henri Jonquières was credited as the layout designer (*maquettiste*) from issue 45 (1935) onwards. Among the frequent contributors we also find the famous French typographer and poet Maximilien Vox and Bertrand Guégan, an expert on bibliophile books. In addition, famous authors such as Paul Valéry, Philippe Soupault, André Beucler, Pierre Mac Orlan, Jean Cocteau, and Raymond Queneau; art critics like Maurice Raynal and Claude Roger-Marx; and designers, including Jean Carlu, Cassandre, Tschichold, and Alexey Brodovitch, wrote articles or created visual content for the magazine.

The editors originally released six issues per year on a bimonthly basis, with each issue costing 30 francs (about 20 euros).<sup>8</sup> The magazine itself did not mention its print run, but Charles Peignot spoke of 3,000 copies in a 1930 letter addressed to his sister, the writer Colette Peignot.<sup>9</sup> Critics confirm this number, adding that a third of the copies

5 Peter Brooker, ‘General Introduction: Modernity, Modernisms, Magazines’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume III: Europe 1880–1940*, ed. by Peter Brooker and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1–21 (p. 18); Anne-Rachel Hermetet, ‘Modern Classicism: *La Nouvelle Revue française* (1909–43)’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume III*, ed. by Brooker and others, pp. 101–19.

6 Patrick Rössler, ‘Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Dessau: “Neue Typographie” — The New Face of a New World: *das neue frankfurt* (1929–33) and *die neue linie* (1929–43)’, in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume III*, ed. by Brooker and others, pp. 969–91.

7 Jean-Luc Froissart, *L’Or, l’âme et les cendres du plomb: L’Épopée des Peignot, 1815–1983* (Paris: Tekhnè, 2004), pp. 301–02; Sophie Kurkdjian, *Lucien Vogel et Michel de Brunhoff, parcours croisés de deux éditeurs de presse illustrée au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Clermont-Ferrand: Institut universitaire Varenne, 2014), pp. 356–57.

8 ‘Convertisseur franc-euro’, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, [www.insee.fr/fr/information/2417794](http://www.insee.fr/fr/information/2417794) [accessed 11 September 2017].

9 Élisabeth Barillé, *Laure: La Sainte de l’abîme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), p. 159.



Fig. 1 Different covers of *AMG* throughout the years

were sold to readers abroad.<sup>10</sup> Due to increasing production costs (possibly connected to the 1936 electoral victory of the left-wing *Front Populaire*, which demanded higher wages for workers, including printers), only five issues per year were published from November 1936 onwards. At the same time, the price for an issue was raised to 35 francs. As of issue 60, published in November 1937, the price was raised once more, an issue now costing 45 francs. International readers paid about 5 to 10 francs more per issue. Readers could also subscribe to the magazine, with a subscription costing between 150 and 200 francs in France and Belgium and 200 to 240 francs abroad.

*AMG*, then, was by no means a cheap periodical, but readers received a lot of luxury for their money. The magazine, which wanted to be a showcase of advanced and high-quality printing techniques, was intricately laid out and richly illustrated with colour images and photographs. A single number measured 31cm by 24.5 cm and was about seventy to eighty pages in length. Both the covers and the interior pages were printed on different types of exclusive paper and each issue featured offset inserts that often served as examples of new printing processes. The magazine's layout designers paid the utmost care to its typography, often giving every article its unique design. Typefaces designed and sold by the Deberny et Peignot foundry had pride of place, which made the magazine a kind of specimen book. Two notable types in this regard are Bifur and Peignot, both created by the famous advertising designer Cassandre. Bifur was a poster typeface that was first introduced in an article printed on shiny aluminium paper in *AMG* issue 9 (January 1929) and which was frequently used for titles and headings. Peignot, despite its somewhat medieval looks, was seen as a revolutionary new typeface, and some issues or articles were completely set in that type. Finally, the designers often experimented with figurative layouts, although their creations were less radical than those found in more avant-garde typography periodicals.

The material dimension of *AMG* was very important to its creators. In an elaborate full-page colophon, they meticulously listed all types of papers, typefaces, and printing processes that had been used for that particular issue. Quite strikingly, this colophon was not printed at the end of the magazine — as was the custom for French books at that time — but right at the beginning, the editors foregrounding the periodical's materiality. The section 'Notes & Échos', found in the back of most issues, often contained further encyclopaedic information on the different types of paper used, in addition to shorter reflections, notes on exhibitions, auctions, and other magazines, as well as advertisements. When production costs rose, the editors chose to publish five instead of six issues each year, so as to guarantee the magazine's material quality (they still raised the price somewhat later).<sup>11</sup> Finally, every year, readers could order a box in which they could organize their copies of *AMG* after reading: the magazine was a luxurious collector's item, and the editors did not fail to point out that loose copies and early volumes of *AMG* were sold at auction for several times their initial selling price.<sup>12</sup>

The editors frequently published special thematic issues. *AMG*, no. 26 (November 1931) was devoted to the international art book, while issue 31 (September 1932) addressed caricatures. The year 1935 saw the publication of a special issue on French novelist Victor Hugo (*AMG*, no. 47), while in 1937, the editors focused on 'Les Arts et les techniques graphiques' (*AMG*, no. 59) and illuminated manuscripts (*AMG*, no. 60). *AMG*, no. 62 (March 1938) was an issue on the 1937 World Exhibition in Paris. Of particular importance are the yearly special issues on photography. *Photographie 1930* appeared in the regular series as *AMG*, no. 16 (March 1930), at no additional cost

10 Dufour, p. 6.

11 Untitled letter to the readers, *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 54 (15 August 1936), no page.

12 E.g. 'À Nos Lecteurs', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 18 (15 July 1930), no page.



Fig. 2 A type specimen showcasing Bifur

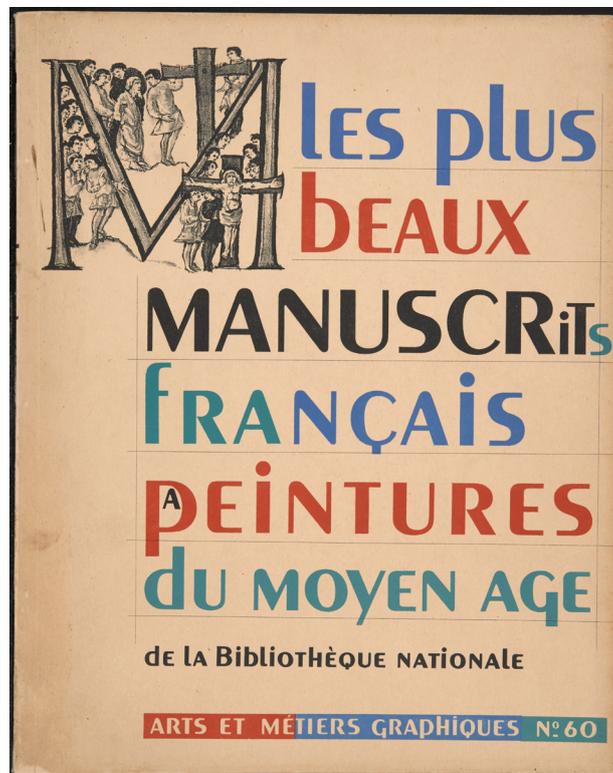


Fig. 3 A cover of an AMG special issue on medieval manuscripts set in Peignot

to subscribers, but readers had to order subsequent instalments separately. The 1930 album had a black cover with just the word 'Photographie' printed on it, and its almost 200 pages were bound with a metal spiral, which at that time was quite an innovation. It featured photographs by many international avant-garde photographers such as Man Ray, Germaine Krull, Maurice Tabard, and László Moholy-Nagy, in addition to more traditional photography, scientific imagery, and advertising photography. Apart from an essay on photography, the special issues were virtually devoid of text, which allowed the images to speak for themselves. Whereas the first special issues highlight modernist photography, the issues from the mid-1930s on mark a return towards a more traditional, even nationalist conception of photography.<sup>13</sup> Starting in 1934, the editors also published a yearly special issue on advertising art, the first of which appeared as *AMG*, no. 42. That issue had a transparent cover made of orange plastic and was bound with yet another type of spiral binding. The magazine editors also ran a publishing house, 'Éditions Arts et métiers graphiques', which published the famous photo book *Paris de nuit*, with a text by Paul Morand and photographs by Brassai (1933). The company continued to publish books on typography, fine arts, and photography long after the magazine itself ceased to exist.

*AMG* had an international scope and network, to which the prices for readers abroad already attest. As a service to these readers, some issues contained abstracts, summaries, or image captions in English, while some issues even had complete translations on separate pages. The editors frequently reviewed international magazines on graphic design, and they had close contacts with international colleagues, most notably H. K. Frenzel of *Gebrauchsgraphik* (1924–38), a German counterpart to *AMG*. Moreover, the final pages of every issue often featured advertisements for magazines from France and abroad.

### 'La renaissance du beau livre'

The first two issues of *AMG* contained a loose leaflet that had a marketing purpose, but also outlined the editors' mission. As such, I would like to discuss this text in a bit more detail. The word 'bibliophiles' is printed on top of the leaflet in bold type, which clearly signals the periodical's envisaged readership. The editors listed a number of reasons why book lovers had to subscribe to *AMG*. The magazine aspired to a high literary value by featuring contributions by important literary authors and art critics, whose texts would be published on beautiful paper. In addition, the periodical would have encyclopaedic value through its technical and historical articles on all aspects of fine book printing. The editors also included a thematic index at the end of most volumes, which allowed interested readers to retrieve information quickly. All of this would be presented in a beautiful layout and in a limited print run, as befits a bibliophile publication.

One of the periodical's main concerns was the fate of the *beau livre* or beautiful book in a time when a lot of shifts were occurring in the publishing world. The turn of the twentieth century saw the book and the press becoming increasingly visual in nature. The book market was flooded by cheap illustrated editions, also by literary publishers,<sup>14</sup> and photography found its way into the mass press (with Vogel's *Vu* as a leading example). Moreover, the press had been a competitor to the book for quite a

13 Alain Fleig, *Naissance de la photographie comme média* (Neuchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1997), pp. 245, 264.

14 Pascal Fouché, 'L'Édition littéraire, 1914–1950', in *Histoire de l'édition française: Tome IV: Le Livre concurrencé 1900–1950*, ed. by Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin (Paris: Fayard, 1991), pp. 210–68 (pp. 220–22).

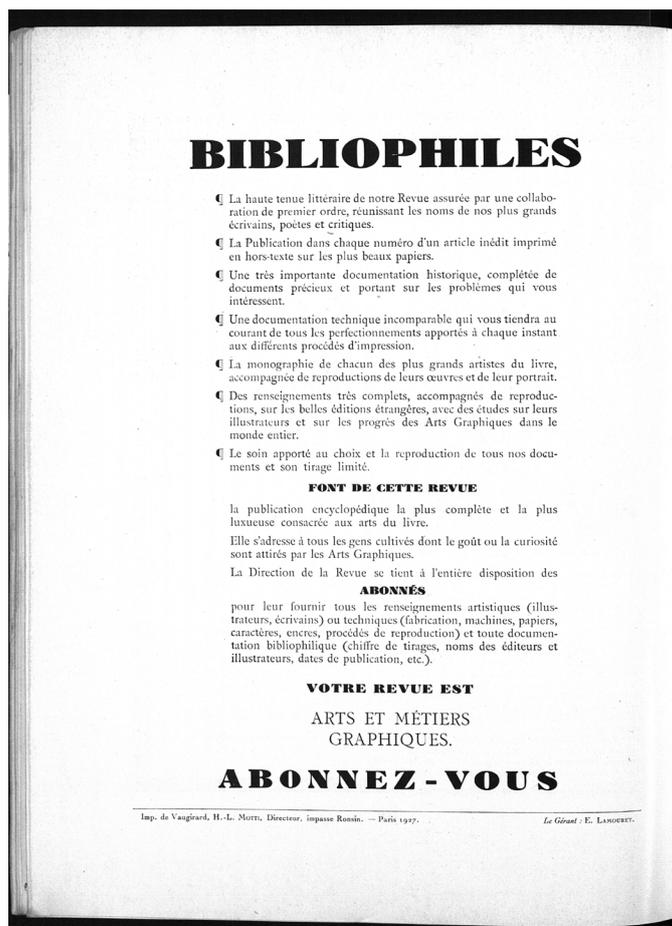


Fig. 4 An advertising leaflet for *AMG*

while.<sup>15</sup> For the editors of *AMG*, however, the main problem was the explosive growth of overly expensive luxury volumes, which had led to a decadence of the bibliophile book.<sup>16</sup> An article called 'Programme 1933–1934' explicitly addressed this problematic situation:

The so-called 'deluxe' book is dead because they have made it LUXURIOUS and EXPENSIVE, instead of making it BEAUTIFUL; because it has become only a pretext for IMAGES [...] and for speculation, instead of being first and foremost a PRINTED TEXT; because it has become a collectors' item that one sends out to be bound and at which one looks only by accident. The 'luxury book' is dead because, put simply, it is no longer a BOOK.<sup>17</sup>

To the editors, the bibliophile book had become an expensive and luxurious collectors' item that was no longer a text or a book, but something to be put in a bookcase not to be looked at again. According to Jean Bruller (who during the Second World War

15 Catherine Bertho, 'Les Concurrences', in *Histoire de l'édition française: Tome IV*, ed. by Chartier and Martin, pp. 13–27 (p. 14).

16 Alfred Fierro, 'Évolution et typologie de la librairie', in *Histoire de l'édition française: Tome IV*, ed. by Chartier and Martin, pp. 111–23 (p. 118).

17 'Le livre dit "de luxe" est mort parce qu'on l'a fait LUXUEUX et CHER, au lieu d'abord de le faire BEAU; parce qu'il n'était plus qu'un prétexte à IMAGES... et à spéculation, au lieu d'être d'abord un TEXTE IMPRIMÉ; parce qu'il était devenu un objet de collection qu'on faisait relier et qu'on ne regardait que par hasard. Le 'livre de luxe' est mort parce que tout simplement il n'était plus un LIVRE.' 'Programme 1933–1934', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 36 (15 July 1933), 5–8 (p. 7).

founded Les Éditions de Minuit under the pseudonym 'Vercors'), a true bibliophile was to appreciate books without snobbery or speculative aims, as a book's price could not be considered a criterion of its value. A truly worthwhile book contained text, typography, and illustrations that were of the first order and formed a harmonious whole.<sup>18</sup> The editors deplored the fact that most bibliophiles were only concerned about money and preferred clichés, so that publishers steered away from more risqué experimental editions.<sup>19</sup> To remedy this, the editors proposed to educate book lovers on the art of the contemporary book through many technical and encyclopaedic articles. A renewed appreciation of the intricate craft of book design could contribute to a renaissance of the beautiful book.<sup>20</sup>

To further help in reviving the bibliophile book, the editors founded their own bibliophile society called 'L'Épreuve' in 1933, a homonym that refers to both the printing proof and the challenges of contemporary publishing practices. The mission statements of that society were published in *AMG*, nos 37 to 39. The founders opposed those who, in 'a spirit of stagnation', adhered to the belief that since Gutenberg no more progress had been made in book typography. To the founders, on the other hand, innovations were omnipresent, and they wanted to make good use of new techniques to give new life to book design. They promoted books in which images and ornaments were no longer mere decorations or illustrations that were secondary to the text: these means now had to support the text and form a whole. Only in this way could typography underscore the beauty and uniqueness of the text. The founders wanted their members to aid them financially in creating works that other, more commercial companies did not take the risk of publishing.<sup>21</sup>

The periodical did not only focus on bibliophile editions. It believed that cheaper, more popular editions too had to be appreciated by bibliophiles. A striking illustration of this position is an essay written by Adrienne Monnier (a writer and publisher who owned the book store La Maison des Amis des livres, and the life companion of Sylvia Beach of the Shakespeare and Co. book shop) called 'Éloge du livre pauvre' ('In Praise of the Poor Book'). The article is an ode to cheap editions that made great works of literature accessible to everyone, without pretending to equal or imitate luxurious editions. Monnier considered such books more important than expensive volumes, as these cheap editions would ultimately ensure that the classics lived on.<sup>22</sup> In *AMG*, no. 48, the writer Roger Dévigne discussed popular editions throughout the centuries.<sup>23</sup> To him, many of these books received less recognition than they deserved: he considered them as rare and as beautiful, from a typographic perspective, as bibliophile editions. Dévigne demonstrated that contemporary popular volumes were part of a longer tradition, which perhaps granted them more legitimacy. Moreover, according to him, cheap reprints of expensive illustrated editions brought such books and literary classics to a broad audience as 'the democratic reflection [...] of luxury publishing'.<sup>24</sup> Dévigne, however, still required these cheap editions to be beautiful, which, he perceived, was not always the case. In the conclusion to his article, the author expressed the hope that

18 Jean Bruller, 'Le Livre d'art en France: Essai d'un classement rationnel', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 26 (15 November 1931), 41–62 (pp. 42, 46–47).

19 Lucien Jais, 'Heurs et malheurs de la société de bibliophiles', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 28 (15 March 1932), 44–45 (p. 45).

20 'Programme 1933–1934', p. 8.

21 'La Nouvelle Société de bibliophiles', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 37 (15 September 1933), no page.

22 Adrienne Monnier, 'Éloge du livre pauvre', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 25 (15 September 1931), 345–48.

23 Roger Dévigne, 'Évolution artistique et graphique du livre populaire', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 48 (15 August 1935), 31–39.

24 'le reflet démocratique [...] de l'édition de luxe'. Dévigne, 'Évolution', p. 36.

many classics would receive a similar treatment and that new typographic techniques would find their way into popular editions.

It seems that *AMG*, then, promoted a more democratic form of bibliophilism, which is normally considered an elitist practice. In this regard, its frequent disapproval of overly expensive editions and its attention to popular editions is significant. The same applies to the editors' founding of their own bibliophile society, the members of which had to be book lovers rather than speculators.<sup>25</sup> Still, the society had a limited number of members who paid a rather high membership fee and had to be accepted by the existing members.<sup>26</sup> Later articles too attest to this tension between an elitist and a more democratic conception of bibliophilism. In a 1937 special issue, Dévigne wrote that beautifully crafted books had to reach thousands of readers, while such were usually limited editions reserved for bibliophile enthusiasts.<sup>27</sup> According to him, in a period that had the technical means to produce luxury editions on a larger scale, it was 'baroque' to believe that a book's worth was related to a limited number of copies being available: rarity, he added, was something a book had to deserve. At the same time, his article suggests that he did not oppose such limited editions altogether. If editors wanted to continue publishing such works, he wanted them to make use of new printing techniques. In the end, Dévigne seems to have desired a new way of spreading and selling bibliophile books in reaction to the speculative practices, but also new ways of designing them. Only when these criteria were met could the rare book continue to exist in a legitimate way, to the benefit of 'an important élite'.<sup>28</sup> Still, if one considers Dévigne's earlier article on popular books, this apparent elitism could have been a way to bring typographic innovations to a broader public: a select few would support small-scale graphic experiments that could later be applied on a larger scale.

In light of this tension between the elitist and the democratic, it is interesting to observe that *AMG* often contained advertisements for editions by large, commercial publishing houses (sometimes next to order forms for very limited editions). In the twelfth issue, one can see a full-page ad for the Sequana book club, founded by publisher René Julliard. Every month, members of this club would receive high-quality editions of recent highlights of French literature at a reasonable price.<sup>29</sup> The advertisements name some of the books in the series, including *Le Radeau de la Méduse* by Auguste Bailly; *Léviathan* by Julien Green; *La Chronique des frères ennemis* by Jérôme and Jean Tharaud; and *Erromango* by Pierre Benoit. All of these titles could be considered typical material for a book club: recent works by successful authors, but no radically innovative texts by avant-garde writers. Books such as those of the Sequana club could be considered an example of the project envisaged by Dévigne: an accessible form of bibliophilism, beautiful but affordable books with content that would strike the majority of its readers as quality literature.

Finally, the magazine's attention to more popular forms of printed matter and typography may also be part of its democratizing project. The editors discussed booklets with folk songs, sensational newspapers, children's books, animation films by Walt Disney, and, most notably, advertising posters. Indeed, the advertising poster was a mainstay topic for the magazine, and the editors considered the poster, which was visible everywhere on the streets and thus very democratic, a legitimate work of art.

25 "L'Épreuve": Société bibliophile de recherches graphiques: Programme', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 39 (15 January 1934), no page.

26 'Extrait des statuts', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 38 (15 November 1933), no page.

27 Roger Dévigne, 'Les Décorateurs, les illustrateurs du beau livre', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 59 (15 August 1937), 40–46 (p. 46).

28 'une importante élite'. Dévigne, 'Les Décorateurs', p. 46.

29 Fierro, p. 116.

### ***Critique littéraire* and *typocritique*: Towards a Redefinition of the Text**

To the editors of *AMG*, a book was a worthwhile bibliophile object only when form and content had aesthetic value.<sup>30</sup> If the magazine itself wanted to be a point of reference for bibliophilism, it did not only have to look good, it also needed literary value. This literary value was even presented as a first ‘selling proposition’ on the advertising leaflet discussed above. The question remains, however, how the magazine fulfilled this claim to literariness, and what its position towards literature was.

The leaflet promised that famous literary authors would contribute to the magazine, and even from a cursory glance at the tables of contents of the issues we learn that the periodical lived up to this claim. Many authors and artists wrote for *AMG*: older and younger writers, traditionalists and innovators, and left- and right-wing authors. Rather than literary prose or poems, these authors wrote essays on bibliophilism, the graphic arts, and the oeuvre of other artists; in short, the regular topics of *AMG*. Such texts, too, were part of the literary production of contemporary writers such as Paul Valéry, Pierre Mac Orlan, or Philippe Soupault, who had to make a living as professional writers or ‘*polygraphes*’.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, in that period, art criticism may still have been considered a literary genre.<sup>32</sup> The many essays on arts and literature, then, were a first way in which the magazine lived up to its promise of literary value.

The opening texts of every issue, the *articles de tête* or lead articles, were also part of that mission. These articles were essays, poems, prose fragments, or excerpts from a letter or a play that were laid out in a unique way and printed on exclusive types of paper. The first issue of *AMG*, for instance, opened with an essay by Paul Valéry entitled ‘The Two Virtues of a Book’. By this time, Valéry was a highly important writer in France, recently accepted into the prestigious *Académie française*. The inclusion of a text by such a prominent author attests to the magazine’s literary and cultural aspirations, even when Valéry was asked to write for a multitude of contemporary publications.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to observe that the essay that was printed in *AMG* had actually already been published in a newspaper and a small bibliophile leaflet by the Dutch publisher Stols.

These opening texts, however, were never included solely for their literary value. They, of course, served to make sure the magazine had literary value, but at the same time they provided an ideal opportunity for the periodical’s creators to showcase their design skills and the latest processes and techniques. In some cases, the editors dubbed these texts an ‘*essai de mise en page*’ or an ‘*experiment in layout*’, but in fact all these texts can be considered visual experimentation or attempts to give a new or existing text a unique layout that harmoniously supported it. In line with the magazine’s bibliophile mission, these experiments resulted in texts that could please a reader with both their content and their visual appearance.

The visual and material dimension of the text, then, was of primary importance to the editors of *AMG*. Valéry clearly suggests this in his essay: ‘A page is an image. It gives a total impression, presents one with a block or a system of blocks and layers, of blacks and whites, a spot with a shape and an intensity that can be more or less

30 Dévigne, ‘*Livre populaire*’, p. 39.

31 Michèle Touret, *Histoire de la littérature française du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Tome I: 1898–1940* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2000), pp. 9, 33.

32 Christine Peltre, ‘*Peinture et écriture au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*’, in *Histoire de la France littéraire: Modernités: XIX<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Patrick Berthier and Michel Jarrety (Paris: PUF, 2006), pp. 539–44.

33 François Chaubet, ‘*Les Relais de l’écrivain au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*’, in *Histoire de la France littéraire: Modernités*, ed. by Berthier and Jarrety, pp. 723–72 (p. 746).

fortunate.<sup>34</sup> As the very first text a reader of *AMG* laid their eyes on, Valéry's article not only ensured the magazine's cultural value, it also clearly outlined its mission: the text had to be seen as an image. As such, in book reviews, notably in the regular feature called 'L'Œil du bibliophile' ('The Eye of the Bibliophile'), editors discussed the material and visual aspects of the volumes under consideration — the type of paper used, the binding, illustrations, typefaces, and layout — and not the book's content. Other magazines focused on the latter, and many bibliophile volumes contained texts that had already been consecrated as 'literary' elsewhere. This method of discussing a book's typography was termed 'typocritique' by Dévigne, who wrote that he did not want to be a literary critic.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, typocriticism, this 'natural science of the book',<sup>36</sup> may very well be part and parcel of literary criticism as a critical, perhaps even objective-scientific, analysis of the visual nature of the text. This is an aspect often overlooked in literary criticism, even today, but it is integral to how a reader experiences a book. The editors of *AMG* were, of course, well aware of this dimension. To them, a book was of the highest order when it featured high-quality contents, typography, and illustrations, or when the typography itself supported the text so well that illustrations became superfluous — something the editors called 'pure typography'. All in all, the editors promoted a redefinition of the literary text as an image and an object: it is not only art made of words, it also has a visual and material dimension that contributes to an aesthetic experience.

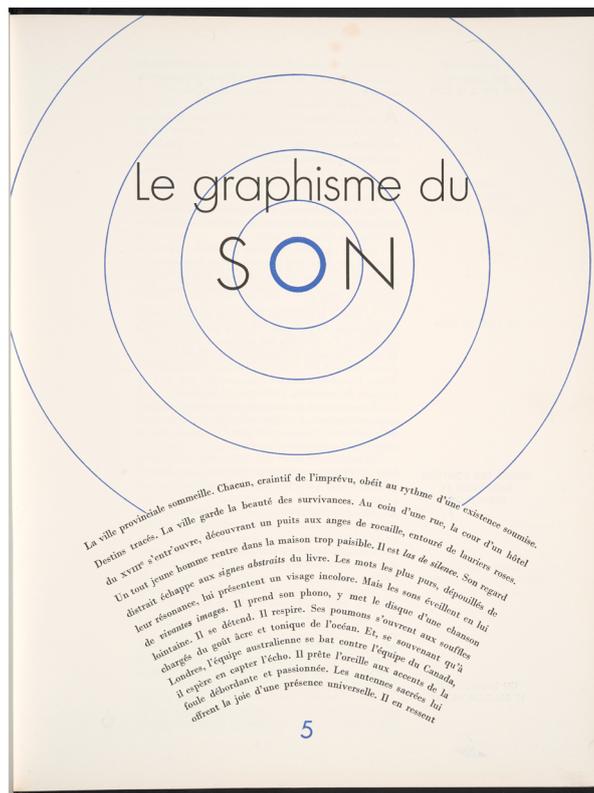


Fig. 5 An article on sound with a typography evoking a record and sound waves

34 'Une page est une image. Elle donne une impression totale, présente un bloc ou un système de blocs et de strates, de noirs et de blancs, une tache de figure et d'intensité plus ou moins heureuse.' Paul Valéry, 'Les Deux Vertus d'un livre', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 1 (15 September 1927), 3–8 (p. 4).

35 Dévigne, 'Livre populaire', p. 39.

36 Roger Dévigne, 'La Lettre et le décor du livre pendant la période 1880–1905', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 54 (15 August 1936), 53–56 (p. 53).

This concept of the text as an image and of a pure typography could be part of a century-old tradition of resistance to images in 'high' literature (although the editors were not opposed to illustrations *per se*, as long as they harmoniously supported the text). In the sixteenth century, humanists started to distrust illustrations. To them, the text mattered most: it had to be read and reflected upon, while images were distracting. At the same time, many of them realized that the text itself could be considered an image or an illustration: 'The written is always visual and, as such, participates in illustrating itself'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, letters are never just the visual manifestation of a preceding (oral) discourse: they can constitute texts-as-visual-objects and foreground their materiality autonomously and according to their own semiotic laws.<sup>38</sup> This property is what Jean-G rard Lapacherie calls 'grammatextuality', or the grammatical or poetic function of script, analogous to Roman Jakobson's poetic function of language. The editors were well aware of this materiality of the text, and by publishing articles with a unique, experimental typography, they foregrounded the text's visual and material side. To them, a carefully selected typeface and layout, employing purely typographic means, could deliver as much aesthetic enjoyment as illustrations.

A feature such as 'Autographes' also attests to the magazine's materialist conception of the text. This feature analyzed manuscripts and letters by famous personalities, including literary authors. Manuscripts and letters could prove interesting to bibliophiles, as they might cast new light on the conception of a literary work and on the author's personality. Moreover, manuscripts were believed to have a unique aura: 'A work read from the manuscript comes alive; we see it being born, we live it; the author's face appears between the lines'.<sup>39</sup> However, the editors' primary focus in the 'Autographes' feature was, again, the visual aspects of the letters and the handwriting, less the content of the manuscript. Like graphologists, they believed that studying an author's handwriting could yield new insights into their psychology and their oeuvre. As such, to typocritics and graphologists, handwritten letters were images and matter in the form of signs or traces on paper.

In line with this visual conception of the literary text, the editors considered the visual work of literary writers. *AMG*, no. 45, for instance, included an article on  mile Zola as a photographer. The author of the article considered Zola's photographic work a valuable addition to his literary oeuvre, stating that it contributed to his fame: 'these photographs [...] show us a much more artistic Zola than his legend leads us to believe'.<sup>40</sup> In a similar vein, the special issue on Victor Hugo opened with an article on the relation between his plastic and literary work:

To put it frankly, it is equally absurd to want to ignore the writer in favour of the painter as to try to understand the poet while ignoring the artist. The one and the other comment on one another, explain one another, clarify one another. [...]

37 'L' crit est toujours visuel et, comme tel, participe   sa propre illustration.' Michel Pastoureau, 'L'illustration du livre: Comprendre ou r ver?', in *Histoire de l' dition fran aise: Tome I: Le Livre conqu rant: Du Moyen  ge au milieu du XVII  si cle*, ed. by Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin (Paris: Fayard, 1989), pp. 602–28 (p. 605).

38 Jean G rard Lapacherie, 'De La Grammatextualit ', *Po tique*, no. 59 (September 1984), 283–94 (p. 283).

39 'Une  uvre lue dans le manuscrit s'anime; on la voit na tre, on la vit; le visage de l'auteur apparait entre les lignes.' Heilbrun, 'Les Manuscrits', *Arts et m tiers graphiques*, no. 47 (1 June 1935), 45–50 (p. 45).

40 'ces photographies [...] nous r v lent un Zola beaucoup plus artiste que ne le laisse supposer sa l gende'. Jean Loize, ' mile Zola photographe', *Arts et m tiers graphiques*, no. 45 (15 February 1935), 31–35 (pp. 34–35).

Everything that constitutes the genius of the writer we find in the plastic art of Victor Hugo.<sup>41</sup>

Both aspects of his work, then, were complementary, mutually influential, and always present throughout his oeuvre. Raymond Escholier, the author of the article, compared Hugo to the Renaissance *homo universalis* who practiced all forms of art. According to Escholier, what mattered most to Hugo was 'to live and to express, through the black and the white, the intense emotion that inspired his life'.<sup>42</sup> To him, Hugo's means, the black and the white, are those of the writer and the visual artist. Ultimately, the plastic artist seems to work with the same material as the writer, and both produce images. Not only literature, then, but authors too were redefined in *AMG*. Zola and Hugo, but also contemporary authors such as Max Jacob and Jean Cocteau,<sup>43</sup> were not only writers, but were equally active in other art forms — always as visual artists.

## Conclusion

Charles Peignot and the editors of *Arts et métiers graphiques* had the ambition to create the most luxurious encyclopaedia on the art of the book and the graphic arts. By doing so, they wanted to contribute to the renaissance of the beautiful book and bibliophilism. Both were perceived to be in poor shape, but the editors believed that a renewed appreciation of the techniques related to the art of the book could remedy this situation. At the same time, the magazine wanted to promote a certain democratization of bibliophilism. The editors did so by discussing cheaper beautiful books and popular forms of printed matter, presenting these as legitimate forms of art. The editors' bibliophile point of view also influenced the way they looked at literary texts. To them, texts not only had content, they also had an important visual and material dimension that was often overlooked in literary criticism; wrongfully so, for the editors. Equally, that same literary criticism paid only little attention to the plastic work of some literary authors. By elaborately discussing all these aspects — for instance, in analyses of a book's typography — the editors promoted a redefinition of the literary text as an object and a broader conception of the author as an artist who also created visual works of art. Readers had to (and still have to) consider texts in a different way: they are not only made to be read, but also to be looked at.

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41 'À vrai dire, il est aussi absurde de vouloir négliger l'écrivain pour le peintre que de tenter de comprendre le poète en ignorant l'artiste. L'un et l'autre se commentent, s'expliquent, s'éclairent. [...] tout ce qui constitue le génie de l'écrivain, nous le retrouvons dans l'œuvre plastique de Victor Hugo.' Raymond Escholier, 'L'Artiste', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 47 (1 June 1935), 5–14 (p. 11).

42 'vivre et [exprimer], par le noir et le blanc, l'intense émotion que lui inspirait la vie'. Escholier, p. 14.

43 Nicole Vedrès, 'Dessins de littérateurs, écrits de peintres', *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 67 (15 March 1939), 37–46.

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