

27 September 2004

## **A letter to ATypI members,**

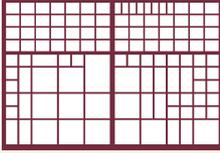
THE FIRST TIME I HEARD OF ATYP I WAS IN 1987, at the time the association was based in Switzerland. Then the annual conference came to Paris 1989, which I was unable to attend, as I was still a student with no clear vision of my future. I recall that I joined ATypI in 1991, my first conference was in 1993, Antwerp (largely organised by Agfa Belgium). This event was a big shock for me. I came to the conference alone and discovered, unexpectedly, many people, from all over the world, sharing a similar interest in type. Fascinating!

It was the year of TypeLab, with a bunch of computers laying around, and the young guns of the time working on font after font – all day and all night. Then, other people composing a newspaper with stores from the conference, using the fonts that people have just made. It was very easy to meet people, from Adrian Frutiger or Hermann Zapf to others like Erik van Blokland or Erik Spiekermann (and many others, sorry not to mention the entire type world), staying late into the night. When I went into the main conference hall I stayed for just two minutes, because the subject wasn't really interesting to me at the time. So, I stayed with the young type designers in the Type-Lab.

Some major things happened at the same time at with the large foundries who had been around for perhaps a hundred years – Monotype in Salfords which closed its office (from the hot metal days) in 1997, Linotype has changed its business a lot too, and Agfa became a big foundry when it bought Monotype, then ITC. New businesses became established too, such as FontShop and the Adobe Originals collection. People like Matthew Carter and Sumner Stone started their own foundries after playing important roles in larger foundries. Well, I need to stop there, missing many things and many people, or I will write the complete history of the type world!

In 1995 I was back again, this time in Barcelona – I have never missed a conference since. In Barcelona, I recall a special moment, when Mark Batty was elected: watching with Jonathan Hoefler, each of us with a big smile, thinking that we were entering in a new era – with a President closely involved in all kinds of type foundries. So many things happened from that year... the arrival of the internet brought us email communication – the fabulous interaction we got once a year at the conference was now something we can get every day.

I became more involved with ATypI in 1998 when I was at the head of the organisation for the Lyon conference. At that time I was elected to the board and came to understand how it was not easy to manage this association in a perpetually changing world. Mark Batty, and past board members, have done a wonderful job all these years, as have the ATypI executives. Managing international organisation like ATypI is a challenge every day.



When I recall the 1993 conference, how can imagine at the time, that ATypI was so open... and that today, I write to you all, about my candidature as next ATypI President? Napoléon said *Impossible n'est pas français*, well it is really true in the case of ATypI.

What I have tried to show, with my own experience, is that I respect very much the variety of people who comprise ATypI. From type designers to type users, marketing and developers, who all, with many others, share the same love for good typography. We come together in mutual respect, to socialise, exchange ideas, start passionate debates and learn from each other. Be assured that this multi-faceted group that is ATypI will be preserved and is the strength of the association.

But, we are now at a new turn, as in 1995. ATypI needs to change again, in a controlled way, without destroying the common past we have all helped to build – big players and small players, our famous and lesser known members, all working together. This is the form ATypI takes, and its our turn to help keep it alive, to adapt to changes in the world and in our business.

Among various issues raised in the past few, intense weeks some wish for a more focused organisation, while others ask that ATypI should back to its original role as trade organisation. Also, how should ATypI should organise its own annual conference, where there is competition with other design and type-related events? The complexity of the business also needs to be taken into account, with the emergence of medium and small sized foundries side by side with the changes happening in the large foundries that gave birth to modern type. At a communication level, it becomes apparent that the web site is a natural place of dialogue amongst members, and we need to develop its services to improve it make it a more useful resource for all members, on a day to day basis. Country delegates and the remaining committee members do a great job each year, but it is time to improve the nature of exchange between them and the membership to make their role more tangible to all of us.

At Board level there is a wish for more transparency, we also need to strengthen the financial base of the association. In the past we have had problems with liability, at all levels, and this is an issue which needs to be resolved, quickly. Finally, we will need to replace our current Executive Director, in 2005, as agreed when she took over the job in difficult times for the association.

So, the task is not easy, and I would never have stood as a candidate for president of the association without confidence in, and the support of, the new candidates for the board – and those who retain their positions on the board. I hope the composition of the new board will be a good sign to members. Will we be able to improve ATypI, by responding to various issues raised by the membership? I really don't know. But my feeling is that we will do our best to create a smooth evolution for ATypI, to serve the members and to promote the association.

Jean François Porchez

*Vice president of ATypI, candidate for presidency at Prague.*