the then
the now
the why

a typographic study

by beth waldner

I was sitting in class one day, and something miraculous happened, I started to listen. My instructor was talking about "Do-it-yourself" typography and the story behind it. I began to think, "I wonder if there is a story behind every typographic style. Could it be that style and design are a reflection of their historical context?" I decided to investigate further into some of the typographic styles that I admire. What drove these styles? How were they used? How can I apply these styles in a contemporary context?

In this typographic study I attempt to answer these questions and present them in an understandable and exciting way.

ENJOY!

FUTURISM

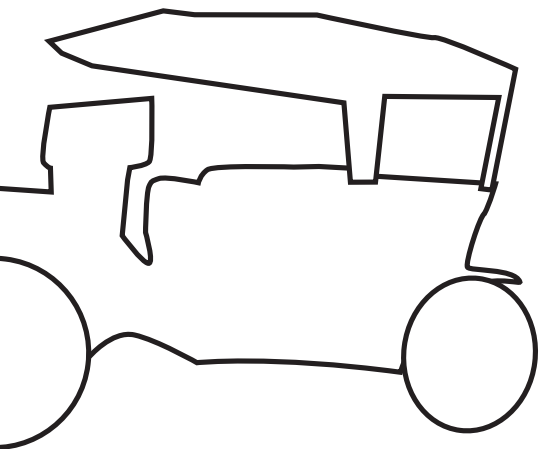In 1909, **Filippo Marinetti** called for a typographic revolution against the classical tradition, called Futurism. He urged artists and poets to separate themselves from correct grammar and syntax and replace them with expression and motion.
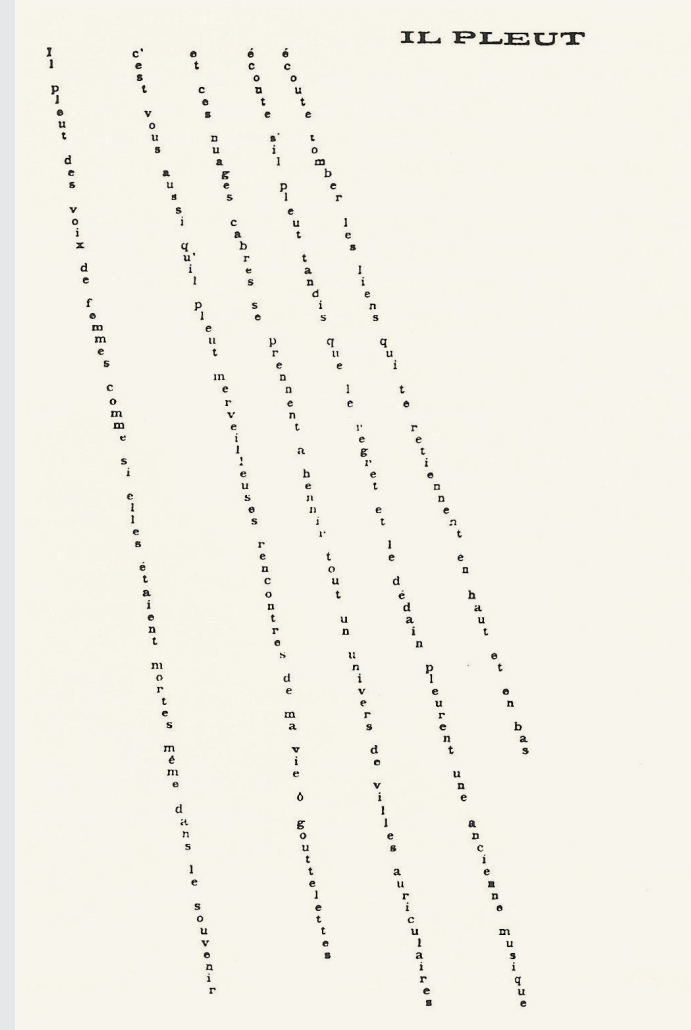
Marinetti published his futurist manifesto "words in freedom" in the Paris newspaper Le Figaro. In his manifesto, Marinetti stated that, "the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed..."

The futurist manifesto was one of the first attempts by an artistic group to explain its work conceptually before many examples had been created.

The futurist movement toward **experimentation and speed** could possibly be explained by the new technological and scientific advances in the late 19th century.

Ardengo Soffici
"Simultaneite Chimismi lirici"
from Bifszf + 18
1915

3

Guillaume Apollinaire
"Il Pleut" or "Its Raining"
from Calligrammes
1918

This piece is from Marinetti's book "Les mots en liberte futurists" meaning, "Futurist Words-in-Freedom." The work depicts a young girl reading her lover's letter from the front, whilst the text above her is exploding violently. The poem was inspired by Marinetti's experiences in the war.

Fillippo Marinetti
Montange + Vallate + Strade x Joffre
1919

Fortunato Depero
Page from Depero Futurista
1927

Society was changing with the invention of the automobile, the wireless radio, the motion picture, and the airplane. Art was to test itself against this new, faster paced, scientific and industrial world. Futurism pushed type and layout into a more **dynamic** asymmetrical composition. Marinetti created some of the most experimental typography and graphic design of the early 20th century.

Technological Advances

1885
Automobiles

1895
Wireless Radio

1896
Motion Picture

1903
Airplane

Inspired by "Moby Dick," Justin Quinn uses the letter "E" to create his own visual language. He explains, "E is, after all, the most commonly used letter in the English language, it denotes a natural number (2.71828), and has a visual presence that interests me greatly." The speed and movement of the typography and the visual sound it creates are futurist qualities.

Justin Quinn
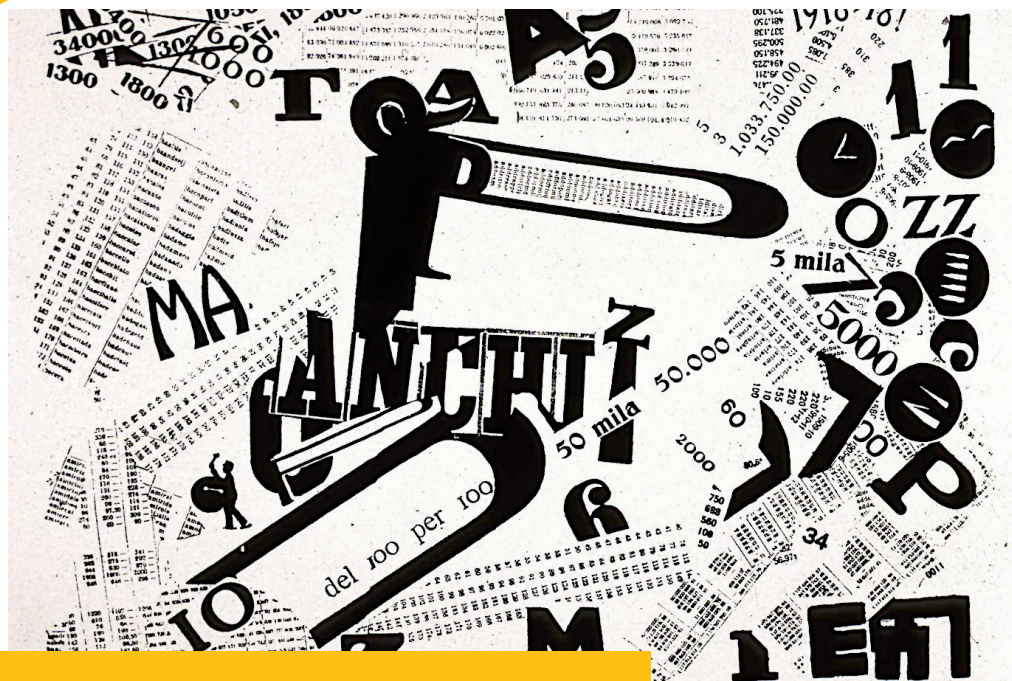Moby Dick, Chapter 35 or 1,294 times E
2007

These typographic posters list the services offered at "Alive and Well Healthcenter" in a doodle-like style. Like in the futurist movement, words become expressive and all syntax and grammar is ignored.

THE WHY

"the world's **magnificence** has been enriched by a **new** *beauty*, the *beauty* of **speed..**"

Futurism was about speed and movement. Harmony was rejected as a design quality. Futurists valued expression in the type. They abandoned proper grammar and syntax. Words became images, used in **painterly** typographic designs.
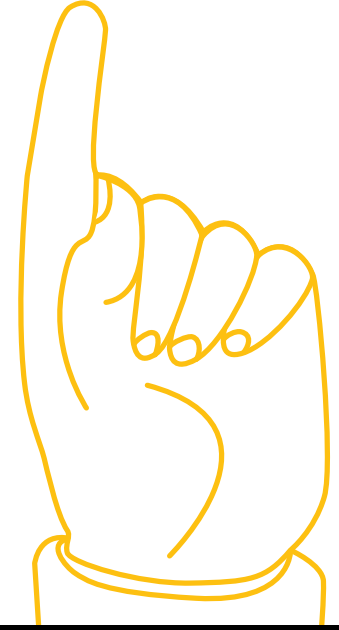
speed and movement

onomatopoeia - words imitate or suggest the source of the sound they are describing (whaam, oink, meow)

words become images

expression through typography

abandoned syntax and grammar

Fillippo Marinetti
Words in Liberty
1913

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DADA

The Dada movement, influenced by **futurism**, reached its peak from 1916 to 1924. It was a **strong** reaction against WWI, and claimed to be the "anti-art" movement. Dada was a **non-sense** word, which literally meant "hobby-horse" but basically was meant to describe the whimsical nonsensical nature of the movement.
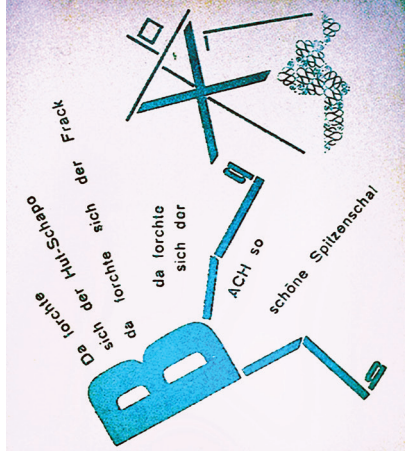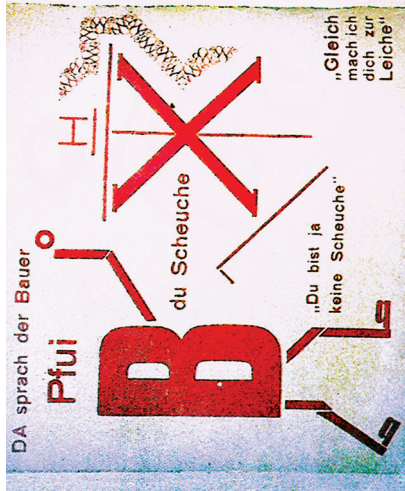
Dadaists waged war against the "status quo" by embracing dissonant ideas and disrupting culture. Dada was all about anarchy and freedom, so much so that it prompted Duchamp to display found objects as art, such as a URINAL.

Theo Van Doesburg
Magazine Cover
1923

Schwitters, Doesburg, and Steinitz
Die Scheuche (The Scarecrow)
1922

The most characteristic effect of Dada's disruption was that it forced the eye to see differently. It attacked the conventional rectangular and sequential format of typeset lines. For example, large **WOOD-BLOCK** typefaces would be jumbled into a poster to draw the eye away from its normal reading pattern.

Dada was a FUSION of chance placement and planned decisions. It was liberating and inspiring. In Dada, typography became kinetic. It moved across the page and was meant to agitate and confuse the public.

In this fairy tale, typographic forms are depicted as characters. Type and image become one as the **B** overpowers the **X** literally with words.

SCHALL und RAUCH

Nr. 6

DADA-Heft

Mai 1920

Dadaists believed that there should be no uniformity. Conventional art represented the *bourgeoise* elite, and therefore was bad. Dadaists wanted to disrupt the "status quo."

This is a good example of the raucous and chaotic typography that Dadaists often used. The effect was to create a disruptive jolt for the viewer. It effectively created confusion in how the eye is to navigate the page.

DADA 3

Directeur:
TRISTAN TZARA

Bois de M. Janco.

Je ne veux même pas savoir s'il y a eu des hommes avant moi. *(Descartes)*

Administration
Mouvement DADA
Zurich
Zeltweg 83

Fr. 1.50

Exposure
Organic Type Poster
2006

A sequence of words and phrases are randomly scattered across this poster. The type is hand drawn and layered over itself, creating confusion and inhibiting readability. Like Dada, there are several mixed typefaces and directions of type. The placement of words is intuitive.

Planet Propaganda
Concert Poster for High Noon Saloon
2008

This poster combines both type and image with the same stylistic qualities. The hand drawn quality of the type lends an illustrative approach and gives the type expression. Overall the poster seems to have a nonsensical appearance.

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THE NOW

totalcontent. Studio The Abbey Warwick Road Southam Warwickshire United Kingdom CV47 0HN
T +01926 812286 M +07976 160967 F +01926 811386 jim@totalcontent.co.uk www.totalcontent.co.uk

A whimsical typographic composition was created using various typefaces and woodblock letters and then printed on the back of stationary. Although, not randomly placed, the type still retains the Dadaist quality of intuitive decisions of typeface and size. The mixing of several fonts creates visual interest.
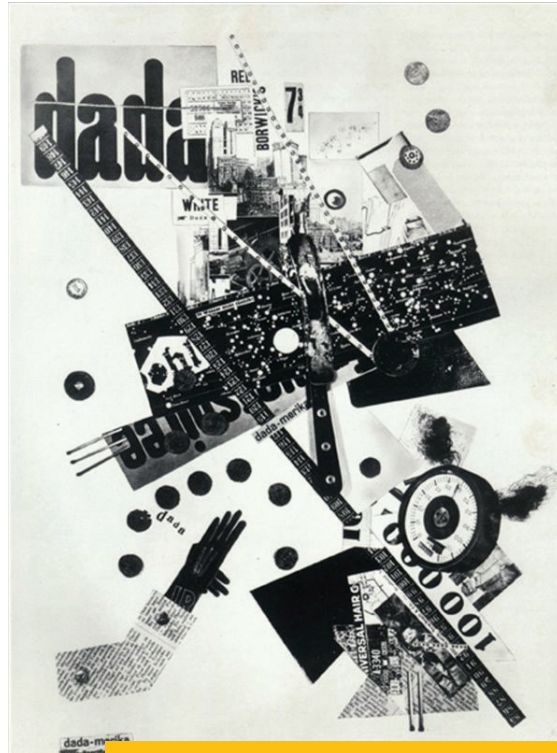
In her poster for the Public theater, Paula Scher experiments with type size and direction. She uses all san-serif fonts, however varies the weights and sizes. In some areas she lets the type overlap the image, where in others the type bends and molds around the image. On the right, the type becomes part of the image as it comes out of the woman's mouth.

Paula Scher
The Public Theater
1995

THE WHY

The Dadaist's goal was to disrupt and jolt culture. The **accelerating** pace of city life gave passerby less and less time to ponder over the constant barrage of advertising. The Dadaists used their jolting typography to catch attention and pull in the casual glance.

Thier innovative type was also a reaction to the conventional bourgeoise and the beginnings of World War I. Dada would set the groundwork for more abstract art, such as surrealism, and **postmodernism**.

John Heartfield
Dada Merica

I am firmly convinced that ALL ART WILL BECOME dADA DA DA istic in the course of time because from proceeds the perpetual DA URGE Richard Huelsenbeck for its renovation.

DADA POINT OF VIEW/STYLE

chaotic and raucous typography
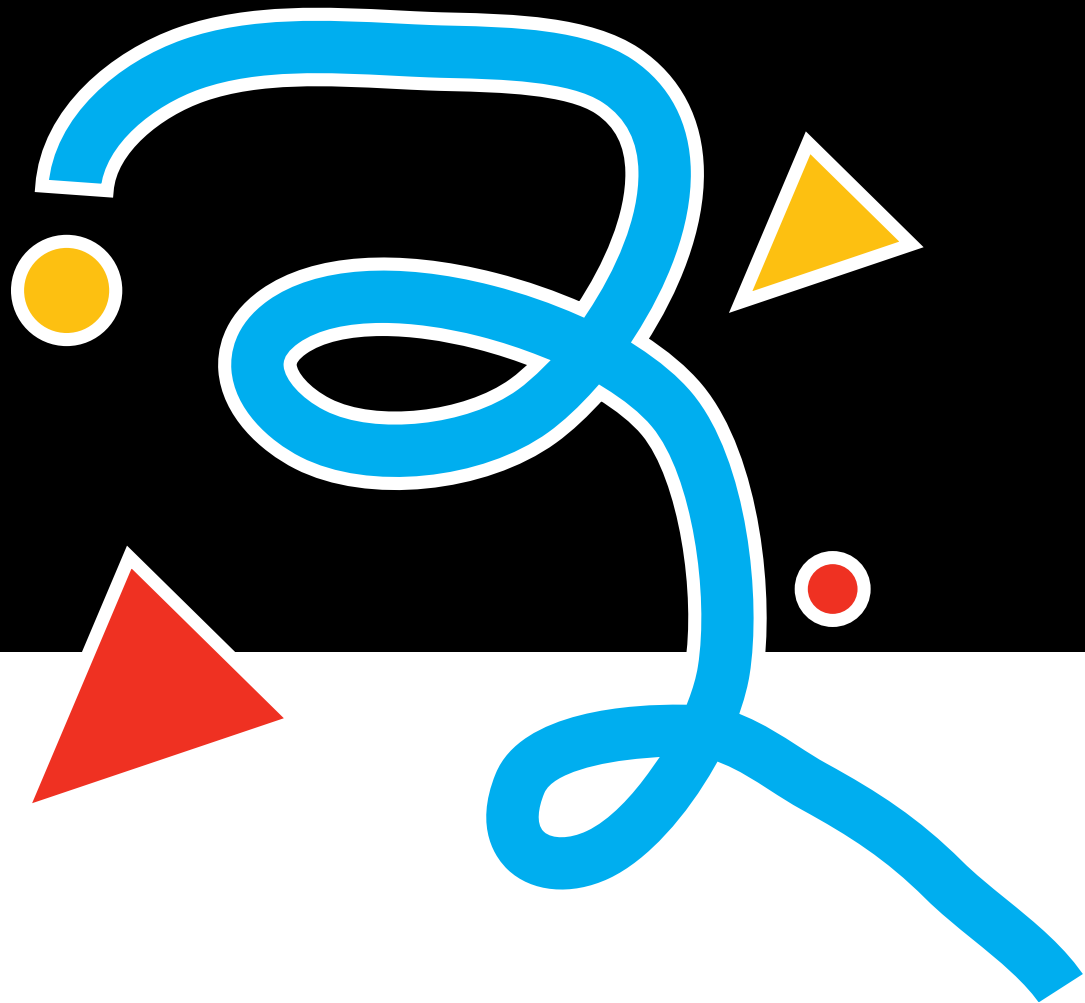
wanted to achieve a disruptive jolt

italics were thrown in haphazardly and capitals and miniscules were applied at random

shouting and screaming through printed words

typography used to approximate noise

increased and decreased the size of type numerous times on the same page, often within the same paragraph

the
THer

In the United States, **Postmodern** graphic design began around the mid-1980's and reached its stylistic peak during the late '90's. The very term "postmodern" describes its origins. In a modern world, social climate was changing fast. The underlying principles which drove modern design started to be questioned. The term "postmodern" was used to designate the work of those breaking away from the modern INTERNATIONAL style.

April Greiman

Luxe Masthead

1978

In this presentation folder designed for Anton Schöb, Tissi uses bright colors and a variation of type sizes to configure the letters of OFFSET into a dynamic composition. She also uses text boxes to define the space for the smaller type, a technique typically used in POMO.
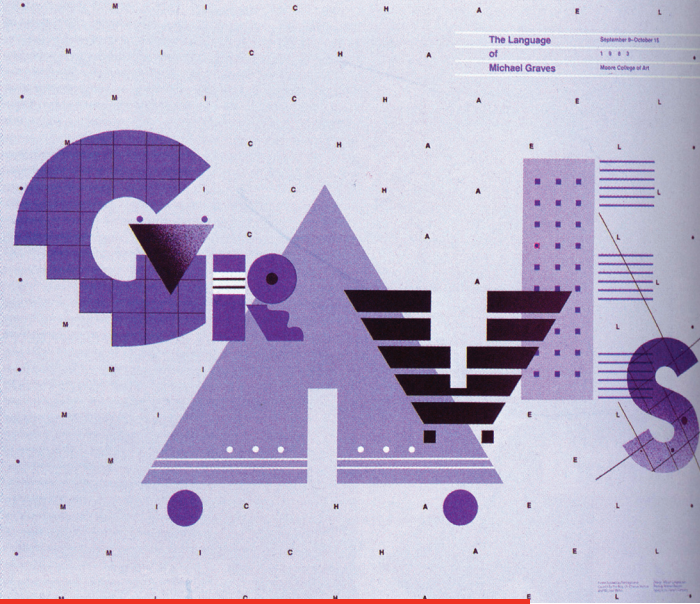
OFFSET
Seit 1948 wandelte sich unser Betrieb von der Buchdruckerei zu einer leistungs-fähigen Offsetdruckerei. Mit einer Vierfarbendruckmaschine, drei Zweifarben-druckmaschinen sowie drei Einfarbendruck-maschinen drucken wir bis zum maximalen Bogenformat von 72 × 102 cm.

Anton Schöb
Buchdruck – Offsetdruck
Foliendruck
Birchstrasse 102
8050 Zürich
Telefon 01-311 22 60

In this exhibition poster, letter forms are transformed into postmodern architectural forms while still retaining their readability. The background is created by the word MICHAEL, which is dramatically letter-spaced and reduced in size, so that the letters create a dot-like pattern.

William Longhauser

Graves Exhibition Poster

1983

Postmodernists challenged the clarity and **ORDER** of modern design. They were intuitive, playful, and personal; all the things that the modernists avoided. Postmodern designers placed objects in space because "it felt right" there was no rational, nor a need for one. Designs became performance pieces on the page, eccentric and full of **ENERGY** and life.

Wolfgang Weingart

Exhibition Poster

1982

Weingart developed the new technique of and layering images and type, as demonstrated in this poster. Images and type would be photographed as film positives, which enabled him to overlap images and create more complex juxtapositions.

California College of the Arts hosts
National Portfolio Day NPDA
Saturday, January 15, 2005
At the CCA
San Francisco campus
1111 Eighth Street

Tours and financial aid workshops, 10 AM–noon
Portfolio reviews, noon–4 PM

Aufuldish & Warinner
California College of the Arts
2005

This poster, advertising a Portfolio Day, uses the POMO style text boxes to contain all of the information. The sketches of birds and clouds are intuitively placed, while the text is anchored to the left side of the page.

Live4This Design Firm

Newsletter for the Art Director's Club of Tulsa, 2007

The bright colors and overlapping type and image give this design a Postmodern appearance. The type also takes on architectural qualities.

the **NOW**

In this design, letter forms are scattered as they become more of a visual element than legible text. Typographic elements such as the parentheses and brackets are used to create structure. This poster is a good example of how the parts of a design can become greater than the whole, a stylistic quality of POMO.

Allen Hori
Typography as Discourse
1989

The international modern style, started with the **Bauhaus** movement, was thoroughly explored and refined. Perhaps so refined and accepted that a rebound movement was inevitable. Postmodernists believed that the modern aesthetic was no longer relevant in the new postindustrial social climate. They rejected the clean and ORGANIZED STYLE of the modernists and set a new standard for personal *expression*, *eccentricity*, and *experimentation*.

PoMo Style

Graduations

Text box shapes

Picture frame silhouettes

Mixed type- at least 3

Interchanged type styles and sizes

Dramatic letter-spaced type

Shadows added to type and photos

Bright colors

Torn edges

Parts are greater than the whole

Fragmented margins

Brush strokes

Squiggles/confetti shapes

Stripes

the WHy

DESIGN MUST SEDUCE, SHAPE,   AND PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY,

EVOKE AN *EMOTIONAL* RESPONSE.

A P R I L   G R E I M A N

DE STIJL

THE THEN

In 1917, **Theo Van Doesburg**, **Piet Mondrian**, and others founded a group they called De Stijl or "the style." They believed that the rectangle was the "HOLY GRAIL" of modernity because it introduced natural order to art.
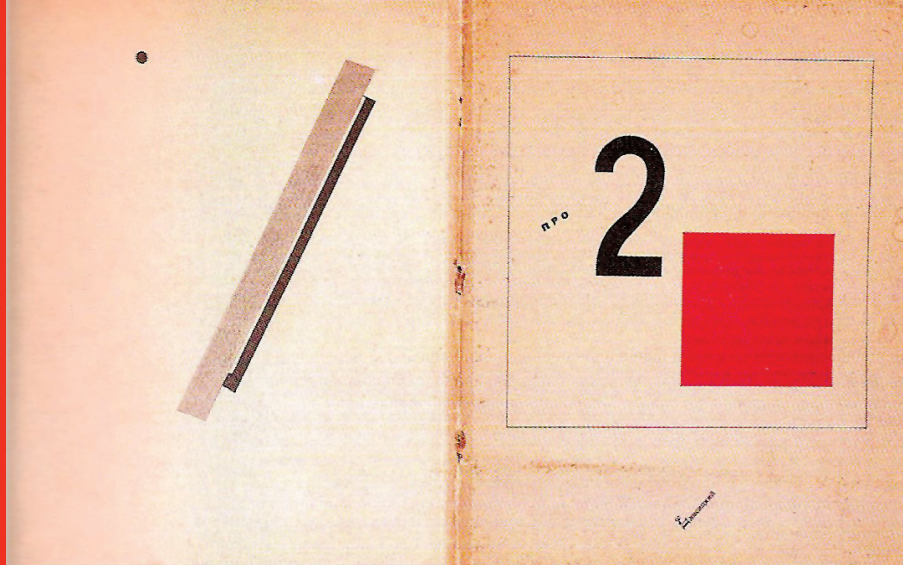
De Stijl was concerned with the functionality of design. It held a high admiration for the modern machine world, and its artists admired such functional designs as the **airplane**. Doesburg once declared that "Art whose function nobody knows, hinders the function of life. For the sake of progress we must destroy art."

In 1917, Van Doesburg founded, edited, and designed the journal De Stijl. He designed a logotype that features his letters which were horizontal and vertical elements separated into discrete units (left).

Theo Van Doesburg
De Stijl
1919

Later, De Stijl was **redesigned** to include the letter "NB," an acronym for the slogan "nieuwe beelding" which meant "new building" (above). The De Stijl journal was a major vehicle for artists of the movement to display and write about their art. Doesberg remained as head of De Stijl and editor of the journal for 15 years.

In this redesigned cover for the De Stijl journal, asymmetry is introduced as well as a broad space in the center which is used to balance the "filled-in" parts of the composition.

In this advertisement, diagonals and verticals are combined and overlaid to create an interesting and dynamic composition. The type also changes size to emphasize important details.

In "Of Two Squares," Lissitzky transforms a child's poem into a typographic novel in which black squares represent the bourgeoise and red squares represent communism. Lissitzky demonstrated a much more dynamic use of type, introducing more asymmetrical compositions and diagonals. Oblique designs were eventually adopted by Doesburg in 1924. Doesburg believed that they "increased the vitality of the overall composition while still maintaining the rigorous geometry of De Stijl." Mondrian disagreed with this attitude, and eventually left the De Stijl movement because he thought that the oblique designs introduced an element of self expression that violated the universal principles of De Stijl.

Paul Schuitma
Advertisement
1937

Tempo

1/2

Half the wait

VSA Partners
Brochure for Tempo
2008

THE NOW

In this brochure for a line of Sappi paper, that allows ink to dry quickly, simplicity is taken to the extreme. Hierarchy is utilized well as it starts the viewer off reading the tag line "1/2 the wait." The brochure cover gives only the vital information: the brand Tempo, the type of paper, Sappi, and the tag line.

In this brochure, the type is placed in a horizontal and vertical manner, and then tipped at an angle to increase the dynamics. The colors and san-serif typeface keep the type simple. Also notice the integration of the word "IMPACT" into the shape of a lowercase "i."

Partners + Napier
Bochure for Rochester Institute of Technology
2008

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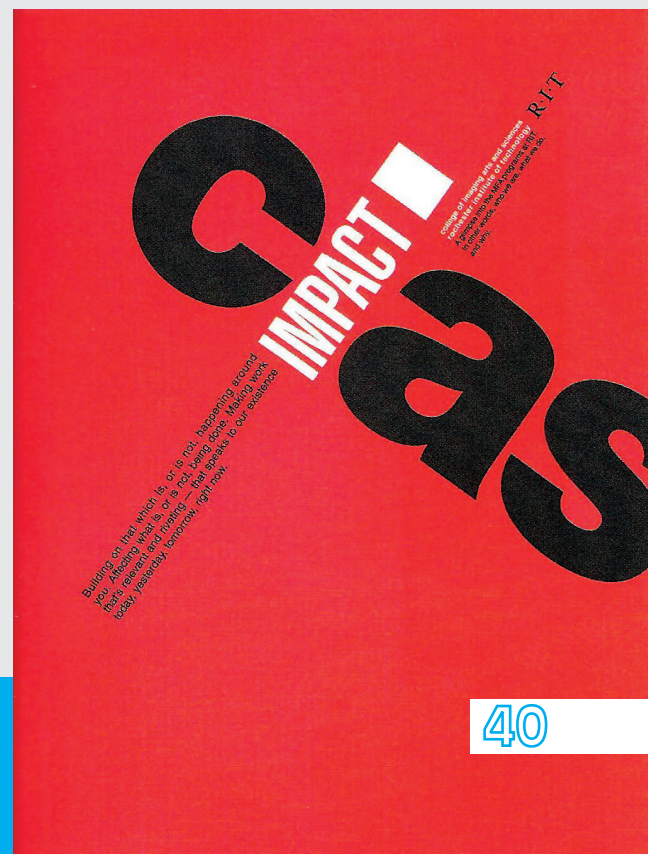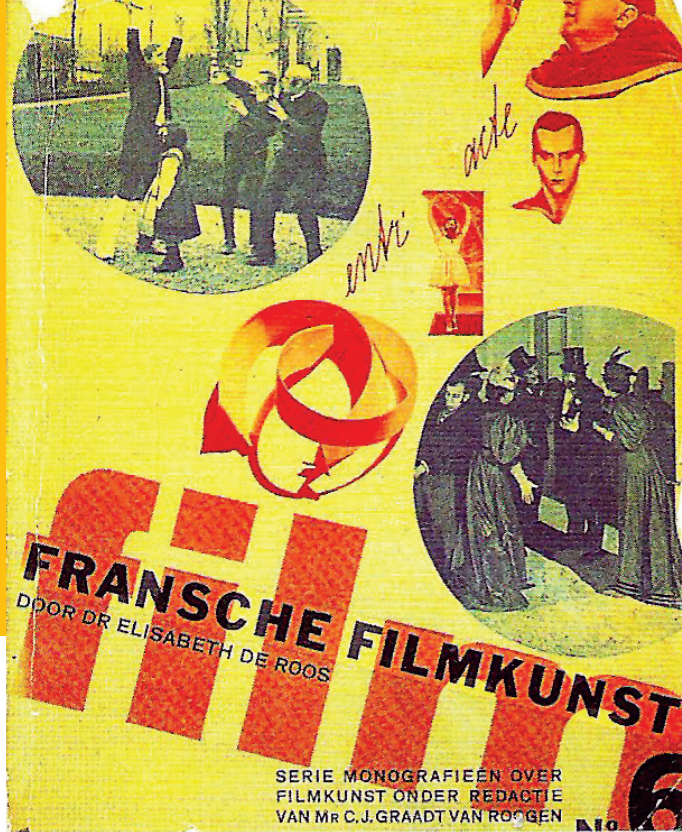
Notice here the experimentation with the cropping of photos and the title of the magazine on a diagonal. Also notice the careful handling of space. Even though the photos are cropped in a non-square format, they do not appear to be floating because of the careful use of space.

DE STIJL "STYLE"

SIMPLICITY

USE OF BLACK, WHITE, GREY AND THE PRIMARY COLORS

VOID OF ORNAMENT OF ANY KIND

IMPERSONAL AND UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

RIGHT ANGLES AND STRAIGHT LINES (LATER ON, DIAGONALS)

"THE STYLE WITHOUT STYLE"

De Stijl embraced a sense of **order** that could have been a reaction to the trauma of WWI. It was "the style without style." Its goal was to achieve "universal harmony." In De Stijl, **geometric** forms could not be identified with any one individual and therefore made De Stijl the most suitable **universal** style for the modern post-war era.

THE WHY

Art is not made for anybody and is, at the same time, for everybody. -Piet Mondrian

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