During the postwar years, when Edward McKnight Kauffer and A. M. Cassandre were applying synthetic cubism’s planes to the poster in England and France, a formal typographic approach to graphic design emerged in Holland and Russia, where artists saw clearly the implications of cubism. Visual art could move beyond the threshold of pictorial imagery into the invention of pure form. Ideas about form and composing space were quickly applied to problems of design. It would be a mistake, however, to say that modern design is a stepchild of the fine arts. As discussed in chapter 12, Frank Lloyd Wright, the Glasgow group, the Vienna Secession, Adolf Loos, and Peter Behrens were all moving a heartbeat ahead of modern painting in their consciousness of plastic volume and geometric form at the turn of the century. A spirit of innovation was present in art and design, and new ideas were in abundance. By the end of World War I, graphic designers, architects, and product designers were energetically challenging prevailing notions about form and function.

Russian suprematism and constructivism
Russia was torn by the turbulence of World War I and then the Russian Revolution in the second decade of the twentieth century. Czar Nicholas II (1868–1918) was overthrown and executed along with his family. Russia was ravaged by civil war, and the Red Army of the Bolsheviks emerged victorious by 1920. During this period of political trauma, a brief flowering of creative art in Russia had an international influence on twentieth-century graphic design. Beginning with Marinetti’s Russian lectures, the decade saw Russian artists absorb cubism and futurism with amazing speed and then move on to new innovations. The Russian avant-garde saw common traits in cubism and futurism and coined the term cubo-futurism. Experimentation in typography and design characterized their futurist publications, which presented work by the visual and literary art communities. Symbolically, the Russian futurist books were a reaction against the values of czarist Russia. The use of coarse paper, handicraft production methods, and handmade additions expressed the poverty of peasant society as well as the meager resources of artists and writers. The poet Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovski’s autobiographical play was printed in a dissonant futurist style designed by David and Vladimir Burliuk (Fig. 15–1), becoming a model for works by others, including Ilja Zdanevich (Figs. 15–2 and 15–3).

The Bolsheviks began a news agency, the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) in 1917, immediately following the Russian Revolution. Two years later ROSTA posters began to be

15-1. David and Vladimir Burliuk, pages from Vladimir Mayakovski: A Tragedy, 1914. In an effort to relate visual form to meaning, Russian futurist graphic design mixed type weights, sizes, and styles.


15-3. Ilja Zdanevich, pages from Le-Dantyu as a Beacon, 1923. The Burliuk brothers and the Dadaists inspired Zdanevich’s playscript design, the lively movements of which are created by mixing type sizes and styles and building letters from letterpress ornaments.

15-4. Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovski, ROSTA Window poster, c. 1921. Such simple posters spread the Bolshevik message to the largely illiterate population.
Russian suprematism and constructivism

produced to support the Red Army in the civil war. Using straightforward pictorial designs, their goal was to portray the Bolshevik version of the new politics through the use of images. Crudely stenciled illustrations presented exaggerated historical and social events to appeal to a largely illiterate or semiliterate audience. Typical images included fancily dressed uncouth capitalists receiving punishment for what the Bolsheviks considered their evil ways.

Issued on separate sheets in a comic book form, they were commonly called ROSTA Windows. They appeared from the fall of 1919 until January 1922 and were hung in shop windows and other places where they would be easily seen. At first, they were hand-copied individual designs, but in the spring of 1920 they began to be produced using stencils, and one hundred copies could be produced in a single day.

Mayakovski was closely linked with the ROSTA Windows, and his first ROSTA poster appeared in October 1919. Although Mayakovski did not choose the themes for the posters, they were based on his writing or approved by him, and close to one-third of the ROSTA illustrations were his designs (Fig. 15–4).

Kasimir Malevich (1878–1935) founded a painting style of basic forms and pure color that he called suprematism. After working in the manner of futurism and cubism, Malevich created an elemental geometric abstraction that was new and totally nonobjective. He rejected both utilitarian function and pictorial representation, instead seeking the supreme “expression of feeling, seeking no practical values, no ideas, no promised land.” Malevich believed the essence of the art
Chapter 15: A New Language of Form

15–5. Kasimir Malevich, Black Square, c. 1913. A new vision for visual art is as far removed as possible from the world of natural forms and appearances.


15–8. El Lissitzky, PROUN 23, no. 6, 1919. Lissitzky developed visual ideals about balance, space, and form in his paintings, which became the basis for his graphic design and architecture.
experience was the perceptual effect of color and form. To

demonstrate this, perhaps as early as 1913 he made a com-
position with a black square on a white background (Fig. 15–5),
asserting that the feeling this contrast evoked was the essence
of art. In works such as the 1915 *Suprematist Composition* (Fig.
15–6), and the cover of *Pereyti tiški lektiši* (First Circle of Lect-
es) (Fig. 15–7), Malevich created a construction of concrete
elements of color and shape. The visual form became the
content, and expressive qualities developed from the intuitive
organization of the forms and colors.

The Russian movement was actually accelerated by the
revolution, for art was given a social role rarely assigned to
it. Lefist artists had been opposed to the old order and its
conservative visual art. In 1917 they turned their energies to
a massive propaganda effort in support of the revolutionaries,
but by 1920 a deep ideological split developed concerning the
role of the artist in the new communist state. Some artists,
including Malevich and Kandinsky, argued that art must
remain an essentially spiritual activity apart from the utilitar-
ian needs of society. They rejected a social or political role,
believing the sole aim of art to be realizing perceptions of the
world by inventing forms in space and time. Led by Vladimir
Tatlin (1885–1953) and Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956),
twenty-five artists advanced the opposing viewpoint in 1921,
when they renounced “art for art’s sake” to devote themselves
to industrial design, visual communications, and applied arts
serving the new communist society. These constructivists
called on the artist to stop producing useless things such as
paintings and turn to the poster, for “such work now belongs
to the duty of the artist as a citizen of the community who is
clearing the field of the old rubbish in preparation for the new
life.” Tatlin turned from sculpture to the design of a stove that
would give maximum heat from minimum fuel; Rodchenko
forsook painting for graphic design and photojournalism.

An early attempt to formulate constructivist ideology was the
1922 brochure *Konstruktivizm* by Aleksei Gan (1893–1942).
He criticized abstract painters for their inability to break
the umbilical cord connecting them to traditional art and
boasted that constructivism had moved from laboratory work
to practical application. Gan wrote that tectonics, texture,
and construction were the three principles of constructivism.
*Tectonics* represented the unification of communist ideology
with visual form; *texture* meant the nature of materials and
how they are used in industrial production; and *construction*
symbolized the creative process and the search for laws of
visual organization.

The constructivist ideal was best realized by the painter,
architect, graphic designer, and photographer El (Lazar
Markovich) Lissitzky (1890–1941), an indefatigable visionary
who profoundly influenced the course of graphic design.
At age nineteen, after being turned down by the Petrograd
Academy of Arts because of ethnic prejudice against Jews,
Lissitzky studied architecture at the Darmstadt, Germany,
school of engineering and architecture. The mathematical
and structural properties of architecture formed the basis
for his art.

In 1919 Marc Chagall, principal of the art school in Vitebsk,
located about 400 kilometers (250 miles) east of Moscow,
asked Lissitzky to join the faculty. Malevich was teaching
there and became a major influence on Lissitzky, who de-
veloped a painting style that he called *PROUNS* (an acronym for
“projects for the establishment [affirmation] of a new art”). In
contrast to the absolute flatness of Malevich’s picture plane,
PROUNS (Fig. 15–8) introduced three-dimensional illusions
that both receded (negative depth) behind the picture plane
(naught depth) and projected forward (positive depth) from
the picture plane. Lissitzky called PROUNS “an interchange
station between painting and architecture.” This indicates
his synthesis of architectural concepts with painting; it also
describes how PROUNS pointed the way to the application
of modern painting concepts of form and space to applied
design. This is seen in his 1919 poster “Beat the Whites with
the Red Wedge” (Fig. 15–9). The space is dynamically divided
into white and black areas. Suprematist design elements are
transformed into political symbolism that even a semiliterate
peasant can supposedly understand: Support for the “red”
Bolshevik against the “white” forces of Aleksandr Kerensky is
symbolized by a red wedge slashing into a white circle.

Lissitzky saw the October 1917 Russian Revolution as
a new beginning for mankind. Communism and social
engineering would create a new order, technology would
provide for society’s needs, and the artist/designer (he called
himself a “constructor”) would forge a unity between art and
technology by constructing a new world of objects to provide
mankind with a richer society and environment. This idealism
led him to put increasing emphasis on graphic design, as he
moved from private aesthetic experience into the mainstream
of communal life.

In 1921 Lissitzky traveled to Berlin and the Netherlands,
where he made contact with De Stijl, the Bauhaus, Dadaists,
and other constructivists. In addition, he met the architect
Hendricus Theodorus Wijdeveld (1885–1987) and designed
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They saw Veshch as a meeting point for new works from different nations. Lissitzky's Berlin period enabled him to spread the constructivist message through frequent Bauhaus visits, important articles, and lectures. Major collaborations included the joint design and editing of a special double issue of Merz with Kurt Schwitters in 1924. The editors of Broom, a radical American magazine covering advanced literature and art, commissioned title pages and other graphics from Lissitzky. A Broom cover layout (Fig. 15–12) shows Lissitzky's practice of making layouts on graph paper, which imposed the modular structure and mathematical order of a grid upon his designs. Advertisements and displays were commissioned by the Pelikan Ink Company (Fig. 15–13). Rebelling against the constraints of metal typesetting, Lissitzky often used drafting-instrument construction and paste-up to achieve his designs. In 1925 he predicted that Gutenberg's system of printing would become a thing of the past and that photomechanical processes would replace metal type and open new horizons for design as surely as radio had replaced the telegraph.

As a designer, Lissitzky did not decorate the book—he constructed it by visually programming the total object. In a 1923 book of Vladimir Mayakovski's poems, For the Voice, also translated as For Reading Out Loud, Lissitzky designed exclusively with elements from the metal typecase, set by a German compositor who knew no Russian (Figs. 15–14 and 15–11). Editor Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967) was joined by Lissitzky in creating the trilingual journal Veshch (Russian)/Gegenstand (German)/Objet (French). The title (meaning "object") was chosen because the editors believed that art meant the creation of new objects, a process for building a new collective international approach led by young European and Russian artists and designers. Lissitzky constructed his cover designs on a dynamic diagonal axis with asymmetrical balancing of elements, the weight placed high on the page. Lissitzky and Ehrenburg realized that parallel yet isolated art and design movements had evolved during the seven-year period of separation when Europe and Russia were bled by revolution and war; they saw Veshch as a meeting point for new works from different nations.

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15–10. El Lissitzky, cover for Veshch, 1922. Mechanical drawing instruments were used to construct geometric letterforms in a different style for each title; small typeset type was pasted in for plating.

15–11. El Lissitzky, title page for Veshch, 1922. Lissitzky searched for a geometric organizational system relating type, geometric elements, and photographs as elements in a whole. These goals were achieved by 1924.

15–12. El Lissitzky, layout for a Broom cover, vol. 5, no. 3, 1922. Isometric perspective letterforms are upside down and backward in the second title presentation, achieving a subtle vitality in a rigorously symmetrical design.

15–13. El Lissitzky, poster for Pelikan ink, 1924. This photogram was produced in the darkroom by placing objects directly on the photographic paper and then making the exposure by flashing a light held to the left.
through 15–16). He said his intent was to interpret the poems as "a violin accompanies a piano." A die-cut tab index along the right margin helped the reader find a poem. Each poem’s title spread is illustrated with abstract elements signifying its content. Spatial composition, contrast between elements, the relationship of forms to the negative space of the page, and an understanding of such printing possibilities as overlapping color were important in this work.

One of the most influential book designs of the 1920s was *The Isms of Art 1914–1924*, which Lissitzky edited with the Dadaist Hans Arp. Lissitzky’s format for this book was an important step toward the creation of a visual program for organizing information (Fig. 15–17). The three-column horizontal grid structure used for the title page (Fig. 15–18) and the three-column vertical grid structure used for the text (Fig. 15–19) became an architectural framework for organizing the forty-eight-page pictorially illustrated portfolio (Fig. 15–20). Asymmetrical balance, silhouette halftones, and a skillful use of white space are other important design considerations. By using large, bold sans-serif numbers to link the pictures to captions listed earlier, Lissitzky allows the numbers to become compositional elements. This treatment of sans-serif typography and bold rules is an early expression of the modernist aesthetic.

Lissitzky utilized photomontage for complex communications messages (Figs. 15–21 and 15–22). On a poster for a Russian exhibition in Switzerland, the image (Fig. 15–23) gives equal position to the female and the male, a significant symbolic communication in a traditionally male-dominated society.

After returning to Russia in 1925, Lissitzky spent increasing amounts of time with large exhibition projects for the Soviet government in addition to publications, art direction, some architectural design projects, and extensive correspondence (Figs. 15–24 and 15–25). His eighteen-year battle with tuberculosis had begun two years before. In December 1941, six months after Germany invaded Russia, Lissitzky died. Through his social responsibility, his mastery of technology
15–17. El Lissitzky, title page for The Isms of Art, 1924. The graphic spirit achieved by medium-weight sans-serif type, mathematical division of the space, white areas, and bold rules established a typographic standard for the modern movement.

15–18. El Lissitzky, title page for The Isms of Art, 1924. The graphic spirit achieved by medium-weight sans-serif type, mathematical division of the space, white areas, and bold rules established a typographic standard for the modern movement.

15–19. El Lissitzky, text format for The Isms of Art, 1924. Rigorous verticals separate German, French, and English texts, and horizontal bars emphasize an important introductory quotation.

15–20. El Lissitzky, pictorial spread from The Isms of Art, 1924. The grid systems of the preceding typographic pages are echoed in the placement of the images, which are one, two, and three columns wide.

15–22. El Lissitzky, cover of Arkhitekturna (Architecture), 1927. The strong structural properties of the composition suggest Lissitzky’s architectural training.

15–23. El Lissitzky, exhibition poster, 1929. In this stark, powerful image, the youth of a collective society are cloned into an anonymous double portrait above the exhibition structure designed by Lissitzky.
to serve his goals, and his creative vision, El Lissitzky set a standard of excellence for a designer. Later, typographer Jan Tschichold wrote, “Lissitzky was one of the great pioneers. . . . His indirect influence was widespread and enduring. . . . A generation that has never heard of him . . . stands upon his shoulders.”

Like Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko was an ardent communist who brought an inventive spirit and willingness to experiment to typography, montage, and photography. His early interest in descriptive geometry lent an analytical precision and definition of form to his paintings. In 1921 Rodchenko abandoned painting and turned to visual communication because his social views called for a sense of responsibility to society instead of to personal expression. Collaborating closely with Mayakovski, Rodchenko produced page designs with strong geometric construction, large areas of pure color, and concise, legible lettering. His heavy sans-serif hand-lettering engendered the bold sans-serif types that were widely used in the Soviet Union.

In 1923 Rodchenko began to design a magazine for all fields of the creative arts, entitled Novyi lef (Left Front of the Arts) (Figs. 15–26 through 15–28). A design style based on strong, static horizontal and vertical forms placed in machine-rhythm relationships emerged. Overprinting, precise registration, and photomontage were regularly employed in Novyi lef. Rodchenko delighted in contrasting bold, blocky type and hard-edged shapes against the softer forms and edges of photomontages. His interest in photomontage was a conscious effort to innovate an illustration technique appropriate to the twentieth century. The beginning of Russian photomontage coincided with the development of montage in film—a new conceptual approach to assembling cinematic information—and shared some of its vocabulary. Common techniques
15–26. Alexander Rodchenko, cover for Novyi lef, no. 1, 1923. The logo is printed in tight registration, with the top half of the letterforms red and the bottom half black.

15–27. Alexander Rodchenko, cover for Novyi lef, no. 2, 1923. In this early photomontage, the montage is crossed out, negating the old order; young children symbolize the new society.


included showing simultaneous action; superimposing images; using extreme close-ups and perspective images, often together; and rhythmically repeating an image.

The concept of serial painting—a series or sequence of independent works unified by common elements or an underlying structure—was applied to graphic design by Rodchenko. In 1924 his series of ten covers for the Jim Dollar (pseudonym for the well-known Soviet author Marietta Shaginian) “Miss Mend” books (Fig. 15–29) used a standard geometric format printed in black and a second color. The title, number, second color, and photomontage change with each edition, conveying the uniqueness of each book. The standardized elements bring consistency and economy to the whole series. As seen in the work of Salomon Telingater (1903–69), a dash of Dadaist vitality was often mixed into constructivist designs (Fig. 15–30). A witty originality informed Telingater’s use of typography and montage elements.

Georgii (1900–33) and Vladimir Augustovich (1899–1982) Stenberg were talented brothers who collaborated on theatrical designs and film posters (Figs. 15–31 through 15–33). Mindful of the reproduction difficulties with photographs at the time, they made meticulously realistic drawings for their posters by enlarging film-frame images via projection and grid methods. These three-dimensional illusions were contrasted with flat forms of bright color in dynamic, well-designed posters conveying strong, direct messages.

The master of propaganda photomontage was Gustav Klutsis (1895–1944), who referred to the medium as “the art construction for socialism.” Employing monumental and heroic images, Klutsis used the poster as a means for extolling Soviet accomplishments (Figs. 15–34 through 15–37). His work has often been compared to John Heartfield’s powerful political statements. It is highly likely that Klutsis was familiar with Heartfield’s work, which was exhibited in Russia during the 1930s. Klutsis was convinced that photomontage was the medium of the future and that it had rendered all other forms of artistic realism obsolete. Although most of his posters celebrated the achievements of Stalin, Klutsis’s uncompromising avant-garde approach eventually caused him to be arrested in 1938 during the Stalinist purges. He perished in the labor camps in 1944.

Another Soviet artist associated with Tatlin and the constructivists who profoundly influenced Russian modernism was Vladimir Vasilevich Lebedev (1891–1967). He embraced Bolshevism and designed bold, flat, neoprimitivist agitational propaganda posters for ROSTA, the Soviet news agency. This work proved to be excellent preparation for designing picture books for children. Lebedev learned to simplify, to reduce forms to their basic geometric shapes, to use only brilliant primary colors, and to tell a story visually and in sequence. “In the twenties,” he explained, “we fought for mastery and purity of art; we wanted fine art to be descriptive, not illustrative. Cubism gave us discipline of thought, without which there is neither mastery nor purity of professional language.” With the growth of the Soviet children’s book industry under Lenin’s New Economic Policy of the 1920s, Lebedev became


15–33. Georgii and Vladimir Augustovitch Stenberg, film poster for The General, 1929. The Stenberg brothers produced this clever poster for an American film, starring Buster Keaton, about a Civil War soldier who repeatedly crossed the front lines in a locomotive.
15–34. Gustav Klutsis, Spartakiada postcard, 1928. Using photomontage, Klutsis designed this postcard to promote a large sporting event.


15–36. Gustav Klutsis, “Everyone Must Vote in the Election of Soviets,” series poster, 1930. This same montage was used for various campaigns.

15–37. Gustav Klutsis, “In the Storm of the Third Year of the Five-Year Plan,” poster, 1930. The figures of three factory works are super-imposed to express the energy of the developing five-year plan.
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the father of the twentieth-century Russian picture book. In such graphic masterpieces as Prikluchenyya chuch-lo (The Adventures of the Scarecrow, 1922), A zbuka (Alphabet Book, 1925), Morozhenoe (Ice Cream, 1925), Okhota (The Hunt, 1925), Tsirk (Circus, 1925) (Figs. 15–38 through 15–40), Vchera i segodnya (Yesterday and Today, 1925), and Bagazh (Baggage, 1926), often in collaboration with the poet Samuil Marshak, Lebedev devised a flexible, modernist shorthand for figures that he reduced to their simplest shapes against a vast white background and relieved only by bright, flat harmonious color and some contrasting texture. Like his French contemporaries, Lebedev cultivated “infantilism” in his work by borrowing the fresh, spontaneous, naive techniques of children’s art. “When I make drawings for children,” he explained, “I try to recall my own consciousness as a child.” He was also extraordinarily inventive with various typefaces. Lebedev, more than anyone else, brought the picture book up to date.

Freeing his designs of any gratuitous detail, Lebedev illustrated Marxist parables on the superiority of the Soviet system to capitalism. Lebedev was an agitational propagandist at heart. But a good communist, he insisted, “doesn’t deny the necessity of an individual approach to illustrations. And the more the artist shows his personality in his work, the more effective will his art be, the deeper it will influence the reader, the closer it will bring him to art.” The Communist Party thought otherwise. During the Great Purges of the 1930s, Pravda denounced Lebedev’s picture books for their “formalism,” and he was forced to capitulate to the dictates of socialist realism, the state-supported style, by replacing his hard-edged designs with lush, benign fluff. He always regretted the compromise.

During the years immediately following the 1917 revolution, the Soviet government had tolerated advanced art while more urgent problems commanded its attention, but by 1922, it accused experimental artists of “capitalist cosmopolitanism” and instead advocated social-realist painting. Although constructivism lingered as an influence in Soviet graphic and industrial design, painters like Malevich who did not leave the country drifted into poverty and obscurity. Like Klutsis, many artists vanished into the gulag. However, constructivism underwent further development in the West, and innovative graphic design in the constructivist tradition continued through the 1920s and beyond.

De Stijl

The De Stijl movement was launched in the Netherlands in the late summer of 1917. Its founder and guiding spirit, Théo van Doesburg (1883–1931), was joined by painters Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), Bart Anthony van der Leck (1876–1958), and Vilmos Huszár (1884–1931), the architect Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud (1890–1963), and others. Working in an abstract geometric style, De Stijl artists sought universal laws of balance and harmony for art, which could then be a prototype for a new social order.

Mondrian’s paintings are the wellspring from which De Stijl’s philosophy and visual forms developed. By 1911 Mondrian had moved from traditional landscape painting to a symbolic style influenced by Van Gogh that expressed the forces of nature. It was then that he first saw cubist paintings. In early 1912 he relocated to Paris and began to introduce the vocabulary of cubism into his work. Over the next few years, Mondrian purged his art of all representative elements and moved cubism toward a pure, geometric abstraction. When war broke out in 1914, Mondrian was in Holland, and he remained there during the war.

The philosopher M. H. J. Schoenmakers influenced Mondrian’s thinking. Schoenmakers defined the horizontal and the vertical as the two fundamental opposites shaping our world, and called red, yellow, and blue the three principal colors. Mondrian began to paint purely abstract paintings composed of horizontal and vertical lines. He believed the cubists had not accepted the logical consequences of their discoveries; this was the evolution of abstraction toward its ultimate goal, the expression of pure reality. Mondrian believed true reality in visual art “is attained through dynamic movement in equilibrium . . . established through the balance of unequal but equivalent oppositions. The clarification of equilibrium through plastic art is of great importance for humanity. . . . It is the task of art to express a clear vision of reality.”

For a time in the late 1910s, paintings and designs by Mondrian, Van der Leck, and Van Doesburg were quite similar. They reduced their visual vocabulary to the use of primary colors (red, yellow, and blue) with neutrals (black, gray, and white), straight horizontal and vertical lines, and flat planes limited to rectangles and squares.

With their prescribed visual vocabulary, De Stijl artists sought an expression of the mathematical structure of the universe and the universal harmony of nature. They were deeply concerned with the spiritual and intellectual climate of their time and wished to express the “general consciousness of their age.” They believed the war was expunging an obsolete age, and that science, technology, and political developments would usher in a new era of objectivity and collectivism. This attitude was widespread during World War I, for many European philosophers, scientists, and artists believed prewar values had lost their relevance. De Stijl sought the universal laws that govern visible reality but are hidden by the outward appearance of things. Scientific theory, mechanical production, and the rhythms of the modern city formed from these universal laws.

In the Dutch language, schoon means both “pure” and “beautiful.” De Stijl adherents believed beauty arose from the absolute purity of the work. They sought to purify art by banning naturalistic representation, external values, and subjective expression. The content of their work was to be universal harmony, the order that pervades the universe. Mondrian produced a body of paintings of incomparable spiritual and formal quality. His compositions of asymmetrical balance, with tension between elements, achieved absolute harmony (Fig. 15–41). The implications for modern design proved to be immense.

A 1925 cover (Fig. 15–42) by Van Doesburg in collaboration with Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) for the former’s book Grundbegriffe der neuen gestaltenden (Principles
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of Modern Design) shows the direct application of the De Stijl vocabulary to graphic design. Even before the movement formed, Van der Leck used flat, geometric shapes of pure color and created graphic designs with flat color images and simple black bars organizing the space (Figs. 15–43 and 15–44).

Van Doesburg applied De Stijl principles to architecture, sculpture, and typography. He edited and published the journal *De Stijl* from 1917 until his death in 1931. Primarily funded with his own limited resources, this publication spread the movement's theory and philosophy to a larger audience. *De Stijl* advocated the absorption of pure art by applied art. The spirit of art could then permeate society through architectural, product, and graphic design. Under this system, art would not be subjugated to the level of the everyday object; the everyday object (and, through it, everyday life) would be elevated to the level of art. *De Stijl* became a natural vehicle for expressing the movement's principles in graphic design. Huszár designed a logo for *De Stijl* with letters constructed from an open grid of squares and rectangles (Fig. 15–45) and also designed some of the early title pages (Fig. 15–46). In 1921 Van Doesburg developed a new horizontal format (Figs. 15–47 and 15–48) that was used until the last issue, published in 1932. (Mondrian stopped contributing articles to the journal in 1924, after Van Doesburg developed his theory of elementarism, which declared the diagonal to be a more dynamic compositional principle than horizontal and vertical construction.)

In designs of alphabets and posters, Van Doesburg applied horizontal and vertical structure to letterforms and the overall layout (Fig. 15–49). Curved lines were eliminated and sans-serif typefaces were favored. Type was often composed in tight rectangular blocks. The square was used as a rigorous module for letterform design. A harmony of form was achieved, but banishing curved and diagonal lines diminished character uniqueness and legibility. Asymmetrically balanced layouts were composed on an open implied grid. Color was used not
15–43. Bart van der Leck, layout for Batavier Line poster, 1915–16. In a series of preliminary layouts, Van der Leck struggled to bring order to the design by dividing the space into rectangles.

15–44. Bart van der Leck, Batavier Line poster, 1916. Flat pure color and bold horizontal and vertical spatial divisions build the design. Because of World War I, this poster could not be used: the shipping lines between the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were severed. When it was eventually employed during the 1920s the text and colors were changed, infuriating Van der Leck. This example is the first printing of the poster and reflects the original design of the artist.

15–44

15–45. Vilmos Huszár, cover design for De Stijl, 1917. Huszár combined his composition with type and Van Doesburg’s logo to create a concise rectangle in the center of the page.

15–46. Vilmos Huszár, title pages for De Stijl, 1918. Huszár presented a positive/negative figure/ground study in spatial relationships. Restrained typography marked Apollinaire’s death.
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15–47. Théo van Doesburg, cover for De Stijl, 1922. Type is asymmetrical balanced in the four corners of an implied rectangle. De Stijl is combined with the letters N and B, which indicated Nieuwe Beelden (New Images).

15–48. Théo van Doesburg, advertisements and announcements from De Stijl, 1921. Five messages are unified by a system of open bars and sans-serif typography.

15–49. Théo van Doesburg, cover for Klassiek, Barok, Moderne (Classic, Baroque, Modern), 1920. For this book cover, Van Doesburg used his own letterforms.

as an afterthought or decoration but as an important structural element. Red was favored as a second color in printing because, in addition to its graphic power to compete with black, it signified revolution.

Van Doesburg comprehended the liberating potential of Dada and invited Kurt Schwitters to Holland to campaign for it. They collaborated on typographic design projects (Fig. 15–50), and Van Doesburg explored Dada typography and poetry, which he published in De Stijl under the pseudonym I. K. Bonset (Fig. 15–51). He saw Dada and De Stijl as opposite but complementary movements: Dada could destroy the old order, and then De Stijl could build a new order on the razed site of prewar culture. In 1922 he convened an International Congress of Constructivists and Dadaists in Weimar. One of the constructivists attending was El Lissitzky, who designed an issue of De Stijl (Fig. 15–52).

In architectural experiments, Van Doesburg constructed planes in space with dynamic asymmetrical relationships. De Stijl architectural theory was realized in 1924 when Gerrit Rietveld (1888–1964) designed the celebrated Schroeder House in Utrecht (Fig. 15–53). This house was so radical that neighbors threw rocks, and the Schroeder children were taunted by their classmates at school. The following year, Oud designed the Café de Unie (Fig. 15–54) with an asymmetrical façade, projecting De Stijl’s vision of order on an environmental scale. Because Van Doesburg, with his phenomenal energy and wide-ranging creativity, was De Stijl, it is understandable that De Stijl as an organized movement did not survive his death in 1931 at age forty-seven. However, others continued to use its visual vocabulary for many years; for example, Van der Leck’s open compositions of forms constructed of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines and shapes separated by spatial intervals are found in works ranging from early posters (see Fig. 15–43) to book designs and illustrations of the 1940s (Figs. 15–55 and 15–56).

In 1918, the Dutch architect Wijdeveld initiated the magazine Wendingen. It started as a monthly publication devoted to architecture, construction, and ornamentation, but during its thirteen years of existence it represented all sectors of the visual arts. Wijdeveld constructed his letters from existing typographic material and used the same technique in his Wendingen covers, stationery designs, and posters. In the
15-54. J. J. P. Oud, façade of the Café de Unie, Rotterdam, 1925. Oud successfully resolved problems of structure, signage, and identification. Architectural and graphic forms of contrasting color and scale are ordered into a harmonious balance.


15-56. Bart Anthony van der Leck, "Het vlas" (The Flax), 1941. This is a page from a children's story by Hans Christian Andersen.

The spread of constructivism
During World War I, Russian suprematism and the Dutch De Stijl movements were isolated from one another, yet both groups pushed cubism to a pure geometric art. After the war their ideas were adopted by artists in other countries, including Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. The Polish

15–58. H. T. Wijdeveld, Internationale Economisch-Historische Tentoonstelling (International Economic Historical Exhibition), poster, 1929. This poster reflects the brick architecture of the Amsterdam School.
designer Henryk Berlewi (1894–1967) was decisively influenced by Lissitzky’s 1920 Warsaw lectures. In 1922 and 1923, Berlewi worked in Germany and began to evolve his *mechano-faktura* theory. Believing that modern art was filled with illusionistic pitfalls, he mechanized painting and graphic design (Fig. 15–61) into a constructed abstraction that abolished any illusion of three dimensions. This was accomplished by mathematical placement of simple geometric forms on a ground. The mechanization of art was seen as an expression of industrial society.

In 1924 Berlewi joined the futurist poets Aleksander Wat and Stanley Brucz in opening a Warsaw advertising firm called Roklama Mechano. They introduced modern art forms to Polish society in industrial and commercial advertisements. Their brochure stated that advertising design and costs should be governed by the same principles that govern modern industry and the laws of economy. Advertising copy was reorganized for conciseness and impact, and visual layout was adapted to this text (Fig. 15–62). Berlewi hoped that
commercial advertising could become a vehicle for abolishing the division between the artist and society.

Władysław Strzeminski (1893–1952) was also an avid proponent of constructivist page design in Poland. Having studied in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Strzeminski had been involved with Russian constructivism in its early stages. Both a painter and writer on art theory, he worked with experimental typography during the 1920s and founded a modern typography school in Lodz during the early 1930s (Fig. 15–63).

In Czechoslovakia, Ladislav Sutnar (1897–1976) became the leading supporter and practitioner of functional design. He advocated the constructivist ideal and the application of design principles to every aspect of contemporary life. In addition to graphics, the prolific Prague designer created toys, furniture, silverware, dishes, and fabrics. The publishing house Družstevní Práce retained Sutnar as design director. His book jackets and editorial designs evinced an organizational simplicity and typographic clarity, giving graphic impact to the communication (Figs. 15–64 through 15–66).
Karel Teige (1900–51), also from Prague, was initially trained as a painter but early in his career began working in typography and photomontage as an enthusiastic advocate of international modernism. He was an active participant in Devětsil (Nine Forces), a group of avant-garde poets, designers, architects, performance artists, and musicians, and designed many of their publications using what was available in the letterpress printer’s type case. Founded in 1920, Devětsil would eventually have as many as eighty members. Teige believed that the untrained practitioner could contribute a fresh and innovative approach to design, and from 1922 until 1938 he designed over one hundred books and periodicals. His constructivist approach involved an expressive use of type, montage, collage, and borrowed clips from silent films (Figs. 15–67 and 15–68). He was the editor of several avant-garde magazines, including Disk, Zeme sovetu, Stavba, and ReD. A social idealist, he believed that good design could help resolve the differences between capitalist America and the communist Soviet Union. After his own country fell to communism in 1948, the new authorities considered him to be too egalitarian and cosmopolitan. They banned him from working as a writer and designer, and he died three years later.

In 1919, after completing law studies in Budapest, Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy turned to nonrepresentational painting influenced by Malevich. In 1921 he moved to Berlin, where Lissitzky, Schwitters, and Van Doesburg were frequent visitors to his studio. His design for Arthur Müller Lehning’s Amsterdam-based avant-garde publication i10—one of the purest examples of De Stijl principles applied to typography—demonstrates the collaboration of constructivism, De Stijl, and Merz. De Stijl member César Domela (1900–92) assisted Moholy-Nagy in the cover design (Fig. 15–69). The printer was initially disturbed by the complete disregard for the rules
The spread of constructivism

15–66. Ladislav Sutnar, cover of Nejmenší dům (Minimum Housing), 1931.

15–67. Karel Teige, cover for Disk, no. 1, 1923. Disk was one of several avant-garde publications edited and designed by Teige.

15–68. Karel Teige, cover for Moderní architektura v československu (Modern Czechoslovakian Architecture), 1930.
of typography, as shown in the opening page of the premiere issue (Fig. 15–70), but eventually he came to understand and appreciate the design. (In 1980, i10 publisher/editor Lehning told Philip B. Meggs that although the i10 cover is often attributed to Domela, Lehning’s recent retrieval of Moholy-Nagy’s cover layouts indicates major responsibility should be credited to him.)

The quest for a pure art of visual relationships that began in the Netherlands and Russia remained a major influence for the visual disciplines throughout the twentieth century. One of the dominant directions in graphic design has been the use of geometric construction in organizing the printed page. Malevich and Mondrian used pure line, shape, and color to create a universe of harmoniously ordered, pure relationships. This was seen as a visionary prototype for a new world order. The unification of social and human values, technology, and visual form became a goal for those who strove for a new architecture and graphic design.
15–69. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, cover design for i10, 1929. The designer saw type as form and texture to be composed with a rectangle, lines, and spatial intervals to achieve dynamic equilibrium. Clarity of communication and harmony of form are achieved.

15–70. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, title page spread for i10, 1927. The printer was deeply disturbed by this design, with its words running vertically, bold sans-serif type placed into serif text for emphasis, bullets separating paragraphs, and bold bars next to page numbers.