

Chapter 8: DE STIJL/ AMSTERDAM SCHOOL

8.1 DE STIJL /Dutch də stɪj/ English duh-STILE/(Dutch for "the style")

8.1.1 THE MOVEMENT

“The group of Dutch artists known as “De Stijl” was founded in 1917 in Lieden with the painter Theo van Doesburg” (Gossel P,2007, p239). It is an Artistic movement during (1917-1930) where chaos of the war was the driving force. That caused many artists to search for a new way of expressing order with the artwork and design. It is also known as *neoplasticism — the new plastic art (or Nieuwe Beelding in Dutch)*

Influenced by the **neoplatonic** philosophy of the mathematician **M. H. J. Schoenmaekers**; **Painter Theo van Doesburg** published a journal named **De Stijl** from 1917 to 1928, spreading the theories of the group.

The De Stijl included:

Artists- **Piet Mondrian, Bart Van Der Leck** and **Vilmos Huszar**

Sculptor- **George Vantongerloo**

Architects- **Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud, Gerrit Rietveld** and **Cornelis Van Eesteren** and

Poet- **Antony Kok**

It has influences on the **visual arts, architecture, and design** and some effect on the world of **music**; the Dutch composer **Jakob van Domselaer** (1890-1960), a friend of Mondrian's, created a number of musical works based on the same principles in 1913.

Also had some influence on the **Bauhaus style** and the **International style**, as well as **clothing** and **interior design**.

8.1.2 CHARACTERISTICS

-Sought to express a new **utopian** ideal of **spiritual harmony** and **order**

-Dedicated to absolute **devaluation** of tradition

-Advocated **pure geometric abstraction** and **universality** by a reduction to the essentials (**simplicity**) of **form** and **color**

Philosophy is based on **functionalism** insistence on recti-linearity of the planes sliding past each other; vertical and horizontal lines do not intersect

It has simplified visual compositions using only the primary colors; red, blue and yellow along with shades of black and white.

8.1.3 PRINCIPLES

- Adheres to **Cubism** which subscribes ethical principles as **truth, objectivity, order, clarity** and **simplicity**
- **Neo-plasticism** where horizontal and vertical lines tend to intersect at **right angle**
- Explicit use of **Primary colors**; red, blue and yellow and shades of black and white
- Planes (2-D elements) are juxtaposed in a **new sense**
- Proclamation of **truth to material**; limit number of materials in one place to avoid in Oud's word "too heterogeneous"
- **Asymmetrical** relations based on decomposition and re-composition of planes or elements

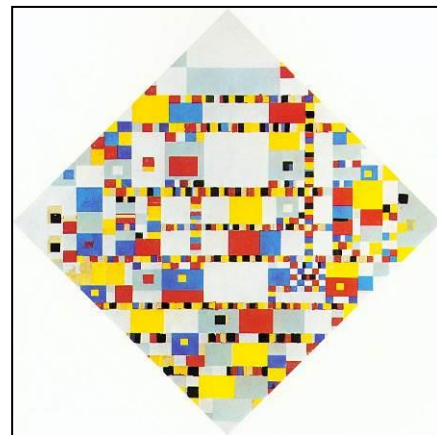
8.1.4 NOTED NEOPLASTICISTS AND THEIR WORKS

8.1.4.1 Piet Mondrian (1872 – 1944)

Pieter Cornelis (Piet) Mondrian was a Dutch **painter**, An Important contributor to the De Stijl art movement. Despite being well-known, often-parodied, and even trivialized, Mondrian's paintings exhibit a complexity that belies their apparent simplicity. He is best known for his **non-representational** paintings, which he called **compositions**, consisting of rectangular forms of red, yellow, blue, or black, separated by thick, black, rectilinear lines. Examples; The **composition** series,



Composition with Yellow, Blue & Red,
1930, Kunsthaus Zürich¹



Victory Boogie-Woogie
(1942–1944), Kunstmuseum Den Haag²

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Mondrian#/media/File:Piet_Mondriaan,_1930_-_Mondrian_Composition_II_in_Red,_Blue,_and_Yellow.jpg

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Mondrian#/media/File:Piet_Mondriaan_Victory_Boogie_Woogie.jpg

8.1.4.2 Theo van Doesburg (1883 – 1931)

Born as Christian Emil Marie Küpper in Utrecht as the son of a photographer. He was a Dutch **artist**, who practiced painting, writing, poetry and architecture. He is known as the **founder** of De Stijl and he was an '**ambassador**' of the movement, promoting it across Europe. He moved to Weimar in 1922, to make an impression on the Bauhaus principal, Walter Gropius and spread the influence of the movement. Doesurg was the driving force behind the group, advocating rejection of traditional art and adoption of a new, abstract language of form involving, for example, the calculated distribution of unequal masses in an anticubist system. In the renovation of the L'Aubette dance café in Strasbourg, France(1926-1928), Doesburg was responsible for the colorful design of the walls and ceilings. He tried to cancel out the boundaries of the spatial structure of the fields that were partially diagonal, partially straight, in the primary colors of blue, red and yellow. When it became apparent that this color was not appealing to the customers, this attempt of meld of art and architecture was judged largely to have failed.³



L'Aubette dance cafe in Strasbourg⁴

8.1.4.3 Gerrit Rietveld (1888 – 1964)

He was a Dutch designer, **Architect** and **cabinet maker**. Started his own furniture factory (1911), while studying architecture. He became a member of De Stijl in 1919, the same year in which he became an architect. Rietveld designed the **Red and Blue Chair** influenced by the style. In 1924 he designed the Rietveld **Schröder house** in Utrecht. The house while guided by geometric forms; is asymmetrical. This is the only house with all the components of De Stijl.

This building was designed for Mrs. Truus Schröder-Schräder. She commissioned the house to be designed preferably without walls. Both Rietveld and Schröder espoused progressive ideals that included "a fierce commitment to a new openness about relationships within their

³ Gossel P, 2007, The A-Z of Modern Architecture, Doesburg Theo van, TASCHEN, p 245

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theo_van_Doesburg#/media/File:Cin%C3%A9-dancing_Strasbourg_-_Theo_van_Doesburg060611_006.jpg

own families and to truth in their emotional lives. Bourgeois notions of respectability and propriety, with their emphasis on discipline, hierarchy, and containment would be eliminated through architectural design that countered each of these aspects in a conscious and systematic way.⁵



Schröder house, Utrecht, 1924⁶

Inside there is no static accumulation of rooms, but a dynamic, changeable open zone. Earlier the living area upstairs is a large open zone except for a separate toilet and a bathroom. However, rooms were created with sliding wall between the living area and the son's room

The "invisible corner"

The facades are a collage of planes and lines whose components are purposely detached from, and seem to glide past, one another. This enabled the provision of several balconies.

Like Rietveld's Red and Blue Chair, each component has its own form, position and color. Colors were chosen as to strengthen the plasticity of the facades; surfaces in white and shades of grey, black window and doorframes, and a number of linear elements in primary colors.⁷

Rietveld broke with the 'De Stijl' movement in 1928 and switched to the Nieuwe Zakelijkheid the same year he joined the **Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne**. He designed the "**Zig-Zag**" chair in 1934 and started the design of the **Van Gogh Museum** in Amsterdam.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rietveld_Schr%C3%B6der_House#cite_note-2, Friedman, Alice T. (2006). Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History. New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 68–69

⁶

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rietveld_Schr%C3%B6der_House#/media/File:Rietveld_Schr%C3%B6derhuis_Ha_yKranen-20.JPG

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rietveld_Schr%C3%B6der_House

8.1.4.4 Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud (1890 - 1963)

He was famous as a follower of the De Stijl movement. He was the Municipal Housing Architect for Rotterdam between 1918 and 1933.

He was one of a number of Dutch **architects** who attempted to reconcile strict, **rational**, 'scientific' **cost-effective** construction technique against the psychological needs and aesthetic expectations of the users. He called it, '**poetic functionalism**'.

As of 1932, he was considered one of the four greatest modern architects alongside Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier. He designed the **Dutch National War Monument** in Amsterdam, the **monument on de Grebbeberg** and **Café De Unie**, Rotterdam. (Sharp D, p79) mentions that Oud's façade is highly colored in Mondrainsque primaries which is a two-dimensional composition.



Café De Unie, 1925⁸

8.2 Werkbund Exhibition, Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart, Germany, 1927

The spectacular success of the Weissenhofsiedlung exhibition and its lasting prominence as a key event in modern movement history was undoubtedly due to its “newness” and consistent appearance. Under Mies van de Rohe's direction, a representative group of European Architects had been brought together to design a model of modern estate of “modern” houses of people with moderate means as well as for a client with aspirations towards villa life. (Sharp D, 1991, p86)



Terrace homes by J J P Oud, 1927⁹

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobus_Oud#/media/File:Cafe_De_Unie.jpg

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobus_Oud#/media/File:WeissenhofsiedlungJJPOud-pjt.jpg

The twenty-one buildings consist of terraced and detached houses as well as apartment buildings. They vary slightly in form but display standardized design language. What they have in common are their simplified facades, flat roofs used as terraces, window bands, open plan interiors, and the high level of prefabrication which permitted their erection in just five months. Despite popular belief, only about one third of the buildings were completely white. Bruno Taut had his entry, the smallest, painted in various colors. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's entry was white, blue, orange, and green. Van der Rohe's was painted a light pink. The eaves of Hans Scharoun's entry were painted orange.¹⁰



Houses by Le Corbusier & Pierre Jeanneret¹¹



The Scharoun residence¹²

8.3 THE AMSTERDAM SCHOOL

The Amsterdam School (Dutch: Amsterdamse School) is a style of architecture that arose from 1910 through about 1930 in the Netherlands. The Amsterdam School movement is part of international Expressionist architecture, sometimes linked to German Brick Expressionism.

Buildings of the Amsterdam School are characterized by brick construction with complicated masonry with a rounded or organic appearance, relatively traditional massing, and the integration of an elaborate scheme of building elements inside and out: decorative masonry, art glass, wrought ironwork, spires or "ladder" windows (with horizontal bars), and integrated architectural sculpture. The aim was to create a total architectural experience, interior and exterior.¹³

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weissenhof_Estate

¹¹ <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/de/WeissenhofMuseum-pjt.jpg>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weissenhof_Estate#/media/File:WeissenhofsiedlungScharoun-pjt.jpg

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amsterdam_School

The three leaders of the Amsterdam School Michel de Klerk, Johan van der Mey and Piet Kramer. The predominantly white window frames and numerous, lovingly crafted details produce a pleasing effect, not just for individual residences but for entire housing areas. Its style represented Amsterdam's new residential quarters and was able to influence major housing construction projects due to political interest as well. But their influence was limited to the design of facades as it was used for cosmetic purpose only. (Gossel P, 2007, p46)



The Scheepvaarthuis, Amsterdam¹⁴



'De Dageraad' housing estate, Amsterdam, 1920-23 (Piet Kramer)¹⁵

Reference Book:

1. Gossel P, 2007, The A-Z of Modern Architecture, Amsterdam School, TASCHEN, p 46
2. Gossel P, 2007, The A-Z of Modern Architecture, De Stijl, TASCHEN, p 239
3. Gossel P, 2007, The A-Z of Modern Architecture, Doesburg Theo van, TASCHEN, p 245
4. Sharp D., 1991, Twentieth Century Architecture A Visual History, Decade 1920, The Bath Press, p (74,75,79,86,87)

Reference article:

Friedman, Alice T. (2006). Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History. New Haven: Yale University Press. p 68–69

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amsterdam_School#/media/File:Amsterdam_Scheepvaarthuis_002.JPG

¹⁵ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1a/Amsterdam_PL_Tak_Complex.jpg