

B-PD123 CONTEXTUAL STUDIES 1A
BA in PRODUCT DESIGN

REPORT : As an art movement, De Stijl is characterised by the use of abstraction to represent utopian ideals such as the search for “universal beauty”. In this essay, you will discuss the ways in which De Stijl provided a direct background for the principles of the Bauhaus as a school. You are to use a minimum of 3 artworks or design objects to illustrate your points

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I certify that the work being submitted for examination is my own account of my own research, which has been conducted ethically. The data and results presented are the genuine data and results actually obtained by me during the conduct of the research. Where I have drawn on the work, ideas and results of others, this has been appropriately acknowledged in the essay. The greater portion of the work described in the essay has been undertaken subsequent to my registration for the degree for which I am submitting this document.

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REPORT

The De Stijl and Bauhaus movements were crucial for the development of modern art as we know it. In this essay, we will discuss the influence the De Stijl movement and its principles had on the Bauhaus school's principles using a few examples. To discuss this we must first understand what the two subjects of comparison are.

THE DE STIJL MOVEMENT AND ITS PRINCIPLES

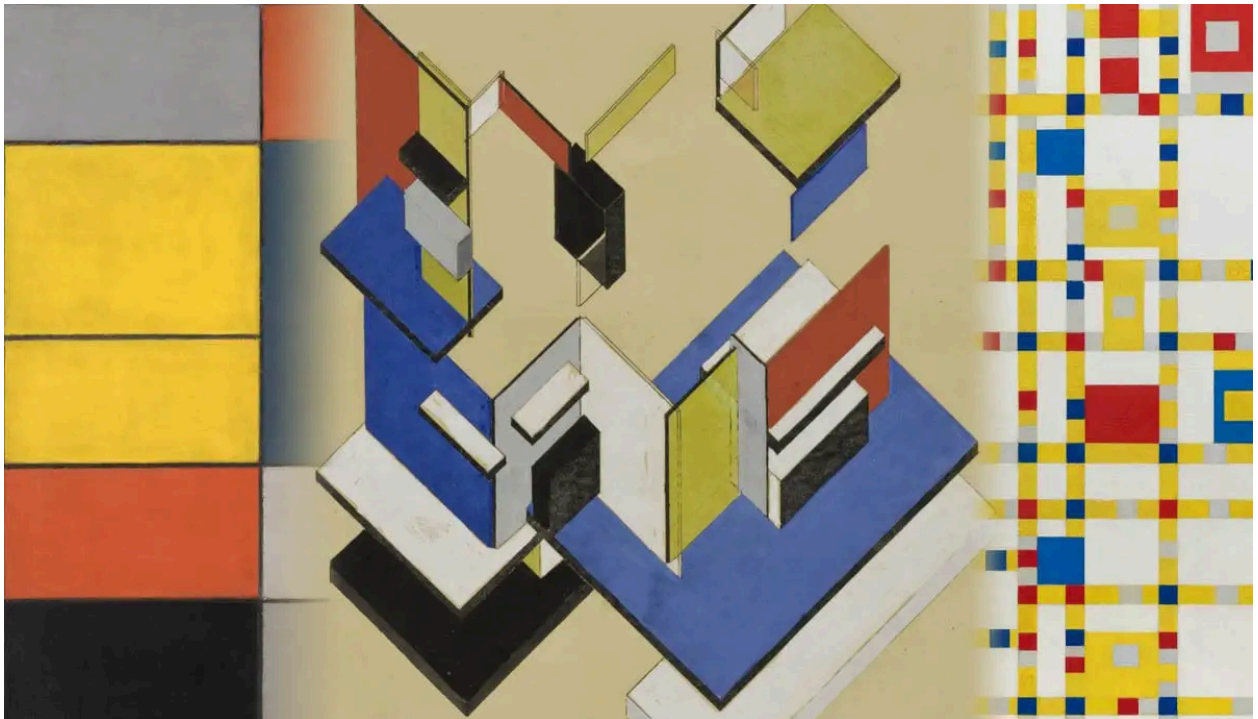


Figure 1: Example of a De Stijl Movement Work

The De Stijl movement (also known as “Neoplasticism”) began in 1917. Translating to “The Style”, the movement was founded in the Netherlands by Theo van Doesburg (1883 - 1931) and Piet Mondrian (1872 - 1944). The de Stijl artist's goal was to achieve visual harmony in art that would act as a model for restoring balance to everyday life, a balance between universal and individual. A visual language that fuses both form and function for the modern era. They recognised what they required for a modern period: abstraction, mass production and design education.

The movement valued simplicity and harmony over all else. The art style had a few distinctive and unique traits, making it easily recognisable. It can be characterised by its cold and abstract aesthetics. Pieces from this movement were composed using only straight lines and primary colours. 2-dimensional works from this movement used rectangular and triangular blocks while 3d works incorporated cubes and pyramid-like shapes. (White, 2003)

THE BAUHAUS SCHOOL AND ITS PRINCIPLES

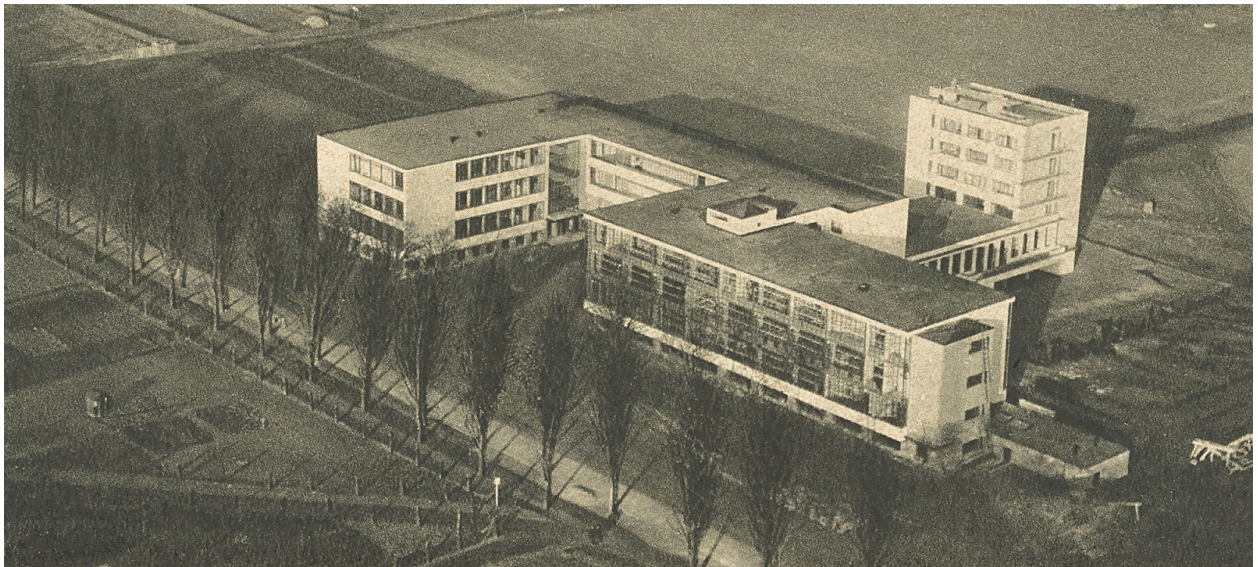


Figure 2 : The Bauhaus School

The Bauhaus school was an institution in Germany founded by Walter Gropius (1883-1967) in the year 1919. The objective of the school was to reimagine the world and display the unity of all arts. It combined the elements of fine arts and design, which had never been imagined before.

Gropius's vision for the school was to focus on designing for production while simultaneously emphasising craft. In 1923, the school adopted the phrase "Art into Industry" as its slogan, solidifying its goals. Popular courses offered by the school were the cabinet-making workshop, the metalworking workshop, the textile workshop and the typography workshop. (Winton, 2016)

The Bauhaus incorporated multiple De Stijl principles, acclimating them into their own and together paving a path for the modernist movement. The following are examples:

1. PRIMARY COLOUR PALETTE



Figure 3 : Gerrit Rietveld's Red and Blue chair

De Stijl limited its colour palettes to primary colours with black and white. The colour palette used was a result of the De Stijl ideology of seeking harmony and order in art. The simplicity of colour is evidently seen in its works making them easily distinguishable. For example, the Red and Blue chair (figure 3) designed by Gerrit T Rietveld is arguably the most well-known work from the De Stijl movement.

Rietveld's chair, designed in the year 1918, represents the De Stijl colour scheme in a 3d work beautifully. The only colours used are the three primary colours (red, blue, yellow) along with black. Although simple, the contrast between the colours makes them bold and

the chair truly catches one's eye. The chair gained popularity as it challenged the traditional notations of a practical household object. It fused the concepts of art and functionality, the concept of sculpture and architecture.

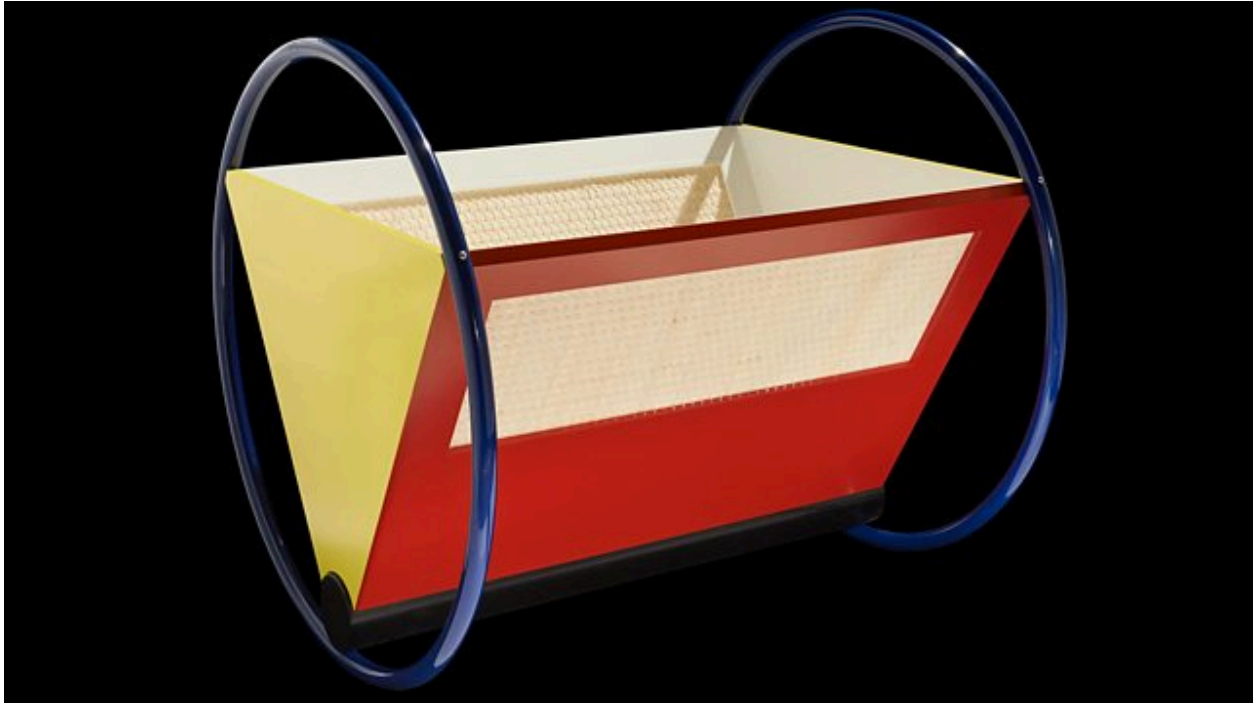


Figure 4 : Peter Keler's Bauhaus Cradle

Similarly, the Bauhaus also worked with this colour scheme, most of its works being comprised of primary colours, black and white. Many works produced by the school had a monotonous colour palette, however, a prime example to support the primary colour palette is Peter Keler's Bauhaus cradle (Figure 4) designed in the year 1922.

The cradle has a simple and straightforward design. It consists of basic shapes (circles, rectangles and triangles) and uses only the three primary colours all over. The lack of any neutral colours causes the existing ones to contrast each other boldly, which is supportive of the same philosophy of De Stijl's choices of colour (Cvetkovski and Sidorenko, 2019)

The renowned art historian and former director of the British Museum Robert Neil MacGregor stated in a BBC podcast "If I had to choose one object to sum up the aesthetic of the Bauhaus, it would be this cradle" while examining the art piece, calling it the "perfect Bauhaus"

2. HARMONY / ORDER

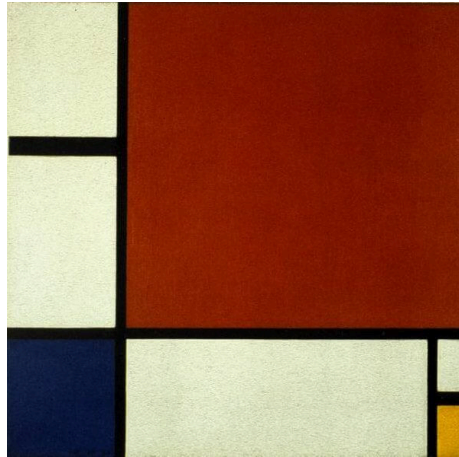


Figure 5: Piet Mondrian's Composition II with Red, Blue and Yellow
Along with the noticeable colour palette, De Stijl's art pieces can also be recognised by their use of a controlled, sometimes almost grid-like structure. This is achieved by the repetitive use of horizontal and vertical lines. The lines intersect and form rectangular shapes which provide a sense of order by creating a systematic framework for visual elements. Piet Mondrian's 1930 "Composition II With Red, Blue and Yellow" (fig) is a classic example to showcase this.

The art piece is simple. using only primary colours, black and white, it consists of intersecting thick black lines forming rectangles of various sizes. Each rectangle holds only a single colour and stays confined within the black edges, providing the viewer with a sense of organisation. The grid serves as a framework for the colour blocks, which emphasises the

precision and order which is associated with De Stijl. (veen, 2018)



Figure 6: Laszlo Maholy Nagy's Bauhaus Balconies

Moving to the Bauhaus, the school also valued and worked towards achieving harmony and clarity through artworks. One of Bauhaus's key principles is to be simple and effective.

Following a grid-like structure allows a piece to be basic in form yet organised and efficient.

An example of this is Laszlo Maholy Nagy's "Bauhaus Balconies" from 1926. (Figure 6)

Nagy designed the prominent protruding balconies of the five-story Bauhaus studio building, making them the key elements of the complex. The balconies and windows form a grid structure when viewed from the outside, making the structure look organised and neat.

(Deicher, 1994)

3. MINIMALISM

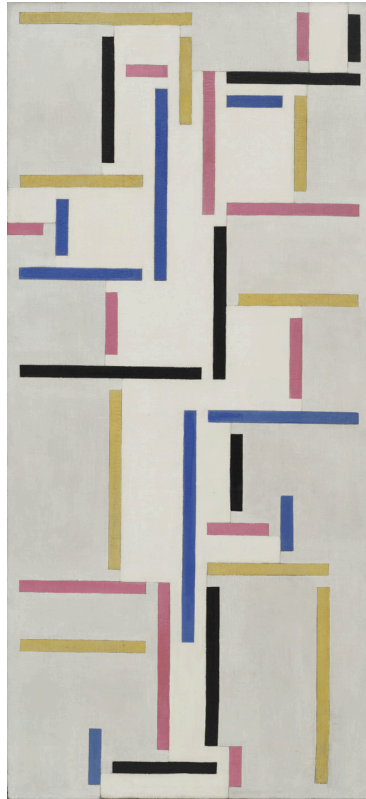


Figure 7 : Theo van Doesburg's Rhythm of a Russian Dance

Lastly, a key feature of the De Stijl movement is its minimalism. The basic shapes, the primary colours, and the organised presentation of works all add to the principle of minimalism. The timelessness of minimal art was essential to the progress of art and design into the modern period. Theo Van Doesburg's 1918 artwork "Rhythm of a Russian Dance" (Figure 7) is an ideal example in support of this.

The Rhythm of a Russian Dance is an extremely simple and straightforward piece. It is comprised of a series of horizontal and vertical lines in red, blue, yellow and black to depict height. White and grey are used on the canvas in the background to better highlight the rectangles. None of the lines intersect to form a grid-like structure but are instead neatly arranged with good spacing between them. This piece is incredibly timeless due to its minimal and simplistic look.



Figure 8: Marianne Brandt's Tea Infuser

The Bauhaus also valued simplicity. One of their primary principles was “form follows function”. The works from the school were always made with simple shapes and colours and avoided natural forms. The focus was on making the design and art pieces efficient with minimal elements. Marianne Brandt's iconic “Tea infuser” (Figure 8) from 1924 is a prime example of minimalism followed in the Bauhaus.

Brandt's tea infuser is one of Bauhaus's most popular product design pieces. The design embodies a basic geometric form. The teapot is a hemisphere with a conical spout, short cylindrical lid and a simple “D” shaped handle. The aesthetics of this product is simple, with the body being grey from silver nickel and a black handle made with ebony. The minimalistic approach to this design is what makes this piece timeless and functional, which is aligned to the shared principles of the Bauhaus. (Pandolfo and McDermott, 2019)

'Each individual part - lid, handle, spout and base - can be clearly read. Brandt then put all of them together again by creating an abstract sculpture which, at the same time, is a teapot. The flat and spherical shapes harmonize perfectly' (Rawsthorn 2007)

The above examples showcase how the philosophies were shared between the De Stijl movement and the Bauhaus school. Although originating from different countries at different times, their core values were shared. From functionality to minimalism, both worked to leave behind traditional beliefs and values and move towards a modern period. De Stijl's principles were key to the modernisation of art and design and helped shape the fundamentals of the Bauhaus movement. The school took in the principles and expanded on them, further developing modern principles which have led us to the modern time period of today.

Word count: 1370

RESEARCH (my notes before researching)

TOPIC 3. DE STIJL

As an art movement, De Stijl is characterised by the use of abstraction to represent utopian ideals such as the search for “universal beauty”. In this essay, you will discuss the ways in which De Stijl provided a direct background for the principles of the Bauhaus as a school. You are to use a minimum of 3 artworks or design objects to illustrate your points

- > What is de stijl
 - History of de stijl
 - Characteristics of de stijl
 - Why was it popular
 - It's significance
 - Its relationship to industrialisation
- > What is the Bauhaus
 - History of bauhaus
 - Why was it popular
 - Its significance
 - Its principles
- > How de stijl have direct bg for its principles
- > 3 bauhaus artworks and talk of how it is influenced by de stijl

AFTER CONSULTATION:

INTRO

- > What is de stijl
 - History of de stijl
 - Characteristics of de stijl
 - Why was it popular
 - It's significance
 - Its relationship to industrialisation
- > What is the Bauhaus
 - History of bauhaus
 - Why was it popular
 - Its significance
 - Its principles

MAIN BODY - DE STIJL PRINCIPLES AND USE EXAMPLES TO SHOWCASE BAUHAUS PRINCIPLES

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Figure 4 : "Bauhaus Cradle." *BBC*, 23 Oct. 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p029ns8j.

Figure 5 : *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow, 1929 by Piet Mondrian*.

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