



THE AVANT GARDE MOVEMENT

What is the Avant-Garde?

One of the most debatable topics among artists and art historians is what type of work constitutes Avant-Garde style. One's definition of avant-garde dictates the movement's time frame – including its highly controversial closing stages. The term comes from a French phrase used in the nineteenth century to denote military special forces, translating in English to “advance guard”. These armed forces were created of small bands of individuals set off in advance of the rest of the army's troops in order to pioneer and clear a path for the masses to follow.¹ Similarly, the avant-garde movement ignited a new way of thinking concerning social order, poetry, literature, science, commerce, morality, and art – all of which were much opposed to the current norms of the time. As individuals began to challenge

these established standards, and the launching of photography was able to realistically capture the surrounding world, artists and poets began to interpret their work in new ways, especially concerning subject matter and production.

From Philosophical Thought to Art

The first understood stage of the avant-garde began from the stirrings of underground agitations and activities that helped to trigger revolutionary events like those in France in 1848 and the Paris Commune.² Such ideas rapidly spread from the political nature to the aesthetic. As art critic Clement Greenberg states in his essay, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, published in 1939, these new societal perspectives of the few were quickly “absorbed by artists and poets, even if unconsciously for the most part.”³ Because of this, Greenberg concluded,



& TYPOGRAPHY

“it was no accident, therefore, that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically [and geographically] with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe.”⁴ Because of the state of ideological confusion, the avant-garde became a way that society handled modernity - not so much a way to experiment, but instead a tool used to keep the culture moving forward; therefore, in the creative atmosphere, the movement's name is closely associated (and often interchanged) with the title of Modern Art. This new, progressive style became known as creating ‘art for art's sake’, a theme often repeated throughout the life of avant-garde, thus beginning a long history that would even-

ually result in abstract and nonobjective art.⁵ Artists began to retreat from such publically celebrated work in order to examine art's intrinsic value, and the significance of creating for the sake of the experience, instead of strictly for representational purpose. This mindset often was received with criticism by the public for the artist's new use of materials and techniques; however, as a result of this innovation during the 1860s and 1870s, some became more curious about the individual behind the new works, causing many artists to feel that a life devoted to art for art's sake was of a higher calling than had previously been established. The artist was then received in one of two ways: an enlightened thinker with a keen sense of perception, wielding the power to change; or completely distinctive in a common world. The artist's spontaneity was

to be admired, even if his means were criticized. Donald Kusip, writer of *The Cut of the Avant-Garde Artist*, claims that such an artist is freer because “he is more absolutely integrated than anyone else, and he can experience in a more primordial way than other people because his sense of perception is not bound by symbolic functioning.”⁶ He goes on to say that it is because “the artist is spontaneous in the face of an environment asking him to conform to it that he is able to sense reality in all its presentational immediacy.”⁷ An experimental attitude is what makes the avant-garde artist no longer bound to the confines of traditional society, but rather able to sense true reality. These forward-thinking groups collectively became a symbol of resistance to the oppressive bourgeois civilization, and brought a new kind of explanation as to the true definition of art and life. This caused the artist to be seen as an individualistic risk taker, able to lead a cowardly society.⁸ Based on this idealism, it is understandable that in a time where Romanticism was popular,

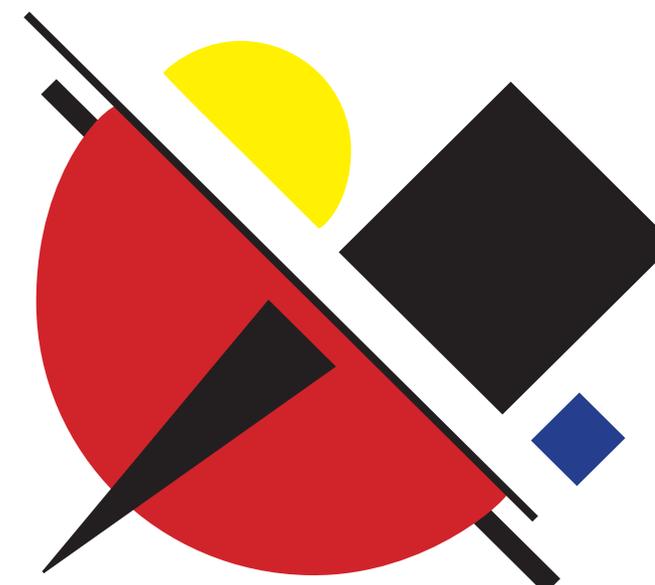




Fig 1. Manet, Luncheon on the Grass, 1863. Oil on canvas; 81 x 101 cm; Musee d'Orsay, Paris www.metmuseum.org



Fig 3. Claude Monet, La Grenouillère, 1869. Oil on canvas; 74.6 x 99.7 cm www.metmuseum.org



Fig 2. Manet, Olympia, 1863. Oil on canvas; 130 x 190 cm; Musee d'Orsay, Paris www.metmuseum.org



Fig 4. Edgar Degas, Dancers Practicing at the Barre, 1877; Mixed media on canvas; 75.6 x 81.3 cm www.metmuseum.org



Avant-Garde was comparatively unpopular.⁹ Philippe Sers describes the movement this way: "Since the nineteenth century, [avant-garde] has become widespread, designating any artistic movement that can be described as innovative... We thus strike upon several basic characteristics of the avant-garde: first, the notion that the avant-garde restores the collective dimension of explorative creativity. But the term also evokes the conditions of conflict that arise between this creativity and

the prevailing society; at the same time, we must keep in mind that 'avant-garde' designates artistic activity as the means for opening up new territory."¹⁰ Many artists began to open up these new territories, such as Edouard Manet, who is the first most notable artist to 'advance' against public opinion as his work directly shaped the beginning of Impressionism. The work he, along with many others, submitted to the Salon of 1863 in Paris (later known as Salon des Refuses) was rejected for its uncommon, scandalous content. Manet's main source of difficulty was that of the subject of a nude woman lounging shamelessly with two clothed men, while another bathes in the background in his work (fig.1).¹¹ His use of perspective was also unrealistic, as the woman in the background is much too large for her placement, meaning the water would spill over onto those in the foreground. A few years later, further outrage came from the Salon of 1865 concerning Manet's Olympia, (fig. 2) again featuring a reclining nude female form. This artwork, not only was shocking in content, but was almost child-like in quality, adding to further criticism of his technique. His work was again rejected from the prestigious public art show, causing him to branch out on his own and explore more freely.¹² In response to this criticism, he began to establish a more innovative style with looser techniques that focused on everyday imagery. A new experience of art ensued for artists with a rejection of academic art and a shift to Impressionism.

European Avant-Garde and its Early Movements

Impressionism is one of the first major modern movements in art history. It developed in

the 1860s and extended to the end of the nineteenth century as a response to artists' refusal of government-sanctioned exhibitions.¹³ These newly independent artists earned further ostracism from institutions of academic art, making the movement innovative and against the general society of the time. Stylistically, artists began to loosely paint what they saw in the world around them instead of the well-detailed and finished work that was typical of the time period.¹⁴ General shapes and patches of pure color were used as sensory elements to give the viewer the general effect of the scene, as they would experience with a quick, fleeting glance. They no longer rendered the subject realistically with great detail and perfect perspective, but rather sought to give the impression of the subject, often using optical mixing of colors to show effects of light in order to convey climate, location, and time period. In response to the Salon des Refuses, a group of self-supporting artists put together the Society of Artist Independents (opening in May 1884) to showcase their work and rebel against the conservative juries in Paris. Many impressionist painters were involved in the initial exhibition, even though they had yet to form an official movement, and the new 'salon' became a focus for avant-garde interests and undertakings.¹⁵ Many famous artists adopted this new style while focusing on a variety of subject matter including: Claude Monet (fig. 3), Edgar Degas (fig. 4), Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Mary Cassatt. Renato Poggioli states in his book, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, that Impressionism, "must be considered a genuinely avant-garde movement in the history of modern art [because] all the avant-gardes derive from impressionism, even though at

times [they have derived] by opposition, as in the case of expressionism."¹⁶ Impressionism is the first definitive movement with themes of avant-garde, thus setting the stage for those to come.

Bridging the gap from Impressionism to Expressionism came a variety of artists exploring new techniques, further opposing even the new constructs defined by the Impressionist artists. Although never considered a definitive movement by the artists themselves, new subject matter and stylistic approaches set them apart and challenged once again the prior standards. Rarely positively recognized for their approach, artists such as Van Gogh, Edvard Munch, and Cezanne, began to focus more on abstract form and pattern instead of solely describing the effects of light, thus streamlining the way into Expressionism.¹⁷ Examples of this are seen in Van Gogh's *Starry Night* (fig 5), and Munch's *The Scream* (fig. 6). The elements behind art and the techniques to apply them became increasingly more important than the content. The stage was set to push the movement in a way that would better express the artist or an idea instead of depicting subject matter. Developed in the early twentieth century, factions such as the Die Brücke group (Germany) and the Fauves (France) helped to facilitate this next stage in avant-garde thinking with expressionist art. According to Poggioli, "expression was feeling through action and the work of art was the result of an action that the artist impressed on the canvas. Expressionist painting no longer wished to represent the world, it chose to live it through the direct experience of subjective drama."¹⁸ Art was becoming important for its



Fig 5. Vincent van Gogh, The Starry Night, 1889. Oil on canvas; 73.7 x 92.1 cm www.moma.org



Fig 6. Edvard Munch, The Scream, 1895. Lithograph; 52.5 x 40.3 cm www.moma.org

intrinsic value rather than its depiction of the external world, while judgment of such work was based on an individual's feelings rather than a particular analysis of its composition or accuracy.¹⁹ Expressive, exaggerated brush strokes and bold colors proved effective in criticizing societal expectations and confronting the urban world that was opening up at the turn of the twentieth century. Artists desired to spark a reaction in viewers and dealt with subjects that conveyed the raw emotion of modern society. These new artworks acted as the "advanced guard" in opening up new ways and possibilities for introspective expression, spreading among various countries such as France, Germany, and Austria in reaction to urbanization.

Developing in Paris in about 1908, Cubism followed Expressionism in the modern art world. Pablo Picasso (fig.7) and Georges Braque helped to idealize the way one understood the subject matter of a piece by using geometric forms of an object and obscuring elements in such a way that they represented different points of view.²⁰ Differing views of a work were reconstructed on a single plane adding to the confusion and fragmented style previously established. Although traditional subject matter was used, this style helped artists re-idealize the way in which it was presented. Alongside of, and in reaction to Cubism, Futurism developed, which was a significant marker of avant-garde artistic movements in the twentieth century. Spurning an attitude of 'down with the past' it ushered in a celebration of advanced technology and urbanization.²¹ Regarded as one of the most important Italian avant-garde movements of the twentieth century (around 1910-1920s), its members hoped to "destroy older forms of culture and to demonstrate the beauty of modern life – the beauty of the machine, speed, violence and change."²² Art works now had a systematic feel and often portrayed a mechanical/metallic type of motion instead of an actual subject. In a turn

away from the out-dated traditions of the past, futurism was received with mixed public reaction. Once again many failed to understand the new developments, while others praised the artists for their innovative thinking.

Growing out of the spread of Futurism came a group of avant-garde movements that included Suprematism (Russia 1910-1920), De Stijl

(Holland 1920s), Bauhaus (Germany 1920's), and Constructivism (Russia 1920's-1950's), where the subject was no longer representational but nonobjective.²³ While Futurism and Cubism focused on using geometric shapes, Abstract Art was based solely on shape and color. Suprematism was the invention of Russian artist Kazimir Malevich and became one

of the earliest and most radical forms of abstract art, being heavily influenced by avant-garde poetry. By deconstructing art, Malevich attempted to work with the most basic essentials, defining what constituted as art by eliminating "representation in order to [favor] pure sensation."²⁴ Minimal background allowed shapes, angles, and placement to become central ideas in order to produce movement and visual interest. Works such as the Black Square became a characterization of this new era of abstraction and helped set the tone for further movements. Loredana Parmesani, author of *Art of the Twentieth Century: Movements, Theories, Schools and Tendencies*, describes abstract art as a whole as being "interested in defining a new language in the arts, one that was no longer tied to a figurative and realistic representation of the world, one adopting only pure formal elements (line, colour, surface) that were utilized for their own intrinsic qualities."²⁵ Building upon the foundation set by Suprematism, and in reaction to World War I, De Stijl art (literally meaning 'the style') used basic forms in relationship to one another to form artworks; however, these extreme, perfected geometric forms became the only elements utilized and were done so with precision.²⁶ This style was applied to various art forms, not simply painting or sculpture, and expanded into typography as well. Works such as those of Piet Mondrian explored a way of universal thought and creativity, thus losing the importance of the individual and working instead toward an idealized utopian vision focused on elements. From bringing the concept of art to the bare minimum in Suprematism, De Stijl artists hoped to use these basic elements to bridge all forms of art as well as other media, including architecture, urban planning, industrial design, typography, music and poetry.²⁷ In reaction to the movement toward technology and modernized thinking, the Bauhaus 'school' (fig. 9) further expanded

upon such ideas to help define art's relationship to society and technology. Because there was becoming a great divide in manufacturing and creativity, this movement attempted to understand and solve the issue of unifying art and industrial design by incorporating a more mechanized style to aesthetic work. This methodology was established because of "anxieties concerning the soullessness of manufacturing and its products, and in fears about art's loss of purpose in society."²⁸ Bauhaus continued the new tradition of abandoning academic art, but was more organized than many of its preceding movements, better furthering ideas concerning problem solving for a modern society. This movement quickly spread and influenced many different cultures throughout various countries that held lasting effects on society at large. Constructivism was highly influenced by this type of thinking of abstraction and modernity, thereby becoming an "identity between artistic beauty and political justness."²⁹ The movement borrowed ideas from Cubism, Suprematism and Futurism to create a new approach to making objects that disregarded aesthetic trepidation with composition. Instead artists wished to focus on the construction of a work by using modern materials that could turn out ideas to be used in mass production. No longer was the focus on expressing beauty, the reality of the world, or even an artist's idealism, but to "carry out a fundamental analysis of the materials and forms of art", thereby leading to functional design.³⁰ Looking to how materials behaved and utilizing their function, constructivism sought a new way to interpret modern life in hopes of constructing a new type of society. Typography of the time also became modernized and more experimental in usage. No longer was type confined to columns and traditional organization; instead it was used boldly and expressively with a mechanical feel. El Lissitzky (fig. 8) and Rodchenko were well known

designers and typographers of this era, utilizing bold lettering, flat color, and movement through their use of diagonals.³¹ Because of the time period in which all of the abstract art movements developed, each greatly influenced and added to the other. Greenburg describes the entirety of abstract art as such, "Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself... In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft. The nonrepresentational or 'abstract,' if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary and accidental, but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extroverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the



Fig 7. Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, 1907
Oil on canvas; 243.9 x 233.7 cm
www.moma.org



Fig 8. El Lissitzky, *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, 1919
Letterpress; 20.9 x 25.2 cm
www.moma.org



Fig 9. Vasily Kandinsky, *Joyous Ascent*, 1923;
Lithograph; 23.3 x 18.8 cm
www.moma.org



Fig 10. Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1951
metal wheel mounted on painted wood stool
129.5 x 63.5 x 41.9 cm
www.moma.org



Fig 11. Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931
Oil on canvas; 24.1 x 33 cm
www.moma.org

very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have already imitated the former. These themselves become the subject matter of art and literature."³² Abstract art furthered the idea of what was considered to be art and employed purposeful manipulation of the elements to create new varieties. These movements broadened the definition of art; illustrated innovative techniques/uses of typography and simple elements; and bridged art with society and societal movements.

Forming in Switzerland alongside of abstract art was Dadaism – an artistic and literary movement in reaction to World War I. Influenced by Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism and Expressionism, Dada was thought to be

one of the more illogical of the avant-garde movements in terms of artistic output. It was, as Parmesani phrases it, "the negation of everything, it was the accidental and the rule, the freedom of the game, and an attempt to give some kind of order to the chaos in the world; it was art and the negation of art."³³ Avant-garde artists such as Duchamp (fig. 10) came together to further advance the concept of art, creating a wide variety of creative outputs in the form of Dada assortments such as performance art, poetry, photography, sculpture, painting and collage.³⁴ The theme of the movement was to reject everything about the current society, so much so that it seemed to reject itself at times by contradicting other works of the same style or time. In one of the more staunch forms of avant-gardism, Dada was in direct opposition to authoritarian leadership and sought to go against society at every possible instance while glorifying individualism. It sought a unique way to understand and conceptualize the changing modern society in the face of World War I, and quickly spread throughout different countries, including the United States. In a society full of rules and authority, Dada seemed senseless and became a way of free expression. This thinking prepared the way for the Surrealist movement that followed. Poggioli describes Dada and the transition as such, "...fundamentally, the Dadaist position began by repeating and carrying to extremes what Rimbaud, the great standard bearer of contemporary avant-gardism, had already formulated at the end of his poetic career... Furthermore, avant-garde nihilism was not exhausted in Dadaism. Just as it had at least in part inherited the tendency from futurism, so it passed it on in turn, almost intact to surrealism."³⁵ Surrealism, although strange and abstract, seemed somewhat sensible after society's reaction to Dada, and carried the art community for a great deal of the mid-twentieth century. Although it continued much of the anti-rationalism of

Dada, the movement sought to tap into the unconscious mind of the viewer through art and creative thought. Artists such as Salvador Dalí (fig. 11) were greatly influenced by the psychological endeavors of Sigmund Freud, believing the mind can be accessed from the repressed power of imagination.³⁶ Such revelations were thought to come from everyday objects and images in abstracted forms, and became a way of understanding the world around individuals in the face of World War II. Parmesani defines surrealism stating, "[it] tried to transform to the canvas... that which disturbed man, who through his unconscious released his own secret desires and inclinations."³⁷ Like other avant-garde movements, surrealism was progressive, thus adding to and stretching the definition of art, while preparing the way for future artistic endeavors.

The "Second" Avant-Garde and its Application in America.

As a break from the continuing increase of avant-garde rebellion, a period of realism in American art took place in reaction to the ending of World War II, thus refocusing many artists and putting emphasis on political expression.³⁸ The revitalization of the language of avant-garde after this time comes under much scrutiny. Many theorize that the new wave of avant-garde movements go against the original idea of rebelling against the popular in order to pave the way for the new. Some critics believe the movements involved in the "second avant-garde" were received too well publically, and thus gave into materialism as opposed to creating art for the sake of solely learning and expressing by the process. Many believed that artists became too focused on public reaction, whether positive or negative, and even created art to receive a specific negative reception, thus advancing their career through opposition. These new movements were in direct effect of social, political, and economic events surrounding their

exposure, instead of in response to artistic pressure. Parmesani, took a positive stance on the movement's reemergence and had many thoughts of the subject of the new wave of avant-garde stating: "The young American artists, the heirs of the European avant-garde... started to express themselves with pictorial languages in the 1930s that, although linked to the European ones, sought their own autonomy and had a disruptive expressive force. The revival of the avant-garde languages on the part of the American artists... was the revival of a research, which was not meant to be a nostalgic glance backwards, but rather a sincere acknowledgement of the important role the European avant-garde movements played at the beginning of the century. The younger artists felt a need... to depart from where the avant-garde artists had been forced to interrupt their research, not because it was culturally impossible to continue it, but because it had been suffocated by political and social factors."³⁹ These new artists were no longer bound by such factors because the previous movements of avant-garde opened up numerous new doors for them to explore. The revival of similar languages after the war thus established an infinite series of artis-



Fig 13. Robert Rauschenberg, 1955
Oil, synthetic polymer paint, pencil, crayon,
pasted printed and painted papers,
and fabric on canvas, mounted
and stapled to fabric, three panels;
243.8 x 333.1 cm
www.moma.org



Fig 12. Jackson Pollock, *White Light*, 1954
Aluminum paint on canvas
122.4 x 96.9 cm
www.moma.org

tic movements. These movements absorbed the ideologies of the past while continuing to question reality through the next step in the evolution of art in order to interact with the world to create change. Such new movements included: abstract expressionism, action painting, color-field painting, art brut, CoBrA, Art Informel, happenings, installations, Fluxus, neo-dada, and minimalism.⁴⁰ Many of these movements were still considered shocking for the time period in which they took place, and brought about a number of famous modern artists including Jackson Pollack (fig. 12) (abstract expressionism), Robert Rauschenberg (fig. 13), and Jasper Johns.⁴¹ All artists during these new movements challenged the others, creating a wide variety of artwork in the process that aimed to express a need to do, act, or live. Many works were created in a spirit

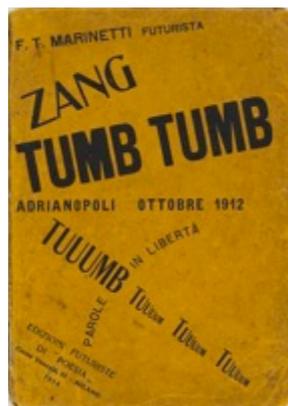


Fig 14. Tommaso Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tumb*, 1914; Book with photomechanical design 20.4 x 13.5 cm www.moma.org

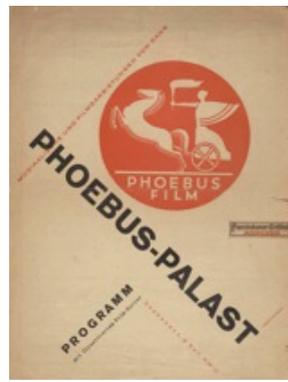


Fig 15. Jan Tschichold, *Phoebus-Palast*, 1927 Letterpress; 31 x 23.5 cm www.moma.org

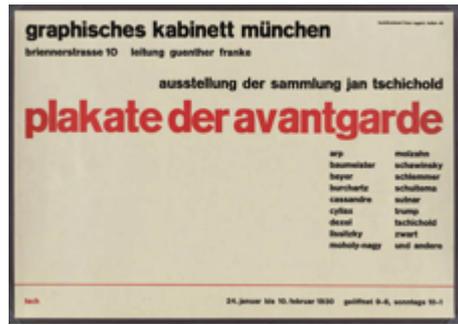


Fig 16. Jan Tschichold, *Posters of the Avant Garde*, 1930 Letterpress; 42.4 x 59.8 cm www.moma.org

of irony or rebellion and were characterized by the absence of traditional composition. Speaking to the controversy of the new avant-garde in relation to its reflection of the former; Brandon Taylor, author of *Avant-garde and After: Rethinking Art Now*, stated that “the radical social agenda of the later 1960s that provided a supportive context for earlier avant-garde art – the anti-Vietnam War protests, the students’ and workers’ strikes, the growth of feminism – was widely perceived to be past history. By 1975 or so, Conceptual art itself was becoming popular, even stale. By the later 1970s and early 1980s it was widely considered to have been, at best, a ground-clearing exercise coincident with a wider mood of disaffection.”⁴² The old supported the styles of the new, allowing fresh paths to be taken; whether these paths were successful is under continued inspection; however, be-

cause of these new movements, the definition of art expanded to include anything in or out of the gallery (including such unthought-of things as sheets of instructions, photocopied documents, lines drawn in the ground, or even a urinal). These new art objects were “resistant to being sold, collected, and evaluated by conventional means” thus making them of avant-garde style in comparison to those publically glorified academic artworks of the past.⁴³ Techniques and theories became more adventurous and revolutionary throughout the long line of avant-garde in an attempt to establish purpose for art in an ever-changing world.

Typography and the Avant-Garde

New typographic styles erupted within the progressive movements of the avant-garde, each setting the stage for the typography of the current society. Before this time, little change had occurred since the invention of printing of moveable type. The traditional style created by monks who prepared illuminated books in the Middle Ages was the standard for many years while production of a work was held in higher regard than design.⁴⁴ During the nineteenth century display faces were designed for the new competitive world of commerce on many different means like posters, bills, and cards.⁴⁵ Modern Art with the Avant-Garde movements greatly changed the look and feel of typographic design. New forms were devised when experimentalism occurred in the poetry and music of early avant-garde movements. The arrangement

of words on a page to further depict the meaning behind a poem, and the movement of sheet music, led to new ways of utilizing type, such as that found in Futurist and modern type trials.⁴⁶ During the time of Futurism, when art began to reject the former and strain for the new and upcoming, Tommaso Marinetti (fig. 14) hoped to free the verse of type and reject the traditional past of book design stating, “I call for a typographic revolution directed against the idiotic and nauseating concepts of the outdated and conventional book... the book must be the futurist expression of our futurist ideas.”⁴⁷ His ideals are realized in his work, *Zang Tumb*, which utilized free verse to express the sensations of military assaults of the Balkan war. The book uses words and text onomatopoeically to visually describe these battles. Marinetti used works such as his magazine *Poesia* to launch the use of free verse publically, as well as advocate forward thinking ideas that challenged the typical and expected layout. He wrote further manifestos including *Destruction of Syntax*, *Imagination without Strings*, *Words-in-Freedom* of 1913 where he declared: “My revolution is aimed at the so-called typographical harmony of the page, which is contrary to the flux and reflux, the leaps and bursts of style that run through the page. On the same page, therefore, we will use three or four colours of ink, or even twenty different typefaces if necessary. For example: italics for a series of similar or swift sensations, boldface for violent onomatopoeias, and so on. With this typographical revolution and this multicoloured variety in the letters I mean to redouble the expressive force of words.”⁴⁸ Other futurist poets and artists continued in this tradition recognizing the new art of advertising and the symbolism apparent between art and industry. Integration, not only of new compositions of type, but of its combination with imagery also appeared during this time period.⁴⁹

Dadaism continued to inspire new forms of type with its collage and photomontage



Fig 17-19. Raoul Hausmann (1886-1971) www.citrinitas.com

centered artists, such as Ilia Zdanevitch. (He utilized the integration of several typefaces along with a mix of composition and sizing for his program for a Dadaist play).⁵⁰ Artists in this style worked specifically with type, and their “designs of printed messages were chaotic in appearance—lines of type utilizing display and book faces running in various directions – even individual letters of words were positioned in completely unorthodox manners.”⁵¹ Examples of this stylized text can be seen in figures 17-19. Use of asymmetry, white space, and varying weights allowed type to become expressive, opening up new avenues for future artists to explore. Continued



Fig 21 & 22. Alexander Rodchenko, graphic design pieces.
www.citrinitas.com

developments in type allowed Constructivism to bring further ways of using typography for inspiring feelings of duty to one's country through advertisement and propaganda. Not only was type dramatic, but it had a new application (to persuade and promote) often in terms of industry or politics. As mentioned, this style stemmed from Cubism and allowed decoration to be eliminated. Instead a focus surfaced on the form and structure of geometric shapes, including the use of letterforms. Piet Mondrain helped to cultivate a layout with an asymmetrical style and bold grid structures.⁵² El Lissitzky created many works during this time (as mentioned above; pictured in fig. 20) and received much inspiration from both Mondrain and the writings of Marinetti. This influence emerged both in Lissitzky's work and in his own writings.⁵³ He was extremely important in guiding graphic design and typography through these outlets. His designs were aimed to take the viewer out of tradition and instead make them actively involved in what they were seeing, while mixing art and political commitment.⁵⁴ He believed he could be an agent for change in Russia and the design world through his artwork, and did so as a teacher and cultural ambassador in Germany, where he influenced major figures in



Fig 23. Graphic Design and Typography of the Bauhaus School.
www.citrinitas.com

the Bauhaus and De Stijl movements.⁵⁵ Other Constructivist artists furthered the avant-garde movement through their design such as Alexander Rodchenko (fig. 21 & 22) who came on the scene after the Russian Revolution and revitalized the idea and composition of photography, especially in combination with type.⁵⁶ Building on these new techniques and principles came De Stijl and its influence on typography. The movement found more geometric typefaces used in abstraction, while a branch of this development, Elementarism, allowed for dynamic tension with its use of diagonal lines. Paul Schuitema was a Dutch graphic artist who specialized in this style. He applied the principles found in De Stijl

to commercial advertising where he used typography in this style to further communicate the message.⁵⁷ He furthered this idea by often using only black, red and white for coloration and bold sans serif fonts.⁵⁸ In reaction to these new movements, Bauhaus typography immersed, which required type for its functional usage and ability to communicate through layout. Artists and typographers such as Moholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer sought to create universal, idealist type in a geometric style. Bayer adopted an all-lowercase typeface for Bauhaus productions in addition to setting the standard use for sans serif fonts.⁵⁹ Serifs were not the only element viewed as unnecessary, as anything that got in the way of type's ability to communicate the message to the audience, including the exclusion of mixtures of capital letters, was viewed as superfluous. This approach gave order to the chaotic styles that preceded it and established contributions still in use today. Arthur Turnbull and Russell Baird in their book, *The Graphics of Communication*, listed such donations from the Bauhaus fashion as: "asymmetrical layout; wide acceptance of sans-serif type; relaxation of traditional margination; bold placement of illustrations; more interesting division of space with contrasting shapes of elements placed in interesting juxtaposition; simplification and release from extensive ornamentation; and greater concentration on utilitarian use of typographic elements."⁶⁰ Through the efforts of Jan Tschichold (fig. 15), avant-garde typography made its way into more commercial use during the 1920s.

"The New Typography" (fig. 16) resulted from the combination of such new usages and forms, seeking to rid layouts of tradition and instead add hierarchy, visual interest, and intentional use of white space to a page.⁶¹ The style of the grid, like that of Constructivism, was subdued and often eliminated, while counterbalancing rectangular elements

remains popular.⁶² The New Typography focuses on effective communication, where violations from the norm are justified, even logical, in effectively presenting a message.⁶³ All of these new ideas concerning typography changed the way print design was approached and in the spirit of avant-gardism challenged previously conceived ideologies of typography's place in advertising and art.

One of the designers who brought the new wave of typography to light is Wolfgang Weingart. As a knowledgeable typographer, Weingart broke many a typographic rule with purpose like many of The New Typography movement. Going against traditionalism, he focused his career on curiosity and experi-

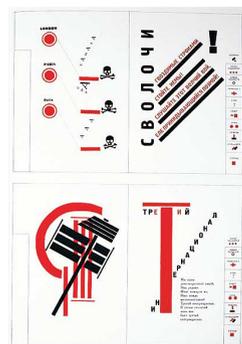


Fig 20. El Lissitzky, Page spreads for a book of poems by Mayakovsky.
www.citrinitas.com



ment for visual enjoyment. Because of his wisdom and boldness to make new discoveries, he created abstract patterns with type ranging from unconventional to absurd. Beginning his fascination of type with Swiss Typography (International Style), Weingart, began experimentations that rebelled against this movement (fig. 24 & 25). Like all engagements of the avant-garde, these risks were not insignificant, but instead added to a new sense of typographic style and produced an evolution of innovative techniques.⁶⁴ He saw the importance of flexibility in typographic design in a fast-moving and rapidly changing world. Working as a teacher and design philosopher, Weingart proved more influential at the Basel School of Design, encouraging his students to take risks and create a new generation of designers that approached design in opposition to tradition, like that of Swiss typography.⁶⁵

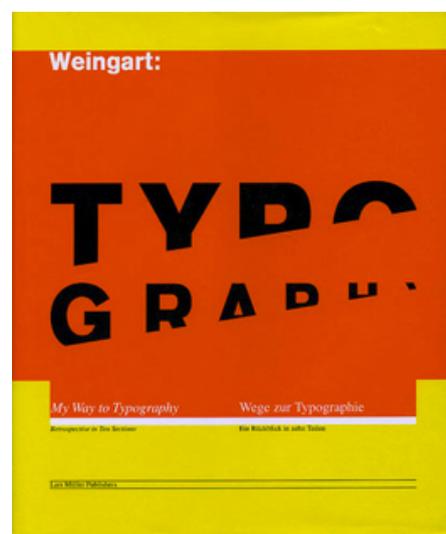
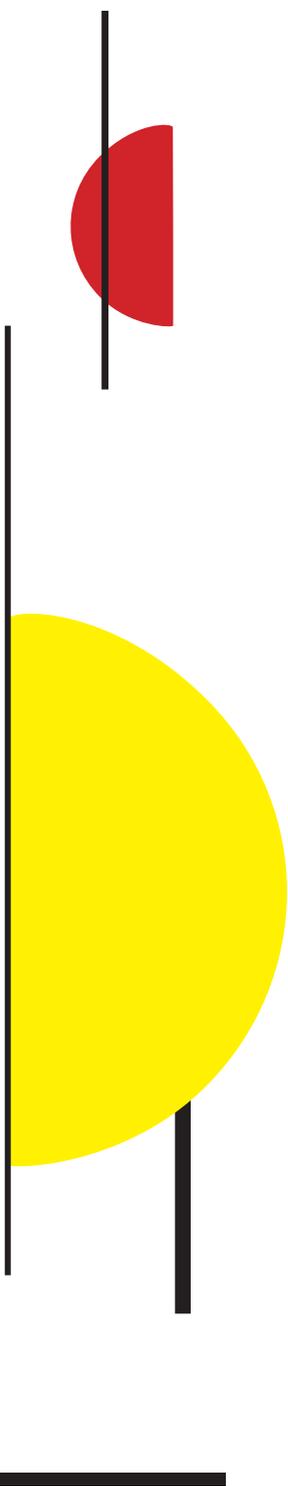


Fig 24. Wolfgang Weingart, *My Way to Typography*, 1973
Book cover
www.designishistory.com

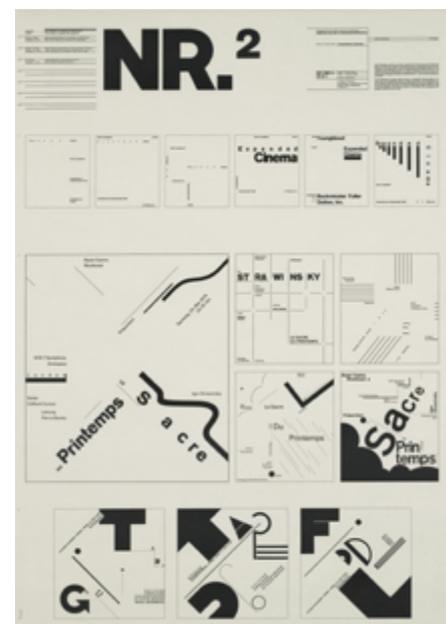


Fig 25. Wolfgang Weingart, *Typographic Process*, 1973;
Lithograph; 87.6 x 61.6 cm
www.moma.org

Endnotes

- Sers, Philippe. *The Radical Avant-Garde and the Contemporary Avant-Garde*. p 849.
- Eburne, Jonathan P and Rita Felski. "Introduction." *New Literary History* 41.4 (2010): v. Project MUSE. Web. 21 Oct. 2012. <<http://muse.jhu.edu/>>.
- Greenberg, Clement. *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*. Art and Culture: Critical Essays. Avant Garde and Kitsch. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961. http://www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/avantgarde.html.
- Greenburg, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*.
- Greenburg, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*.
- Kuspit, Donald B. *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Print. p 7.
- Kuspit, 7.
- Kuspit, 1.
- Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. p 45.
- Sers, 849.
- Rabinow, Rebecca. "Édouard Manet (1832–1883)". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mane/hd_mane.htm
- Rabinow, "Édouard Manet (1832–1883)".
- www.theartstory.org/movement-impressionism.htm.
- www.theartstory.org/movement-impressionism.htm.
- www.theartstory.org/movement-impressionism.htm.
- Poggioli, 15.
- www.theartstory.org/movement-post-impressionism.
- Poggioli, 16.
- www.theartstory.org/movement-expressionism.
- Parmesani, Loredana. *Art of the Twentieth Century: Movements, Theories, Schools and Tendencies, 1900-2000*. Milano: Skira, 2000. Print. p 18-19.
- Poggioli, 52.
- Theartstory.org/movement-futurism.
- Parmesani, 27.
- Parmesani, 30.
- Parmesani, 27.
- www.artstory.org/movement-de-stijl.
- www.artstory.org/movement-de-stijl.
- www.theartstory.org/movement-bauhaus.
- Parmesani, 30.
- www.theartstory.org/movement-constructivism.
- www.theartstory.org/movement-constructivism.
- Greenburg, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*.
- Parmesani, 35.
- www.theartstory.org/movement-dada.
- Poggioli, 63.
- Theartstory.org/movement-surrealism.
- Parmesani, 37.
- Parmesani, 42.
- Parmesani, 49.
- Parmesani, 49-49.
- Taylor, Brandon. *Avant-garde and After: Rethinking Art Now*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1995. Print. p 7-9.
- Taylor, 9.
- Taylor, 9.
- Turnbull, Arthur T, and Russell N. Baird. *The Graphics of Communication: Typography, Layout, Design*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968. p 213.
- Turnbull and Russell, 213.
- www.designhistory.org. *Experiments with Typographic Form*.
- www.designhistory.org. *Free verse and Futurism*.
- www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/avantgarde.html. *The Typographic Revolution*.
- www.designhistory.org. *Free verse and Futurism*.
- www.designhistory.org. *Russian typographic Revolution*.
- Turnbull and Russell, 214.
- Turnbull and Russell, 214.
- www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/avantgarde.html. *The Typographic Revolution*.

- www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/avantgarde.html.
- www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/avantgarde.html.
- www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/avantgarde.html.
- www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/avantgarde.html.
- www.citrinitas.com/history_of_viscom/avantgarde.html.
- Turnbull and Russell, 214.
- www.designhistory.org. *The New Typography*.
- Turnbull and Russell, 214.
- Turnbull and Russell, 218.
- <http://www.aiga.org/wolfgang-weingart-making-the-young-generation-nuts>.
- <http://www.designishistory.com/1960/wolfgang-weingart>.

