

The Modernist Era

Part IV

Graphic design in the first half
of the twentieth century

The Influence of Modern Art

The first two decades of the twentieth century were a time of ferment and change that radically altered all aspects of the human condition. The social, political, cultural, and economic character of life was caught in fluid upheaval. In Europe, monarchy was replaced by democracy, socialism, and communism. Technology and scientific advances transformed commerce and industry. Transportation was radically altered by the coming of the motorcar (1885) and the airplane (1903). The motion picture (1896) and wireless radio transmission (1895) foretold a new era of human communications. Beginning in 1908 with the Turkish revolution that restored constitutional government and the Bulgarian declaration of independence, colonized and subjugated peoples began to awaken and demand independence. The slaughter during the first of two global wars, fought with the destructive weapons of technology, shook the traditions and institutions of Western civilization to their foundations.

Amidst this turbulence, it is not surprising that visual art and design experienced a series of creative revolutions that questioned long-held values and approaches to organizing space as well as the role of art and design in society. The traditional objective view of the world was shattered. The representation of external appearances did not fulfill the needs and vision of the emerging European avant-garde. Elemental ideas about color and form, social protest, and the expression of Freudian theories and deeply personal emotional states occupied many artists. Some of these modern movements, such as fauvism, had a limited effect on graphic design. Others, such as cubism and futurism, Dada and surrealism, De Stijl, suprematism, constructivism, and expressionism directly influenced the graphic language of form and visual communications in this century. The evolution of twentieth-century graphic design closely relates to modern painting, poetry, and architecture.

Cubism

By introducing a design concept independent of nature, cubism began a new artistic tradition and way of seeing that challenged the four-hundred-year Renaissance tradition of pictorial art. The genesis of this movement was a series of works by the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) that applied elements of ancient Iberian and Africa tribal art to the human figure (Fig. 13–1). Boldly chiseled geometric planes of African sculpture, masks (Fig. 13–2), and fabrics were an exciting revelation for Picasso and his friends. Another major influence was the French postimpressionist painter Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), who observed that the painter should “treat nature in terms of the cylinder and the sphere and the cone.” The drawings and paintings of these artists demonstrate the new approach to handling space and expressing human emotions. Figures are abstracted into geometric planes, and classical norms for the human figure are broken. The spatial illusions of perspective give way to an ambiguous shifting of two-dimensional planes. Some figures are simultaneously seen from more than one viewpoint.

Over the next few years, Picasso and his close associate Georges Braque (1881–1963) developed cubism as the art movement that replaced the rendering of appearances with the endless possibilities of invented form. *Analytical cubism* (Fig. 13–3) is the name given to their work from about 1910–1912. During this period they analyzed the planes of the subject matter, often from several points of view, and used these perceptions to construct a painting composed of rhythmic geometric planes. The real subject is shapes, colors, textures, and values used in spatial relationships. Analytical cubism’s compelling fascination grows from the unresolved tension of the sensual and intellectual appeal of the pictorial structure in conflict with the challenge of interpreting the subject matter. Cubism has a strong relationship with the process of human vision. Our eyes shift and scan a subject; our minds combine these fragments into a whole.

Picasso and Braque introduced paper collage elements into their work in 1912. Collage allowed free composition independent of subject matter and declared the reality of the painting as two-dimensional object. The texture of collage elements could signify objects. To denote a chair, for example, Picasso glued

oilcloth printed with a chair cane pattern into a painting. Often letterforms and words from newspapers were incorporated as visual form and for associated meaning.

13–1. Pablo Picasso, *Nude, c.* 1906–07. The seeds of cubism are contained in the fragmentation of the figure and background spaces into abstracted geometric planes.

13–2. Lege African mask, from what is now the Republic of Congo, undated. Abstracted geometric forms showed European artists a different approach to art and design.

13–3. Pablo Picasso, *Man with Violin*, 1911–12. In the analytical cubism phase, Picasso and Braque studied the planes of a subject from different vantage points, fractured them, and pulled them forward toward the canvas surface. The planes shimmer vibrantly in ambiguous positive and negative relationships one to another.

In 1913 cubism evolved into *synthetic cubism*. Drawing on past observations, the cubists invented forms that were signs rather than representations of the subject matter. The essence of an object and its basic characteristics, rather than its outward appearance, were depicted. Juan Gris (1887–1927) was a major painter in the development of synthetic cubism. His paintings, such as the 1916 *Fruit Bowl* (Fig. 13–4), combined composition from nature with an independent structural design of the picture space. First he planned a rigorous architectural structure using golden section proportions and a modular composition grid; then he “laid the subject matter” on this design scheme. Gris had a profound influence on the development of geometric art and design. His paintings are a kind of halfway house between an art based on perception and an art realized by the relationships between geometric planes.

Among the artists who clustered around Picasso and Braque and joined the cubist movement, Fernand Léger (1881–1955) moved cubism away from the initial impulses of its founders. From around 1910, Léger took Cézanne’s famous dictum about the cylinder, sphere, and cone far more seriously than any other cubist. Motifs such as nudes in a forest were transformed into fields of colorful stovepipe sections littering the picture plane. Léger’s work might have evolved toward an art of pure color and shape relationships, but his four years of military service among working-class French citizens and the heightening of his visual perception during the war turned him toward a style that was more recognizable, accessible, and populist. He moved closer to his visual experience in paintings like *The City* (Fig. 13–5). Perceptions of the colors, shapes, posters, and architecture of the urban environment—glimpses and fragments of information—are assembled into a composition of brightly colored planes. The letterforms in Léger’s paintings and graphic work for Blaise Cendrars’s book *La fin du monde, filmée par l’Ange Notre-Dame* (*The End of the World, filmed by the Angel of Notre-Dame*), an antiwar book describing God’s decision to destroy life on earth due to humans’ warlike nature (Figs. 13–6 and 13–7), pointed the way toward geometric letterforms. His almost pictographic simplifications of the human figure and objects were a major inspiration for modernist pictorial graphics that became the major thrust of the revived French poster art of the 1920s. Léger’s flat planes of color, urban motifs, and the hard-edged precision of his machine forms helped define the modern design sensibility after World War I.

By developing a new approach to visual composition, cubism changed the course of painting and to some extent graphic design as well. Its visual inventions became a catalyst for experiments that pushed art and design toward geometric abstraction and new attitudes toward pictorial space.

Futurism

Futurism was launched when the Italian poet Filippo Marinetti (1876–1944) published his Manifesto of Futurism in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909. Marinetti’s stirring words established

futurism as a revolutionary movement in which all the arts were to test their ideas and forms against the new realities of scientific and industrial society:

We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness. Courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our poetry. . . . We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed . . . a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samoth-race*. . . . Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece.

The manifesto voiced enthusiasm for war, the machine age, speed, and modern life. It shocked the public by proclaiming, "We will destroy museums, libraries, and fight against moralism, feminism, and all utilitarian cowardice."

Marinetti and his followers produced an explosive and emotionally charged poetry that defied correct syntax and grammar. In January 1913, Giovanni Papini (1881–1956) began publication of the journal *Lacerba* in Florence, and typographic design was pulled onto the artistic battlefield. The June 1913 issue published Marinetti's article calling for a typographic revolution against the classical tradition. Harmony was rejected as a design quality because it contradicted "the leaps and bursts of style running through the page." On a page, three or four ink colors and twenty typefaces (*italics* for quick impressions, boldface for violent noises and sounds) could redouble words' expressive power. Free, dynamic, and piercing words could be given the velocity of stars, clouds, airplanes, trains, waves, explosives, molecules, and atoms. A new and painterly typographic design, called *parole in libertà* or "words in freedom," was born on the page (Figs. 13–8 through 13–12).

Noise and speed, two dominant conditions of twentieth-century life, were expressed in futurist poetry. Marinetti wrote that a man who has witnessed an explosion does not stop to connect his sentences grammatically but hurls shrieks and words at his listeners. He urged poets to liberate themselves from servitude to grammar and open new worlds of expression. Since Gutenberg's invention of movable type, most graphic designs used a vigorous horizontal and vertical structure, but the futurist poets cast these constraints to the wind. Freed from tradition, they animated their pages with a dynamic, nonlinear composition achieved by pasting words and letters in place for reproduction from photoengraved printing plates.

13–4. Juan Gris, *Fruit Bowl*, 1916. Cubist planes move forward and backward in shallow space, while the vertical and diagonal geometry of a grid imposes order.

13–5. Fernand Léger, *The City*, 1919. This monumental composition of pure, flat planes signifying the geometry, color, and energy of the modern city led its creator to say that "it was advertising that first drew the consequences" from it.

13–6. Fernand Léger, pages from *La fin du monde*, 1919. The destruction of the earth begins when the angel on Notre Dame Cathedral blows her trumpet; mayhem is illustrated by falling names.

13–7. Fernand Léger, page from *La fin du monde*, 1919. A whirlwind tour of the re-creation of the earth after the fall of man is illustrated by a pinwheel of lettering spelling "accelerated slow motion cinema."

The futurist concept that writing and/or typography could become a concrete and expressive visual form has been a sporadic preoccupation of poets dating back at least to the work of the Greek poet Simias of Rhodes (c. 33 B.C.). Called pattern poetry, the verse that explored this idea often took the shape of objects or religious symbols. In the nineteenth century, the German poet Arno Holz (1863–1929) reinforced intended auditory effects by such devices as omitting capitalization and punctuation, varying word spacing to signify pauses, and using multiple punctuation marks for emphasis. Lewis Carroll's

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland used descending type sizes and pictorial shape to construct a mouse's tail as part of the mouse's tale (Fig. 13–13).

In 1897 the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98) published the poem “Un coup de dés” (“A Throw of the Dice,” Fig. 13–14), composed of seven hundred words on twenty pages in a typographic range: capital, lowercase, roman, and italic. Rather than surrounding a poem with white, empty margins, Mallarmé dispersed this “silence” through the work as part of its meaning. Instead of stringing words in linear sequence like beads, he placed them in unexpected positions on the page to express sensations and evoke ideas. Moreover, he was successful in relating typography to the musical score—the placement and weight of words relate to intonation, stress, and rhythm in oral reading.

Another French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), was closely associated with the cubists, particularly Picasso, and was involved in a rivalry with Marinetti. Apollinaire had championed African sculpture, defined the principles of cubist painting and literature, and once observed that “catalogs, posters, advertisements of all types, believe me, they contain the poetry of our epoch.” His unique contribution to graphic design was the 1918 publication of a book entitled *Calligrammes*, poems in which the letterforms are arranged to form a visual design, figure, or pictograph (Figs. 13–15 and 13–16). In these poems he explored the potential fusion of poetry and painting, introducing the concept of simultaneity to the time- and sequence-bound typography of the printed page.

13–8. Carlo Carrà, “Parole in libertà” (free word composition), 1914. The futurist poets believed that the use of different sizes, weights, and styles of type allowed them to weld painting and poetry, because the intrinsic beauty of letterforms, manipulated creatively, transformed the printed page into a work of visual art.

13–9. Filippo Marinetti, “Montagne + Vallate + Strade x Joffre” (Mountains + Valleys + Streets x Joffre), 1915. This poem “depicts” Marinetti’s journey, which included the war front (lower left), France (upper left), and a visit to Léger (top right).

13–10. Ardengo Soffici, “Bifszf + 18 Simultaneità Chimismi lirici,” 1915. Traditional verse is composed against clusters of modulating letterforms used as pure visual form. Diagonal rules link the units and create rhythms from page to page.

13–11. Filippo Marinetti, poem from *Les mots en liberté futuristes* (Futurist Words-in-Freedom), 1919. Here, the confusion, violent noise, and chaos of battle explode above the girl reading her lover’s letter from the front. Marinetti’s experience in the trenches of war inspired this poem.

13–12. Filippo Marinetti, “Une assemblée tumultueuse” (A Tumultuous Assembly). Foldout from *Les mots en liberté futuristes*, 1919.

13–13. Lewis Carroll, typographic image, 1866. Unexpected and totally different from the rest of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, this graphic experiment in figurative typography has received both design and literary acclaim.

On 11 February 1910, five artists who had joined Marinetti’s futurist movement published the *Manifesto of the Futurist Painters*. Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), Carlo Carrà (1881–1966), Luigi Russolo (1885–1947), Giacomo Balla (1871–1958), and Gino Severini (1883–1966) declared their intent to “Destroy the cult of the past. . . . Totally invalidate all kinds of imitation. . . . Elevate all attempts at originality. . . . Regard art critics as useless and dangerous. . . . Sweep the whole field of art clean of all themes and subjects that have been used in the past. . . . Support and glory in our day-to-day world, a world which is going to be continually and splendidly transformed by victorious Science.” The futurist painters were strongly influenced by cubism, but they also attempted to express motion, energy, and cinematic sequence in their work (Fig. 13–17). They first used the word *simultaneity* in a visual-art context to express concurrent existence or occurrence, such as the presentation of different views in the same work of art.

13–14. Stéphane Mallarmé, pages from “Un coup de dés” (A Throw of the Dice), 1897. Mallarmé anticipated the formal and expressive typographic concerns that emerged in the twentieth century, when poets and painters became interested in the creative potential of the printed page.

13–15. Guillaume Apollinaire, “Il pleut” (It’s Raining), from *Calligrammes*, 1918. Letterforms sprinkle figuratively down the page, relating visual form to poetic content.

13–16. Guillaume Apollinaire, poem from *Calligrammes*, 1918. The typography becomes a bird, a water fountain, and an eye in this expressive design.

13–17. Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912. The futurist painters sought to introduce dynamic motion, speed, and energy to the static, two-dimensional surface.

13–18. Antonio Sant’Elia, drawing for the new city of the future, 1914. These drawings were reproduced with Sant’Elia’s manifesto in *Lacerba*. After the war, many of his ideas about form developed in architecture, product, and graphic design.

The Manifesto of Futurist Architecture was written by Antonio Sant’Elia (1888–1916). He called for construction based on technology and science and for design that addressed the unique demands of modern life (Fig. 13–18). He declared decoration to be absurd and used dynamic diagonal and elliptic lines because their emotional power was greater than horizontals and verticals. Tragically, Sant’Elia was killed on the battlefield, but his ideas and visionary drawing influenced the course of modern design, particularly art deco.

Among the artists who applied futurist philosophy to graphic and advertising design, Fortunato Depero (1892–1960) produced a dynamic body of work in poster (Fig. 13–19), typographic, and advertising design. This young painter shifted from social realism and symbolism to futurism in 1913 after seeing a copy of the futurist paper *Lacerba*. In 1927 Depero published his *Depero futurista* (Figs. 13–20 and 13–21), a compilation of his typographical experiments, advertisements, tapestry designs, and other works. *Depero futurista* is a precursor of the artist’s book, published by an artist as a creative expression independent of the publishing establishment. From September 1928 until October 1930, Depero worked in New York and designed covers for magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *Movie Makers*, and *Sparks*, as well as print advertising. Although limited to a sophisticated and cosmopolitan audience, the appearance of his futurist work in American graphic communications proved somewhat influential in America’s movement toward modernism. Futurism became a major influence on other art movements, and its violent, revolutionary techniques were adopted by the Dadaists, constructivists, and De Stijl. The futurists initiated the publication of manifestos, typographic experimentation, and publicity stunts (on 8 July 1910, 800,000 copies of Marinetti’s leaflet *Against Past-Loving Venice*, were dropped from a clock tower onto Venice crowds), forcing poets and graphic designers to rethink the very nature of the typographic word and its meaning.

Dada

Reacting against the carnage of World War I, the Dada movement claimed to be anti-art and had a strong negative and destructive element. Dada writers and artists were concerned with shock, protest, and nonsense. They bitterly rebelled against the horrors of the world war, the decadence of European society, the shallowness of blind faith in technological progress, and the inadequacy of religion and conventional moral codes in a continent in upheaval. Rejecting all tradition, they sought complete freedom. The Dada movement developed spontaneously as a literary movement after the poet Hugo Ball (1886–1927) opened the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Switzerland, as a gathering place for independent young poets, painters, and musicians. Dada’s guiding spirit was a young and volatile Paris-based Rumanian poet,

Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), who edited the periodical *DADA* beginning in July 1917. Tzara joined Ball, Jean Arp (1887–1966, also known as Hans Arp), and Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974) in exploring sound poetry (Fig. 13–22), nonsense poetry, and chance poetry. He wrote a steady stream of Dada manifestos and contributed to all major Dada publications and events. Chance placement and absurd titles characterized their graphic work (Fig. 13–23). Dadaists did not even agree on the origins of the name *Dada*, such was the anarchy of the movement. One version says the movement was named when dadaists opened a French-German dictionary and randomly selected the word *dada*, a child’s hobbyhorse.

13–19. Fortunato Depero, New Futurist Theater Company poster, 1924. Flat planes of vibrant color, diagonal composition, and angular repetitive forms produce kinetic energy.

13–20. Fortunato Depero, cover for *Depero futurista*, 1927. Bound by massive chrome bolts, this book expresses its status as a physical object.

13–21. Fortunato Depero, page from *Depero futurista*, 1927.

13–22. Hugo Ball, Dada poem, 1917. Sound and sight poems such as this expressed the Dadaist desire to replace man’s logical nonsense with an illogical nonsense.

13–23. Dada magazine cover for *The Bearded Heart*, 1922. A casual organization of space has found illustrations randomly dispersed about the page with no particular communicative intent.

13–24. Alfred Stieglitz, photograph of *The Fountain*, by Marcel Duchamp, 1917. When an object is removed from its usual context, we suddenly see it with fresh eyes and respond to its intrinsic visual properties.

The French painter Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) joined the Dada movement and became its most prominent visual artist. Earlier, cubism had influenced his analysis of subjects as geometric planes, while futurism inspired him to convey time and motion. To Duchamp, Dada’s most articulate spokesman, art and life were processes of random chance and willful choice. Artistic acts became matters of individual decision and selection. This philosophy of absolute freedom allowed Duchamp to create ready-made sculpture, such as a bicycle wheel mounted on a wooden stool, and exhibit found objects, such as a urinal, as art (Fig. 13–24 and Fig. 13–25). The public was outraged when Duchamp painted a mustache on a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*. This act was not intended, however, as an attack on the *Mona Lisa*. Rather, it was an ingenious assault on tradition and a public that had lost the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance.

Dada quickly spread from Zurich to other European cities. Dadaists said they were not creating art but mocking and defaming a society gone insane; even so, several Dadaists

13–25. Marcel Duchamp, 1917. Cover of *La septième face du dé* (*The Seventh Face of the Die*), by Georges Hugnet, 1936.

13–26. Hannah Höch, *Da—dandy*, collage and photomontage, 1919. Images and materials are recycled, with both chance juxtapositions and planned decisions contributing to the creative process.

13–27. Kurt Schwitters, untitled (*Grüne Zugabe*), probably 1920s. Material gathered from the streets, alleys, and garbage cans was washed and cataloged according to size and color for use as the raw material of art.

13–28. Kurt Schwitters, *W W priimittitii*, 1920. The Dada poets separated the word from its language context; these two poems are intended to be seen as pure visual form and read as pure sound. Intuitive but highly structured typography grew out of the initial random chance of early Dada poetry.

13–29. Kurt Schwitters, Théo van Doesburg, and Kate Steinitz, page from *Die Scheuche* (*The Scarecrow*), 1922. In this modern fairy tale, type and image are wedded literally and figuratively as the B overpowers the X with verbiage.

13–30. Kurt Schwitters, pages from *Merz* 11, 1924. Ads for Pelikan tusche and inks demonstrate Schwitters's growing interest in constructivism during the 1920s.

13–31. John Heartfield, poster attacking the press, 1930. A surreal head wrapped in newspaper appears over a headline: "Whoever reads the bourgeois press turns deaf and blind. Away with these stupidity-causing bandages!"

produced meaningful visual art and influenced graphic design. Dada artists claimed to have invented photomontage (Fig. 13–26), the technique of manipulating found photographic images to create jarring juxtapositions and chance associations. Both Raoul Hausmann (1886–1977) and Hannah Höch (1889–1978) were creating outstanding work in the medium as early as 1918.

Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) of Hanover, Germany, created a nonpolitical offshoot of Dada that he named *Merz*, coined from the word *Kommerz* (commerce) in one of his collages. Schwitters gave *Merz* meaning as the title of a one-man art movement. Beginning in 1919, his *Merz* pictures were collage compositions using printed ephemera, rubbish, and found materials to compose color against color, form against form, and texture against texture (Fig. 13–27). His complex designs combined Dada's elements of nonsense, surprise, and chance with strong design properties. When he tried to join the Dada movement as "an artist who nails his pictures together," he was refused membership for being too bourgeois.

Schwitters wrote and designed poetry that played sense against nonsense (Fig. 13–28). He defined poetry as the interaction of elements: letters, syllables, words, sentences. In the early 1920s, constructivism (discussed in chapter 17) became an added influence in Schwitters's work after he made contact with El Lissitzky (1890–1941) and Théo van Doesburg (1883–1931), who invited Schwitters to Holland to promote Dada. Schwitters and Van Doesburg collaborated on a book in which typographic forms were depicted as characters (Fig. 13–29). Between 1923 and 1932 Schwitters published twenty-four issues of the periodical *Merz* (Fig. 13–30), whose eleventh issue was devoted to advertising typography. During this time Schwitters ran a successful graphic design studio with Pelikan (a manufacturer of office equipment and supplies) as a major client, and the city of Hanover employed him as typography consultant for several years. When the German political situation deteriorated in the 1930s, Schwitters began spending more time in Norway, and he moved to Oslo in 1937. After Germany invaded Norway in 1940 he fled to the British Isles, where he spent his last years and reverted to traditionalist painting.

In contrast to the artistic and constructivist interests of Schwitters, the Berlin Dadaists John Heartfield (1891–1968), Wieland Herzfelde (b. 1896), and George Grosz (1893–1959) held vigorous revolutionary political beliefs and oriented many of their artistic activities toward visual communications to raise public consciousness and promote social change. John Heartfield is the English name adopted by Helmut Herzfelde as a protest against German militarism and the army in which he served from 1914 to 1916. A founding member of the Berlin Dada group in 1919, Heartfield used the harsh disjunctions of photomontage as a potent propaganda weapon and introduced innovations in the preparation of mechanical art for offset printing. The Weimar Republic and the growing Nazi party were his targets in posters (Figs. 13–31, 13–32, and 13–33), book and magazine covers (Figs. 13–34 to 13–37), political illustrations, and cartoons. His montages are the most urgent in the history of the technique. Heartfield did not take photographs or retouch images but worked directly with glossy prints acquired from magazines and newspapers. Occasionally he commissioned a needed image from a photographer. After storm troopers occupied his apartment-studio in 1933, Heartfield fled to Prague, where he continued his graphic propaganda and mailed postcard versions of his graphics to Nazi leaders. In 1938 he learned that he was on a secret Nazi list of enemies and fled to London. He settled in Leipzig, East Germany, in 1950, where he designed theater sets and posters. Before his death in 1968, he produced photomontages protesting the

Vietnam War and calling for world peace. “Unfortunately Still Timely” was the title of one retrospective of his graphic art.

Heartfield’s younger brother, Wieland Herzfelde, was a poet, critic, and publisher who edited the journal *Neue Jugend* (New Youth), which was designed by Heartfield (Fig. 13–38). After being jailed in 1914 for distributing communist literature, Wieland started the Malik Verlag publishing house, an important avant-garde publisher of Dada, left-wing political propaganda, and experimental literature. The painter and graphic artist George Grosz was closely associated with the Herzfelde brothers. He attacked a corrupt society with satire and caricature (Fig. 13–39) and advocated a classless social system. His drawings project the angry intensity of deep political convictions in what he perceived to be a decadent, degenerate milieu.

Having inherited Marinetti’s rhetoric and assault on all artistic and social traditions, Dada was a major liberating movement that continued to inspire innovation and rebellion. Dada was born in protest against war, and its destructive and exhibitionist activities became more absurd and extreme after the war ended. In 1921 and 1922, controversy and disagreement broke out among its members, and the movement split into factions. French writer and poet André Breton (1896–1966), who was associating with the Dadaists, emerged as a new leader who believed that Dada had lost its relevance, making new directions necessary. Having pushed its negative activities to the limit, lacking a unified leadership, and with its members facing the new ideas that eventually led to surrealism, Dada foundered and ceased to exist as a cohesive movement by the end of 1922. However, Schwitters and Heartfield continued to evolve and produced their finest work after the movement’s demise. Dada’s rejection of art and tradition enabled it to enrich the visual vocabulary started by futurism.

13–32. John Heartfield, Yuletide poster, 1934. Under the headline, “Oh Tannenbaum in Germany, how crooked are your branches,” a sickly tree symbolizes the ethos of the Third Reich.

13–33. John Heartfield, anti-Nazi propaganda poster, 1935. The headline, “Adolf, the Superman: Swallows gold and talks tin,” is visualized by a photomontage X-ray of Hitler showing an esophagus of gold coins.

13–34. John Heartfield, cover for Deutschland Deutschland über alles, by Kurt Tucholsky, 1927.

13–35. John Heartfield, “Der Sinn des Hitlergrusses” (The Meaning of the Hitler Salute), cover for AIZ, 1932.

13–36. John Heartfield, “Der Sinn von Genf: Wo das Kapital lebt, kann der friede nicht leben” (The Meaning of Geneva: Where Capital Lives, Peace Cannot Live), cover for AIZ, 1932. In Geneva crowds of demonstrators against fascism were shot with machine guns.

13–37. John Heartfield, cover for AIZ, 1934. Shells form a cathedral to symbolize the mentality of military expansion and the arms race. A swastika, dollar mark, and pound sign top the towers.

13–38. John Heartfield, page from *Neue Jugend*, 1917. Pages of this radical tabloid have a visual vitality of Dadaist origin.

13–39. George Grosz, cover for *Der Blutige Ernst* (Dead Serious), 1919. A couple before a collage of cabaret ads signify postwar decadence.

Through a synthesis of spontaneous chance actions with planned decisions, Dadaists helped to strip typographic design of its traditional precepts. Also, Dada continued cubism’s concept of letterforms as concrete visual shapes, not just phonetic symbols (Fig. 13–40).

13–40. Ilya Zdanevitch, poster for the play Party of the Bearded Heart, 1923. Vitality and legibility are achieved using typographic material from over forty fonts.

13–41. Giorgio de Chirico, *The Departure of the Poet*, 1914. De Chirico's timeless poetry stops short of the bizarre or supernatural.

13–42. Max Ernst, collage from *Une semaine de bonté* (A Week of Kindness), 1934. Photomechanical printing techniques obliterate cut edges, unifying the image.

13–43. René Magritte, *The Blank Signature*, 1965. The surrealists defied our rational understanding of the world, and their vocabulary of pictorial and symbolic innovations began to seep into the mass media.

Surrealism

With roots in Dada and in a group of young French writers and poets associated with the journal *Littérature*, surrealism entered the Paris scene in 1924, searching for the “more real than real world behind the real”—the world of intuition, dreams, and the unconscious realm explored by Freud. Apollinaire had used the expression “surreal drama” in reviewing a play in 1917. The poet André Breton, founder of surrealism, imbued the word with all the magic of dreams, the spirit of rebellion, and the mysteries of the subconscious in his 1924 *Manifesto du Surréalisme*: “*Surrealism*, noun, masc. pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.”

Tristan Tzara came from Zurich to join Breton, Louis Aragon (1897–1982), and Paul Eluard (1895–1952). He stirred the group on toward scandal and rebellion. These young poets rejected the rationalism and formal conventions dominating postwar creative activities in Paris. They sought ways to make new truths, to reveal the language of the soul. Surrealism (or “super reality”) was not a style or a matter of aesthetics; rather, it was a way of thinking and knowing, a way of feeling, and a way of life. Where Dada had been negative, destructive, and perpetually exhibitionist, surrealism professed a poetic faith in man and his spirit. Humanity could be liberated from social and moral conventions. Intuition and feeling could be freed. The writers experimented with stream-of-consciousness writing, or automatism, to seek an uninhibited truth.

The impact of the surrealist poets and writers has been limited to French literary and scholarly circles; it was through the movement's painters that surrealism affected society and visual communications. While surrealists often created works so personal that communication became impossible, they also produced images whose emotional content, symbolism, or fantasy triggered a collective, universal response in large numbers of people. Breton and his friends speculated about the possibility of surreal painting. They discovered the work of Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) and declared him the first surrealist painter. A member of the short-lived Italian metaphysical school of painting, De Chirico painted hauntingly empty vistas of Italian Renaissance palaces and squares that possess an intense melancholy (Fig. 13–41). Vacant buildings, harsh shadows, deep tilted perspective, and enigmatic images convey emotions far removed from ordinary experience.

Of the large number of artists who joined the surrealist movement, several significantly influenced visual communications, with a major impact on photography and illustration. Max Ernst (1891–1965), a restless German Dadaist, used a number of techniques that have been adopted in graphic communications. Fascinated by the wood engravings in nineteenth-century novels and catalogues, Ernst reinvented them by using collage techniques to create strange juxtapositions (Fig. 13–42). These surreal collages have had a strong influence on illustration. His *frottage* technique involved using rubbings to compose directly on

paper. As he looked at his rubbings, Ernst's imagination invented images in them, much as one sees images in cloud formations. Then he developed the rubbings into fantastic pictures. *Decalomania*, Ernst's process of transferring images from printed matter to a drawing or painting, enabled him to incorporate a variety of images into his work in unexpected ways. This technique has been used extensively in illustration, painting, and printmaking.

Figurative surrealist painters have been called "naturalists of the imaginary" by French art historians. Space, color, perspective, and figures are rendered in careful naturalism, but the image is an unreal dreamscape. The Belgian surrealist René Magritte (1898–1967) used jolting and ambiguous scale changes, defied the laws of gravity and light, created unexpected juxtapositions, and maintained a poetic dialogue between reality and illusion, truth and fiction (Fig. 13–43). His prolific body of images inspired many visual communications.

13–44. Salvador Dali, *Le grand paranoiac (The Great Paranoid)*, 1936. The viewer simultaneously sees figures groping in a landscape and a large human head.

13–45. Joan Miró, *Painting (called The Addition)*, 1925. Miró often worked with little conscious direction of his brush, creating paintings that are intuitive, spontaneous expressions of the subconscious mind.

13–46. Käthe Schmidt Kollwitz, "The Survivors Make War on War!" poster, 1923. This powerful antiwar statement was commissioned by the International Association of Labor Unions in Amsterdam.

13–47. Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation No. 29*, 1912. Kandinsky defined an improvisation as a spontaneous expression of inner character having spiritual nature.

The theatrical Spanish painter Salvador Dali (1904–1989) influenced graphic design in two ways. His deep perspectives inspired designers to bring vast depth to the flat, printed page; his naturalistic approach to simultaneity (Fig. 13–44) has been frequently imitated in posters and editorial images.

Another group of surrealist painters, the emblematics, worked with a purely visual vocabulary. Visual automatism (intuitive stream-of-consciousness drawing and calligraphy) was used to create spontaneous expressions of inner life in the work of Joan Miró (1893–1983) and Jean Arp. Miró explored a process of metamorphosis through which he intuitively developed his motifs into cryptic, organic shapes (Fig. 13–45). As early as 1916, Arp explored chance and unplanned harmonies in works such as *Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*. The biomorphic forms and open composition of these artists were incorporated into product and graphic design, particularly during the 1950s.

Surrealism's impact on graphic design has been diverse. It provided a poetic example of the liberation of the human spirit. It pioneered new techniques and demonstrated how fantasy and intuition could be expressed in visual terms. Unfortunately, the ideas and images of surrealism have been exploited and trivialized frequently in the mass media.

Expressionism

In early-twentieth-century art, the tendency to depict not objective reality but subjective emotions and personal responses to subjects and events was called *expressionism*, which emerged as an organized movement in Germany before World War I. Color, drawing, and proportion were often exaggerated or distorted, and symbolic content was very important. Line and color were often pronounced; color and value contrasts were intensified. Tactile properties were achieved through thick paint, loose brushwork, and bold contour drawing. Woodcuts, lithographs, and posters were important media for many expressionists.

Revolting against conventional aesthetic forms and cultural norms, expressionists felt a deep sense of social crisis, especially during the years prior to World War I. Many German expressionists rejected the authority of the military, education, government, and Hohenzollern rule. They felt deep empathy for the poor and social outcasts, who were frequent subjects of their work. Intense idealism fueled the expressionists' belief in art as a beacon pointing toward a new social order and improved human condition.

German artists formed two early expressionist groups: *Die Brücke* (The Bridge) originated in Dresden in 1905, and *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) began in Munich in 1911. Expressionists consciously sought new approaches to art and life. Die Brücke artists declared their independence in transforming their subject matter until it conveyed their own unexpressed feelings; by contrast, Der Blaue Reiter redefined art as an object without subject matter, but with perceptual properties that were able to convey feelings. Die Brücke's figurative paintings and woodblock prints were forged with thick, raw strokes, often becoming bold statements about alienation, anxiety, and despair. German expressionism extended into theater, film, and literature, for example in such works as Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*.

Outstanding examples of the expressionist concern for the human condition and its representation in easily understood graphic imagery are found in drawings, prints, sculpture, and posters by Käthe Schmidt Kollwitz (1867–1945). Married to a physician who ran a clinic in a Berlin working-class district, Kollwitz gained firsthand knowledge about the miserable conditions of the working poor. She documented their plight in figurative works of great emotional power. Great empathy for the suffering of women and children is conveyed by her posters (Fig. 13–46).

Founding members of Der Blaue Reiter included Russian émigré Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and the Swiss artist Paul Klee (1879–1940). Less inclined to express the agony of the human condition, they sought a spiritual reality beyond the outward appearances of nature and explored problems of form and color. Kandinsky led the group and became the leading advocate of art that could reveal the spiritual nature of people through the orchestration of color, line, and form on the canvas. Kandinsky's book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910) was an early argument for nonobjective art capable of conveying emotions from the artist to the observer through purely visual means without subject matter or literal symbols. Kandinsky compared color and form to music and its ability to express deep human emotion. This belief in the autonomy and spiritual values of color led to the courageous emancipation of his painting from motifs and representational elements (Fig. 13–47).

Klee synthesized elements inspired by all the modern movements as well as children's and naive art, achieving intense subjective power while contributing to the objective formal vocabulary of modern art (Fig. 13–48). His subject matter was translated into graphic signs and symbols with strong communicative power. Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* (1925) defined the elements of art, their interaction, motion, and spatial depth. His published lectures are the most complete explication of modern design by any artist.

In France the *fauves* (wild beasts), led by Henri Matisse (1869–1954), shocked proper French society with their jarring color contrasts and spirited drawing in the first decade of the century. Except for Georges Rouault (1871–1958), the fauves were more involved with color and structural relationships than expressions of spiritual crisis.

The techniques and subject matter of expressionism influenced graphic illustration and poster art; the emphasis on social and political activism continues to provide a viable model for graphic designers addressing problems of the human condition and environment. Inspiration was drawn from art by children, unschooled artists, non-European cultures, and tribal arts. Theories about color and form advanced by Kandinsky and Klee became important foundations for design and design education through their teaching at the Bauhaus, discussed in chapter 16.

It was inevitable that the new visual language of the modern movements, with its concern for point, line, plane, shape, and texture, and for the relationships between these visual elements, would begin to influence photography, just as it had affected typography in the futurist and Dadaist approaches to graphic design.

Francis Bruguiere (1880–1945) began to explore multiple exposures in 1912, pioneering the potential of light recorded on film as a medium for poetic expression. In his photographic abstractions, the play of light and shadow becomes the subject (Fig. 13–49). Another photographer who extended his vision into the realm of pure form was Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966). By 1913 his photographs of rooftops and views from tall buildings focused on the pattern and structure found in the world instead of depicting objects and things (Fig. 13–50). Coburn’s kaleidoscope patterns, which he called *vortographs* when the series began in 1917, are early nonobjective photographic images. Coburn praised the beautiful design seen through a microscope, explored multiple exposure, and used prisms to split images into fragments.

13–48. Paul Klee, *Fish Magic*, 1925. Images are reinvented into potent signs; color, form, and texture are delicately balanced into a cohesive composition; and the whole transmits a quiet poetry from a world invented by the artist’s imagination.

13–49. Francis Bruguiere, *Light Abstraction*, undated. By cutting and bending paper, Bruguiere composed a photographic composition of forms moving in and out of space.

13–50. Alvin Langdon Coburn, *The Octopus*, 1912. The visual design patterns of shape and tone became Coburn’s subject as he viewed the world from unexpected vantage points.

13–51. Man Ray, *Sleeping Woman*, 1929. In this surreal image, solarization is used not just as a visual technique but as a mean to plumb the psychic experience.

13–52. Man Ray, page from *Facile (Easy)*, by Paul Eluard, 1936.

An American artist from Philadelphia, Man Ray (born Emanuel Rabinovitch, 1890–1976), met Duchamp and fell under the Dada spell in 1915. After moving to Paris in 1921, Man Ray joined Breton and others in their evolution from Dada toward surrealism, with its less haphazard investigation of the role played by the unconscious and chance in artistic creation. During the 1920s he worked as a professional photographer while applying Dada and surrealism to photography, using both darkroom manipulation and bizarre studio setups. He was the first photographer to explore the creative potential of solarization (Fig. 13–51), the reversal of the tonal sequence in the denser areas of a photographic negative or print, which adds strong black contours to the edges of major shapes. (Fig. 13–52). Solarization is achieved by giving a latent or developing photographic image a second exposure to light. Man Ray’s cameraless prints, which he called *rayographs* (Fig. 13–53), were more complex than schadographs. Man Ray frequently made his exposures with moving beams of light and combined experimental techniques such as solarization with the basic technique of placing objects on the photographic paper. He also used distortion, printing through textures, and multiple exposures as he searched for dreamlike images and new interpretations of time and space, applying surrealism to graphic design (Fig. 13–54) and photography assignments.

12–1. Frank Lloyd Wright, title page for *The House Beautiful*, 1896–97. An underlying geometric structure imposed a strong order upon the intricacy of Wright’s textural design

12–2. Margaret Macdonald, bookplate design, 1896. Reproduced in *Ver Sacrum* in 1901 as part of an article on the Glasgow group, this design depicts Wisdom protecting her children within the leaflike shelter of her hair before a symbolic tree of knowledge, whose linear structure is based on Macdonald’s metalwork.

12–3. Margaret and Frances Macdonald with J. Herbert McNair, poster for the Glasgow Institute of the Fine Arts, 1895. The symbolic figures have been assigned both religious and romantic interpretations.

12-4. Charles Rennie Mackintosh, poster for The Scottish Musical Review, 1896. In this towering image that rises 2.46 meters (over 8 feet) above the spectator, complex overlapping planes are unified by areas of flat color. The white ring and birds around the figure create a strong focal point.

The concepts, images, and methods of visual organization from cubism, futurism, Dada, surrealism, and expressionism have provided valuable insights and processes for graphic designers. The innovators of these movements, who dared to walk into a no-man's-land of unexplored artistic possibilities, continue to influence artists, designers, and illustrators to this day.