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| **Rietveld, Gerrit Thomas (1888-1964)** |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Gerrit Rietveld was a Dutch furniture designer and architect associated with the avant-garde movement known as De Stijl (The Style). Influenced by the abstract paintings of Piet Mondrian, Rietveld’s work emphasised pure geometric form and primary colours. As the principal interpreter of the De Stijl aesthetic, Rieveld demonstrated how Mondrian’s abstract style could be translated into three dimensional design objects and buildings. His work helped to formulate many of the principles that became integral to Modernist design of the 1920s and 30s.  Born in Utrecht, Rietveld was the son of a cabinet-maker. He worked with his father from the age of eleven and this experience gave him a thorough grounding in craft skills. |
| Gerrit Rietveld was a Dutch furniture designer and architect associated with the avant-garde movement known as De Stijl (The Style). Influenced by the abstract paintings of Piet Mondrian, Rietveld’s work emphasised pure geometric form and primary colours. As the principal interpreter of the De Stijl aesthetic, Rieveld demonstrated how Mondrian’s abstract style could be translated into three dimensional design objects and buildings. His work helped to formulate many of the principles that became integral to Modernist design of the 1920s and 30s.  Born in Utrecht, Rietveld was the son of a cabinet-maker. He worked with his father from the age of eleven and this experience gave him a thorough grounding in craft skills. He then worked as a draughtsman for a jeweller in Utrecht from 1906 to 1911. Opening his own furniture workshop in 1917, he established himself as a cabinet-maker and attended night-school to study architecture.  Rietveld designed his now-famous Red-Blue Chair in 1918. This was originally an unpainted piece, extolling the virtues of simple craftsmanship. The following year, however, Rietveld encountered the pioneering work of Theo van Doesberg and Piet Mondrian, the principal members of De Stijl. Rietveld joined the group and painted the chair in the signature De Stijl colours in 1923, thus transforming it into a three-dimensional realisation of a Mondrian painting. The joints extend beyond their point of contact, suggesting that the chair was merely an ensemble of planes and lines coalescing in infinite space.  File: Chair.jpg  Figure 1. Gerrit Rietveld, Red-Blue Chair, 1918  Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rietveld_chair_1.JPG>  In 1921 Rietveld designed a jewellery shop in Amsterdam, which successfully applied the new aesthetic to architecture and interior design. However, the most complete expression of De Stijl principles is the Schröder House (1924), designed for Mrs Truus Schröder and built in a conventional suburban area of Utrecht. The elevations are fractured into a series of planes and lines suspended in space and colour is used to articulate their rhythm. The Dutch word ‘stijl’ can also mean a post, jamb or support and this is visualised in the form of the building, where the structural supports are emphasised by the use of colour. Such honest expression of structure became a central tenet of Modernist architecture. The emphasis on rectangular planes establishes a powerful visual unity between interior and exterior. Internally, the various rooms are separated from each other by loose sliding partitions, which enabled the owner to reconfigure the space.  File: House.jpg  Figure 2. Gerrit Rietveld, Schröder House, 1924  Source: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a7/Rietveld_Schr%C3%B6derhuis_HayKranen-20.JPG>  Rietveld’s experiments drew the attention of radical designers throughout Europe. In 1923, Walter Gropius invited him to exhibit at the Bauhaus. Rietveld’s emphasis on formal purity had a profound influence on Bauhaus theory and practice, and subsequently on the whole gamut of Modernist design.  During the 1930s Rietveld gravitated away from De Stijl and engaged with a more functionalist and socially-orientated mode of architecture known as Nieuwe Bouwen (New Building). His later work has received less attention, but he became increasingly concerned with social housing, experimenting with new materials and construction techniques. In 1951 Rietveld designed a retrospective international exhibition about De Stijl. This reignited interest in his work and earned him a number of prestigious commissions, including the Dutch pavilion for the Venice Biennale (1953) and the press room for the UNESCO building in Paris. In 1963 he designed the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, but this was not completed until after his death. |
| Further reading:  (Brown)  (Küper and van Zijl)  (Mulder and van Zijl)  (Overy, Büller and Den Oudsten)  (Van Zijl)  (Vöge and Overy)  (White) |