



**A NEW  
ATTITUDE  
TOWARDS  
FAMILIAR  
THINGS.**

**STILL**

# DE STIJL

De Stijl ('The Style') was the name of a periodical which was first published in 1917. The contributors to the periodical explored the creation of a new visual representation, which expressed their increasingly modern world. The collective style of art, design and architecture which was published became known as De Stijl.

Developments in engineering, technology, schools of psychology and social change were at the heart of De Stijl thought and philosophy. The aim of the movement's patrons, Piet Mondrian and Theo Van Doesburg was to 'contribute something towards the new sense of beauty'<sup>2</sup>.

De Stijl was therefore very much influenced by the world at that time. It is often thought that the basic geometric shapes and primary colours of the artworks are not representational of anything.

This is untrue. They sought to create a new attitude towards familiar things, in line with their new world.

Rather than be figurative, their artworks and designs looked beyond the surface, studying the energy, movement, form and balance in their surroundings.

This publication is the result of applying the philosophies of De Stijl to our present world. It provides a refreshing interpretation of the beauty of today's surroundings.

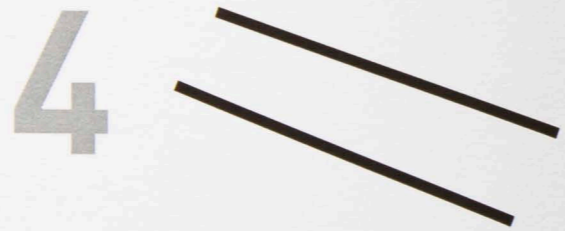
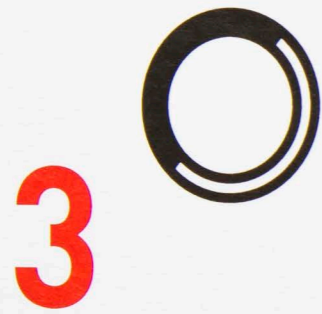
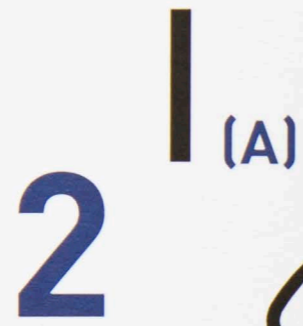
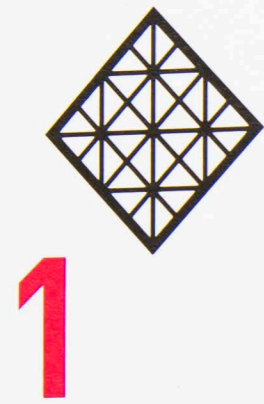
<sup>2</sup> C. Blotkamp, "Mondrian: The Art of Destruction" Reaktion, London 1994 P10.

## **MANIFESTO**

*One hundred years ago the artists and designers of De Stijl lived in a world of significant change and innovation. Their philosophy and publications interpreted and reflected the new technology and modern thought.*

*This book explores the application of their philosophy in the here and now, in a time of not dissimilar change and challenge. But rather than reflect on specific artworks and designs a series of graphic experiments are used to observe the importance of the De Stijl philosophy.*

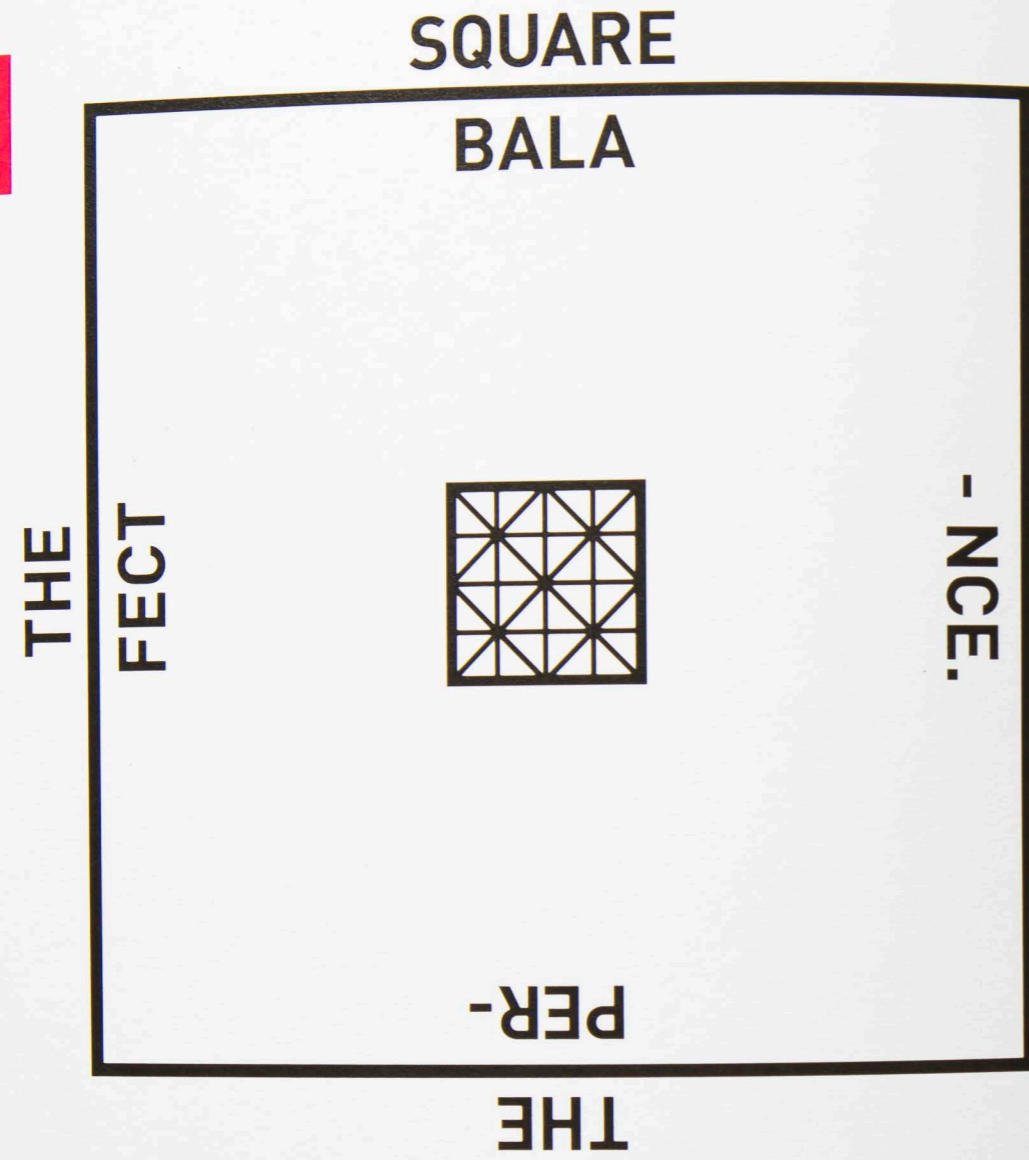
*The experiments create forms, reinforce ideals and embody our quest for learning. They reflect the constant evolution in design interpreted through an influential and sometimes forgotten philosophy of a hundred years ago.*



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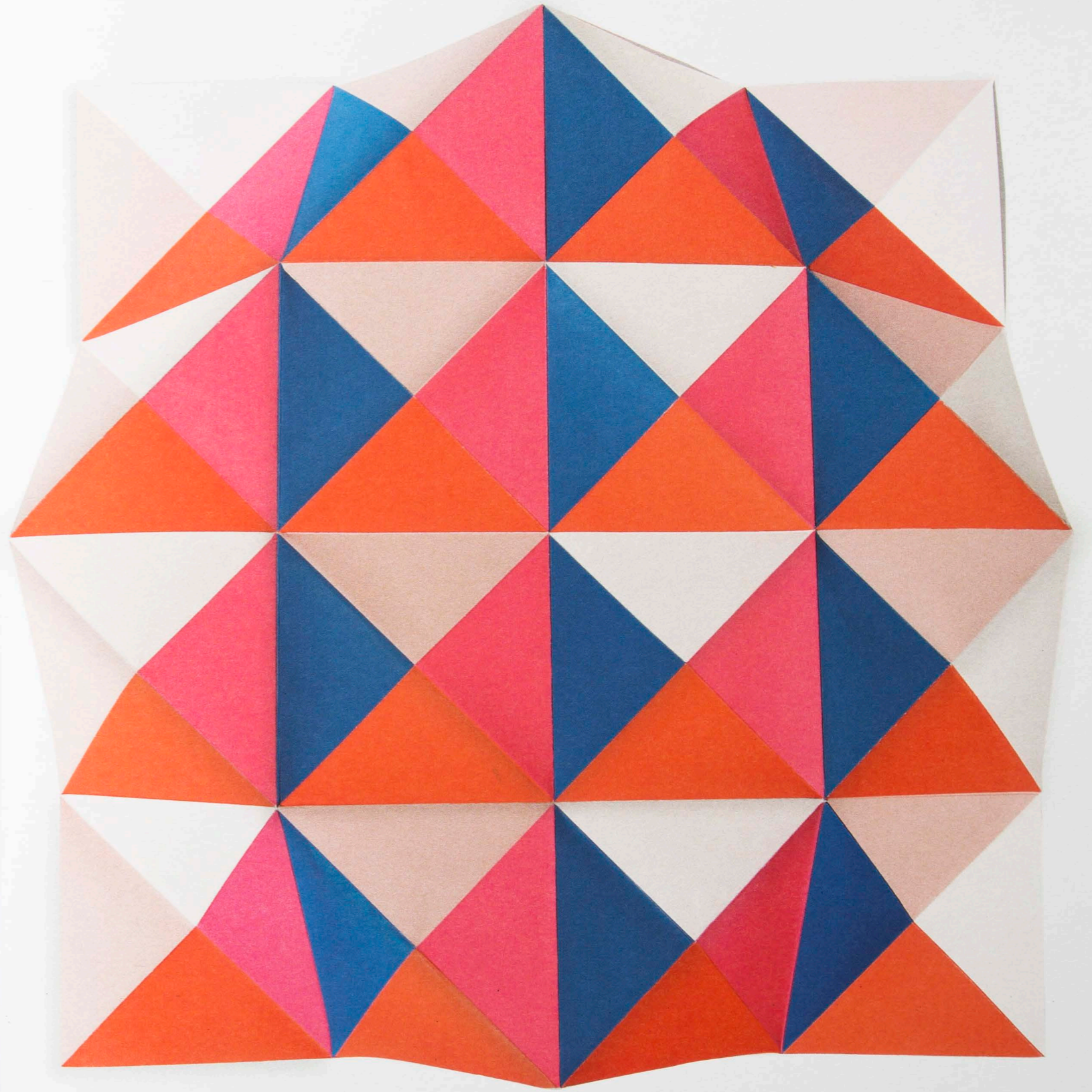
1



The square by its virtue of being completely balanced was fundamental to De Stijl, representing the world as a unity. It represents a balance of the forces; creation, nature and man<sup>3</sup>.

**Experiment:**  
 The purpose of this experiment is to explore the square itself and what graphic possibilities does it's shape and balance hold. Using a square piece of paper, fold it evenly as many times as you can.

<sup>3</sup> J Milner, "Mondrian" Phaidon Press Limited London 1992, p110.

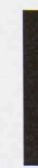




"NATURE INSPIRES ME,  
PROVIDES ME WITH THE  
EMOTION BY WHICH I AM  
MOVED TO CREATE SOMETHING,  
BUT I WANT TO APPROACH  
THE TRUTH AS CLOSELY AS  
POSSIBLE ABSTRACTING  
EVERYTHING UNTIL I COME TO  
THE FOUNDATION OF THINGS."<sup>4</sup>  
- MONDRIAN

2

(A)



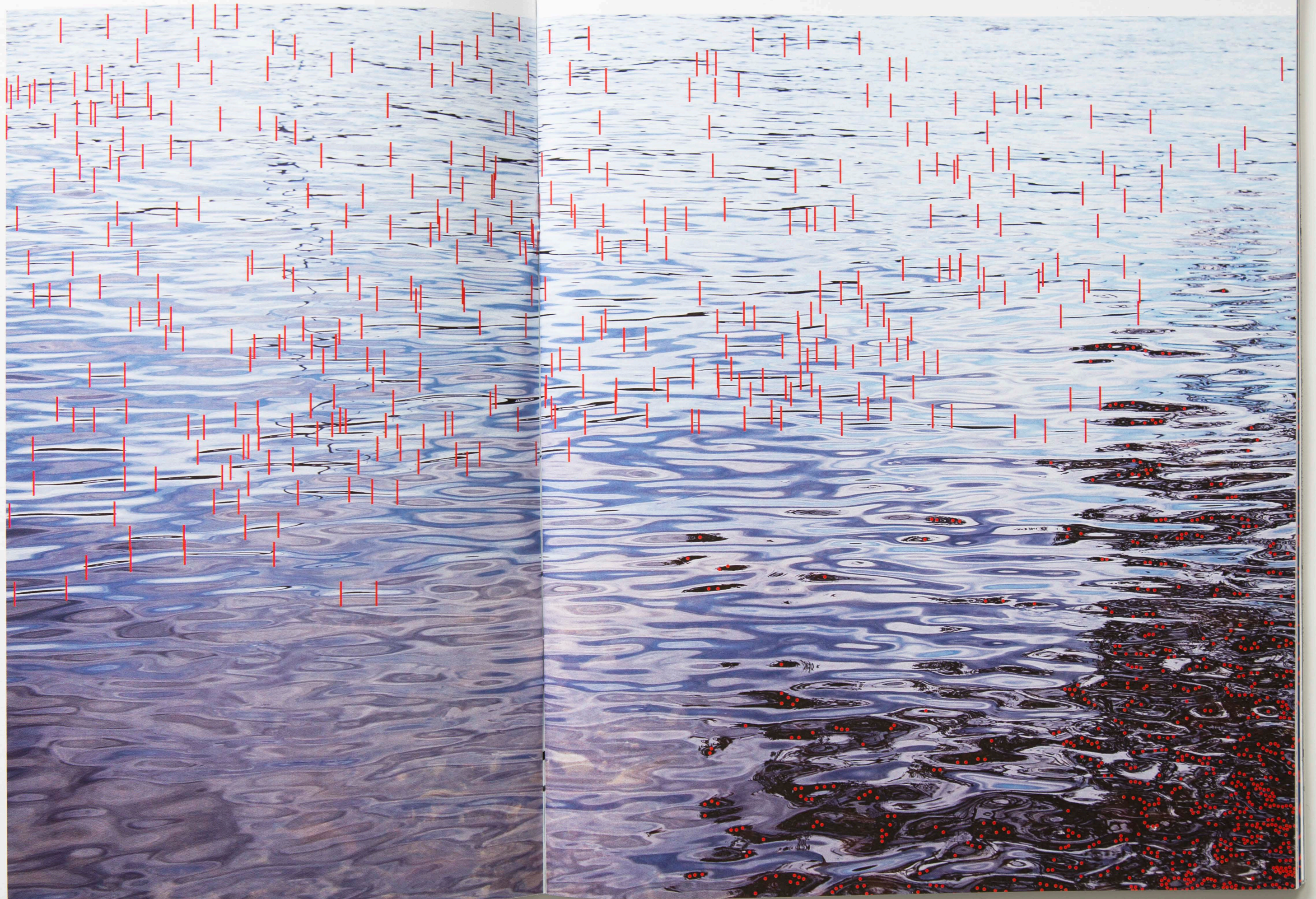
## WATER MOVEMENT

*Experiment:  
Depict the movement  
of water over a period of  
ten seconds. Use dots to  
cover the clusters of black  
shadow. Use lines at the  
start and end of the slithers  
of shadow.*

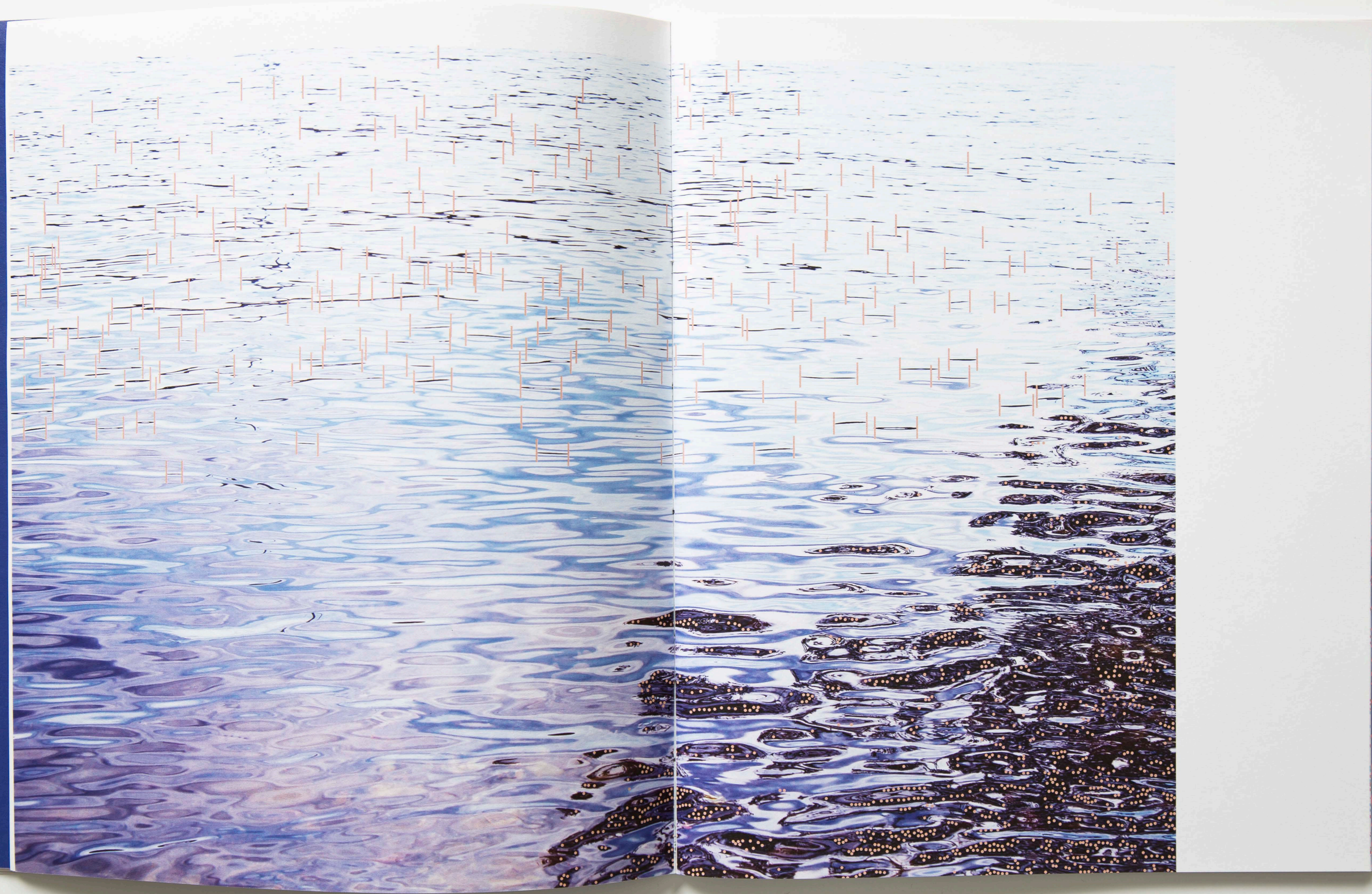
The movement and energy of the environment, such as water, was a design focus in De Stijl. This experiment focuses on the movement of light on the water's surface and explores the energy and form of the water.

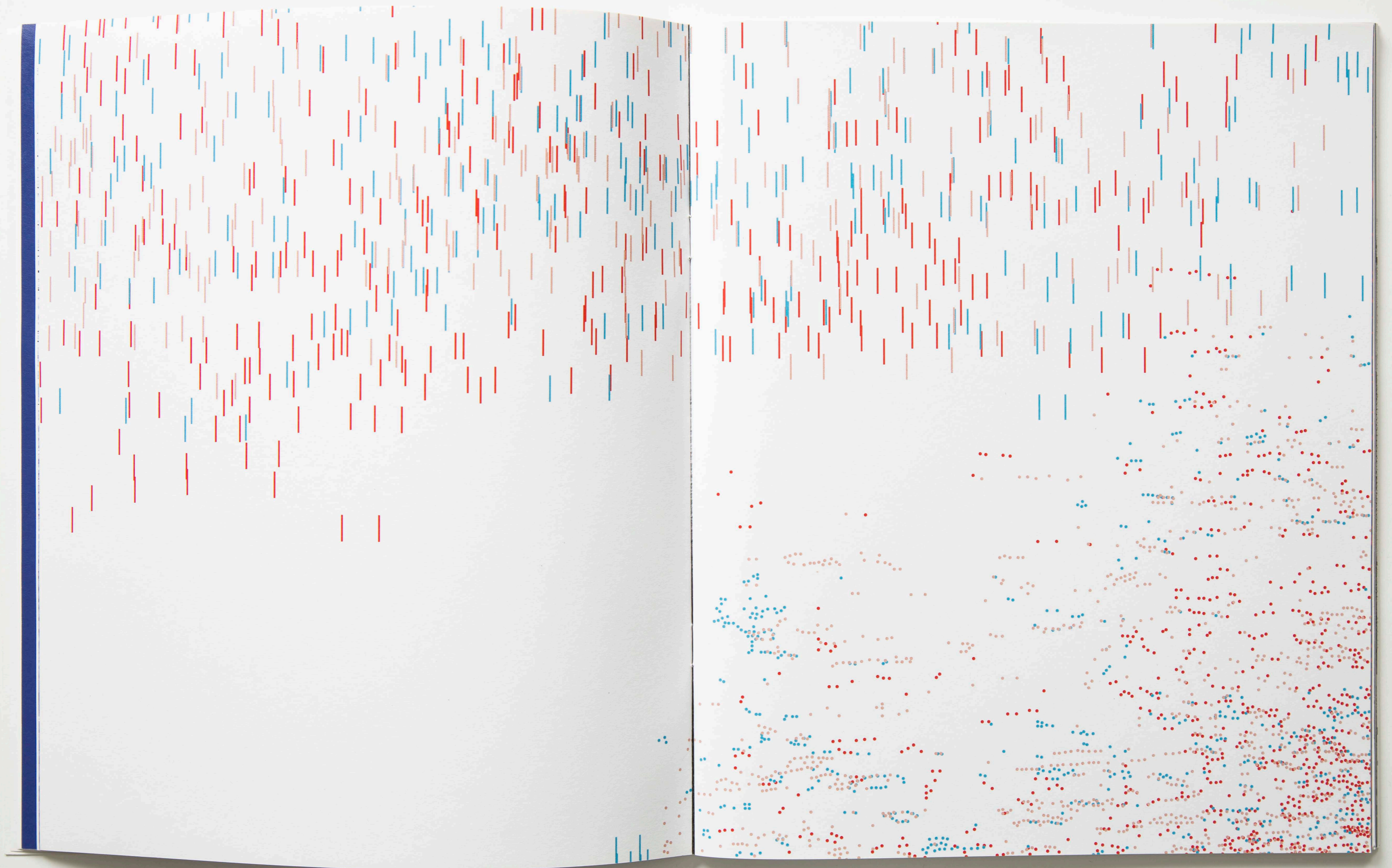
<sup>4</sup> C. Blotkamp, H. Esser, Sjael Ex, N. Gast, C. Hilhorst, E. Hoek, M. Kuper, E. Vermeulen, "De Stijl: The Formative Years, 1917-1922" The MIT Press Cambridge, London 1982, p.6.



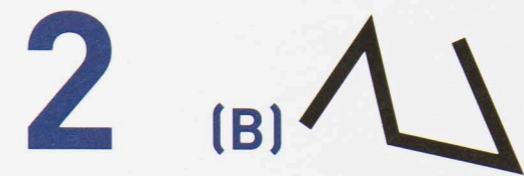








"...I AM NOW WORKING ON A THING WHICH IS A RECONSTRUCTION OF A STARRY SKY, BUT STILL I MAKE IT WITHOUT THE NATURAL GIVEN."<sup>5</sup>  
- PIET MONDRIAN



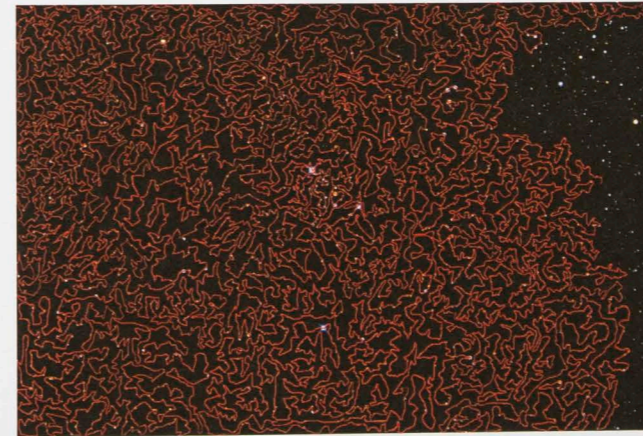
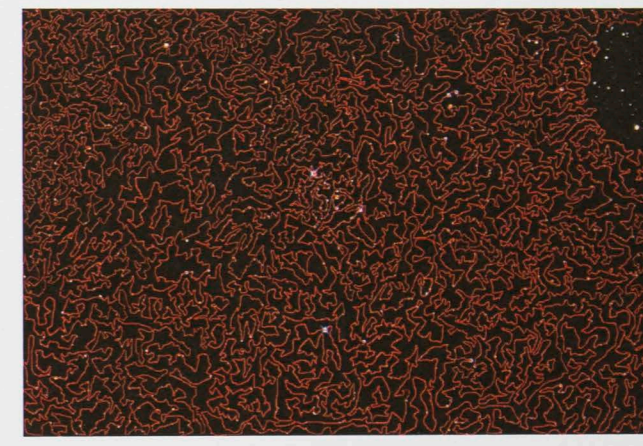
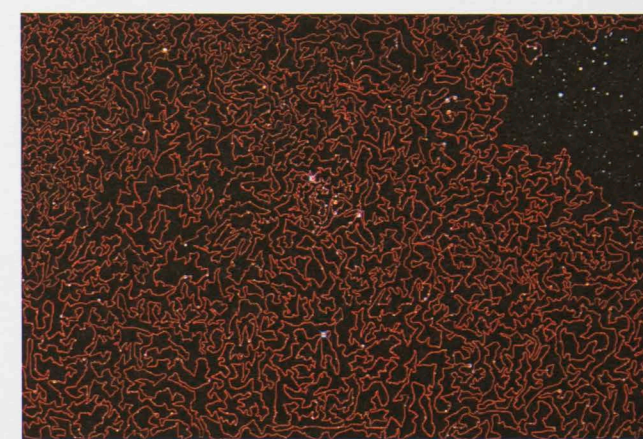
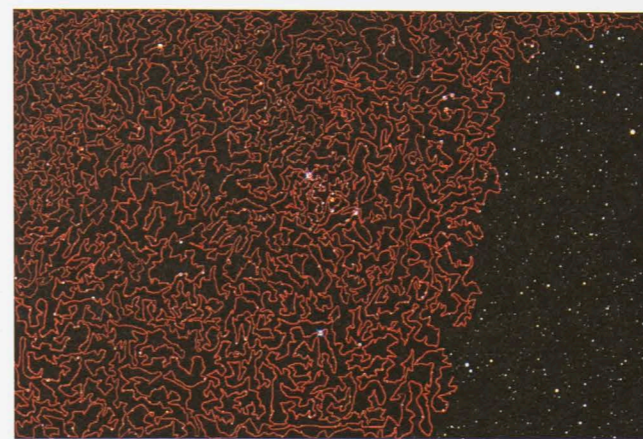
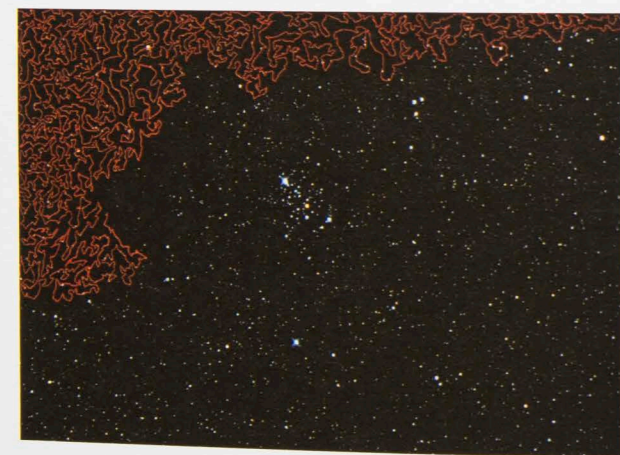
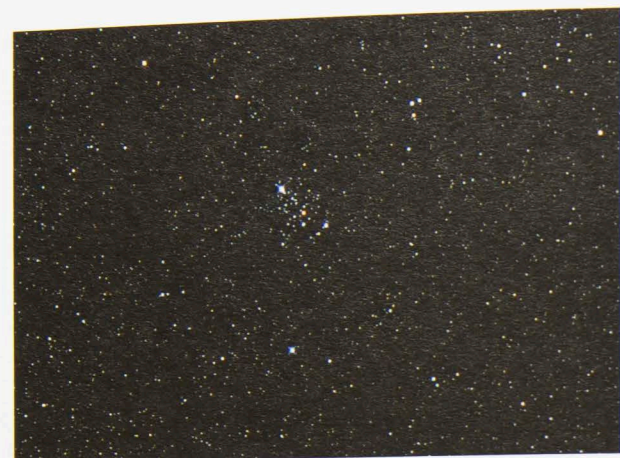
## RECONSTRUCTION OF A STARRY SKY

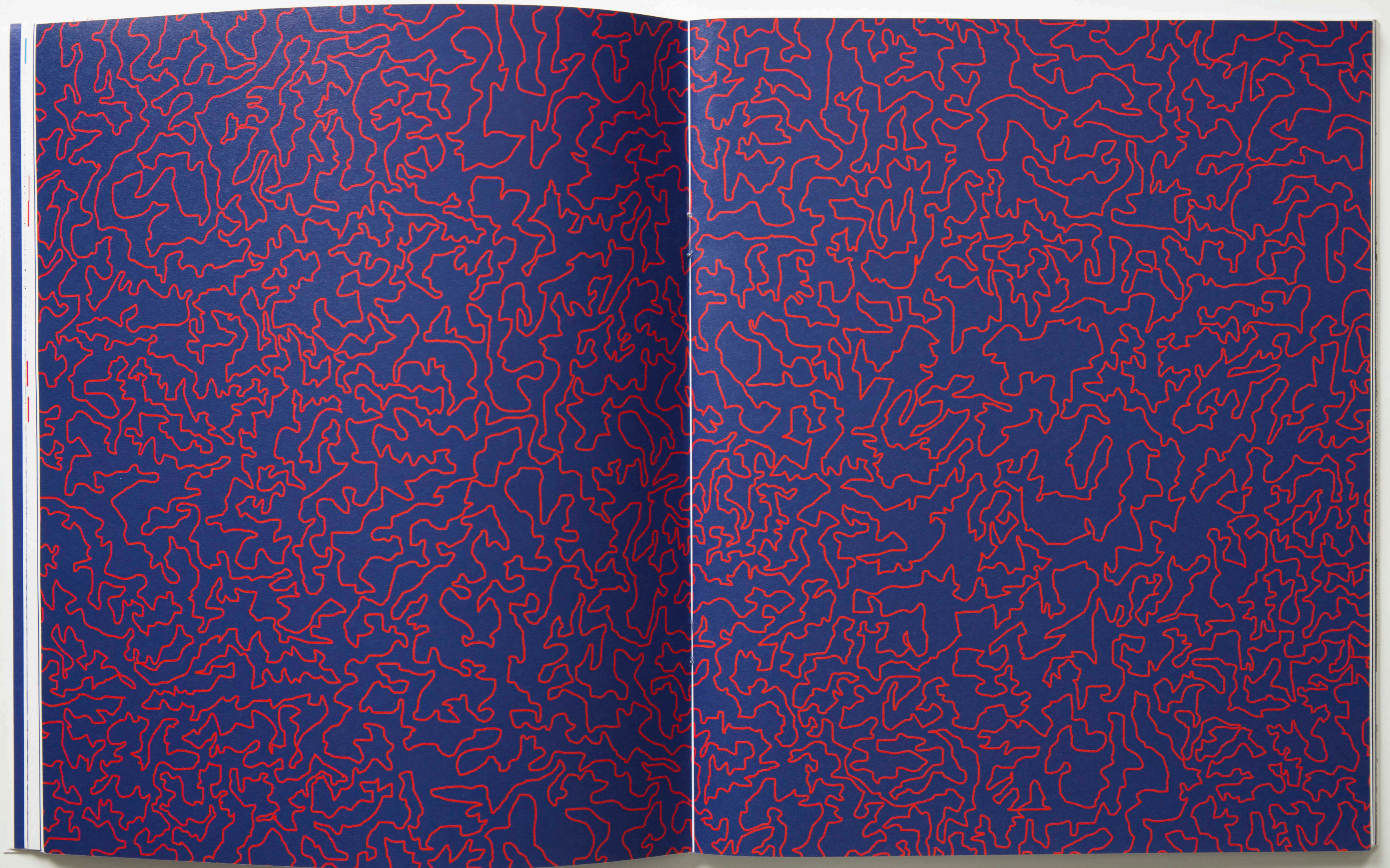
**Experiment:**  
Join all of the stars together using a continuous line.  
Do not cross over this line.

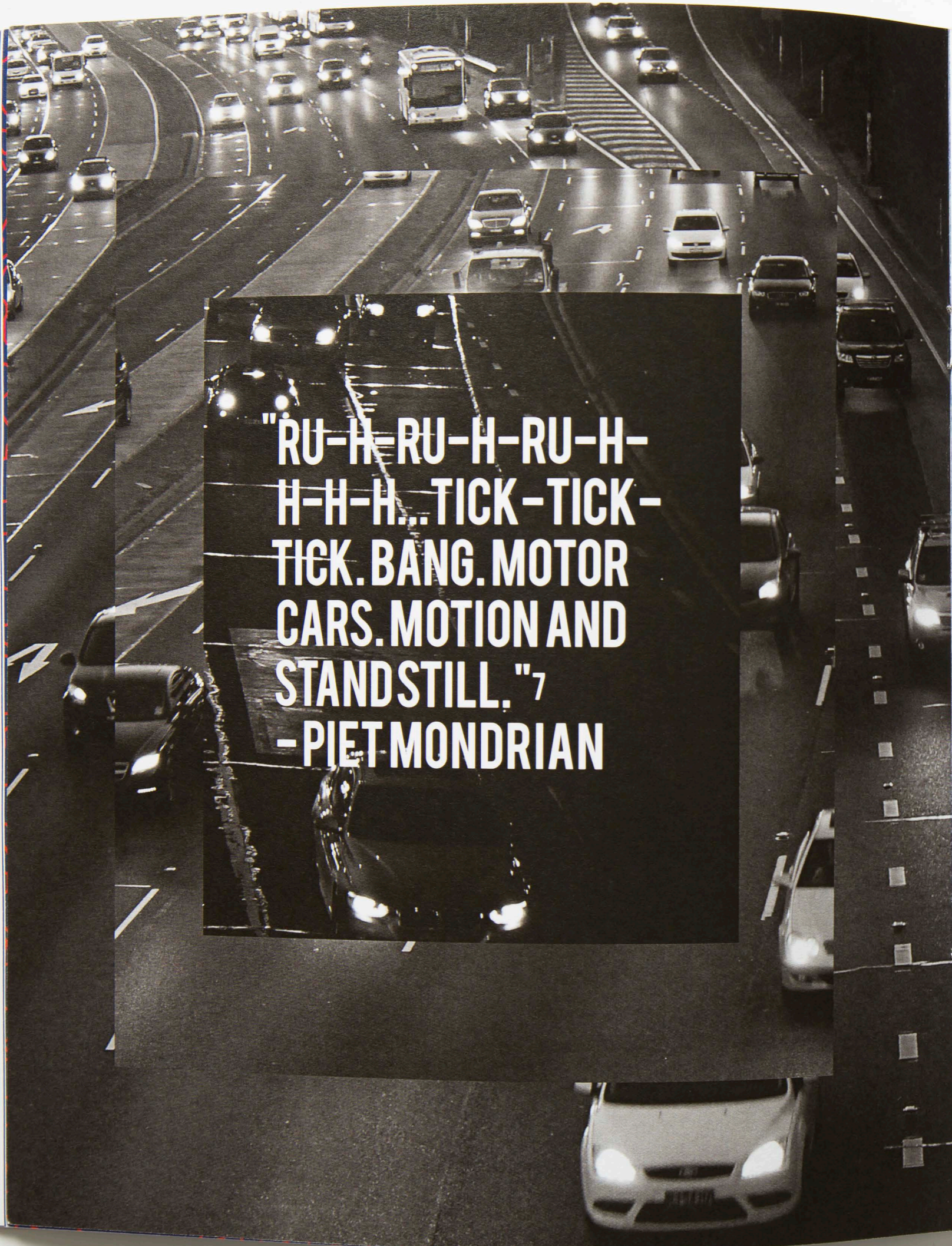
Abstracting the sky was a focus for Mondrian in 1917. His aim was to recreate the night sky without using the obvious imagery and still show the vivid light of a starry sky<sup>6</sup>.

The focus of this experiment is to create a new representation of the sky, showing its vibrancy and energy whilst staying away from natural imagery.

<sup>5</sup> J Milner, "Mondrian" Phaidon Press Limited London 1992, pp90-92.  
<sup>6</sup> J Milner, "Mondrian" Phaidon Press Limited London 1992, p94.







"RU-H-RU-H-RU-H-  
H-H-H...TICK-TICK-  
TICK.BANG.MOTOR  
CARS.MOTION AND  
STANDSTILL."<sup>7</sup>  
- PIET MONDRIAN

# 2 (C)

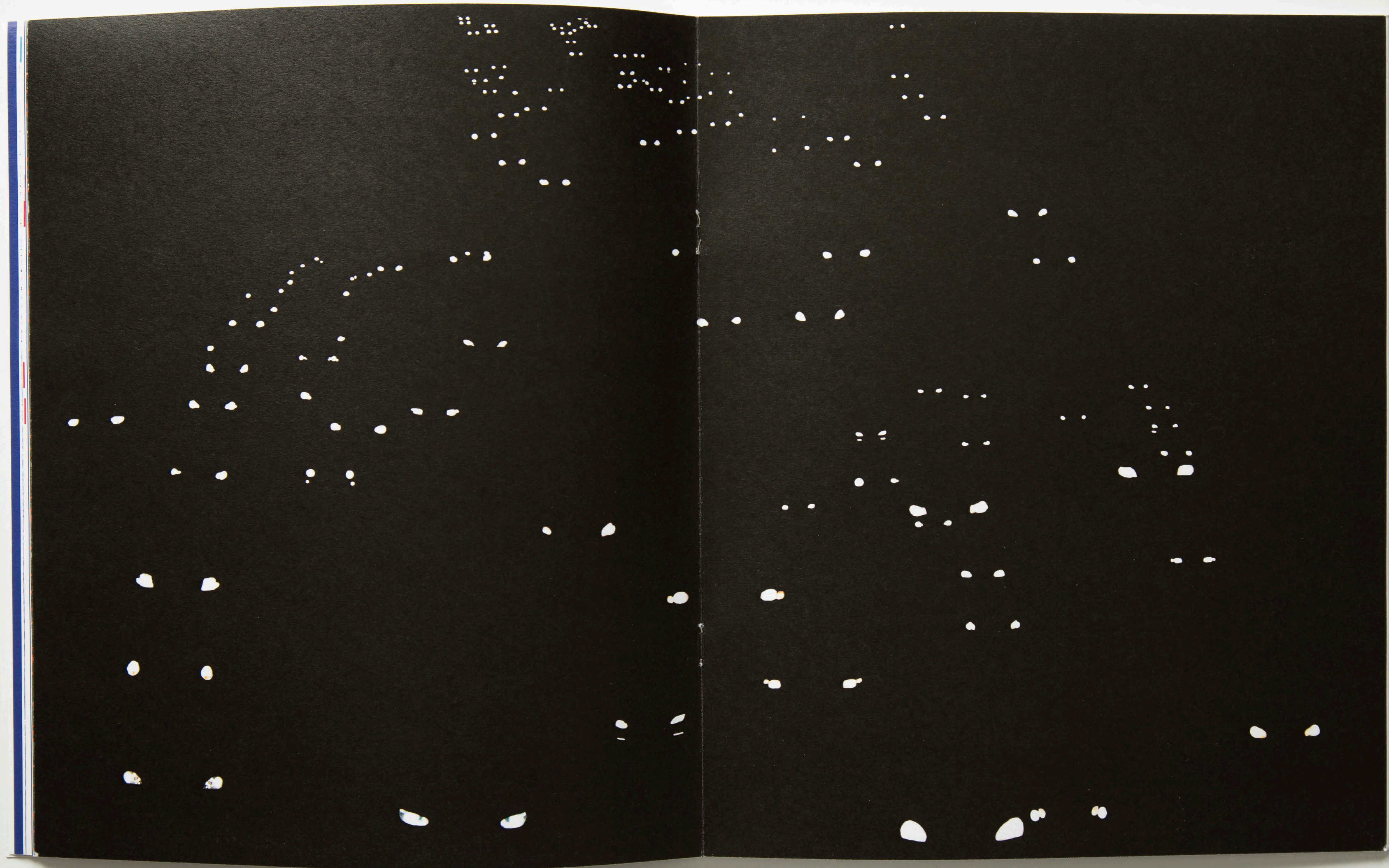
## TRAFFIC MOVEMENT

*Experiment:  
Take photos in peak  
hour of oncoming  
traffic. Cut out the  
headlights of the cars.*

Mondrian became interested with the sounds of the modern world, particularly that of the motor cars. This experiment focuses on the grandscale of peak hour traffic in the present day.

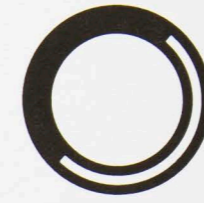
<sup>7</sup> C. Blotkamp, "Mondrian: The Art of Destruction" Reaktion, London 1994 P10.





"THE RELATIONSHIPS NO LONGER  
CORRESPOND TO AN UNDERLYING  
GRID. EVOLVED BY THE EYE THEY  
OPERATE EFFICIENTLY ON THE  
VISUAL LEVEL."<sup>8</sup>  
- JOHN MILNER

3



## THE GRID AS A FRAMEWORK

*Experiment:  
Grids in design often used  
for layouts and typography.  
To explore this create two  
layouts. One based on a strict  
mathematical grid, and the  
other based around a grid  
that is balanced to the eye.*

The grid in De Stijl was fundamental to the development of its abstractedness. Initially the grid employed by the artists and designers was mathematical and exacting. However, it developed into a grid formation that was less prescriptive and balanced to the eye<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> J Milner, "Mondrian" Phaidon Press Limited London 1992, pp120-122.  
<sup>9</sup> R Padovan "Towards Universality Le Corbusier, Mies, and De Stijl"  
Routledge London 2002, p74.

**A T F I R S T  
T H E Y F O L  
L O W E D A N  
U N D E R L Y  
I N G M A T H  
M A T I C A L  
G R I D S T R  
U C T U R E .**

*The strict mathematical  
grid doesn't leave room  
for variety.*

*Breaking down the mathematical  
grid results in a sense of rhythm,  
movement and depth in flatness.*

**BASIC  
FORM,  
&  
MOVEMENT.**

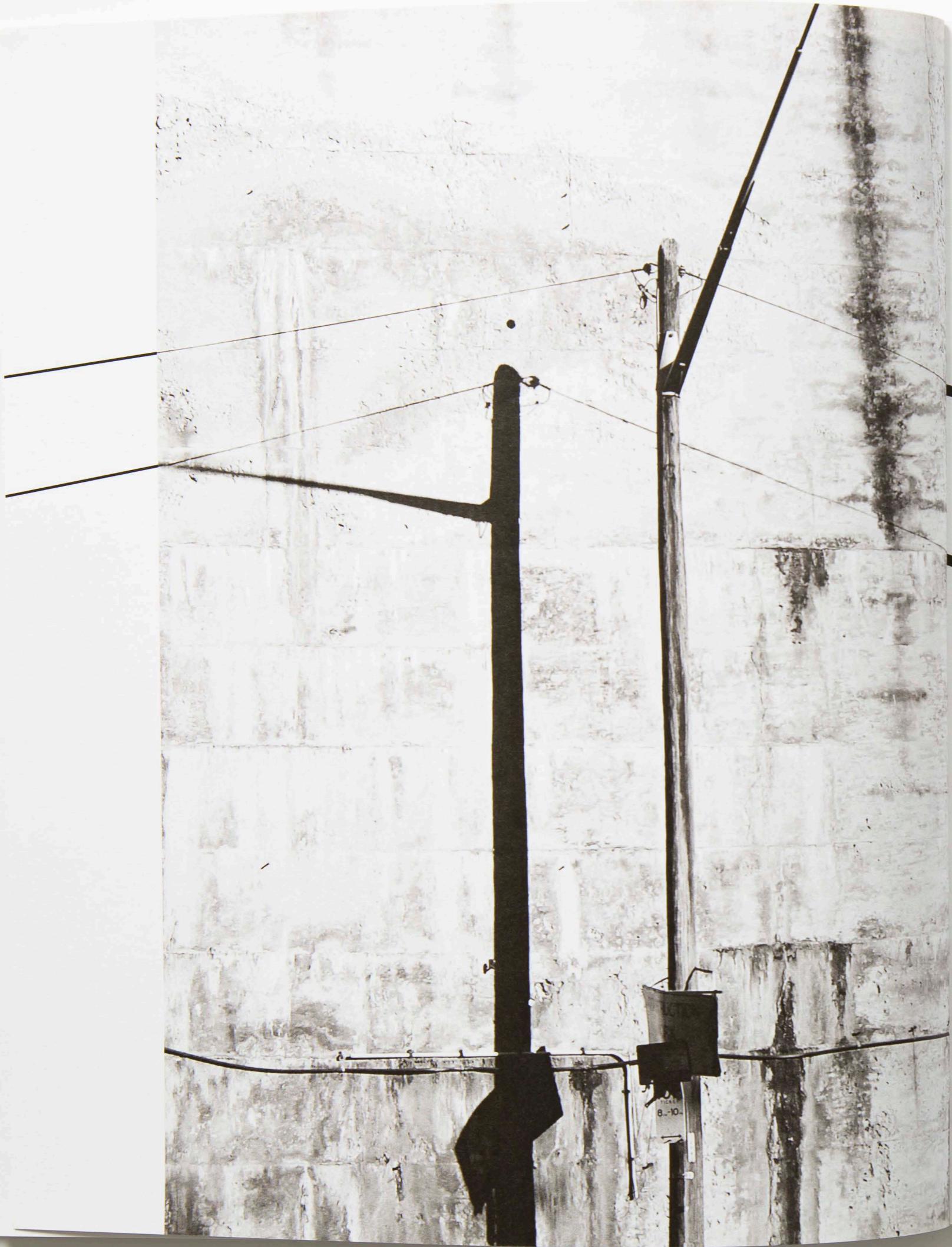
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## A BORDERLESS CANVAS

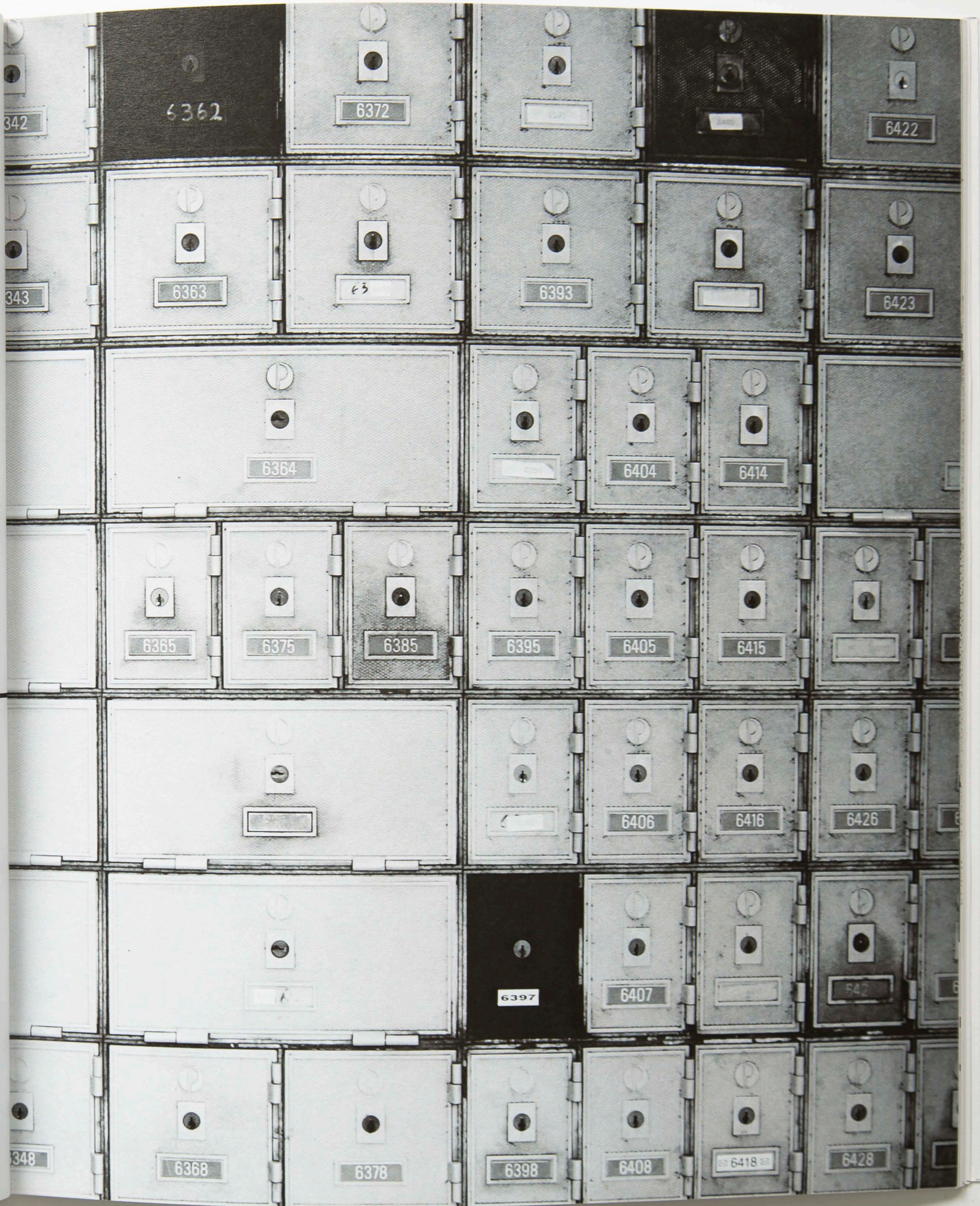
*Experiment:  
Take photos of the  
cityscape's form and  
shape, capturing a sense  
of the underlying grid.*

The canvas' of De Stijl I didn't have borders and the geometric forms painted were not confined to the canvas<sup>10</sup>. The grids and forms continued off the canvas.

<sup>10</sup> P. Overy, "De Stijl" Thames and Hudson Ltd, London 1991, p.122.

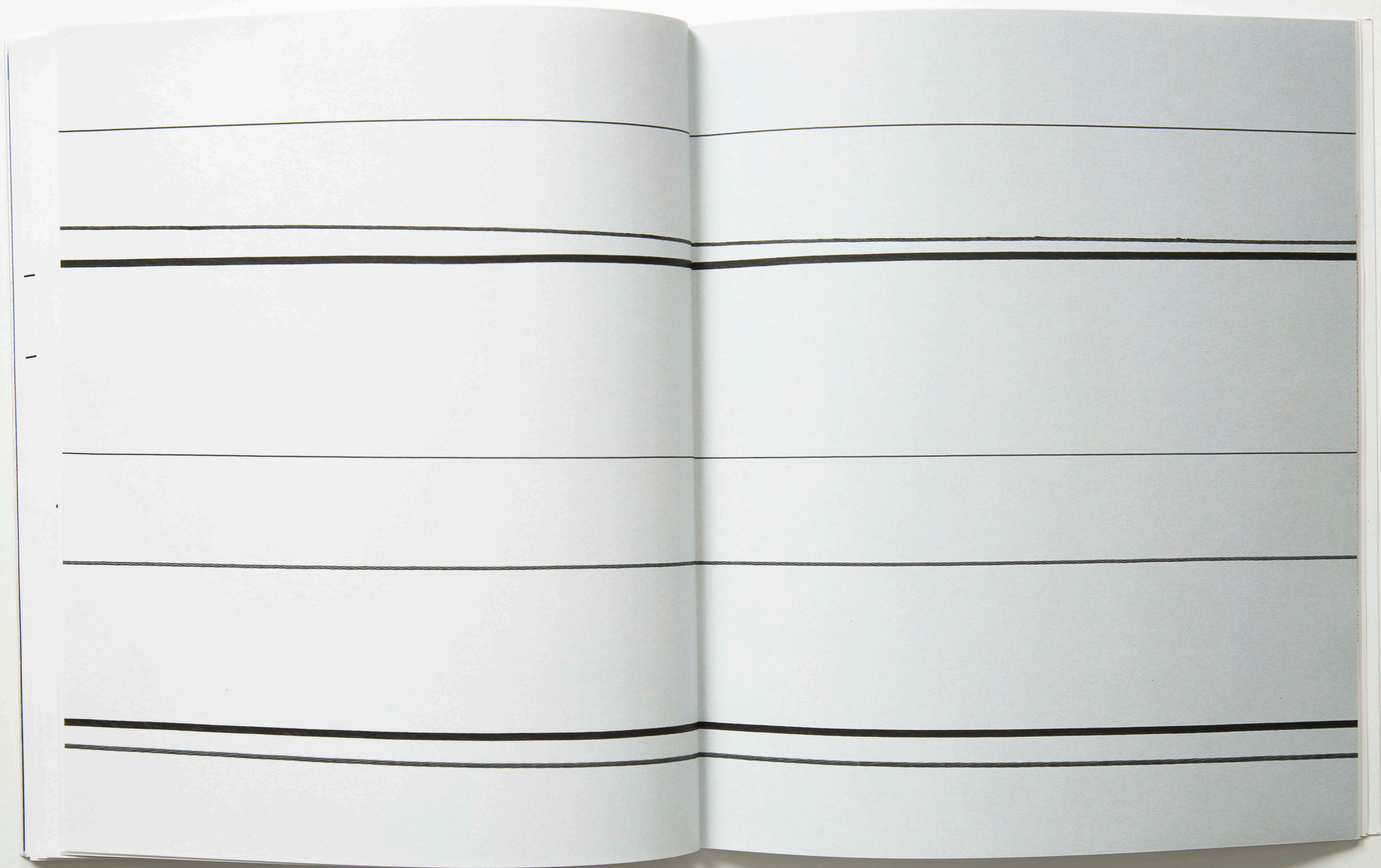




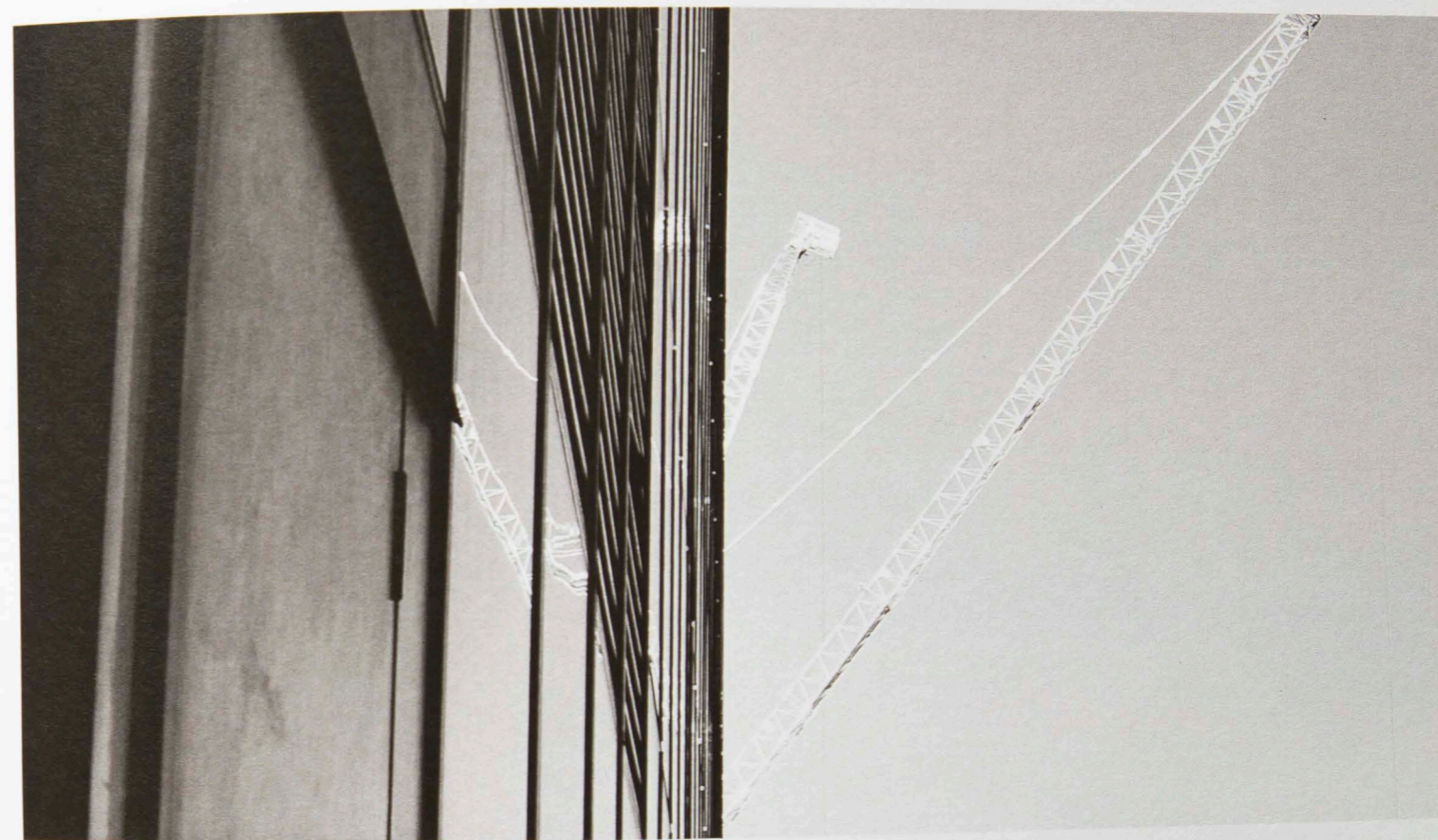


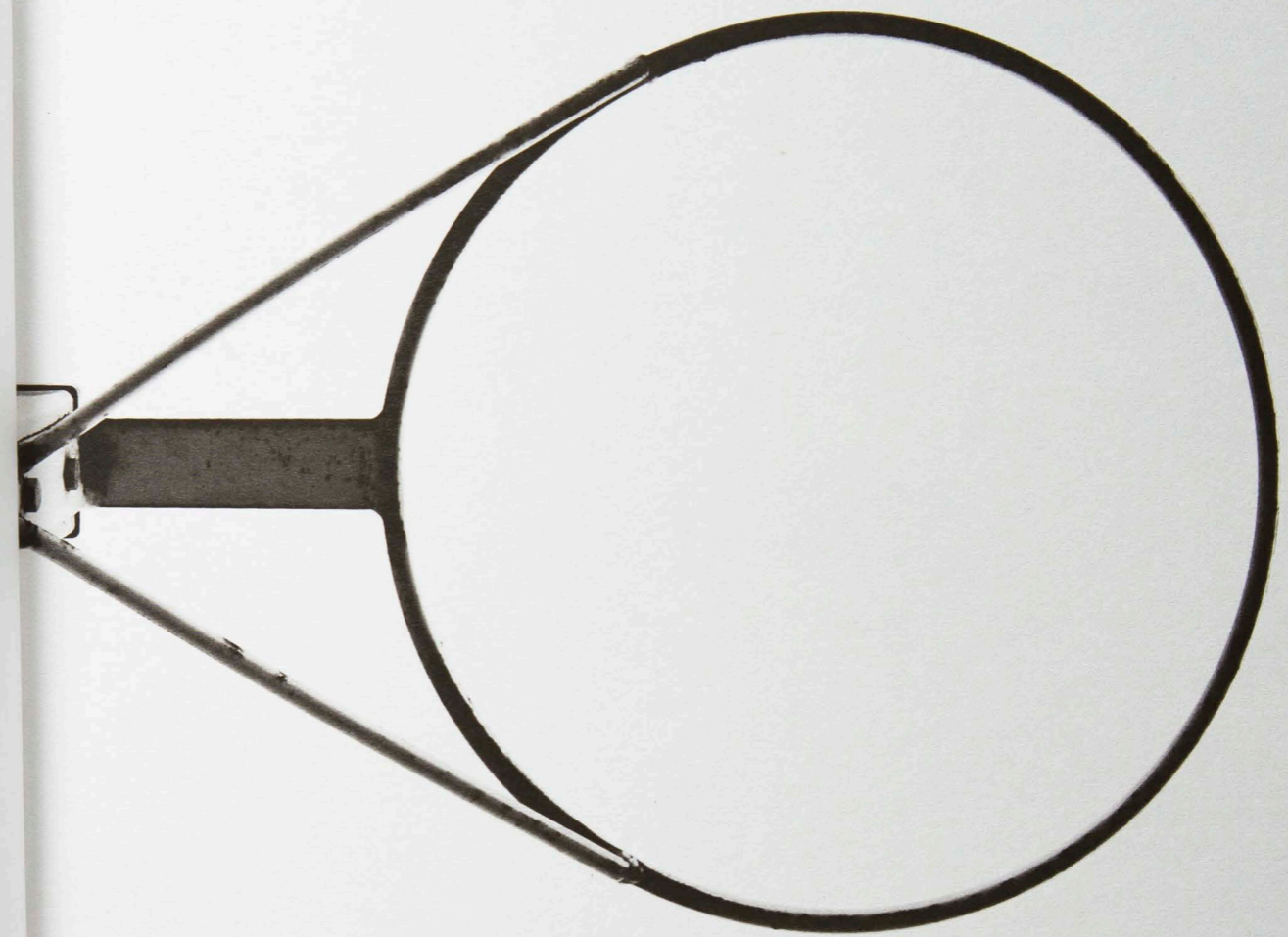






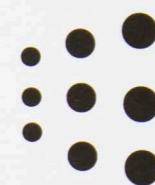






"A NEW RHYTHM OF LIFE IS IN A STATE OF GENESIS, A RHYTHM IN WHICH A NEW AESTHETIC ENERGY AND A NEW IDEAL OF FORMS SEEMS TO BE MARKED IN BROAD OUTLINES."<sup>11</sup>  
- THEO VAN DOESBURG

5



## THE VISUAL EVOLVES

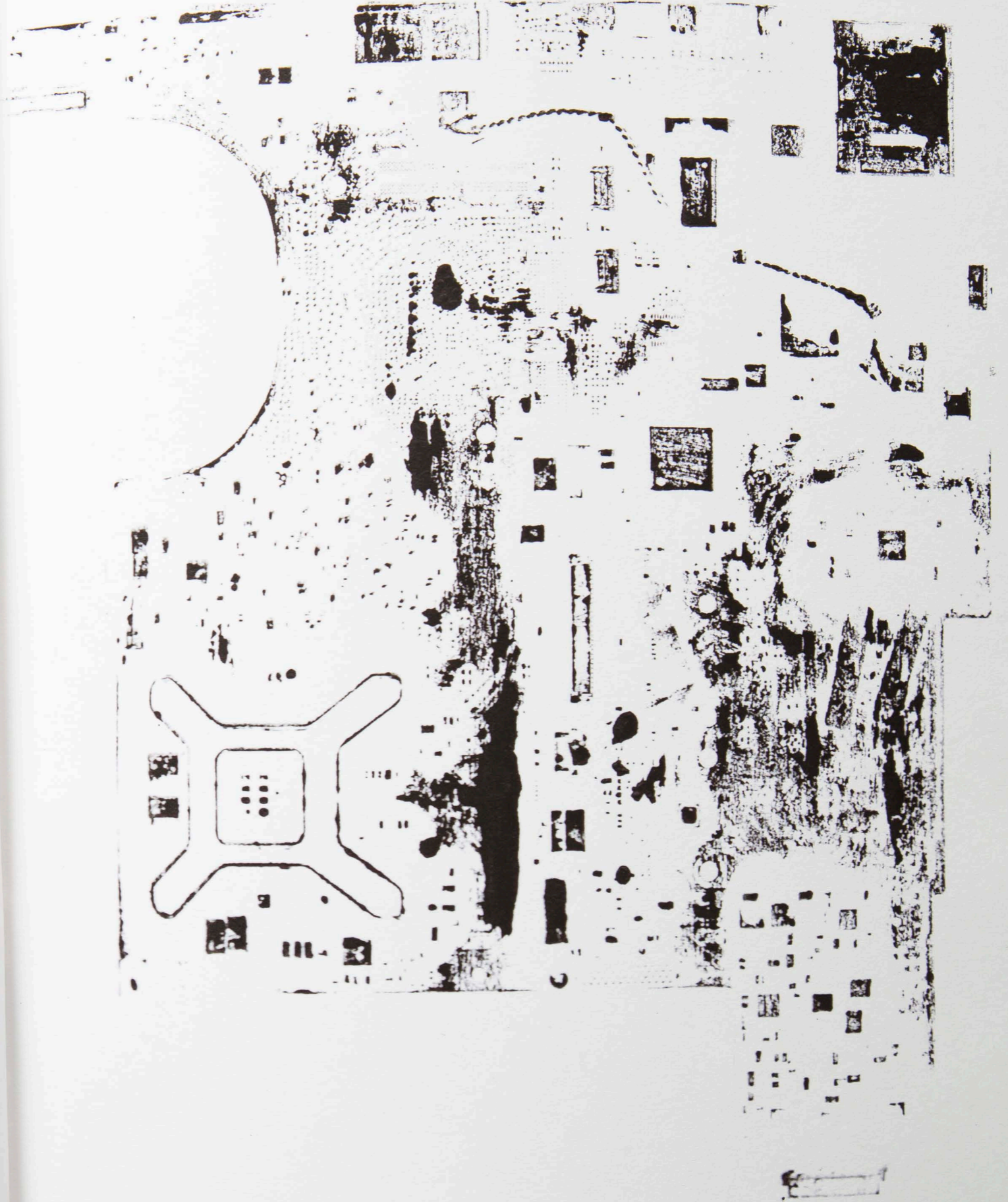
*Experiment:  
Apply ink to  
computer part  
and press into  
paper and lift.*

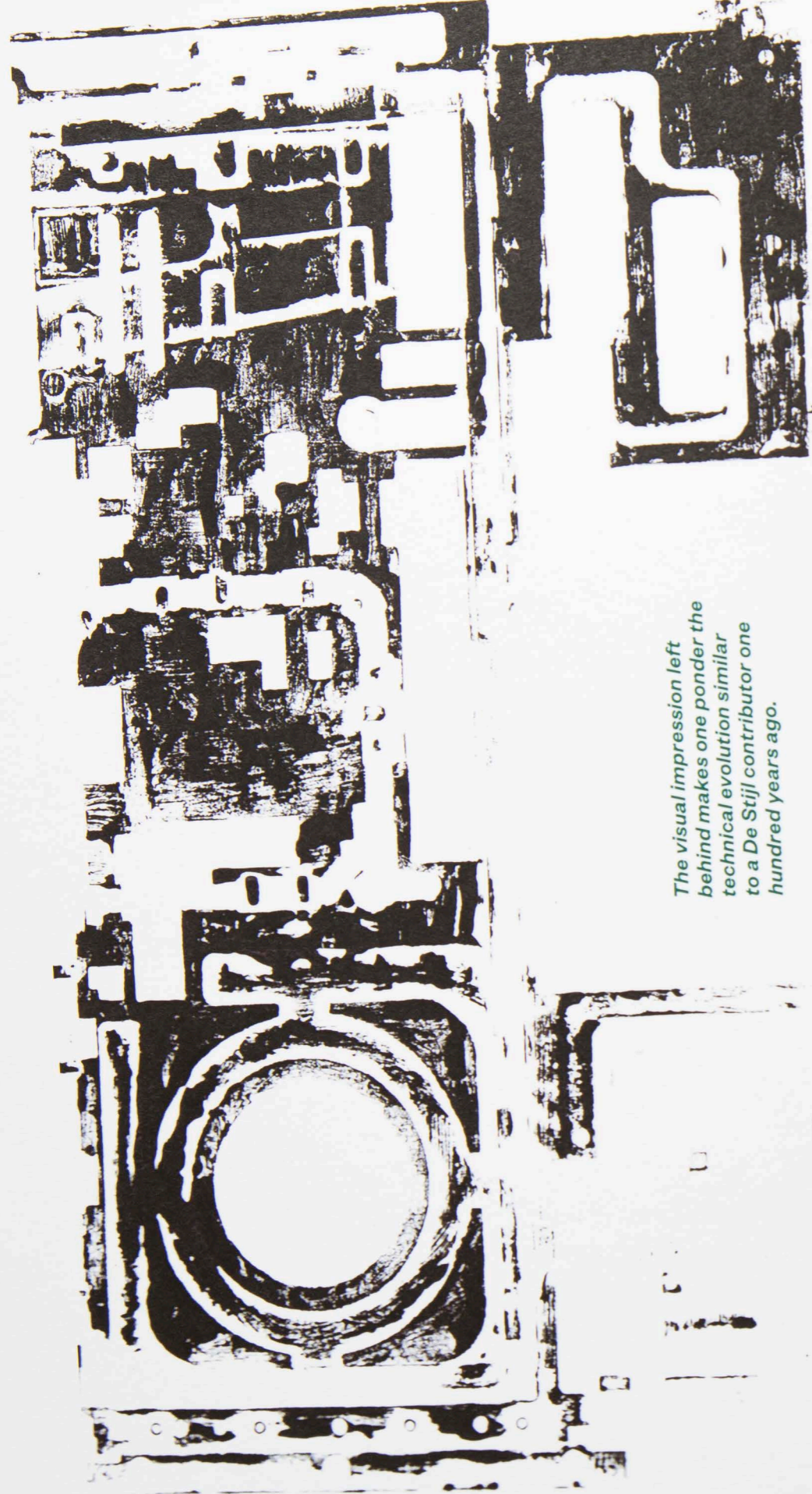
The De Stijl approach generated interesting visual images of their new and technologically driven world. The underlying philosophy of De Stijl was that art and design should constantly evolve and express the now. This saw the contributors move away from literal imagery towards abstract and basic form. This experiment explores the computer just as our lives become increasingly infiltrated by computers and electronic devices the expression of design and art has shifted<sup>12</sup>. What does that mean for the expression of our time in art and design?

Rather than use a computer in the usual way this experiment takes a computer apart and uses its physical components to generate an image. The impressions created are powerful and abstract, not unlike the ones created by De Stijl. They enable the viewer to ponder the technical evolution existing today.

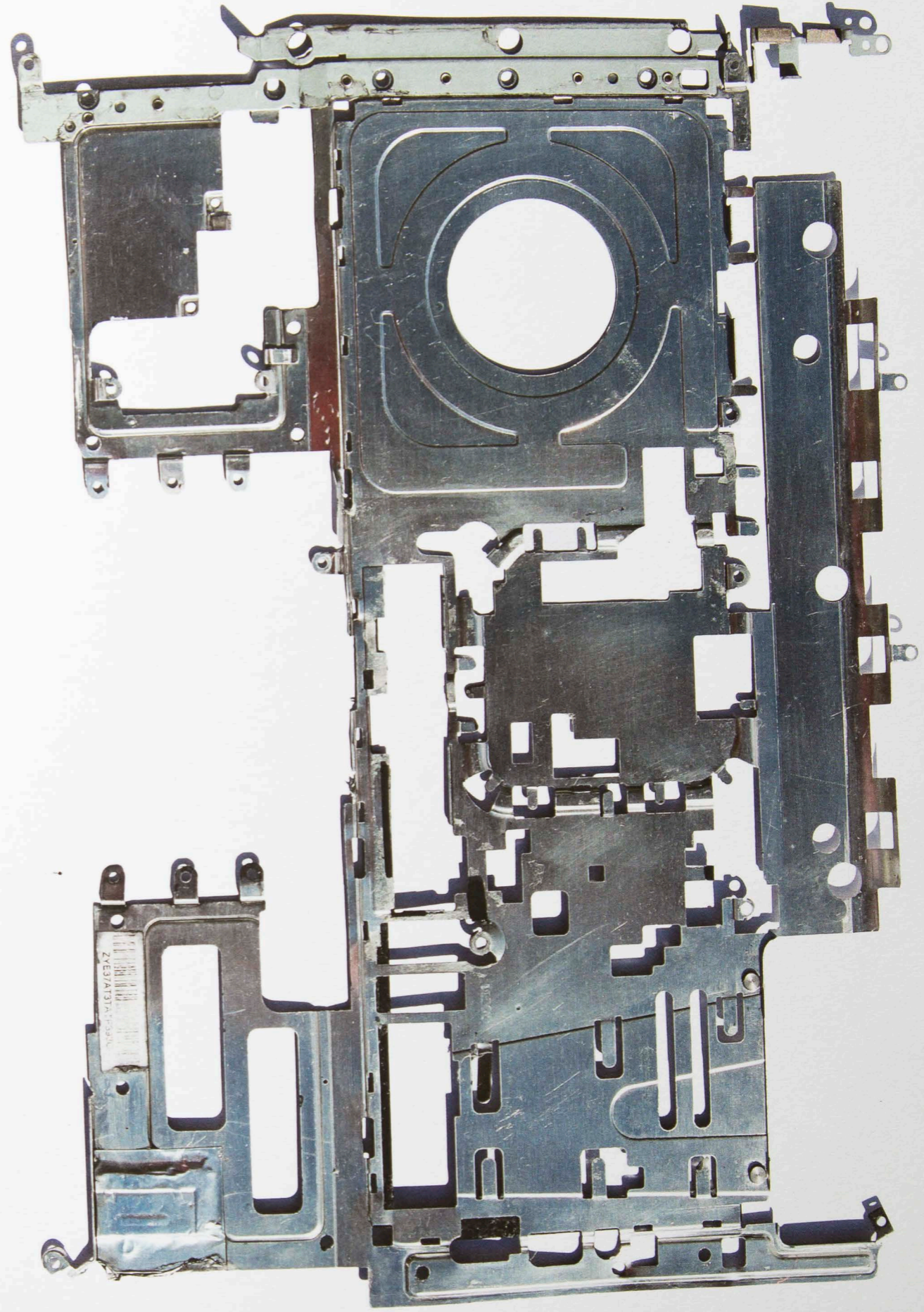
<sup>11</sup> P. Overy, "De Stijl" Thames and Hudson Ltd, London 1991, p.108.

<sup>12</sup> J. McCormack, A. Dorin, (2004) 'Generative Design: a paradigm for design research' in Redmond, J. et. al (eds) in Proceedings of Futureground, Design Research Society, Melbourne.





*The visual impression left behind makes one ponder the technical evolution similar to a De Stijl contributor one hundred years ago.*



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J. Milner, "Mondrian" Phaidon Press Limited London 1992

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