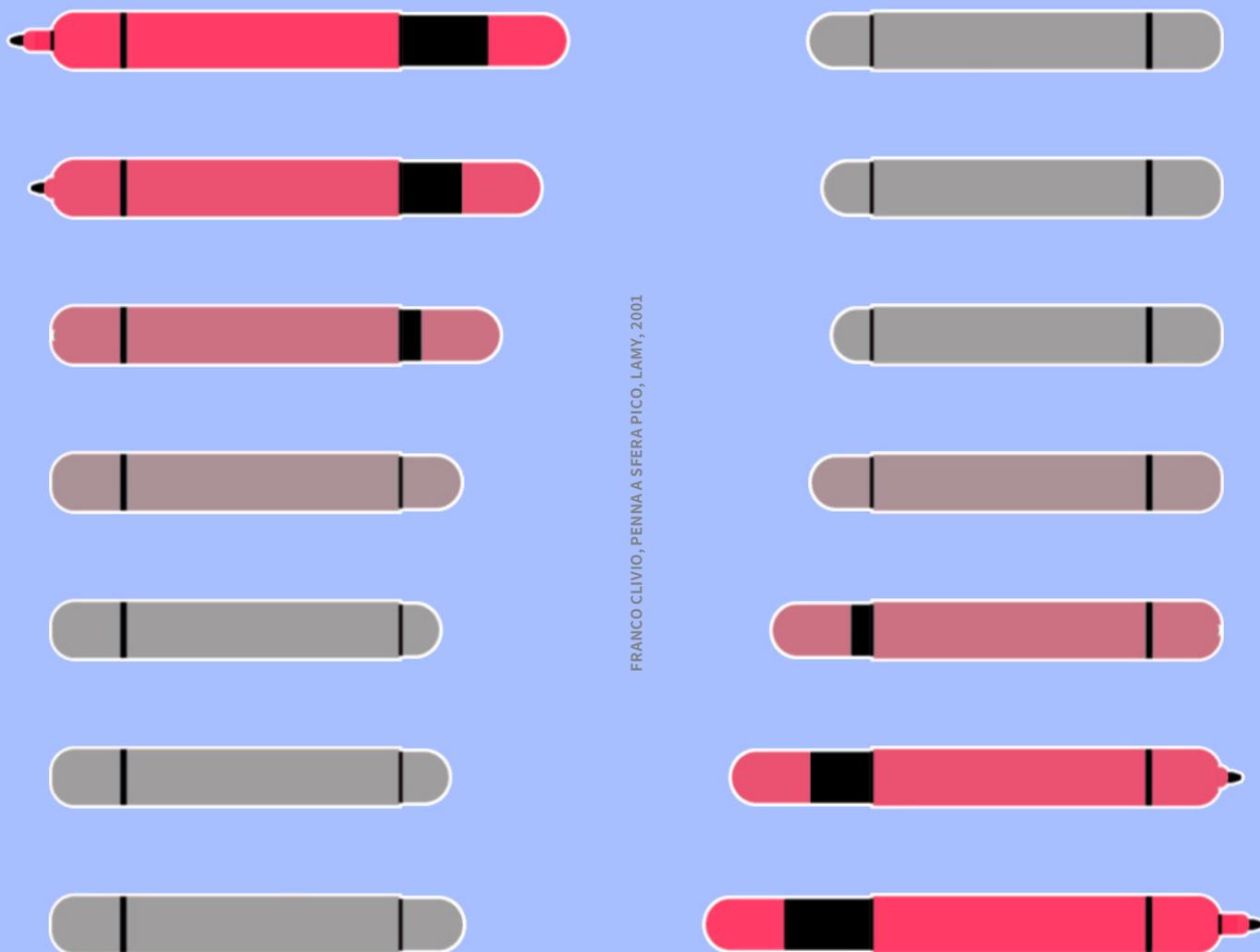


Ais/Design Journal

Storia e Ricerche



AIS/DESIGN JOURNAL
STORIA E RICERCHE
VOL. 3 / N. 6
SETTEMBRE 2015

I DESIGNER
E LA SCRITTURA
NEL NOVECENTO

ISSN
2281-7603

PERIODICITÀ
Semestrale

INDIRIZZO
AIS/Design
c/o Fondazione ISEC
Villa Mylius
Largo Lamarmora
20099 Sesto San Giovanni
(Milano)

SEDE LEGALE
AIS/Design
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Ricerche

MEDIATING THE MODERN MOVEMENT TO A LAY AUDIENCE IN THE INTERWAR YEARS: THE LAYOUT DESIGNER AND DESIGN CRITIC PIERRE-LOUIS FLOUQUET

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Criticism, Flouquet, Layout design, Magazine, Popularization

Pierre-Louis Flouquet (1900-1967) is mainly known for his abstract paintings and poetry, but surprisingly much less as the most prolific writer and editor on design in Belgium between 1922 and 1967. This article offers a new understanding of Flouquet's contribution to the design culture by examining his early work, developed in his capacity as a design critic and layout designer during the interwar years. The focus is on the origins of his popularization discourse and the importance of his communication strategy, which culminated in the establishment of *Bâtir* in 1932, one of Belgium's main design magazines. It is argued that Flouquet's ability to express his critical view, simultaneously through his writings and graphic design, defined the strength of his mediation discourse, a discourse which he perpetuated thereafter for thirty five years in his magazines and papers, turning him into a key mediator of modernist design in Belgium.

Pierre-Louis Flouquet (1900-1967) was a designer, design critic, painter, publicist, stage designer, poet, journalist, and editor.[1] While several studies have mainly focused on his activities as a painter and a poet, his contribution to design in Belgium was much broader and significant than what has been revealed so far (Goyens de Heusch, 1979, 1993; Strauven, 2005; Poreye, 1959; Vanlaethem, 1986; Werrie, 1927).[2] Indeed, Flouquet's substantial written production on design spanned continuously from 1922 until his death in 1967. He was the founder, editor and layout designer of eight magazines.[3] He wrote and edited several books and thousands of articles on interior decoration, applied arts, art, architecture, and urbanism. Moreover, the volume of his writings remains to this day much greater than other well-known Belgian authors of his time, including Henry van de Velde.

The relationship between Flouquet's writings and designs is remarkable for several reasons. First of all, Flouquet came to these practices simultaneously. Furthermore, he has come to the fore in several genres of writing, from poetry to journalism, adopting a variety of positions from an explicitly critical approach to a purely commercial attitude. This led him to address different types of audiences - both in terms of size and profile. Finally, he practiced different forms of design during his career: from the challenging artistic expression as an abstract painter of the avant-garde to a utilitarian advertising designer, from graphic layout designs to stage design.

This article offers a new understanding of Flouquet's contribution to design and design culture, and specifically to the popularization of the Modern Movement in Belgium during the interwar years, when he practiced as design critic and layout designer. His early work already shows the origins and development of his communication strategy, which resulted in the establishment of *Bâtir* (1932-1940), at that time one of Belgium's main design magazines. This study argues that Flouquet's ability to simultaneously express his critical view through his writings and his graphic design defined the strength of his role as a mediator of modernist design in Belgium, which he carried on from his early work until 1967 through magazines and papers.[4] This article therefore intends to contribute to the discussion of those figures who, in various countries and on a national scale, worked to introduce and spread, among the lay public, the tenets of modernist design - a discussion which only in the recent years has begun to receive scholarship's attention/interest.

1. The Avant-garde years: Questioning conventions

Flouquet the multi-artistic communicator

During his early career (1919-1928), Flouquet practiced several art forms while questioning established written and graphic conventions. His avant-garde years determined two fundamental attitudes which followed him all his life.[5]

Firstly, Flouquet's multi-artistic practice led him to consider all arts as united, long before he claimed this ideology theoretically. Although in the interwar years the disciplinary boundaries, as we know them today, were blurred,[6] Flouquet stands out for his particularly diversified practices beside those of painter and poet. From criticism to design, his creative activity included what his first biographer Werrie (1927, p. 10) qualified as the "technical aspects of art" or "the embellishment of the everyday",[7] such as poster design, stage design, advertisement, and typography, which he practiced as art director of the company Comino which was specialized in advertisement and related design items (Fig. 1).[8]

Secondly, central to Flouquet's career was his commitment to communicate his work and ideas especially through magazines, a medium on which he worked since his early years of activity, gaining experience as graphic collaborator, writer and publicist. In 1924, he had illustrated *Au Volant*, *Montparnasse*, *Geste*, *Aventure*, *Dés, ça ira!*, *7Arts*, *Disque vert*, *Bataille littéraire*[9] and he had written criticism in *7Arts*, *Université de Paris* (Werrie, 1927, p. 44). Moreover, in 1928, Flouquet was already considered "one of the few international artists who play a leading role in communicating innovative art approaches while having a major role as seductive leader, referee and judge" (Werrie, 1927, p. 3).

"7Arts": Acquiring the double role of critic and designer

Flouquet's multi-artistic practice and communication ambition led him to found the modernist magazine *7Arts*, *Hebdomadaire d'Information et de Critique* (1922-1928) with his friends, the architect Victor Bourgeois, the writer Pierre Bourgeois, the painter Karel Maes and the musician Georges Monnier.[10] They co-directed the magazine together and Flouquet also acquired the role of design critic as well as layout design.

The magazine defended a functionalist approach in all artistic forms and addressed the international modernist avant-garde to which it was connected. *7Arts* was part of a network of avant-garde journals and presented works by members of Bauhaus, Russian constructivists

and De Stijl. Warmoes (1983, p. 99) even described *7Arts* as “the true bulletin of the international avant-garde”. Mentored by Henry Van de Velde, whom the founders admired, and echoing the theory of Gesamtkunstwerk (total artwork), *7Arts*’s collective manifesto claimed: “Our objective is vast. *7Arts* : ALL THE ARTS” (Bourgeois, Flouquet, Maes & Monier, 1922, June).[11] It added that, since “art is an active expression of society”, it concerned all manifestations of modern society: advertisement, wall-paper typography, furniture design, dance, theater, typography, fashion, sport and even neon-light adverts. Several documents in the Flouquet archives attest to Flouquet’s intensive involvement in the magazine’s design. *7Arts*’s four pages were densely organized in three columns, like a newspaper. Initially, illustrations were rare and concentrated on the last page, where Flouquet’s engravings or those by other artists close to the group were promoted. From 1924, illustration spread on all pages, interrupting columns and establishing literal relationships between text and image. From issue number 25 in 1925, the magazine’s layout design was sharpened with thick black lines recalling a similar graphic principal developed simultaneously by the Russian artist El Lissitzky (1925). Thereby, the white space between paragraphs was turned into an abstract composition of thick black discontinuous and orthogonal lines enhancing the graphical contrast of the pages and making them more dynamic.

Thanks to his innovative graphic designs, Flouquet soon gained an international reputation, and in 1928 the German typographer Jan Tschichold mentioned him as a key figure of modernist typography along with Willy Baumeister, Lázlo Moholy-Nagy, Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky and Le Corbusier (Tschichold, 1928, p. 64).

In *7Arts*, Flouquet’s practice as a critic blossomed too. During the first two years, the five founders collectively signed all articles, according to the cooperative spirit of this imprint, but, right from the beginning, Flouquet wrote a significant number of these articles. In 1924, he started signing an increasing number of texts alone as an art critic, and soon he stood out as the journal’s most prolific author. Perceptive and precise, his articles demonstrated a less radical and more spiritual vision than that expressed by his partners. According to Werrie, Flouquet mastered

a diversity of tone, a multiplicity of nuances. His literary form is so rich that he surprises and conquers the most irreducible opponents to the new spirit. The sensibility of his sentences, the originality and the precision seduce linguists. His analyses are remarkable for their convincing character. He evenly masters the critic in anger, in admiration as well as in the doctrinary presentation of a thesis (Werrie, 1927, pp. 7-9).

Most of Flouquet’s articles were exhibition reviews promoting the work of contemporary Belgian and international artists while expressing his opinions. In his article “Art nouveau, révolte nouvelle” (1927), for example, he explained his joy as a critic to discover exceptional creators and his fascination for the “devotion” of such figures and their capacity to “subjugate” the sign of times. He also contributed to the column “Carnet d’un citadin” where forms of expression of modern society were discussed.[12] As an example, in “Le Calicot” (The banner) (1924), he enthusiastically pleads for the emotional impact that quality advertising can have in the urban landscape, which he considered capable of poetically improving a spot. After recommending simplicity with regards to technical issues, he invited readers to go out and discover by themselves good

advertising in the city, thus revealing an ambition for involving and convincing his readers in a ludic way.

Flouquet's key concepts on the relations between writing and design

At the time of his collaboration with 7Arts, Flouquet developed two concepts which would become key to his popularization discourse on modernist design: the supremacy of theory over practice, and the importance of the relationship between text and image by design.

The supremacy of practice over theory. Flouquet practiced design and writing regularly, leading him to question the relation between theory and practice.

In 1922, he was persuaded by the supremacy of practice over theory, and he developed an anti-dogmatic and anti-stylistic attitude towards creativity. In the aforementioned 7Arts manifesto, Flouquet co-declared that the true aim of all artistic forms, including painting, was their subordination to the decorative and functional demands of architecture and to its social purpose (Flouquet, 1922, June).[13] These ideas became the tenets of a form of constructivism known as *Plastique Pure* of which Flouquet was one of the champions along with the artists Victor Servranckx, Prosper De Troyer, Felix De Boeck and Jozef Peeters.[14] This radical attitude was expressed at a time when Flouquet was involved in the design of stained glass windows for a building in the Cité Moderne in Brussels, designed by his friend the architect Victor Bourgeois (Fig. 2).

However, Flouquet soon identified the limits of radical theories in artistic contexts. The same year, in the article "Picasso - invention: oeuvre de poète" where he discussed the work of Picasso, Flouquet (1922, December) expressed his fascination for Picasso's independent attitude towards theory. To Flouquet the strength of Picasso lies in the way each work of art asserts this artist by denying his previous work. Soon afterwards, Flouquet's painting integrated more lyrical forms than those of most of his colleagues (Fig. 3), and he developed what Werrie (1927, p. 15) defined as "sentimental abstraction", meaning that, unlike abstraction that escapes from reality, Flouquet's abstraction was capable of integrating the expressive and sentimental power of the real objects and of making it universal.

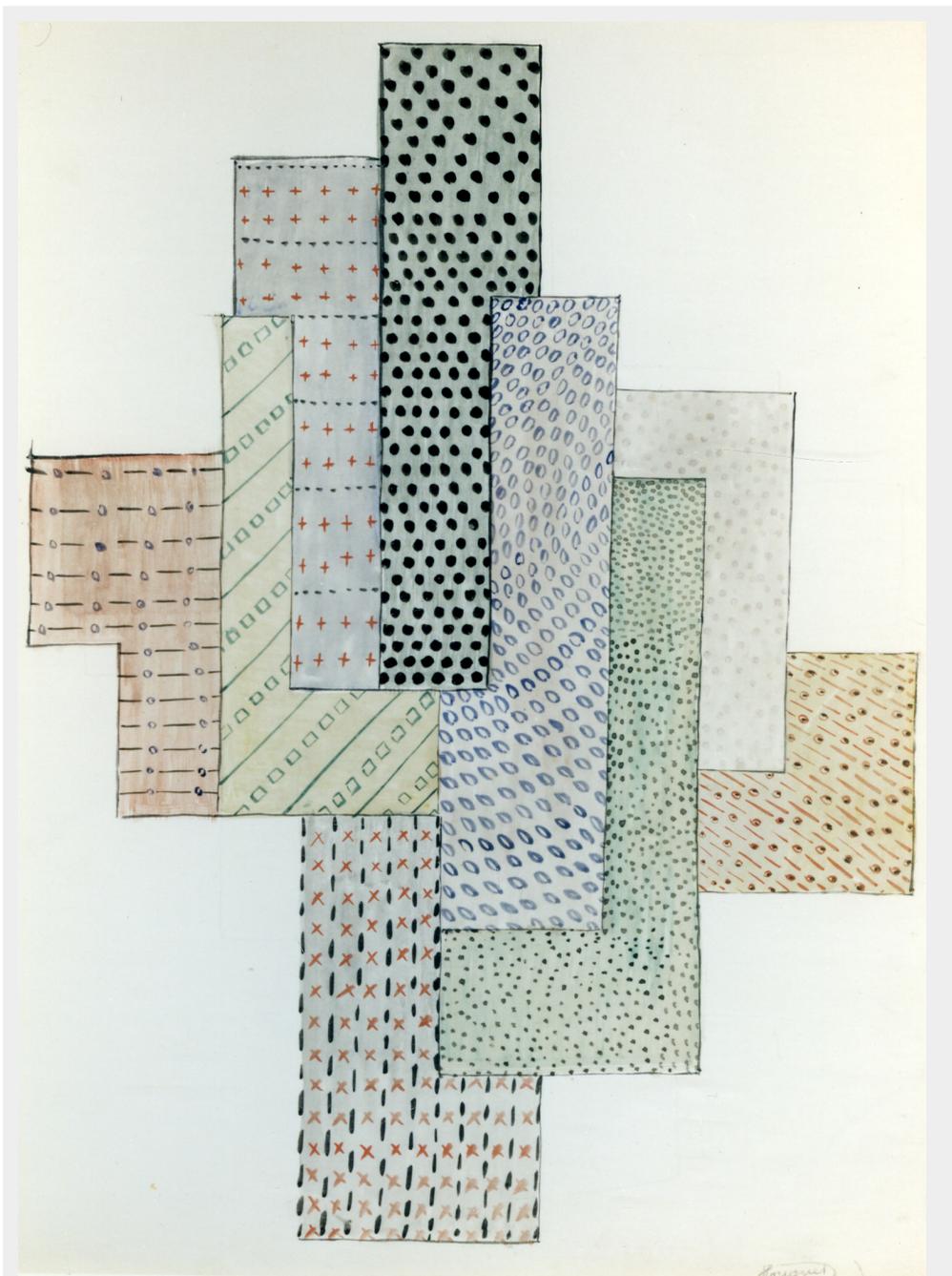


Fig. 1 - P.-L. Flouquet, *Construction*, watercolor, pencil, ink on paper, 1921. / © KIK-IRPA, Brussels (Belgium), cliché KM2803.



Fig. 2 - P.-L. Flouquet, *Féminité*, Serie 2 number 9, oil on canvas, 1922. / © KIK-IRPA, Brussels (Belgium), cliché KM3122.

In 1926, Flouquet expressed a more nuanced version of his initial radical theory and claimed the autonomy of painting from architecture in his article "Peindre?". He even claimed in the article "Expositions" the supremacy of practice over theory: "Theory results from the work of art. By defining it, it summarizes it. But life spurts - never from a theory! Substance does not dominate the form, it allows it" (Flouquet, 1926, January). *From design to theory: relationships between text, image and design*. Flouquet's practice as an illustrator led him to develop a theory of illustration that formed the basis of his further layout designs. Before founding 7Arts, he had ensured a wider distribution for his own graphic work by being a graphical collaborator of modernist avant-garde magazines. As a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels, he had contributed, as mentioned above, to *Au Volant* (1919) and *Le Geste* (1919-1920). Ideologically, he was involved in art contexts that were emerging from an artistic and pacifist internationalism influenced by the French movement "Clarté", led by Henry Barbusse and inspired by the ideology of Romain Roland (Mus & Vandevoorde, 2013). In 1920, during his military service in Paris, Flouquet created his first magazine, *Aventure* (1921-1922) with the writers Marcel Arland and René Crevel. Fascinated by Fernand Léger, André Lhote and the artists connected to the *Section d'Or* and *L'Esprit Nouveau*, Flouquet signed the graphical designs and published his illustrations next to those of Chas-Laborde, Raoul Dufy, Fernand Léger, Jean Dubuffet, and Man Ray. The innovative and impertinent tone of *Aventure* resulted from the contributions of several writers.[15] The founders ended *Aventure* after its third issue, when figures from the Dadaist movement tried to take control of the magazine. The founders then pursued their initial aim under a new title *Dés* (1922) defined as a Franco-Belgian publication. Flouquet was in charge of the Belgian part since he was about to move back to Brussels for personal reasons. While in Paris, Flouquet had also started illustrating books. His first commission, for which he produced very accurate drawings of the human body, was a scientific book (Thooris, 1922). Thereafter, he designed abstract engravings for poetry books written by the Belgian authors Pierre Bouregois (1927), Maurice Casteels (1923), Léon Chenoy (1925) and Michel de Ghelderode (1927) (Fig. 4).

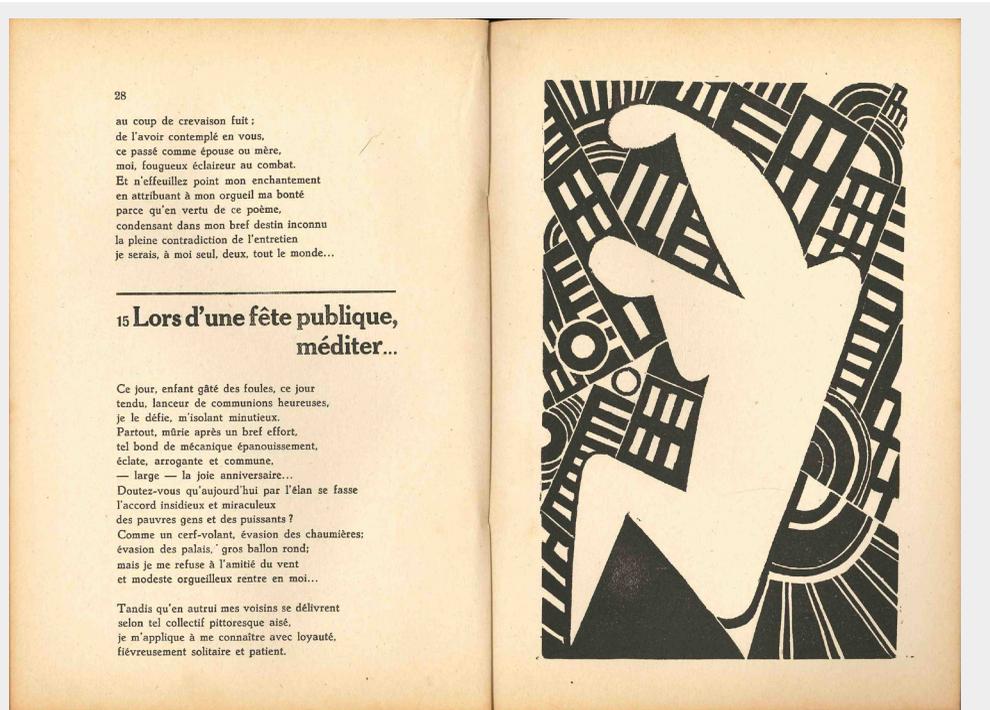


Fig. 3 -P.-L. Flouquet, linocut illustration from the poem book by Pierre Bourgeois, *Romantisme à toi*, Bruxelles: Edition L'Equerre, 1927. / © AML Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels (Belgium).

The many experiences Flouquet had made during his stay in Paris stimulated his thinking and fostered his practice as a critic. In 1922 he started conceptualizing the relationship between text and illustrations in his article "Peinture" published in the first issue of *7Arts*, where he considered the image subject to the typography of the text (Flouquet, 1922, June). Later, in an article featured in issue No. 23 in 1926 "De l'illustration: Art Créateur", he considered illustration a service as much as a creation and he advanced a theory on its relationship with text. According to the degree of involvement with the writer, she or he could choose to transmit either the physical or sensitive quality of the text, or enrich it by bringing additional elements to the text. Flouquet identified three ways to illustrate a text: "exemplify", "comment" and "embellish". In the first case, the illustrator is conditioned by the "content" of the text, which he graphically exemplified in order to "serve" the text. Flouquet rejected literal relationship, which he considered to be often harmful in the case of poems. A good illustration should be a "graphical transfiguration". In the second case, the illustrator aims at commenting and transcribing the text's emotional and sensitive ideas in the rhythm of his own material. The third approach - embellish - is characterised by text and illustration that are totally independent from one another, the illustration merely embellishing the text with purely decorative graphical elements. Flouquet then considered this independence as superficial because "there is no collaboration without penetration".

“A radical consequence of this method is the “typographic creation” where “commentary” and “ornamentation” merge by identifying with the text and developing it graphically according to a rhythm responding to its psychological emotion”. This theory reflected the modernistic intention of Flouquet to rethink and reformulate the text/image relationship. If analyzed according to his own theory, his illustrations for Pierre Bourgeois’s poems would be considered “comments” since the engravings were created in the spirit of his own sentimental abstraction, without being a literal transposition of the text (Bouregois, 1927) (Fig. 4). Published after this theory, Flouquet’s twenty linographs illustrating Camille Poupeye’s book on modernist theatre, *La Mise en scène théâtrale d’aujourd’hui* (1927), show instead a more literal attitude in the graphic interpretation of the subject (Fig. 5), as they appear conditioned by the content they express. For Poupeye’s text, Flouquet drew the portraits of four young theatre authors - Constantin Stanislavsky, Max Reinhardt, Jacques Copeau, and Vsevelod Meyerhold - and illustrated stage designs by several innovative designers including, among others, Gordon Craig, Fernand Léger, Alexander Vesnine, and Lioubov Popova.[16] Although Poupeye did not mention them in his book, Flouquet also represents three of his own stage designs: the open-air theatre in the neighbourhood Cité Moderne in Brussels; the scenography for the play *Monsieur Un Tel* by Paul Avort; and a stage design for *Coeur à gaz* by Tristan Tzara. These illustrations - as well as the poster designs and costume designs he made with the group L’Assaut - are interesting also because they contribute to documenting Flouquet’s work as a designer working for theatre.[17]

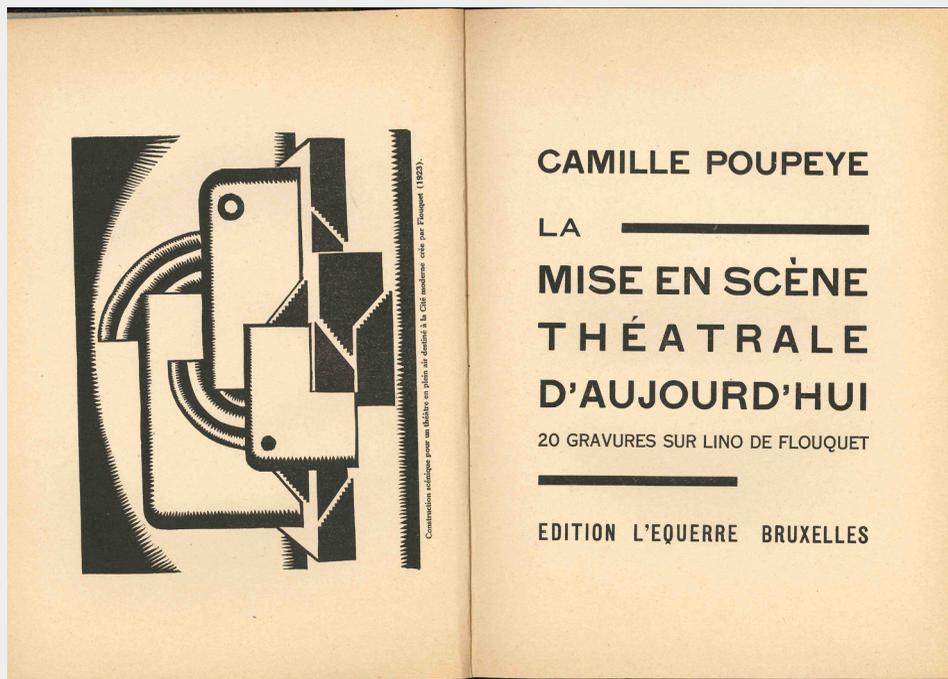


Fig. 4 - P.-L. Flouquet, linocut illustration of the stage set of his own design for an open-air theatre in La Cité Moderne in Brussels. From Camille Poupeye, *La Mise en scène théâtrale d’aujourd’hui*, Bruxelles: L’Equerre, 1927. © AML Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels (Belgium).

2. Beyond the Avant-garde: Popularizing modernist theories and design in newspapers

From 1928, Flouquet started to popularize modernist designs in a didactic way via newspapers in order to reach a wider audience and ensure the social artistic transformation he believed in. This turn from specialized magazines and audience to the general public was the result of several factors.

During the interwar years in Belgium, an important effort was made on popularization to ensure the implementation of new ideas and inventions in everyday life, and newspapers and journals were the ideal media by which to ensure a wide diffusion of knowledge among the masses (Balthazar, 1994; Dumont, 1981; Vandenbreenen & Vanlaethem, 1996). Modernists who claimed that art should have a social dimension aimed to popularize their designs and ideology. In Belgium, modernist design was institutionalized with the foundation of the art school La Cambre in 1926 and needed didactic communication in order to pursue its social implementation.[18] In June 1928, at the *Congrès préparatoire international de l'architecture moderne*, which Flouquet followed through the participation of his close friends, the architects Victor Bouregois and Huib Hoste, the congress participants recommended establishing a positive relationship between modern design and public opinion.[19] They argued that the message of modernity should be brought to public debate by addressing non-professionals: "Today it is crucial that architects practice an influence on the public opinion by teaching it the main concepts of modern architecture" (CIAM, 1928, p. 30).

A few months after the CIAM, that recommendation was echoed by Flouquet and his partners at *7Arts* in their leave-taking from this magazine, entitled "L'Intransigeant (Paris)...annonce: *7Arts* a cessé de paraître": "Since the elite has responded to our call, we only have one thing to try: conquer the lay public". They added that it was "vain to bring the masses to an avant-garde magazine" and that a change of communication strategy was required to reveal modernism to a broad public. Their new communication strategy intended to include the magazine in the newspaper *L'Aurore* and thus to address their discourse to "neutrals" and even "opponents" of modernism by involving them on a daily basis (Bourgeois, Flouquet, Maes & Monier, 1928, September). *L'Aurore: Transferring avant-garde criticism and layout design to a newspaper* Flouquet and the writer Pierre Bourgeois had helped Albert Dumont to found the Belgian newspaper *L'Aurore* (1928-1929). In his contribution to his new endeavor, Flouquet was prolific as illustrator and as writer (Seyl, 1967). He designed the layout of all the titles of the newspaper's main columns.[20] The letters were hand-drawn and mixed with small motifs and human figures in reference to the content of the column. Flouquet also used his figurative illustration skills by drawing portraits of the persons making the headlines. He even made caricatures as well as humorous sketches, thus bringing a ludic and humoristic dimension to the design.

However, the popularization ambition of *L'Aurore* was apparently affected by Flouquet's decision to move to Paris for family reasons a couple of months after the newspaper's launch. Although he continued to work as the newspaper's foreign correspondent, the weekly art page he shared with Pierre Bourgeois's appeared as a literal transfer of *7Arts* more than the opportunity to respond to the popularization ambition.[21]

“Notre première page 7Arts”, which was the first column in L’Aurore signed by the 7Arts group, was even a copy of the 7Arts manifesto published six years before (Bourgeois, Flouquet, Maes & Monier, 1928, 22 December). Besides, Flouquet’s writing had not changed, and he still was mainly concerned with the review of art exhibitions. In his articles featured under the title “Billets parisiens” he commented on everyday aspects of Parisian’s urban life – similarly to what he already did in “Carnet d’un citadin”.

L’Aurore ended with the sudden death of Dumont. Despite its brevity, this experience had brought increased iconographic and ideological visibility of contemporary designs, which within the context of Belgian newspapers of the time had been previously unseen. Monde: *Adapting avant-garde criticism and layout to a newspaper*

Despite this setback, Flouquet’s ambition to spread modernist design remained a major concern for him. While directing 7Arts had strengthened and broadened his network of international avant-garde personalities, working at L’Aurore had given him a valuable experience in making newspapers. Shortly after arriving in Paris in 1928, Flouquet was recruited by the French writer Henri Barbusse to work as artistic director and illustrator for *Monde* (1928-1935), [22] a progressive communist weekly, gathering internationally acclaimed left-wing intellectuals such as Sergei Eisenstein, Jack London, and Albert Einstein, who formed a strong stimulating context of creativity. At *Monde*, Flouquet’s communication strategy evolved significantly in terms of layout and writing. Beside the graphical layout he was also in charge of an art column.

The arrival of Flouquet was marked by a radical change in the weekly’s general layout. He introduced asymmetrical layout compositions and photographic reproductions of artworks to the cover, and used the same strategy in his art column

Moreover, since his arrival, he began a hectic experimentation of text-image combinations on the newspaper’s cover, resulting in several successive changes in its layout design (Fig. 6). From issue No. 8, July 28, 1929, he replaced the layout initially symmetrical and dominated by text with a cover design based on a single powerful and contrasted illustration by a contemporary artist. Progressively, headlines appeared next to the image and became balanced by thick black lines as it is evident from issue No. 49, May 11, 1929 – a solution that clearly recalls what he just had done in 7Arts. Within a year, the cover was divided in two asymmetrical columns separating the headlines from the cover picture. The position and proportions of these columns changed in each issue. From issue No. 79, December 7, 1929 he changed the design of the title and structured the cover with black vertical and horizontal lines of different thickness without closing angles. (see Fig. 6 to the left). Flouquet’s last layout for the cover, appeared at the beginning of 1930, when he further enhanced the asymmetry. The title was written twice around a singular M forming a strong graphic right angle in the upper left corner balanced diagonally by the large illustration (see Fig. 6 to the right).

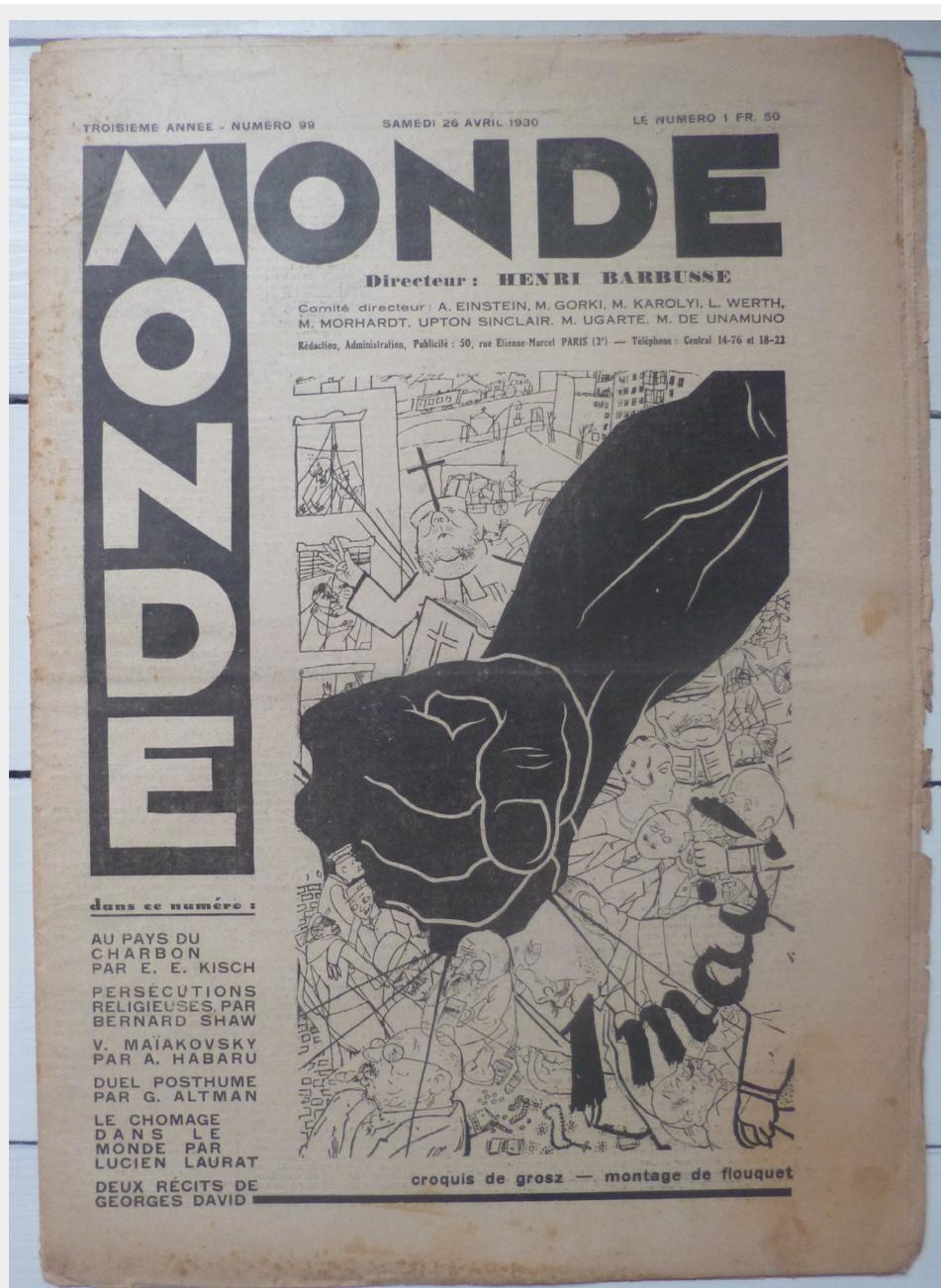


Fig. 5 - P.-L. Flouquet, two covers for the French communist weekly *Monde*. Left: an example of cover layout based on thick black lines (7 December 1929); the illustration on the cover is by the Belgian Nicolas Eekman. Right: an example of cover layout with the double title (26 April 1930); in the illustration on this cover Flouquet superimposes a fist on top of a drawing by the German artist George Grosz for stating the importance of Labour Day (1 May). / Private collection.

Flouquet also modified the relationship between text and image by contributing to the newspaper's content. By creating a regular double paged art column, he succeeded in broadening the notion of art as well as increasing the editorial space dedicated to contemporary arts. This daily double page was entirely dedicated to a single visual art form. In addition, due to new printing techniques, he introduced photographs in the journal's double-page art column. Illustrations became the dominant layout items of the double page, liberating it from the graphical rigidity of the columned layout of the other pages. The page, which was organised as one continuous surface often ignoring the central fold, became a field for experimenting with new graphic relationships between text and illustration (Fig. 7) - experimentations which stood in clear contrast to other articles featured in the newspaper. Thereby Flouquet managed to create a sensation of scale difference which was rather uncommon in newspapers at the time. This almost enabled the reader to dive into the arts.



Fig. 6 - P.-L. Flouquet's article on the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle, in *Monde*, 17, 12 October 1929, offers an example of the double art page in *Monde*. / Private collection.

Political and economic articles were illustrated with graphical artwork for which Flouquet valued his network of avant-garde artists, thus increasing their international visibility. German artists such as Georg Grosz, Willy Baumeister, and Adolph Behne regularly had their work published as did Belgian artists such as Franz Masereel, James Ensor, and the Flemish expressionists. Just as he had done in *L'Aurore*, Flouquet drew the portraits of persons making the headlines and of the many international authors

contributing to the weekly (artists, authors, but also politicians, industrialists, scientists, etc.). These accurate portraits had a rare intensity of evocation and even appeared three times on the cover (on 18 May 1929, 6 July 1929, 26 April 1930).

The didactic discourse. In his writings, Flouquet progressively developed a more didactic discourse by using rhetorical figures. Explaining the work of an artist to the common reader required finding a common ground of life experiences and emotions, rather than concentrating on technical or aesthetic aspects. Once familiar with the artist, the reader would be prepared to understand the art via criteria other than aesthetic ones. Progressively, Flouquet prepared the ground for a discussion on rational terms, avoiding matters of taste. This was for example the case in an article entitled "Exposition" featured in issue No. 20 on July 20, 1929. There he started the article by using sentences of large consensual content, reassuring readers and capturing their attention. Then he confronted the readers' supposedly prejudices with his own opinion, finally inviting them to ground their appreciation of the artwork on qualities other than the aesthetics. In 1930 Flouquet left *Monde* and returned to Brussels after distancing himself from Barbusse's increasingly radical communism.

3. *Bâtir*: A magazine for popularizing modernist design

In December 1932, Flouquet founded and started directing the Belgian design magazine, *Bâtir*, which he specifically created to respond to the lack of media popularizing design and to ensure the implementation of modernist design in society. Initially, his intention was to gather all existing publications lobbying for modernist design into a single magazine. But the different design associations rejected this idea. The decisive opportunity finally appeared in 1932, when a businessman of Jewish origins, Herman Hirsch de la Mar, offered to finance and publish a new design journal.[23] Flouquet became its director and received *carte blanche* to create what was to become *Bâtir*. *Popularizing the plurality of modernist design*

Flouquet defined *Bâtir* as a journal aiming at popularizing modernist design: "It will be of interest for anyone, and it will be understood by everybody" (Flouquet, 1932, December). He argued that the broad public seemed to have an inadequate perception of the design debate, which was limited to a quarrel between old school and modernists, while also ignoring contemporary design and ancient heritage. His goal was to provide a better explanation of modern design, thus helping people to appreciate the value of contemporary design as well as the aesthetic qualities of their own living environment. Flouquet detached the design magazine from any professional association and defined *Bâtir* as an "independent journal" (*organe libre*). Thus he claimed the public and popular character of design in all its forms: architecture, urbanism, and interior decoration were addressed to the reader as vectors for improving the life conditions of all citizens. Rather than favouring a specific aesthetic attitude to modernism, Flouquet aimed to illustrate the many coexisting tendencies of modern design. Ideologically, his pluralist editorial line reflected his own vision beyond the mere matter of style. In order to offer the readers a diversified view, he wrote articles and published interviews with architects whose own opinions were diverse (*Bâtir* Nos. 10, 25, 27-29). Breaking ideological and linguistic boundaries, he published several issues on design's productions from the different provinces of the country. By uniting these different expressions in his journal, he managed to rise above existing divisions in the profession. As such, *Bâtir* differs from other design magazines of the 1930s, which as Hélène Jannièrè observed (1999; 2012), often treated modern design as a dominant and consensual trend that was being institutionalized and mediated towards a large audience.

Bâtir: Design of a hybrid

Bâtir's modernist layout was, in many respects, similar to the asymmetrical layouts that Flouquet had designed for *Monde* and in contrast to other Belgian design magazines of that time. The cover design of *Bâtir* particularly recalls the 1929 cover layout of *Monde* however mirrored horizontally, with the title at the bottom of the page. As for the interior pages, the reference to the double art page in *Monde* is also evident. Indeed, a single text column, varied in size and shape on every page according to the illustrations, dominate the page, and photographs are typically placed on the edge without any margin.

In order to popularize design via *Bâtir*, Flouquet recycled and adapted his former ideas. However, he also developed a unique hybrid form, on a combination of a design magazine and an illustrated news magazine. Indeed, his intention was clearly to differ from design journals of the time, the content of which was unattractive and inaccessible for non-initiated readers. Furthermore, that period witnessed the emergence of a new media phenomenon, which had appeared with the creation of illustrated news magazines such as the French *Vu* (1928-1940) or the Belgian socialist magazine *A-Z* (1932-1937).^[24] Both were recent outcomes of the new printing technology that enhanced graphical quality of photographic reproductions (Meggs & Purvis, 2006). Their discourse was based on an overwhelming quantity of photography, making them a persuasive media that would appeal to a broad audience of readers.

In the making of *Bâtir*, three main editorial characteristics of design magazines and illustrated news magazines are mixed. Firstly, the title, *Bâtir* (to build) - a short verb set in the infinitive form - is neither connected to a specific period in time, nor to a specific territory, practice, or material. As such, the title was similar to that of contemporary popular magazines such as *Monde*, *Vu*, and *A-Z*, and even of the commercial design magazines issued by companies dealing with construction materials, such as *Acier*, *Béton*, or *Clarté* (from the glass industry). Indeed *Bâtir* contrasts with the usual titling of most design magazines of that time (Fig. 8). Many of them contain an article: *La Cité*, *L'Epoque*, *L'Emulation*, and so forth, or were composed of longer words that would emphasize the modern character of the content - e.g. *Moderne Bouwformen*, *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, *Architectural Forum* and so on. *Bâtir* and the Flemish magazine *Opbouwen* ("Building" or "Uplifting") were exceptions to this tendency, and used sans serif capital letters, reflecting their modernist commitment.

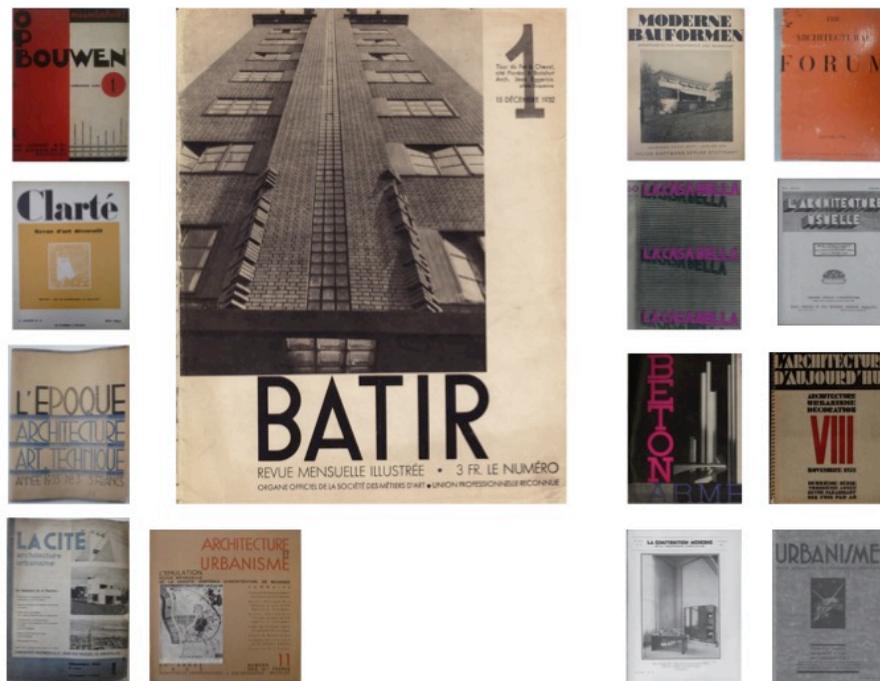


Fig. 7 - A comparison of the cover layout of the first issue of *Bâtir* in December 1932 with a sample of cover layouts for design magazines issued in the same period. / Private collection.

Secondly, the cover design was treated in different ways by design magazines and illustrated news magazines. In this respect, *Bâtir's* approach was more similar to illustrated news magazines than to design magazines: a large black and white photograph printed directly on the paper dominated the covers of *Bâtir*. At that time, the covers of design magazines were generally dominated by the title as main graphic item. Thirdly, the photographs Flouquet chose in terms of framing and subject for the covers of *Bâtir* were very different from what was used at that time in design magazines as well as in illustrated new magazines. In opposition to illustrated news magazines, wherein the human figure was central, *Bâtir's* covers often adopted a high angle view, a radical contrast with classical representation by elevation traditionally used in design magazines. This dynamic effect reinforced the visual message of a new point of view on design. While subjects were always contemporary designs, they were not restricted to famous, largely acclaimed or beautiful designs, as in design magazines. Flouquet also dared to feature the picture of a slum on one of *Bâtir's* covers - No. 13, 1933 - in order to denounce poor social conditions in the cities. Such an attitude was unusual for design magazines at that time, but rather common for illustration magazines. Flouquet clearly intended to make a statement on the social dimension of design and, in doing so, pleaded for a socially emancipating form of design, thus connecting design with politics. In line with modernist views he remained convinced by the necessity to employ the tools of his discipline to facilitate social improvement and progress (Goldhagen & Legault, 2000).

For Flouquet, photography was an art form capable of adding emotional description and, as such, responding to the second type of illustration according to his theory (see above). Photography should reflect the conditions engendered by modern urban density, occasioning a higher proximity with the built environment. Tightly framed in a sharp subjective point of view, the new designs overwhelmingly dominated the picture and reduced the nearby environment to a minimum.

Designing a popularization discourse

In *Bâtir*, Flouquet established several kinds of relationships between text and image, echoing his former theory.[25] In his editorials, Flouquet often defended his critical positions regarding an actual design problematic, without illustrating it literally. The photos juxtaposed with his text were not mentioned in it, but they did form a distinct narrative of designs confronted by similar problematics (Fig. 9). On several occasions, when his text was a critical discussion of a local situation, the juxtaposed pictures presented foreign designs, which inevitably were understood as positive examples with which to compare, although he, in these cases, diplomatically avoided using nationalistic judgement. This suggestive iconography aimed at raising the curiosity of the readers, inviting them to intellectually establish a relationship between text and images, thus broadening their horizon in terms of design culture. This strategy, which fostered readers to reach by themselves an unwritten conclusion, or to draw their own conclusions, also reveals Flouquet's sharp understanding of the importance of valuing the reader's own discovery and meaning-making in the process of convincing him or her about modernist design.

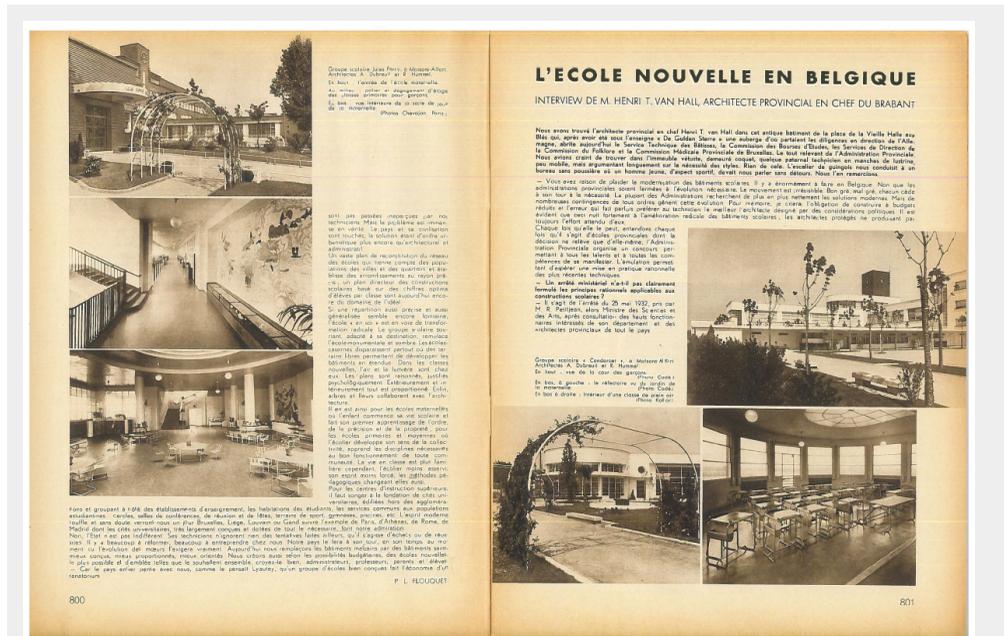


Fig. 8 - Double page designed by P-L. Flouquet, in *Bâtir*, 45, August 1936, 800-801. Without illustrating the content of the text, the photos act as a distinct critical narrative for the reader, who can also see them as good examples of what should be done in order to respond to the critical issues discussed in the text. / Private collection.

A strong relationship between text and image also dominated the advertisements in *Bâtir*. Flouquet kept both their content and layout under his control. From the simple advert to the multipage advertorial, he adapted these to the theme of the issue, thus reinforcing the efficiency of the magazine in terms of advertisement and communicated ideology. The magazine's major sponsors, UPL, a wallpaper factory, and Kessels, a company selling Venloo bricks, were represented with advertorials, which were almost identical to the main articles. [26] This advertisement quality enabled the magazine to be sold for a low price, thus responding to the aim of popularization.[27] It also ensured *Bâtir*'s success in the very dense and competitive market of design periodicals at the beginning of the 1930s.[28] Inevitably, Flouquet was criticized for the commercial aspect of *Bâtir*. But he regularly responded that it was a *sine qua non* condition in order to ensure the large diffusion and vulgarization of modern architecture. In a letter addressed to Pierre Bourgeois, Flouquet wrote: "In the end, it is wrong to criticise the commercial aspect of *Bâtir* due to its high number of prints. This journal has done more to popularizing architecture than all the art magazines published after the war".[29]

After Bâtir: The beginning of a long career

In *Bâtir*, Flouquet presented a progressive discourse on modernism and a powerful voice against the more conservative newspapers or writers who were critical of the achievements of modernism. *Bâtir*'s editorial success is testified by its positive reception by the audience, not only in economic terms, but also in terms of content. This made Flouquet a key figure in Belgium as a specialist in popularizing modernist design. Not surprisingly, less than a year after founding *Bâtir*, Flouquet was commissioned to direct the *Bulletin officiel de l'Exposition Universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1935*, a magazine promoted by the national authorities and organizers of the event to inform the general public about the world exhibition. Flouquet had been convincing in his popularization task and turned out to be a useful aid to the administration, which, on the occasion of the 1935 World Exhibition in Brussels, awarded *Bâtir* a Grand Prix for its remarkable accomplishments.

In Flouquet's career, *Bâtir* marks the beginning of thirty-five years of magazine production for popularizing modernist design, of which he controlled the design, the content and the criticism. Although his further magazines integrated some editorial modifications, they present a continuity with *Bâtir*. His constant manifold art practices gave him a critical distance from design. Critically, his force remained his general art concept, and his anti-dogmatism avoided the inevitable failures of stylistic approaches. His gift for design analysis, his talent as a writer, and his efficiency as layout designer and director was unequalled in Belgium. He became a leading figure dominating the debate on modern architecture and its communication. He was not only a pioneer but also a key figure among the design critics who emerged in the post-war period such as the Flemish K.N. Elnó (Floré, 2012).

5. Conclusions

Through magazines, Flouquet enhanced the diversified art practice of his avant-garde years. He simultaneously endorsed the roles of graphic designer and critic, which enabled him to express his critical view by integrating writing and graphic design into a unified communication strategy aimed at the popularization of modernist design and of its diverse formal and ideological manifestations. During his early avant-garde career and as one of the founding members of the magazine *7Arts*, he established constant interactions between his designs and his critical writing, resulting in the main concepts to which he remained faithful throughout his career. His communication strategy was further developed in the years when he collaborated with the newspapers *L'Aurore* and *Monde*, when he attempted to bring avant-garde and modernist design concepts to a broader, non-specialized, audience. In the 1930s, by creating *Bâtir*, Flouquet produced a specific medium aimed at popularizing modernist design which marked the beginning of his leading role as a mediator of modernist design in Belgium which he kept until his death in 1967.

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NOTE

1. This article is based on my ongoing joint PhD research at Université Libre de Bruxelles and Gent University on Flouquet's design publications. It addresses Flouquet's own and largely unexplored archives conserved at the Archives et Musée de la Littérature in Brussels (AML), whom I wish to thank for giving us access.↵
2. Flouquet was born in France. Although he immigrated to Belgium at the age of 10 he remained French until 1938, when he became Belgian. Flouquet trained as a painter at the Royal Academy of arts in Brussels. Between 1919 and 1934 he practiced as an abstract painter. From 1930 until 1967 he wrote and published poetry.↵
3. *7Arts* (1922-1928; 1948-1949), *Bâtir* (1932-40), *Bulletin officiel de l'exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1935* (1933-1935), *Reconstruction* (1940-1944), *Chantiers* (1946-1949), *Cahiers d'urbanisme* (1949-1969), *Bruxelles 55* (1955-1956), and *La Maison* (1945-1967).↵
4. Several published doctoral dissertations have recently investigated the public's reception of modernity in Belgium; see, e.g., De Caigny (2010), Floré (2010), De Vos (2012).↵
5. Ideologically, he was involved in art contexts emerging from an artistic and pacifist internationalism influenced by the French movement, Clarté, led by Henri Barbusse and inspired by the ideology of Romain Roland (Mus & Vandevoord, 2013, p. 350).↵
6. At that time, practicing several arts was often part of an artistic practice as a whole. Belgian literature and art periodicals exemplify that. Literary magazines regularly published articles on the arts, and art magazines were generally written and directed by literary figures.↵
7. All quotes from texts in languages other than English are translated by the article's author.

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8. The art critic Poreye (1959) explained this as a consequence of Flouquet's poor social conditions.↵
 9. For more information on these magazines see De Marneffe (2006).↵
 10. *7Arts* was published by the Société Coopérative d'Édition et de Propagande Intellectuelle l'Équerre in Brussels, a cooperative society founded in 1921 by Mrs. Emile Vandervelde, Victor and Pierre Bourgeois, Léon Chenoy, Alfred Dupont, Jacques Joris and Georges Rens, whom Flouquet knew very well.↵
 11. The manifesto was formulated in four slogans: "Art is the active expression of society"; "Artistic revolution and artistic order are inseparably united"; "Art is an organized invention"; and "Art has left life, our prodigious urban, industrial and passionate life. It must be reintegrated."↵
 12. "Carnet d'un citoyen" was initially collectively signed by the five co-directors, but from 1924 they were signed "one of the three". Werrie (1927, pp. 32-36) attributed several of these articles to Flouquet: "Un spectacle moderne: l'orchestration des foules" (*7Arts*, 13, 1924, 2), "Le Calicot" (*7Arts*, 2, 1924, 2), and "Oraison lyrique" (*7Arts*, 4, 1924, 3).↵
 13. Although this article was signed by the five co-directors of *7Arts*, Werrie (1927) attributes this article as well as several other articles from the first years of *7Arts* to Flouquet.↵
 14. *7 Arts* was written in French, and gathered the same artists as the Flemish journals *Het Overzicht* and *ça ira!* to which it was ideologically close.↵
 15. Among the contributors were Louis Aragon, Paul Valéry, Tristan Tzara, Max Jacob, Jean Cocteau and André Gide.↵
 16. In 1928, Flouquet was about to publish a book collection with the editor Charles Moureau in Paris illustrating main modernist figures within architecture, painting, music, poetry, literature, sculpture, and cinema. Due to economic reasons, the project was never accomplished.↵
 17. The group L'Assaut was founded in 1925 by Flouquet and the painter Jean-Jacques Gailliard, Their aim was to innovate the field of theater by gathering artists, stage designers, producers and costumers. Flouquet, indeed, designed posters, costumes and stage sets. Shortly afterwards, in 1928, he published critical articles on theatre and stage design in several magazines, including *Echantillons* (Flouquet, 1928, February) and *La Nervie*, in its special issue on Russian art (Flouquet, 1927, April).↵
 18. La Cambre was founded in Brussels by the Belgian state through the initiative of its first director Henry Van de Velde. He asked Flouquet to be part of the teaching staff. But at that time accepting that job required Flouquet to change his nationality to Belgian, which he only decided to do later.↵
 19. Flouquet knew Héléne de Mandrot, the patroness of this congress, which was held at her property the Château de La Sarraz (Switzerland). He was invited several times at the art events she organised there.↵
 20. Flouquet drew the column titles: "Aurore Magazine", "Page du cinema", "Les spectacles, Informations économiques et financières", "Les spots" and "Pour amuser les petits et les grands".↵
 21. This art page was part of a column dedicated to popularizing new technological inventions and cultural ideas.↵
 22. *Monde's* first issue was published on June 9, 1928. Its direction committee was composed of Albert Einstein, Maxim Gorki, Upton Sinclair, Manuel Ugarte, Miguel de Unamuno, Mathias Morhardt and Léon Werth.↵
 23. Unfortunately, de la Mar's connection with Flouquet and reasons for financing such a periodical at that time remain unknown.↵
 24. *Vu* was founded by Lucien Vogel, see Frizot & de Veigy (2009) and Kurkdjian (2014). *A-Z* was a socialist illustrated news magazine published in Brussels by J. Meuwissen.↵

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25. Gropius, Petrasch, Sartoris, Robertson, Papadaki, and Milbauer along with Brunfaut, Bonduelle, Blomme and Obozinski contributed to the first issues of *Bâtir*. However, Flouquet rapidly dominated the content of the whole magazine, using several pseudonyms to hide his journalistic monopoly (Archives et musée de la Littérature, Flouquet archives).↵
 26. The advertorials are not signed, but in the archives several of the manuscripts are written by Flouquet.↵
 27. *Bâtir* was sold at 3 and 4 FR. According to an editorial, it was printed in 30,000 copies – the largest circulation in Europe for such a magazine. Comparatively, according to Pierre Vago, *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* had 1200 prints in 1930 and attained 10000 in 1940 (Ragot, 1990).↵
 28. In Belgium, there were about 14 design magazines, which were contemporary with *Bâtir* as were *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, *La Casa Bella* (later *Casabella*) and *AC Documentos de actividad contemporanea* abroad.↵
 29. Letter by Flouquet to Pierre Bourgeois 2.10.1936, Flouquet archives, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels↵

AIS/DESIGN JOURNAL
STORIA E RICERCHE
VOL. 3 / N. 6
SETTEMBRE 2015

I DESIGNER
E LA SCRITTURA
NEL NOVECENTO

ISSN
2281-7603
