In 1951, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam had a scoop; with the exhibition *De Stijl, 1917-1931* (July-August 1951) it presented the first retrospective of the group De Stijl. Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964), a former member of De Stijl, was responsible for the arrangement of the works and the decor. The exhibition committee was additionally composed of former De Stijl members Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud (1890-1963) and Cornelis van Eesteren (1897-1988), as well as Nelly van Doesburg (1899-1975), Stedelijk Museum curator Hans Jaffé (1915-1984) and director Willem Sandberg (1897-1984). Each of them was responsible for gathering works they thought suitable for the show, and each of them had their own agenda. The result was – much like the original De Stijl group – a cooperation not devoid of controversy.

Although interdisciplinary collaboration was one of the major objectives of De Stijl, there was a lively discussion on which artist and what discipline should get priority. While Sandberg aimed to move Mondrian (1872-1944) to the forefront, Nelly saw her late husband, Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931), as the central figure of the group. As we will see later, this discussion was inextricably related to the question of whether painters or architects had done the pioneering work of De Stijl. Although Rietveld, himself an architect as well as a talented colorist, tried to take all wishes into account, he arranged the exhibition so that his own contribution to De Stijl was amplified.

The show clearly bore Rietveld’s signature style and thereby complemented the exhibited works. Keeping the ideals of De Stijl in mind, Rietveld integrated the various disciplines in his display. On the walls and floors he applied areas of color and grouped certain objects. In the third room of the exhibition, one section contained only his work – furniture as well as architectural designs (room C, see fig. 4). Here, the objects and their surroundings were in such unity that Rietveld had in fact created an ideal Stijl interior, made up solely of his designs. By backdating his work and opposing it to that of Mondrian and Van Doesburg, Rietveld effectually suggested that he was at the base of the pioneering work of De Stijl.

To show how Rietveld was able to appoint himself such importance in the exhibition, I will retrace the steps of the committee through the correspondence of its members. These records give insight not only into the initial purposes of the committee but also into the individual differences between the members’ starting points. It seems that most committee members were so preoccupied with their own objectives that