

[typoscript Giedion]

[typoscript Giedion in Archive of Letters to C. and S. Giedion-Welcker, Zürich]

LA VRAIE VALEUR DES OPPOSITIONS

Tout le monde connaît ces deux oppositions principales de la vie: le bien et le mal. Tout le monde souffre ou est heureux par l'un ou par l'autre. Mais tout le monde ne se rend pas compte de la vraie valeur de ces oppositions, et, en général, on n'en voit même pas la nécessité; on exige le bien en évitant, si possible, le mal.

Par intuition, l'homme veut le bien: l'unité, l'équilibre - surtout pour lui-même. C'est ainsi qu'il retombe dans la recherche d'un bien-être faux et d'un équilibre statique, qui, forcément, s'oppose à l'équilibre dynamique de la vie. Il se contente d'une fausse unité, et, en cherchant celle-ci, il rejette évidemment toute dualité des oppositions qui, au fond, est apparente mais pourtant est bien réelle pour nous.

Il est évident que, jusqu'ici, l'homme en général, ressentant l'unité profonde de la vie, mais vivant dans ce monde déséquilibré¹, n'accepte pas simultanément la dualité des oppositions²: ne vive³ pas une vie complète⁴ dans laquelle cette dualité⁵ se perd. Pour⁶ cette vie, il nous⁷ faudra une réalité plus⁸ parfaite, mais aussi un développement plus avancé: une plus longue culture. C'est pourquoi on se contente d'une unité apparente, se limite continuellement dans⁹ des formes particulières de tout genre. Vivant dans des oppositions non-équivalentes et étant lui-même un complexe de ces

oppositions, l'homme n'a pas la certitude de la possibilité d'une harmonie¹⁰ véritable dans la vie. Il est tout naturel qu'il ne cherche que « le meilleur ¹¹ » des oppositions que la vie lui offre en le¹² considérant comme l'unité ressentie. Cependant, la vie nous démontre¹³ que sa beauté consiste en ceci que précisément les oppositions déséquilibrées¹⁴ inévitables nous poussent vers la recherche des oppositions équivalentes qui seules, créent l'unité véritable, laquelle, jusqu'ici, ne s'est réalisée - en toute relativité -¹⁵ qu'en art et dans la pensée. C'est ainsi dans la réalité. Mais également dans le plan

moral, l'opposition des idées et des conceptions nous fait approcher de la vérité: l'unification, l'anéantissement des oppositions.

¹ [Gedeelte van deze tekst afgedrukt in: Alfred Roth, *Begegnungen mit Pionieren*, 1973, p. 188-9; in het vervolg aangeduid als 'Begegnungen']

in *Begegnungen*: 'déséquilibré'

² in *Begegnungen*: '[...] des oppositions du bien et du mal [...]'

[Tekst in typoscript met aantekeningen in Holtzman Deposit Box1, 32b; in het vervolg aangeduid als 'Typoscript 32b']

in *Typoscript 32b*: verbetering: '[...] les deux oppositions [...]'

³ [Tekst in: Serge Lemoine, *Mondrian/Roth Correspondance*, 114, p. 135-7; in het vervolg aangeduid als 'Correspondance' }

in *Correspondance*: 'vit'

in *Typoscript 32b*: verbetering: '[...] il ne vit pas [...]'

⁴ in *Typoscript 32b*: verbetering: '[...] une vie véritable complète [...]'

⁵ in *Correspondance*: 'qualité'

⁶ [Tekst in typoscript in Jaffé-archief, RKD, doos XLVI; in het vervolg aangeduid als 'Typoscript Jaffé']

in *Typoscript Jaffé*: typefout (?) 'Our'

⁷ in *Begegnungen*: 'nous' ontbreekt

⁸ in *Begegnungen*: 'plus' ontbreekt

⁹ in *Begegnungen*: '[...] à des formes [...]'

¹⁰ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: 'équilibre' i.p.v. 'harmonie'

¹¹ in *Begegnungen*: '“les meilleures”'

¹² in *Begegnungen*: 'les'

¹³ in *Typoscript 32b*: 'démontre'

¹⁴ in *Begegnungen*: 'déséquilibrées'

¹⁵ in *Begegnungen*: aandachtstreepje ontbreken

En créant des unités apparentes, l'homme veut aller trop vite. Mais en s'arrêtant à celles-ci, il va trop lentement. Ce qui s'impose donc avec force, c'est la purification et la séparation mutuelle des unités fausses: des formes particulières. C'est ainsi que les oppositions se montrent en tant que rapports purs. L'équivalence de ceux-ci trouvée, le rythme se dégage, la voie est libre, ouverte à la vie.

Si, à présent, nous nous imaginons pouvoir vivre dans une unité véritable et ne voyons pas le déséquilibre existant, nous serons désillusionnés. La vie nous démontre que nous devons « créer » cette unité et que cela ne se fait qu'en séparant, en rompant et en reconstruisant les unités apparentes qui existent ou facilement naissent partout. Etant dans la réalité, il faut compter avec cette réalité, mais pour cela il la faut bien voir et observer qu'elle n'est pas une forme complète et fermée, mais un mouvement perpétuel d'oppositions changeantes.

La vie, l'histoire, la science et l'art nous apprennent que ce n'est que par le discernement et l'expérience des oppositions que, lentement, nous aboutissons¹⁶ à l'unité,¹⁷ à la vie complète: que la vie¹⁸ n'est qu'un approfondissement continu de la même chose.

Heureusement, l'homme de nos jours ne croit plus¹⁹ mais il observe. Il est donc de la plus grande importance que nous trouvions, au milieu du chaos et de la plénitude de la vie, établie sur le terrain libre de l'art, la voie juste pour arriver à une équivalence des oppositions qui crée - en toute relativité - la vie complète, l'harmonie²⁰, le bonheur. L'art justifie d'une façon plastique ce qui est difficile à déterminer littérairement.

Généralement, dans la vie, on observe bien les oppositions en tant que des formes particulières, mais on néglige de les voir en tant que des « rapports ». Toutefois, ce sont précisément les rapports propres et mutuels des éléments qui déterminent l'ensemble.

L'art n'a jamais négligé la recherche de ces rapports ni négligé de rompre l'aspect statique que la réalité nous impose. En art plastique, l'artiste a distingué, attentivement étudié les oppositions de la réalité, cherché à composer lignes, et formes²¹ et couleurs dans des rapports justes et équivalents, afin de créer un équilibre dynamique qui annihile l'équilibre statique des choses. C'est là que l'œuvre d'art nous émotionne par son harmonie²² (l'unification du mal et du bien); c'est là que nous y retrouvons la souffrance et la joie - c'est là qu'elle est complète.

En art, les oppositions principales s'expriment par le rapport rectangulaire (établi ou non-établi) qui est absolu. Mais ce rapport obtient une expression relative et vivante par des rapports secondaires: d'autres rapports de position, des rapports de dimension et des rapports de valeurs, toujours variant. L'œuvre ne montre jamais une répétition de moyens plastiques, mais toujours une opposition constante de ceux-là.

Bien que ces rapports aient toujours été établis intuitivement²³, l'artiste qui, de sa nature, ne cherchait qu'à exprimer la beauté des formes particulières, est devenu de plus en plus conscient de²⁴ ce qu'il faisait. C'est ainsi que, durant les siècles, une culture des rapports est née qui de nos jours s'épanouit. Dans le passé, cette culture s'opposa à la culture de la forme particulière, et c'est par l'action réciproque de ces deux cultures que nous pouvons considérer aujourd'hui cette dernière comme touchant à sa fin: la recherche des rapports a annihilé la forme particulière, de plus en plus séparée et rompue, et la forme neutre, la ligne et la couleur pures sont devenues les seuls moyens pour exprimer les rapports. La culture des rapports « purs » est née.

C'est donc par la « culture » de la forme particulière et non par la négligence de celle-ci que l'art, dans l'art nouveau, est arrivé à la culture des rapports purs. Durant des siècles et siècles,

¹⁶ in *Begegnungen*: 'aboutirons'

¹⁷ in *Begegnungen*: komma ontbreekt

¹⁸ in *Begegnungen*: '[...] que l'évolution de la vie [...]'

¹⁹ in *Correspondance*: komma achter 'plus'

²⁰ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: 'l'équilibre'

²¹ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: 'plans' i.p.v. 'et formes'

²² in *Typoscript Jaffé*: 'harmonie' tussen aanhalingstekens

²³ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: 'intuitivement' is onderstreept

²⁴ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: 'conscient de' is onderstreept

la forme n'a pas perdu son aspect naturel, jusqu'à ce que les temps nouveaux (depuis l'impressionnisme) l'aient modifié d'abord, ensuite annihilé.

Réjouissons-nous de vivre dans une époque où l'art s'est délivré de la domination des formes particulières. Ces formes sont ce qui empêche la pleine jouissance de l'unité que seule la forme neutre, la ligne et la couleur pures peuvent établir d'une façon claire si ces moyens se perdent par la composition.

L'étude de la culture de l'art nous donne la certitude que nous nous approchons d'une vie qui n'est plus dominée ni par des formes particulières ni par des rapports (oppositions) déséquilibrés: d'une vie des formes et des rapports purs - d'une vie « humaine ».

Si l'on remarque que l'art toujours a montré l'harmonie²⁵, nous pouvons observer dans l'art nouveau que ce n'est que par la force du génie (intuition) que l'art du passé, malgré tout, a exprimé une harmonie voilée. Bien que l'œuvre du passé eût une expression équilibrée, il y eut toujours quelque chose qui dominait dans les formes et dans les rapports. (Par exemple la prédominance des figures ou des corps²⁶ dans des tableaux ; l'expression prédominante de la hauteur dans le gothique, etc....).

L'art, depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours, nous montre que nous marchons vers une vie ouverte, claire, libre, là où nous nous trouvons encore dans une vie du passé, où tout est confus, où une partie domine, où tout se mélange: le bien et le mal, la bonté et la méchanceté, l'amour et la haine - où tout est une unité apparente²⁷.

Cependant, on pourrait remarquer que l'artiste compose l'œuvre d'art, mais que la vie compose la vie et que nous sommes comme jetés²⁸ dans le monde. Mais n'oublions pas, d'abord, que l'artiste dans son œuvre, lui aussi est poussé par la vie, et ensuite, que nous tous faisons partie de la vie, de cette vie qui ne compte pas avec le temps et l'espace et qui est, au fond, tout comme l'art, toujours la même. Elle n'a qu'à se développer en nous. Même malgré nous, nous faisons partie de la grande composition parfaite de la vie, laquelle, si nous observons bien, s'établit selon le développement de l'art. Mais n'oublions pas que le présent c'est l'unité du passé et de l'avenir !

Décembre 1934.

²⁵ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: typefout(?) 'l'harmoniet'

²⁶ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: typefout (?) 'dorps'

²⁷ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: 'apparente' is onderstreep

²⁸ in *Typoscript Jaffé*: 'jetés' tussen aanhalingstekens

The true value of oppositions in life and art.

Good and evil – the two principle oppositions of life – all the world knows them, all the world suffers or is happy on account of one or the other of them. But all the world is not aware of the true value of this opposition, and in general does not even see the necessity of them: one demands good, escaping, if possible from evil. By intuition, man wants good: unity, poise, especially for himself. It is thus that he falls back into the search for false ease and static equilibrium, which is contrary to the dynamic equilibrium of ⟨-th⟩ true life.

He is self-satisfied with false unity and in searching for this he obviously discards ⟨that→all⟩ duality of oppositions, ⟨-with⟩ which, at bottom, is only apparent, but which is, nevertheless, real to us.

It is evident that, so far, man in general, has felt the profound unity of ⟨-th⟩ true life, but, living in this unbalanced world, has not accept simultaneously the ⟨-duall⟩ two oppositions: did not live life as a whole in which the duality is lost. For such a life we should need a world which is perfect: also further development - longer culture. That is why one is satisfied with unity which is only apparent

and confines oneself continually in particular forms of all sorts. Living among non-equivalents oppositions and being oneself a complex of these oppositions, one has not the certainty of the possibility of real harmony in life. It is natural that one merely seeks “the better” in the oppositions that life offers one, taking it as an conscious unity. However, life shows us that its beauty consists in this that is precisely the inevitably unbalanced oppositions that pushes us to the search of equivalent oppositions: which alone create real unity: that unity which, so far, has only been realized in thought and in art. It is thus in reality. But equally on the moral plane, the oppositions of ideas and conceptions bring us to ⟨-th⟩ truths: unification, the annihilation of opposites.

Creating apparent unities, man tries to go too fast. But stopping at these, he goes too slowly. That which emerges forcefully is the purifying and mutual separation of false unities: of particular forms. ⟨-It is thus⟩ Art shows it us.

Art shows us that it is thus that oppositions come in true relation to one another, equivalence is found, rhythm comes out, the way is clear, open to ⟨-us⟩ true life.

If at present we imagine ourselves to be able to live in true unity and do not see the lack of balance in existence, we shall be disillusioned. Art shows us that we have to “create” this unity, and that this is only done in separating, breaking and reconstructing the apparent unities which exist or easily appear everywhere. Being within this reality, one must take it into account, and for that one must face it and observe that is not a shut, completed form, but a perpetual movement of changing oppositions.

Life, history, science, and art teach us that it is only by the discernment and experience of oppositions that we reach unity, the fullness of life, and find that life is but a constant deepening of the same thing: a continual progress.

Fortunately, man in our days believes no longer: he observes. It is therefore of the greatest importance that we find, in the midst of the chaos and abundance of life, established on the free domain of art, the true way to arrive at a balance of oppositions which creates, in full relativity, complete life, harmony, happeness. Art justifies in a ⟨plastiq→plastic⟩ way what is difficult to state literally.

Generally, in life, one observes the particular forms, but one misses seeing their oppositions. However, it is exactly the proper and mutual relations between the elements (forms) which determines the whole.

⟨Plastique→Plastic⟩ art has never failed to search for these relations nor failed to break the static aspect which reality imposes. In plastic art, the artist has detected and studied attentively the oppositions of reality, searched to compose lines, forms, and colours in just and equivalent relations, so as to create the dynamic equilibrium which annihilates the static equilibrium of things. It is there that the work of art emotionalises us by its harmony (unification of good and evil). It is there that we recover the unification of suffering and joy – there that it is complete. ⟨+Life has to grown to the ⟨+equivalent⟩ opposition of its chief oppositions and to the equivalent measure of its secondary relations.⟩

In plastic art the chief oppositions are absolute, constant. They express themselves in rectangular relations (established or not). But this absolute relation of position (height and breadth) gains a relative and living expression through secondary relations: of scale and of value, always varying. The work never shows repetition of plastic means, but always a constant opposition of these.

Although these relations have ⟨been always→always been⟩ established intuitively, the artist, primitively only seeking to express the beauty of particular forms, became more and more conscious of the value of their proper and mutual relations. It is thus through centuries that a "culture of relations" was born, which in these days opens out. In the past this culture was mixed with the culture of particular form and opposed to this and it is through the reciprocal action of these two cultures that we can now-a-days consider this last as nearing its end: the search for relations has annihilated particular, which had been more and more separated and broken up, and neutral form, pure line, and colour have ⟨betw→become⟩ the only means of expressing these relations. The culture of "pure relations" has appeared.

It is thus through the culture of particular form, and not through the neglect of this, that art, the new art, has arrived at the culture of "pure relations". For centuries and centuries form never lost its naturalistic aspect, until these new times (since Impressionism) having been first modified, it was then annihilated.

Let us rejoice to be alive in the period when plastic art has liberated itself from the domination of particular forms. It is these forms which prevent full delight in the unity, that only neutral form, pure line and colour can give, if these "means" are lost in the composition.

The study of the culture of art gives us certainty that we are approaching a life which is no longer dominated by particular forms, nor by unbalanced oppositions: a life of pure and equivalent relations – a "human" life.

If the remark is made that art has always shown harmony, we can ⟨–say⟩ see in the new art that it is only by the power of genius (intuition) that the art of the past, in spite of everything, has expressed a "clouded" harmony. Even though the art of the past expressed balance, there was always something which dominated in the forms and the relations. For example, the predominance of figures and of bodies in pictures, and the predominance of height in Gothic, etc.

⟨+It was the same in life. And ⟨+still⟩ now-a-days the world is composed of non-equivalent forms by non-equivalent relations.⟩

Art, from antiquity until these days, shows us that we are moving toward a life that is open, clear, free, although we find ourselves still in the life of the past, where all is confused, where parts

dominate, where all is mixed: good and evil, goodness and wickedness, love and hate - where all is unity that is only apparent.

However one could say that (<-de) the artist composes the work of art, but that life composes life, and that we are as if thrown into the world. But we must not forget that in his work the artist himself is impelled by life, and then that we are all part of life, of that life which does not reckon with time and space, and which is at bottom – the same as art - always the same.

Even in spite of ourselves we are part of the great composition of perfection, which is true life, which, if we observe well, establishes itself in according to the development of art. But don't let us forget that the present is the unity of the past and of the future.

- Piet Mondrian - *autograph manuscript Holtzman Deposit 32a*

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