

[typescript 41Bd]

[Holtzman Deposit, Box 2, Folder 41B]

[Mondrian's handwritten corrections are indicated with indications used for documentary editing; typewriter corrections are inserted.]

Art and Life Towards the Liberation from Oppression. //

Introduction //

This (script aims to be → essay attempts) an objective xxxxx observation of /
truth revealed in art and life. (While) (o → O)nly general truths have /
value in the culture of mankind (+ ,) (+ it is necessary to avoid) personal or subjective ¬
conceptions /
(+ should) (must be avoided.) (T → t)emporary observations cannot enlighten us /
concerning art and life. Art and life have to be seen in their /
entire development. Not only the present (+ but also the historic forms of expression) (forms ¬
of expression) must /
be studied (but also the historic forms of expression) (;) and the /
remains of the past have to be explored. Only in this way can we /
see the true content of human culture (+ ,) (and thus) discern the xxxx /
xxxxxx causes and consequences of its actual state (Only then /
can we) (+ and) determine whether there is progress or decay. Only the /
perception of the whole of human culture can produce the acceptance /
or rejection of general truth. To see things (only) in terms of /
particular periods is misleading. (B → b)ecause of mutual inequality,) (m → M)an is not at ¬
the same time at the same degree of development, (+ because of mutual inequality.) //

[correctieopmerking in de linkermarge:] (+ Double space.) //

(Oppression in Art and Life.) //

Life and art reveal human culture as (+ a) progressive continuity of /
construction and destruction. The (compulsion → tendency) to construct is /
innate in human nature. Self-construction and the construction of /
(+ his) environment is man's first intention. (verwijzingssteken:] **A**) (While) (c → C)onstruction ¬
(+ being) (is) the /
predominant force in human nature, it is logical that man (kind) opposes /
xxxxxxxxxxxxx destruction with all xxx (its) (+ his) power. xxxxxxxxxxxx /
Nevertheless, the destructive tendency is also innate in man. /
(+ He tries to avoid destruction but is forced by /
inner and external factors to destroy.) ///

⟨- [verwijzingssteken:] ⊥ If he does not do it himself, it is [xxx] /
[xxx] it) //

2 [verwijzingssteken:] ↑ see that every following construction is /
better, //

Discontent⟨+ ed⟩ with ⟨the first → arizing⟩ construction, ⟨we → he⟩ destroy⟨+ s⟩ it and /
construct⟨+ s⟩ anew, ⟨- otherwise we are compelled to do so⟩ ⟨+ it is effected⟩ [verwijzingssteken:] ⊥ ¬
⟨by → through⟩ external /

forces. ⟨- Man tries to avoid destruction but is forced by inner or /
external causes to destroy.⟩ When we ⟨- understand this⟩ [verwijzingssteken:] ↑ then the /
great significance of destruction ⟨is → becomes⟩ clear. Without destruction, /
progress is impossible. //

[correctieopmerking:] ⟨+ double space⟩ //

[verwijzingssteken:] **B**

It is oppression that ⟨+ causes or⟩ produces ⟨- the compulsion to destroy⟩ ¬
⟨+ destruction⟩. /

Oppression prevents the expression of the constructive tendency: ⟨+ it⟩ /
⟨- or⟩ destroys the existing forms of construction. ⟨+ From this results⟩ ⟨- As a consequence,⟩ /
the struggle for freedom ⟨+ .⟩ ⟨- follows⟩ ⟨- When⟩ Free⟨+ d⟩ from oppression, /
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx a new and more complete construct- /
ion ⟨is → becomes⟩ possible. //

[linkermarge ⟨+ Later⟩ [alinea is omcirkeld] This statement requires us to see whether construction is /
successively better, that is, whether progress exist⟨- s⟩ and of /
what it consist⟨- s⟩. ⟨+ ?⟩ ⟨+ But first we have to see⟩ //

⟨- [verwijzingssteken:] **A** It is important to see that, although /
strough out the course of history the /
essential action of human culture /
is constructive, continious destructions /
⟨are → is⟩ necessary untill ⟨+ the⟩ equivalence /
of construction and destruction is ⟨ob → at⟩tained. /
Then a dynamic moment in /
equilibrium is possible.⟩ //

[verwijzingssteken:] **B** Oppression in ⟨- life⟩ Art and Life. ///

At present oppression is so clearly evident /
 <- th> in <- (by) the> world-events that everyone /
 must regard it as one of the greatest evils. /
 But does everyone see <- this evil> it in its real /
 significance, in its positive and negative /
 action ? //

Oppression <+ is> manifest<+ ed> <- it self> as evil as long as /
 it is not individually and commonly opposed /
 by equal force. To <- be> oppose<- d> <+ it>, <it → we> must <- be> /
 view<- ed> <+ it> <- realistically> <+ realistically> and studie<- d> <+ it> <- realistically>. /
 <It → We> must <- be> <basically understood → and> it → understand it basically). //

<- Life and art is (are)> <+ Human life is> oppressed by internal /
 causes, both physical and moral, as well by /
 external factors. We see the facts of oppression <+ in> /
 <- on> <- <+ In all fields> <p → P>olitic(al → s), economic(al → s) and <+ also in> domestic ▯
 <+ life.> /

<- domain.> <+ We see> <A → a>rt suffer<- s> from the ignorance /
 of the public, educated by incompetent /
 writers, critics, teachers, museum commit- /
 tees, etc. <But → and> above all <- it suffers> from /
 <mens → mans> <- the> <subjective limited → limited subjective> vision <- of /
 man.> //

In all ages, oppression <+ temporarily destroys> destroy<ed → s> culture /
 and life <- - at least for a time. At any /
 time>, <o → O>ppression robs us of the individual /
 and common freedom necessary to <- con> /
 human development. It retards human /
 progress: the constant movement toward<- s> the ///

however, is) //

[*verwijzingsteken:*] **Z** This retardation, ⟨- delay⟩ ? /

⟨+ 4⟩

better, the deeper, the more intense - toward /
the balance of construction and destruction. //

⟨- Despite ⟨- ⟨+ this⟩ retard⟨+ ation⟩ ⟨-⟨+ fact⟩ reveals it self) [*verwijzingsteken:*] **Z** ⟨- as⟩ ¬
necessa- /

ry to real development ⟨- which⟩ ⟨+ for [xx]⟩ requiers /

time, ⟨- it must be⟩ ⟨+ but⟩ ⟨+ oppression is only⟩ temporary in ⟨the → human⟩ construc- /
tive life. It is necessary to fight ⟨+ against⟩ it. //

Although the evil of oppression is clearly /
manifest in life ⟨+ ,⟩ ⟨- and art⟩, it is not always /
clearly discernable because it ⟨- mostly⟩ is /
veiled by all manner of particular forms. /

⟨- This is also applies to⟩ ⟨+ The same is true ⟨for → in⟩⟩ art. ⟨If → When⟩ art ⟨follows → ¬
represents⟩ /

⟨life or nature → reality⟩ in its ⟨commonly → natural⟩ appearance. /

⟨+ Then⟩ oppression ⟨+ is⟩ disguise⟨s → d⟩ ⟨- itself⟩ in all kinds of /
particular limited forms and ⟨- therefore⟩ /

seems non-existent. But in plastic art /

time and movement are fixed ⟨+ ,⟩ ⟨- which fact⟩ ⟨+ therefore⟩ ⟨- ⟨+ reason⟩ /

⟨- causes that⟩ ⟨-⟨+ reason why⟩ observation is easier and oppress- /

sion can be studied ⟨in a purer way → directly⟩. //

[*verwijzingsteken:*] **P** ⟨⟨B → b⟩ because ⟨- the⟩ of its camouflaged appea- /

rance. [*verwijzingsteken:*] **X** In life and art, the danger ⟨+ exist⟩ ⟨- exist⟩ ⟨- of⟩ /

⟨- of accepting oppression ⟨- ⟨+ [xxx]⟩ exist.⟩ ⟨+ that oppression⟩ → In life and art, the danger ¬
exist that oppression because of its camouflaged appearance) Oppression does /

not always cause revolt. ⟨- In⟩ ⟨h → H⟩ human nature /

reveals ⟨- th⟨is → e⟩ powerful⟨- l⟩ opposition of⟩, ⟨+ the⟩ ⟨- ⟨+ the⟩ desire /

for oppression and the desire to be free of it. /

⟨This → It is this⟩ opposition ⟨+ that⟩ causes ⟨that → the⟩ long and conti- /

nuous struggle that life and art show until /

human equilibrium is neared. ///

[vermijzingsteken:] **P** In $\langle A \rightarrow a \rangle$ rt and life $\langle +$ there is \rangle the danger $\langle +$ of accepting \rangle exist that, /
 $\langle -$ oppression \rangle because of its camouflaged /
appearance, \langle is accepted oppression \rightarrow oppression is accepted. \rangle ///

<- 2->

<+ 5>

<- demonstrate that plastic art can help to clarify this evil.> //

<- Plastic art shows that in life and in art, we experience / objective oppression from the reality around us and that we suffer / subjective oppression from our personal, limited vision.> Plastic / art reveals to us that in order to vanquish objective oppression, / existing elements and forms must be selected carefully, or if possible, / transformed. To master subjective oppression, the transformation of / our mentality is needed. To accomplish this <- ,> human development, time / experience <- ,> <+ and> education are indispensable. //

To the layman, it may seem strange to hear that the culture of / plastic art shows a progressive liberation from oppressive factors. / Actually this statement is based on technical facts revealed <- to / artists> through <- their> practical research<- es>. A real comprehension / of plastic art can only be obtained through a technical understanding. The technical aspect consists in the use of the expressive means - / volumes, planes, lines, colors - and in the development of these / expressive means toward their pure state. //

<- Although the evil of oppression is clearly manifested in life, / it is not always clearly discernable in relation to its basic causes, / for it is veiled by all manner of particular complications in the / appearance of things. This also applies to art. If art follows life / or nature in terms of representation, oppression disguises itself in / all kinds of particular forms and relationships, and there fore, / seems non-existent. But in <+ plastic> art, time and movement are fixed; thus <+ is ?> / <- [xxx]> <contemplation → observation> is easier <+ .> <- and> <o → O>ppression can be ¬ studied in a / purer way. //

Because of its camouflaged appearance in life and art, there / is the danger of accepting oppression; oppression does not always> ///

4- [verwijzingssteken:] ⊥ express complete // <+ 5a>

If we <are able to → can> understand the culture of plastic art as a /
continuous growth toward the full utilization of its freedom to /
[verwijzingssteken:] ⊥ <- pure> life, then one way to optimism is open to humanity <. → :> <+ it> /
<- The culture of art> reveals to us that <life → plastic art> is a continual growth, /
an irresistible progress. In spite of all, human culture <- must mani-> <+ has> /
<- fest> <- <+ has> <- what the culture of art demonstrates: continual progress.> <+ the same ⊃
content.> But /
subjective factors <- prevent this from being seen> <+ obscure this content and> <[xxx] → it is> ⊃
seen only <+ as> /
<- [xxx]> continual change. //

[correctieopmerking in de marge:] <+ Double space.> //

<- Through its> <+ In the development of its> culture, plastic art shows a growth toward /
the culmination of limited form, then a dissolution of this form /
and a determination of the freed constructive elements (planes, /
colors, lines.) If we observe this fact, we can conclude that our /
whole culture equally reveals the same process. //

The question whether this process in life and in art is a /
progress or a decay is answered when we consider that is the /
liberation of life and art from <- all> obstacles toward a clearer /
manifestation of their real content. <This → It> is not <- merely> a reduction /
or el<+ i>mination, but it is an intensification. <- This freeing is an /
abstraction, it is a realization.> In abstract art <- ,> we see this /
clearly. There the elements of form are no longer veiled by the /
limited form but appear as the expressive means. This fact is /
undeniable progress. For all art reveals that limited form is /
narrative, symbolic <- ,> and that its constructive elements - <+ volumes,> planes, /
colors <+ ,> <- and> lines <+ ,> - establish <- art>. [verwijzingssteken:] ⊥ Nevertheless from the ⊃
naturalistic /
viewpoint, the loss of limited form is decay. [correctieteken: nieuwe alineas] <We find analagous /
decay in life → In life We find analagous decay>; at first, the diminution of the physical force of /
man; then the fact that humanity as a whole differentiates itself //

[verwijzingssteken:] ⊥ the plastic expression. ///

from natural primitive life. ⟨- In⟩ ⟨+ While in⟩ spite of this, humanity is developing, /
 ⟨- but⟩ is it recognized sufficiently that this is due partly to facts /
 which appear as decay? //

We can conclude that plastic art shows a double action manifest- /
 ed in life and in art: an action of decay and an action of growth: /
 a progress of intensification and determination of the fundamental /
 aspect of forms, and a decay through the reduction of their external /
 aspect. Art and human life show that this reciprocal action does not /
 destroy but manifests the intrinsic value of form. By establishing /
 greater equivalence of the opposing factors, ⟨- a possibility of⟩ ⟨+ this action creates the⟩ /
 ⟨+ to⟩ approach⟨- ing⟩ equilibrium ⟨- is created⟩. //

When we think of the masterpieces ⟨+ in the art⟩ of the past, this statement /
 concerning progress may seem to be untrue. But then it is necessary /
 to see that in art the culture of particular forms is culminated /
 and completed, and that art has undertaken the culture of pure /
relationships. This means that particular form, freed from its /
 limitations and reduced to more neutral form can now establish purer /
 relationships. Art is freeing itself from oppressive factors that /
 veil the pure ⟨+ plastic⟩ expression ⟨+ .⟩⟨- of life.⟩ What is true in art must also /
 be true in human life. //

It must be stated that plastic art contains two co-existent /
 cultures: that of limited form and that of relationship; they /
 develop together until the oppression of limited form is ended. /
 When the elements of form become more or less freed, then relationship /
 becomes a special culture. ⟨+[*verwijzingssteken*:] X⟩ This change is created by the whole of /
modern art, but is realized in abstract art.

[*verwijzingssteken*:] X⟩ The principal pre-occupation with the relationship⟨- s⟩ of more /
 neutral expressive means is clearly manifested in ⟨+ all⟩ modern art.) What- /
 ⟨- [xxx]⟩ ///

ever our conception may be, this change must be recognized. Only /
 this recognition can prevent errors. It must be equally recognized /
 that an analagous change must have taken place in life. //

Throughout history, human life, oppressed by material and /
 physical factors, by particular forms, frees itself from these /
 factors by means of the purification of these forms as well by the /
 determination of these relationships. The changing conditions of /
 human life in experience, education, science, and technics are /
 reducing the brutish, primitive force of Man and transforming it into /
 a real human force. A less physical animal constitution and a strong- /
 er mentality is making Man more "human." //

Progress is a continual "real" change. Every new period /
 appears as a sudden mutation after a long evolution by construction /
 and destruction. In the line of progress, modifications are important /
 and necessary, but insufficient. Possibilities of expressing the /
 content of life in a stronger and purer way are to be created. New /
 possibilities astonish the masses but <[xx] → the> measses have helped to /
 create them. //

Progress for humanity consists in the conquest of oppression; /
 it parallels the progress of art. Oppression destroys itself but /
 not without humanity's continual struggle against it. <– At present, we /
 see the facts of mutual oppression: political, economic, domestic. /
 Art suffers from the ignorance of the public, educated by incom- /
 petent writers, critics, teachers, museum committees, etc.> By the /
 study of the forms and relationships that art and life show, the /
 complicated causes and consequences of all oppression can be under- /
 stood. Then we can see the necessary function of oppression. ///

[*verwijzingsteken:*] ∫ But the ⟨+ true⟩ function of plastic art was /
neglected. ⟨- It⟩

⟨- 3-⟩

⟨+ 6⟩

⟨- cause revolt. Does there not exist in human nature this powerful /
opposition: the desire for oppression and the desire to be free of) /
it, this opposition which causes that long and continual struggle /
that life and art show until human equilibrium is neared?) //

[*correctieopmerking in linkermarge:*] ⟨+ Double space⟩ /

Plastic art is an abstract, a free domain of life; the causes /
and consequences of its expression are purely for study. It does not /
tolerate oppression and can resist it, for art is not bound by /
material or physical conditions. [*verwijzingsteken:*] × //

⟨+ While⟩ Writers and thinkers have deeply explored the facts and the /
causes of the tragic realities created by oppression, Art ⟨+ only⟩ has been /
used for immediate and personal pur[xxx] → poses). ⟨- It described⟩ ⟨e→E⟩vents, persons, /
battlefields ⟨+ were described⟩, war camouflage and prop⟨+ ag⟩anda were made. ¬

[*verwijzingsteken:*] ∫ ⟨- But the function⟩ /

⟨- of⟩ ⟨p → P⟩lastic ⟨[xxx] → art⟩ is neither descriptive nor cinematic. It is not merely /
a means of enjoyment amidst an incomplete life, or a simple express- /
ion of that life even in its beautiful aspect. ⟨-All this is incidental.⟩ //

Art is the esthetic establishment of complete life -- unity /
and equilibrium -- free from all oppression. For this reason it /
can reveal the evil of oppression and show the way to combat it. /
Plastic art establishes the true image of reality, for its primary /
function is to “show,” not to describe. It is up to us to “see” what /
it represents. It cannot reveal more than life ⟨- teaches⟩ ⟨+ manifest⟩ ⟨- ,) but it can /
evoke in us the conviction of ⟨+ the⟩ existant truth ⟨- ,) ⟨+ obscured in life.⟩ The culture of ¬
plastic /
art can enlighten ⟨- mankind⟩ ⟨+ human culture⟩, for it not only reveals ⟨- human⟩ ⟨+ this⟩ ¬
culture, but /
being free, ⟨- it⟩ advances it. //

When we view the tragic events of war, pessimism overtakes us /
and makes it difficult to think of ⟨- culture⟩ ⟨+ the futur⟩. The effect of actual /
events weakens our confidence in ⟨- the progress of⟩ life. Where is ⟨- be⟩ /
⟨⟨+ to⟩ be found, ⟨+ ?⟩ ⟨- despite this.⟩ a true optimism → a true optimism to be found⟩ ¬
⟨- concerning humanity’s future?⟩ //

[*verwijzingsteken:*] × Nevertheless, ⟨- generally⟩ it is not ⟨+ generally⟩ seen in ⟨- its pure⟩ ¬
⟨+ terms of⟩ /

plastique expression. [*verwijzingsteken:*] X ///

⟨- [verwijzingsteken:] **F** By further /
abstraction⟩

[verwijzingsteken:] **X** //

In order to recognize this, we have to ⟨- see⟩ ⟨+ consider⟩ /
⟨+ distinguish⟩ reality ⟨- as a objective apparition in itself⟩ /
⟨- and f thus free⟩ from our subjective vision ⟨+ of it.⟩ /
In the sence reality manifests forms, con- /
structed by volumes ⟨- which are⟩ ⟨+ composed of⟩ built by /
planes. ⟨+ Although⟩ ⟨T → t⟩he planes are essential, ⟨- but⟩ particu- /
lar forms ⟨- reveals⟩ ⟨+ are manifest.⟩ ⟨-themselves. first -⟩ ⟨- [verwijzingsteken:] **F**⟩ /
⟨- The creation of an image. But [xxx]⟩ ⟨+ Nevertheless,⟩ ⟨- ⟨+ However⟩ ⟨+ it is⟩ the reci- /
proque action of these forms ⟨- this means⟩ /
⟨- it⟩ caused by their mutual opposition, ⟨- is⟩ /
⟨- what vivified them⟩ ⟨+ that makes them living for us.⟩ ⟨- By⟩ It is this action /
that ⟨- evoks⟩ ⟨+ evoks⟩ ⟨- in us ⟨+ [xxx][xxx]⟩ our vitality in us and thus⟩ /
makes ⟨+ us⟩ feel ⟨- us⟩ ⟨+ our⟩ ⟨- harmonie⟩ ⟨- ⟨+ harmonie⟩ ⟨+ vitality⟩ ⟨+ and makes⟩ ¬ ⟨-
equilibrium.⟩ //

⟨a → A⟩s this ⟨- the⟩ ⟨+ is⟩ essential in art, the probleme /
is to evoke this feeling -- not to represent /

⟨- the⟩ particular ⟨+ itys of⟩ forms. ⟨+ [verwijzingsteken:] **N**⟩ ⟨- The true image⟩ /
⟨- of⟩ //

⟨- In art plastic⟩ Generally plastic art is /
considered to be an ⟨- este⟩ esthetical result of /
modelling forms. In this way particu- /
lar forms ⟨- became⟩ ⟨+ become ⟨- are⟩⟩ ⟨- this essential content⟩ ⟨+ predominant and⟩ /
⟨- of art⟩ expression in art. ⟨- How directly li-⟩ ⟨+ and seeing now thus⟩ /
⟨- ving and comprehensible for⟩ ⟨+ unified with⟩ subjective /
⟨- feelings and this is⟩ ⟨- the⟩ ⟨+ its⟩ intrinsic ⟨value → expression⟩ /
⟨- is obscured, remains but⟩ is obscured ⟨+ , oppressed⟩ ⟨+ in art⟩ [verwijzingsteken:] **X** /
⟨- It is clear that⟩ Plastic expression ⟨- is thus⟩ /
⟨+ not only⟩ ⟨- more than ⟨+ then⟩ and independant of particular forms⟩ ///

[*verwijzingssteken:*] **X** for those who like to see it clearly /
manifest <- For others it becomes more /
real who, unifie subjective feelings <+ need in order to feel <+ the> <+ their> intrinsic \neg
expression) /
<- with particular forms and thus limite /
of art, need to unifie partical feelings /
with particular forms,) //
For others <+ with <particular feelings <- are> predominant \rightarrow predominant particular feelings> \neg
this expression is more living /
through the predominance of <+ the> particularitys /
of form. <- They need to be able to unifie) /
their feelings with) But exactly by this /
predominance the intrinsic value of <+ plastic> art is /
not understood but only vaguely felt.) //

[*verwijzingssteken:*] **N** Plastic art <- remains> <+ is> <- thus> plastic <- not> /
<- as long as it has> <+ when it expresses <- the> reality and space by> concrete <- expressive> \neg
means. /
<- to express reality and space. Even planes) /
Particular limited forms can be <- abstr) /
represented in abstraction. <+ as well as through particular forms,) relationship can /
be <- established> expressed through volumes, /
planes, <- even by further abstracting> <- by><+ and) /
lines. <- It is "art" through the action of) /
<- its expressive means the relationship) /
Plastic art is "art" through <- the dynamic) /
<- action> <+ of the relationships in dynamic action> of its expressive means and through /
the way in which these /
are represented. /
Until modern time, tradition and predominance /
of subjective feelings have concealed this thruth. ///

[verwijzingssteken:] **F** by means of the relationships /
of space and form. //

⟨- but ⟨-s tron⟩ more true when these forms /
are ⟨- excluded⟩ reduced to ⟨+ is⟩ illuminated⟩ and) /
is solely an establishment of ⟨- palpable⟩ /
an image of reality ⟨+ (space and form)⟩ ⟨- which⟩⟨+ that⟩ unifies us /
with ⟨- its this reality⟩ it ⟨+ *[verwijzingssteken:]* **F**⟩ ⟨- It depends on⟩ /
or mentality which) The chois of the /
expressive means, ⟨- partcular⟩ forms in /
their particular or general aspect, ⟨- planes⟩ /
volumes and planes is dependent on our /
mentality and feelings. //

It is this reciproque action that evolves our /
vitality: it makes forms, volumes and /
planes ⟨+ not only⟩ ⟨+ the relationship of⟩ living for us, but makes us see /
⟨- the⟩ equilibrium.) ⟨- through⟩ ///

The Art of the Past and Modern Art.

We have to see whether modern art is really progress or decay. /
 We must compare both the new and the old expressions in the culture /
 of plastic art. But where is the boundary between the old and the /
 modern? If we follow the development of plastic art from the past /
 to the present, we see a gradual detachment from the natural vision /
and a progressive determination of the real expressive means. We /
 see no sharp division between the art of the past and modern art. The /
 two expressions dissolve into each other, until, in modern times, /
a real difference of expressive means - forms, colors, spatial /
 relationships - is created. //

However, everyone feels a difference in the conc(⟨pe → ep⟩)tion of /
 the two expressions, even when the subject in both is identical. /
 It cannot be otherwise, because the men of the past, living under /
 quite different conditions, obviously must have had ⟨- [x]⟩ different /
 conceptions. Much that was veiled in the past is now clearer. Plastic /
 art, as well as life, makes this apparent. Human culture - science, /
 technics, the whole of our daily life - has developed with results: /
 it has created another reality out of the past. Plastic art, as well /
 as life, is emerging from ignorance toward understanding. If this /
 statement seems contradicted by destructive events, both art and /
 reality reveal that it is nevertheless true. But we must remember /
 that life, which is continuous growth, is free from time and space, /
 and it creates through destruction and construction. //

For modern man, the great art of antiquity reveals itself more /
 or less as darkness, even when it is not dark or tragic; a white /
 marble statue expressing peaceful, dreamy romanticism, a devoutly ///

religious conception can be as oppressive as a darky, murky picture. //

In general, the past has a tyrannic influence, which is /
difficult to escape. The worst is that there is always something /
of the past within us. We have memories, dreams - we hear the old /
carillons; enter the old museums and churches; we see old buildings /
everywhere. Fortunately, we can also enjoy the modern constructions, /
marvels of science, technique of all kinds, as well as modern art. /
We can enjoy real jazz and its dances; we see the electric lights of /
luxury and utility; the window displays. Even the thought of all this /
<+ is> gratifying. Then we feel the great difference between modern times /
and the past. //

Modern life and art are annihilating the oppression of the past. /
Progress in communication, production, concurrence in trade, the /
struggle for livelihood have created a lighter environment, even when<- s> /
the inevitable remains of the past dominate. Electric signs, posters, /
technical constructions of all kinds, compensate for the dearth of /
sufficient new architecture. //

In war, many relics of the past are destroyed, among them /
many beautiful specimens of art. Obviously it is hard to see /
beautiful things disappear. But life, as continuous progress, is always /
right. Eventually another environment nearer to our present mentality /
will be created. But where? In the same places? In the same countries ? /
It is important that the new constructions must not be /
creat<[xx] → ed> in the spirit of the past; they should not be repetitions /
of what has been previously e<px → xp>ressed. It must become clear that /
everything should be the true expression of modern times.//

Like our environment, modern art reveals change. All modern /
art shows a conception that <+ con>forms to the time, and this is true /
even of the academic art which continues to express itself in the ///

traditional way. //

It would be erroneous to limit modern plastic art to narrow /
frontiers. Two principal expressions exist: one of them uses more /
or less naturalistic forms and colors; the other employs more or /
less purified means of expression. These two expressions appear /
under different names, but all names are approximate, partial, and ⟨- ,⟩ /
therefore, misleading. //

It appears as though these two expressions oppose each other, /
but when we observe that in different way both show the same /
search for freedom, then we see their unity. For all modern art /
reveals a liberation from the oppression of the past. //

Modern art rejects the methods of expression used in the past, /
continues its real content. It continues what the art of the past /
began: the transformation of natural vision. //

All the art of the past shows an exaggeration of the tension /
of lines and forms, changes in the natural colors and proportions: /
a transformation of reality's natural aspect. Art has never been a /
copy of nature, for such a copy would not have been strong enough /
to evoke human emotion. The living beauty of nature cannot be copied. : /
it can only be expressed. //

Modern times creates a greater transformation of reality; some- /
times by means of freer composition, freer colors and forms /
(academic art, realism, surrealism) and sometimes by a more con- /
sequent transformation of forms and their relations. (abstract art) /
Bound together by unchangeable plastic laws, the different tendencies /
of modern art continue the struggle for a more real establishment of /
the true content of art. But to accomplish this, freedom is necessary. /
⟨- Art and life⟩ ///

Art and Life Need Freedom.

Plastic art shows that whatever conceals its real content /
suppresses art. Art's progress contains and therefore requires /
 deliverance from this oppression. The culture of art is the
continual search for freedom. As in human life, it is continually /
in search of freedom of thought and action. But human culture is /
 long and complicated by the fact that men are individual and /
 different and new human beings are continually being born. Each /
new generation has to obtain its own experience., to begin its
its individual culture from that point which progress has already /
reached. The choice seems to be between past and present, but in /
 reality progress must be followed. It is obvious that because of /
 the inequality of men, simultaneous equal progress is impossible. /
But progress continues - it does not wait. Fortunately everything /
 is moving in a more accelerated tempo, for the light of modern /
 times makes the way clearer. //

The inequality of men is also manifest in art and is an /
 obstacle to simultaneous progress. Artists are mutually different /
 and new artists continually come into being. Instead of continuing /
 and developing art's real progress, young artists would seek for /
 something "new." But because art is intuitive creation in a free /
 domain, all obstacles are more easily overcome than in life. //

It is right that a new generation should be opposed to /
 convention and go its own way. But there is a danger when there is /
 conflict with existing progress, and this is what often happens in /
 art and in life. Conflict arises out of personal convictions and personal /
 interests, and thus progress is delayed. The inequality of men do s /
 not, however, involve the degradation of society. As long as freedom /

exi ///

exists, progress can be continued. This does not mean that egoism /
 is excluded. To a certain degree, the difficulty of maintaining /
 and creating an existence and livelihood requires it. Particular /
 interest is one of the factors that prevents social life from /
 being free. Art is disinterested and for this reason it is free. //

Humanity is constly developing toward freedom. More and more, /
 the world becomes conscious that unity must be created as in art /
 by the stablishment of purer forms and purer mutual relationships. /
 Time proves that humanity, despite all its deviations, is always /
 moving in the right direction. Aside that which we consider wrong, /
 better social forms and mutual relations are evolving - the con- /
 sequence of necessity. But as long as there are tyrannical powers /
 that seek to create a false unity by force, no better world order /
 is possible. Humanity, as well as art, needs freedom. Just as in /
 art, where freedom can be approached by equivalent relationships /
 of varied forms, social life can approach freedom in spite of the /
 inequality of men. But the culture of plastic art shows that real /
 freedom requires mutual equivalence. //

Plastic art shows that real freedom is not mutual equality /
 but mutual equivalence. In art, forms and colors have different /
 dimension and position, but are equal in value. In the same way, /
 through greater mutual equivalence of individual elements, our /
 life can be better than it is now. By its freedom, art always /
 creates a certain mutual equivalence of its composing forms, and /
 shows the need for this freedom in human life. However, because of /
 the inequality of men, a certain constraint must establish our /
 social life, and reality manifests that this can exist without /

tyranny. But the most import ///

tyranny. But the most important constraint is that which social life /
itself imposes upon the individual. It is logical for this a certain /
degree of individual development is needed. //

The Real Content of Art.

History, actual events, and above all, the real expression of /
plastic arts clearly show the evil of oppression and the need /
for freedom. The problem "What is art?" cannot be solved by explain- /
ing our personal conceptions, for these will vary according to /
individual feeling. Actually, plastic art is manifested in two /
principal tendencies: the "realistic" and the "abstract." The first is /
viewed as an expression of our aesthetic feelings evoked by the /
appearance of nature and life. It has been stated that the latter is /
an abstract expression of color, form, and space by means of more /
abstract and often geometric forms or planes; it does not follow /
nature's aspect and its intention is to create a new reality. //

These definitions are incomplete and often misleading. Even the /
most abstract art does not arise from an inner source alone. /
As in all art, its origin is in the reciprocal action of the individual /
and the environment and it is inconceivable without feeling. /
Realistic art as well as abstract art is an expression of form and /
space: the difference results from different conceptions and the use /
of different expressive means. In spite of particular definitions, /
art shows only one necessity: the expression of the beauty of vitality, /
which is obscured in life. Beauty is relative because men are mutually /
different. The fact that the perception, feeling and conception of /
beauty continually progressing, parallel with all progress, is /

too much neglected. Attachment (is→to) a merely conventional conception ///

of ⟨- baity⟩ beauty hinders a true vision of it. When the conception /
of beauty does not change in a progressive direction, there is /
something wrong in human life: it is either at a standstill or in /
regression. //

Art is the expression of truth as well as of beauty. We /
do not know what complete truth is. We only observe many truths, /
all transient and changing. Plastic art shows us that the purest /
expression of truth is the purest expression of vitality; it is the /
most constant expression in art, the most free of subjective and /
objective oppressive particularities. As the esthetic expression /
of ⟨- the⟩ vitality ⟨+ ,⟩ ⟨- of⟩ pure life, all art is true, but it shows truth /
in different degrees of clarity. It is the same in human life. W⟨eh → he⟩n /
self interest stands in the way, truth is suppressed and life appears /
to degenerate temporarily. But the age-long culture of art shows /
that life destroys all that is untrue. //

To make a descriptive definition of the deepest content of /
art is impossible as to define the deepest content of life. Art is /
created through intuition. In our daily, social, and intellectual /
life, all of which are only partial expressions of vitality, /
intuition can lose its force due to many forms of oppression. But /
in art intuition is free, insofar as it is not oppressed by /
subjective factors. //

In art, the expression of vitality - pure life - is that /
“something” which is identical in all art. That “something” is also /
revealed in Nature and in all reality. Due to different causes, such /
as changes of light, the appearance of nature and reality is not /
constant. In plastic expression, a work of art is constant. Vitality /
reveals itself as dynamic continuous movement in equilibrium. ///

A study of plastic art shows us that it establishes dynamic / equilibrium through a rhythm of forms, lines, and colors in a manner / that evokes esthetic emotion. It depends upon our individual / conception “how” dynamic equilibrium will be established and “how” / it will be seen. The expressive means by which the rhythm of forms, / lines, colors is established are not only these, but also the empty / space between them. Plurality of forms, lines, colors and empty / spaces create relationship. In single forms, the proportions of / the different parts of these forms represent the relations that / create rhythm. It should be emphasized that forms, colors, lines, / spaces are as important as the relationships, and conversely, all / means of expression determine the character of the rhythm. The / same is true in social life: the constituent elements are as / important as their mutual relations. //

We have already seen that the culture of plastic art, from / its origins, shows a progressive determination of relationships, / until today relationship can be established only through the / elements of form, purified color and determined space. On the / other hand, we see a progressive reduction of forms and colors / and a growing determination of space. This reduction of form and / color - a freeing of form and color from their particular appearance / in nature - is necessary to free rhythm, and consequently art. / Clearer rhythm produces clearer equilibrium. //

In nature, the appearance of things is so expressive, so / “living,” that the tendency is to feel only harmony and to ignore / rhythm. If art is to give us the feeling of reality, it cannot / follow reality’s aspect. Art has to accentuate rhythm, but in such / a manner that rhythm dissolves in unity. ///

The purest rhythm must be the purest expression of life. But /
 seeing and creating are always more or less subjective. In art /
 although the individual emotions are always differently evoked, /
 all expressions of rhythm are true. But objectively, all particular- /
 ities of forms and colors oppress pure rhythm. Whatever our feelings /
 and conceptions may be, the culture of plastic art shows the way /
 of progressive expression. This, however, can only assist us to /
 strengthen our conception and to control our feeling - it cannot /
 make us create art. It is the same in life. Nothing can tell us /
 what we have to do. Religion, philosophy, science and art express <+ ?> /
 the general paths of human progress. These paths can be a help or /
 a hindrance according to individual development but they cannot /
 dictate this development. //

The art of the past established rhythm not only veiled by /
 subject matter and particular forms, but oppressed by the spirit of /
 the past. When we became more liberated from this oppression, /
 Modern art was born. In our time, rhythm is more and more accentuated, /
 not only in art, but in mechanized reality and in the whole of life. /
 Marvelously determined and full of vitality, it is expressed real /
 jazz, swing, and Boogie-woogie music and dance. //

As a consequence of the accentuation of rhythm and the /
 reduction of natural forms and colors, the subject loses its importance /
 in plastic art. For some, this fact is a gain; for others it is a /
 loss. For some, the subject is a help; for others it is an obstacle /
 to the enjoyment of the real content of art. Objectively, the /
 subject is more or less tyrannical. It thrusts plastic art into /
 literature, psychology, philosophy - narrative. To enjoy the pure ///

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plastic expression of a work of art, one has to rule out /
the psychological factors that the subject awakens. //

All Modern Art is distinguished by a greater relative freedom from /
the oppression of the subject. Impressionism emphasized the impression /
of reality more than its representation. After the Impressionists /
all art shows a relative negation of Nature's aspect: the Cubists /
delivered a further blow; the Surrealists transformed it; /
the Abstract artists excluded it. //

Whether obscured or clarified, rhythm expresses dynamic /
movement through the continual opposition of the elements of /
composition. By this means, plastic art expresses <+ dynamic> <action → action> in a real /
plastic way. It creates <+ this> action by the tension of the forms, lines, /
and the intensity of the colors -- and in this is its force. /
In art, we distinguish oppositions of position and dimension. /
The principal, the most exact, and the only constant opposition of /
position is the right angle, in which two straight lines are opposed. /
In all, the function of rhythm is to prevent static expression through /
dynamic action. //

In art, as in life, it is the equivalence and not the equality /
of opposite factors that creates unity. Art shows that difference /
in power and capacity exist and are necessary, but abuse of these /
factors is fatal. Art and life show that oppositions produce the /
continual destruction and construction of forms necessary to /
approach the establishment of complete life. In plastic art opposing /
factors annihilate each other in such a manner that there is no /
oppression: the result is unity. In human life, we see oppositions /
mainly as Good and Evil. The reciprocal action of these oppositions /
forms the rhythm of human life: it brings life toward unity. Thus, ///

seeing Evil perform its purpose, the acceptance of it becomes /
obvious. But plastic art affirms that to create unity, we have to /
oppose Evil with what is called Good. //

In Plastic Art we see the mutual oppression of forms and colors /
annihilated by the creation of mutual equivalent values. Whereas in /
art, this is a moral struggle, in life, the struggle is physical /
as well. In life the physically strongest seems to dominate. How /
is oppression to be vanquished? How is equilibrium to be created? /
How are equivalent values to be established? Time must solve these /
problems. For those who can see it, the way is revealed in life and /
in art. Life being intrinsically in equilibrium ends oppression /
through the resistance created by itself. Then a new and better life /
becomes certain. //

The liberation from oppressive factors can be clearly seen /
in the development of architecture. In general architecture of /
the past absorbed painting and sculpture, in order to create works /
of art. In this way, architecture was oppressed by painting and /
sculpture and painting and sculpture were oppressed by architecture. /
Modern architecture attempts to free itself from this oppression, /
compelled to do so by practical and economic exigencies. Through /
reciprocal action, it developed its essential character simultaneously /
with painting and sculpture. However, in this way, the purification /
of modern architecture has not reached the completeness necessary /
to satisfy our moral as well as our practical exigencies. //

In order to reach completeness in a new way, modern architecture /
has to realize in its buildings the essential content of painting. ///

and sculpture. It must establish pure relationship through the /
 pure means of expression: form and color. This signifies that it /
 has to establish equivalent proportions and not employ color merely /
 as decoration, but as a constructive part of the building. /
 Transformation of the traditional means of enrichment - paintings /
 and sculptures - is insufficient. These remain harmful to pure /
 architecture. Displacing easel paintings with mural paintings is /
 even a greater destruction of the architectural construction. //

Only planes and volumes in pure color can conform to the new /
 constructive means. To accomplish pure expression "painters and /
 sculptors" are necessary, because the capacities obtained in /
 painting and sculpture can lead to the completeness of the technical /
 part of building. //

For those who would live in this architecture, the existence /
 of pictures and statues and with them their oppression would /
 be ended. We can see "art" as the substitute that compensates for /
 lack of beauty in life. //

PIET MONDRIAN ///