

# BAUHAUSBÜCHER

EDITORS:  
WALTER GROPIUS  
L. MOHOLY-NAGY

PIET MONDRIAN

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# NEW DESIGN

NEOPLASTICISM  
NIEUWE BEELDING

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**FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE FUTURE**



# NEO-PLASTICISM

## THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE OF PLASTIC EQUIVALENCE

Although art is the plastic expression of our aesthetic emotion, we cannot therefore conclude that art is only “the aesthetic expression of our subjective sensations.” Logic demands that art be the *plastic expression of our whole being*: therefore, it must be equally the plastic appearance of the *nonindividual*, the absolute and annihilating opposition of subjective sensations. That is, it must also be the *direct expression of the universal in us*—which is the *exact appearance of the universal outside us*.

The universal thus understood is that which *is* and *remains constant*: the more or less *unconscious* in us, as opposed to the more or less *conscious*—*the individual*, which is repeated and renewed.

*Our whole being* is as much the one as the other: *the unconscious and the conscious, the immutable and the mutable, emerging and changing form through their reciprocal action*. This action contains all the misery and all the happiness of life: misery is caused by *continual separation*, happiness by perpetual rebirth of the *changeable*. The immutable is beyond all misery and all happiness: it is *equilibrium*.

Through the immutable in us, we are united with all things; the mutable destroys our equilibrium, limits us, and separates us from all that is other than us. It is from this equilibrium, from *the unconscious*, from *the immutable* that art comes. It attains its *plastic expression* through *the conscious*. In this way, *the appearance of art* is plastic expression of *the unconscious and of the conscious*. It shows *the relationship* of each to the other: its appearance changes, but *art* remains immutable.

In “the totality of our being” the individual or the universal may dominate, or equilibrium between the two may be approached. This latter possibility allows us *to be universal as individuals: to exteriorize the unconscious consciously*. Then we see and hear *universally*, for we have transcended the domination

it no longer can exist morphoplastically. Through its quasi-abstract plastic means, it is possible for sculpture to *become aesthetic plastic expression through equilibrated opposition of expansion and limitation*—precisely when it is free of utilitarian or structural exigencies.

If the old sculpture and architecture to some extent determine space that would otherwise be empty and undefined, then the new sculpture (and equally the new architecture) determines it much more by reducing the capriciousness of the natural *through equilibrated composition and by focusing all its attention upon relationships*. Sculpture and architecture, until the present, destroy space *as space* by dividing it. The new sculpture and architecture must destroy *the work of art as an object or thing*.

Each art possesses its own *specific* expression, its *particular nature*. Although the content of all art is one, the possibilities of plastic expression are different for each art. Each art discovers these possibilities within its own domain and must remain limited by its bounds. Each art possesses its own *means of expression*: the *transformation* of its plastic means has to be discovered independently by each art and must remain limited by its own bounds. Therefore the potentialities of one art cannot be judged according to the potentialities of another, but must be considered independently and only with regard to the art concerned.

With the advancing culture of the spirit, all the arts, regardless of differences in their expressive means, in one way or another become more and more the plastic creation of determinate, equilibrated relationship: for equilibrated relationship must purely express the universal, the harmony, the unity that are proper to the spirit.

If the so-called plastic arts express themselves through more or less gross material, *music* and *verbal art* (insofar as it is “sound”) use far more tenuous materials. This is a capital difference that makes them entirely dissimilar arts.

If *noise* is transformed into *sound*, the properties of noise remain unchanged. Does noise take on limited form? If color takes form, it can be neutralized by opposition of color or of straight line: is the same reduction possible for *sound*?

*Verbal art* is the plastic *of sound* and *of idea*. Even the written word contains sound, although we do not hear it. In the present use of word, *purely abstract appearance* is veiled, confused by *materialized sound*, *traditional plastic exteriorization* and *bastardized idea*. Verbal art therefore cannot be *the direct plastic expression of the universal* through the plastic means now at its disposal. And yet ... it is clearly evident that abstract beauty will ultimately reveal itself in this art too. Just like music, verbal art will have much further to go than the so-called plastic arts in order to attain a truly new plastic.

It follows that the more easily the plastic means of an art can be purified, the more quickly it can attain the New Plastic. The different arts do not come to equal profundity at the same time, for being different appearances of the universal, they do not mature at the same time.

Verbal plastic will free itself far more slowly than painting from the domination of limiting form. Indeed, the word arouses *the individual* in us far more than does the natural appearance of the thing it expresses. The word has become *our representation* of perceptible reality. The word is also *utilitarian* (as an element of language). Because *the individual* dominates everywhere in the world, language finds its principal basis in the individual. Thus, attachment to individuality obscures the pure expression of the word. And even if the new spirit, in growing, succeeds in severing this attachment, the word will still preserve its individual *plastic expression*.

Nevertheless, the word, as an element of language, remains necessary to designate things. Separation between word-as-language and word-as-art would probably drive verbal art too far outside of life. That is why, where the so-called plastic arts are able to nullify form *directly*, verbal art will have to destroy form *indirectly* ... at least in the immediate future. The idea that a word signifies in our consciousness will be transformed through *a contrary plastic*, for this alone can free a word of its limitation. Then, by a natural transition, the new idea will approach the suppression of form. In the far distant future, the word will have to be *re-created without form*—it could *become “sound” of a new character, not limited* either as sound or as idea. The word could also be represented by image alone. Sounds, signs, or images would



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