ON MONUMENTALITY AND COLOR
(Written by Fernand Léger)

Colored space.
The craving for color is a natural necessity just as for water and fire. Color is a raw material indispensable to life. At every era of his existence and of his history, the human being has associated color with his joys, his actions, and his pleasures.
The flowers come into the home: the most usual objects cover themselves with color. Dresses, hats, make-up—all these things call for decorative attention the whole day long. It is color which remains the chief interest. Its action is multiple. Inside and outside, color imposes itself victorious everywhere.

Modern publicity has taken possession of color and roads are framed with violent-colored posters, which are destroying the landscape. A decorative life is born out of this main preoccupation, it has imposed itself upon the whole world.

So color and its dynamic or static function, its decorative or destructive possibilities in architecture, is the reason for this study. Possibilities for a new orientation in mural painting exist; they should be utilized.

A bare wall is a “dead, anonymous surface.” It will come alive only with the help of objects and color. They can give life to the wall or destroy it. A stained, colored wall becomes a living element.

The transformation of the wall by color will be one of the most thrilling problems of modern architecture of this present or the coming time.

For the undertaking of this modern mural transformation, color has been set free. How has color been set free?

Until the pictorial realization by the painters of the last
fifty years, color or tone, were fast bound to an object, to a representative form. A dress, a human being, a flower, a landscape, had the task of wearing color.

In order that architecture should be able to make use of it without any reservations, the wall had first to be freed to become an experimental field. Then color had to be got out, extricated, and isolated from the objects in which it had been kept prisoner.

It was about 1910, with Delaunay, that I personally began to liberate pure color in space.

Delaunay developed an experience of his own, keeping the relations of pure complementary colors (it was really the continuation on a larger and more abstract scale of the New Impressionists). I was seeking out a path of my own in an absolutely opposite sense, trying to avoid so much as possible complementary relations and to develop the strength of pure local colors.

In 1912, I got some pure blue and pure red rectangles into the picture ("Femme en bleu," 1912).

In 1919, with "La Ville," pure color, written in a geometrical drawing, found itself realized at its maximum. It could be static or dynamic; but the most important thing was to have isolated a color so that it had a plastic activity of its own, a plastic activity without being bound to any object.

It was modern publicity which at first understood the importance of this new value: the pure tone ran away out from the paintings, took possession of the roads, and transformed the landscape!

Mysterious abstract signals made of yellow triangles, blue curves, red rectangles spread around the motorist to guide him on his way.

Color was the new object, color set free. Color had become a new reality. The color-object had been discovered. It was about this time that architecture in turn understood how it would be possible to utilize this free color (color set free), its possibilities inside and outside the building.
Decorative papers began to disappear from the walls. The white naked wall appeared all of a sudden. One obstacle: its limitations. Experience will be able to lead toward the colored space.

The space, that I shall call the “habitable rectangle” is going to be transformed. The feeling of a jail, of a bounded, limited space, is going to change into a boundless “colored space.”

The “habitable rectangle” becomes an “elastic rectangle.” A light blue wall draws back. A black wall advances, a yellow wall disappears. Three selected colors laid out in dynamic contrasts can destroy the wall.

**Destruction of a wall**

The new possibilities are numerous. A black piano, for instance, before a light yellow wall, creates a visual shock, which is able to reduce the “habitable rectangle” to half its dimensions.

The visual and decorative revolution will appear even stronger if you put the pieces of furniture in an asymmetrical organization. Our visual education has been symmetrical. Modern scenery can be absolutely new if we employ asymmetry.

From a fixed dead condition in which no play, no fancy can be allowed, we are coming into a new domain which is absolutely free.

No possibility of interior arrangement was given to our imagination within the stiffness of the symmetrical order.

We all have been educated in this symmetrical tradition. It is very strong as most middle-class people are still bound to this traditional order.

An anecdote can bring out the strength of this habit of mind.

Living in the Parisian suburbs, I had in my room an old, large chest of drawers, on which I put some personal artistic objects. I liked to place them always in an asymmetrical way: the most precious thing was at the top and others in the middle.

I had a maid in my particular room even in Paris. I always found such a maid important in the house. They were placed on each side. I always had them, but a very small maid were placed in the kitchen.

Perhaps a roof"

It would be the destruction of the strength which exists.

The exterior of a building, its weight, its stiffness, is part of the colors and atmosphere.

The “exterior” is not a part of the interior walls.

Why not use it to play with the street and of a wall?

During the World War in Montparnasse; a friend of mine, talking about the thrill of going to Moscow, was asked to go to Moscow a yellow street.

I think that a man, who has the habitations of the new world, needs for polychromatic interiors in the increased space made for them.

No serious attention.

The poor man without the liberation through the house, but he can become the master of space. Because of his needs for light.

Color set freely.

The urban cit
from the walls. The white rectangle will appear even more radiant in an asymmetrical setting, and the walls have been symmetrical for a few if we employ...

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...an asymmetrical
Polychrome problem, interior and exterior: a shaded view of static façades leading, for instance, to an attractive central place. At this place I conceive a spectacular, mobile, bright monument with some possibilities of change (attractive, powerful means), giving it the same importance as the form of the church that Catholicism has so well succeeded in imposing upon every village.

Liberated color will play its part in blending new modern materials and light will be employed to make an orchestration of everything.

The psychological influences, conscious or unconscious, of these factors, light and color, are very important. The example of a modern factory in Rotterdam is conclusive. The old factory was dark and sad. The new one was bright and colored: transparent. Then something happened. Without any remark to the personnel, the clothes of the workers became neat and tidy. More neat and tidy. They felt that an important event had just happened around them, within them. Color and light had succeeded in creating this new evolution. Its action is not only external. It is possible, while leaving it to grow rationally, wholly to change a society.

The moral emancipation of a man becoming conscious of three dimensions, of exact volume of weight! This man is no more a shadow, working mechanically behind a machine. He is a new human being before a transformed daily job. This is tomorrow's problem.

Paris Exhibition, 1937. The organizers summoned a number of artists to try to find an attractive sensational effect; a spectacular effect, which in their minds would bribe the visitors to keep the fête in memory when they went back home. I proposed: Paris all white! I asked for 300,000 unemployed persons to clean and scrape all the façades.

To create a white, bright city! In the evening, the Eiffel Tower, as an orchestral conductor, with the most powerful projectors in the world, would diffuse along these streets, upon those white and receptive houses, bright many-colored lights (some airplanes would have been able to cooperate in this new fairy tale). A melodic melody which moves the world . . . My dream.

The cult of the old, shabby taste for ramsheque, esque, are they passing? The historic, stirring relics of the opportunity of other times.

The polychrome is known domain. In those green and blue others painted yourself depressed and a cup. A decorative.

Color in society tries to cover up. The humble becomes a real purpose. A decorative.

Color keeps on like music, allows the verity. But the verity, who has any retouching? How difficult it is to be too "true." The verity.

The work of art and an imaginative.

Pure color is color. But the nature. Color is a stenography of it has broken less restraint, sometimes within a zone of creative.

The future will be a combination between the art and sculpture. Since
in this new fairy scene). Loud speakers would have diffused a melodious music in connection with this new colored world . . . My project was thrown back.

The cult of the old patinas, of the sentimental ruins: the taste for ramshackle houses, dark and dirty, but so picturesque, are they not? The secular dust which covers the historic, stirring remembrance, did not permit my project the opportunity of realization.

The polychrome clinic, the color cure, was a new unknown domain beginning to thrill young doctors: some green and blue wards for nervous and sick people, some others painted yellow and red, stimulating and nutritious for depressed and anemic people.

Color in social life has indeed a great role to fill. Color tries to cover over humdrum daily routines. It dresses them up. The humblest objects use it as a concealment of their real purpose. A bird on a handkerchief, a flower on a coffee cup. A decorative life.

Color keeps within itself its eternal magic which, like music, allows truth to be wrapped around. The men who like truth, who like to think of living with it raw, without any retouching, are scarce. Creators in all domains know how difficult it is to use truth, how it becomes dangerous to be too "true." Expressive strength resides in a balanced verity.

The work of art is a perfect balance between a real fact and an imaginary fact.

Pure color is more true in the realistic sense than shaded color. But the majority of the people like shaded colors . . . Color is a strength with two sharp knives. Sometimes when it has broken loose it attacks and destroys without any restraint, sometimes it lightly enfolds things and objects within a zone of good taste, which is called "la vie décorative."

The future will certainly belong to the effective collaboration between the three major arts: architecture, painting, sculpture. Since the Italian Renaissance, which was a time
of fullness for these three arts, no epoch has been able to keep this artistic collectivity alive.

It is for us to undertake this problem though under another aspect. The successive liberations which, since Impressionism, have allowed modern artists to escape from the old constraints (subject, perspective, copy of the human form) allow us to realize a wholly different architectural unity.

New materials, liberated color, the liberty of invention are able to transform the problem and to create new spaces. It is especially in the measuring of quantities, in a conscientious rationalism, that modern architecture must impose itself as the orchestral conductor of this collaboration. The present sickening profusion, this heaping up of works of art, should be avoided: they are making the art of the Renaissance into a confusion without example. A measure, a rule, the acceptance of constraints, a discipline, should be accepted by all three parties. This should be the basis of any collective work.

Daily we hear the word “beautiful”: the beautiful bridge, the beautiful automobile. This feeling of beauty which is awarded to useful constructions is a proof of the enormous need which men feel within them for an escape through art.

The same term is used for a lovely sunset. There is then a common term between natural beauty and manufactured beauty.

Then why not make, why not manufacture the monument of beauty?

Useful for nothing, a magnificent place to repose, which would be a shelter for the anonymous crowd during their enervating day with its hurried rhythm, which is our cadence. It is possible to realize it, with the use of the new liberties, by means of the major arts: color, music, form. Everything is set free! Let us think of former times, when so many magnificent temples were built, which mark and express those passed civilizations.

It would be unbelievable that ours should not achieve its popular temple, its popular public park, the means of planning the most visual, the most harmonious path and fixes the gaze.

Architecture cannot remain utilitarian. In each age man is more free for a freer sense than the previous one.

The exaltation of the game is not the same as that of the temple must for the man of today, important as this is for the man of yesterday.

Imagine a day without the sharp and light steeple, round and square, factory chimneys and factory chimneys... the two art forms blended.

Man enthusiastic, peaceful, happy, expresses his joy in the same way as that of the man of tomorrow's work.
its popular temples. Architecture, in every time, has been the means of plastic expression most sensitive to the people: the most visual, the most grandiose. It dominates the view and fixes the gaze.

Architecture can be aggressive or welcoming, religious or utilitarian. In every case it is "ready for use" for us in a freer sense than ever before.

The exaltation of 80,000 spectators watching a football game is not the climax but the end of civilization. The new temple must foresee an answer to a natural need as important as this is for a great sports show.

Imagine a dazzling point, in which the feeling of bright, light steeples, religion, the need for verticality, high trees and factory chimneys would come to be unified and blended.

Man enthusiastically lifts his arms above his head to express his joy in this elevation. To make high and free. Tomorrow's work.