

I have often spoken in my explanation of Mondrian's work about unity and multiplicity, infinite and finite, variable and constant, suggesting possible analogies between Neoplastic space and existential reality. I shall now develop this aspect in greater depth.

The meeting of two perpendicular lines gives birth in *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (*BBW*) to small squares (**D 1, 2, 3**). These can be seen as parts of one line inside the other.

It has been asserted that the relationship between the lines and the small squares is one of interaction between a space of infinite extension (absolute space of an exclusively horizontal or exclusively vertical nature) and a finite space (the small square) that seeks instead to concentrate and maintain equilibrium between the two opposing directions (**D 1, 2**).

Mankind also lives in a condition of inner duality. The human being experiences a finite dimension in relation to the infinite space of the universe in much the same way as the small square (finite) on a line (infinite) in a two-dimensional space.

The locating of a small square on a horizontal or a vertical line generates opposition respectively with its own vertical or horizontal component. The small squares move back and forth between the horizontal and vertical lines so as to rectify every instance of momentary imbalance (**D 3**).

It often occurs in our lives that internal imbalance generates external movement (action) and the attainment of a new internal equilibrium is then challenged by a new external situation in a constant dialectic between interior and exterior.

In *BBW* external space (lines) is internalized (planes) and internal space is then externalized.

We have already observed this dialectic between exterior and interior in the *Evolution* triptych of 1911 (**34.2**).

Internalizing the exterior means opening up, going beyond the narrow boundaries of the conscious self, and allowing this to be enriched as far as possible by the unpredictable diversity of the world, not only the external world but also the internal, the almost infinite reality that we bear within us and often find it difficult to decipher.

It means taking cognizance of the duality existing within us; understanding that our every act (thought or action) is the result of opposing drives, just as every small square or plane of *BBW* is born out of impulses that unavoidably undergo a vertical shift while intent on developing horizontally and vice versa.

The equilibrium attained between exterior and interior is never static. Neoplastic space is therefore grounded on a dynamic relationship between opposing entities. This is why the unity of **45** opens up again and the planes of *BBW* are less than permanent. These are moments of equilibrium attained, lost, and then regained in a new form. The greater the effort to establish an equilibrium in a stable and absolute form, the more it opens up to a new movement making it unstable and relative. So it is in our lives.

In *BBW* an infinite space (lines) becomes finite space (planes), the external internal, and multiplicity unity. Opposing concepts assume the same value but only through a dynamic process that ideally reunites the two contrasting aspects without either being able to obtain permanent value on its own. In a dynamic vision, which therefore entails a certain temporal sequence, the duality present within us reveals an intrinsic unity, which is instead experienced as lacerating duality when a static vision, restricted to the particular facts of the moment, prevails.

The immediacy of the painted image is certainly very different from the much longer and more intricate processes of real life. Neoplastic space expresses the instantaneous life of the moment while simultaneously evoking processes that can last a long time in reality and ultimately suggesting the unity of all things, i.e. a dimension that we associate with the eternal. *BBW* is to be seen as a concentrate of space and time: what lasts the length of time required

for perception of the visual fact in the representational dimension of art can instead dilate and last for days, months, and years in the space-time of real life. The thousands of different situations that orchestrate the rhythms of our existence are condensed in the work of art that represents life in essential and hence abstract terms. If it were not abstract, if it were concerned with the fleeting aspects of each individual situation and thing, it would lose sight of the whole and be unable to express life at a universal level.

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The entire process observed in *BBW* can be summarized as an expanded space undergoing gradual concentration. In this light, we can regard the unitary plane and the entire painting respectively as synthetic and analytic or as complex versions of one and the same thing. I am thinking once again of the flower that looks like a condensed point when seen from a distance but reveals increasing complexity on closer observation. In addition to the external landscape, however, I am thinking also and above all of its internal counterpart made up of varied and contradictory signs that sometimes display a certain continuity and become like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, ultimately revealing a single overall design.

If we see the geometry of *BBW* as a two-dimensional representation of our inner space, we can interpret the various entities and planes of different colors as symbolizing the contradictory reality existing within us. Consider the inherent complexity of each and every one of us. We must all contemplate within ourselves the most disparate and sometimes apparently irreconcilable aspects, just as apparently irreconcilable as horizontal and vertical or yellow, red, and blue are in Neoplastic space. We must all know ourselves completely. Diversity must not prevail and invade the self, the many must not prevail over the one, but still less can the self avoid confrontation with multiplicity. The goal is to find equilibrium within oneself through continuous interaction with the external world. Discover to our deep sorrow that external conflict is often born out of unresolved tension within us.

We often feel the presence within us of conflicting selves that generate discordant animation. (Consider *BBW* and its planes, some vertical and some horizontal, some one color and some another.) Ours is the sometimes difficult task of understanding the sense of the conflict and opposition and finding a "dominant self" (the unitary plane) capable of endowing our actions with a sense corresponding to our true nature.

The unity we see in *BBW* is a vertical plane colored blue that succeeds in reaching a horizontal "soul" colored yellow through an equivalent plane colored red. All this is a synthesis of the greatest diversity, which is expressed in painting by means of the most contrasting values. *BBW* urges us to attain full and conscious self-fulfillment through a dynamic process.

We can regard the transition from the frenetic and precarious space of the small squares to the more constant space of the planes (from an external to an internal space) as a plastic symbol of the gradual consolidation of an inner world through resistance to the conflicting pressures of the external world (symbolized in *BBW* by the lines) and reinforcement of the equilibrium within (synthesis and the equivalence of opposites). Every small square has one part of itself (horizontal) that is opposed to the other (vertical). Every line strives to open up the concentration that every plane endeavors in its own way to consolidate and preserve. This generates a dialectical process of evolution.

Indian wisdom says that *the self is the friend of the self for those who overcome the self through the self*. Those who resist initial impulses and overcome situations of duality transform conflict with the self into synthesis and unity of being.

At the same time, however, the process of growth and enrichment would not be possible without conflict and opposition.

Will power makes it possible to resist the promptings of instinct and keep the inner space comparatively whole, but there would be no evolution and pro-

gress without the discordant pressures that put us to the test and thus afford the opportunity for self-consolidation. Will power with unity as its aim would be nothing without the temptations that seek to weaken it (the single straight line that runs contrary and threatens equilibrium and the synthesis of opposites). It is up to us to derive benefit and enrichment from temptation without yielding, to open up to the world without getting lost in it. I am thinking of Mondrian's work and the process of opening up and interpenetration established between unity and multiplicity.

It is essentially a question of measure and proportion. Neoplastic space tells us that the excessive predominance of any part of us will sooner or later generate an opposite reaction. The dynamic equivalence of opposites: multiplicity tends toward unity and unity generates new multiplicity. In *BBW*, as in life, excess generates its opposite. A traveler who keeps heading east will eventually arrive in the west. This is how things seem to work on this planet. This is how the space of *BBW* works. We are reminded of Dante Alighieri and his law of divine retribution.

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As pointed out above, the small square strives to concentrate space upon itself so as to maintain balance between the two opposing directions, each of which would seek to expand the same space exclusively in one way.

The tendency of the small square to restrain and counterbalance the dynamic space of the lines manifests itself in symmetrical configurations (**D 4**).

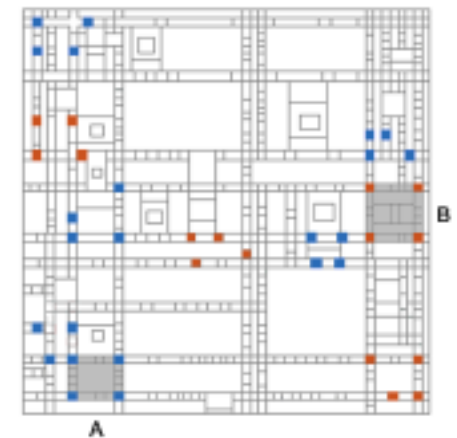
A symmetry is to be understood here as a measurable and hence finite interval of space generated within the infinite space of a line, a more orderly and constant section within a variable space. Human beings also endeavor during their lives to transform the variable flow of existence as far as possible into a more orderly and constant rhythm of foreseeable events.

In addition to the symmetries highlighted in **D 4**, which can be described as linear because they appear on the same line, *BBW* presents others that are generated between pairs of lines and tend to evoke a rectangular type of symmetrical configuration (diagram 72 **d**). Symmetries composed of four small squares of the same color can thus be seen at points A and B (blue at A and red at B).

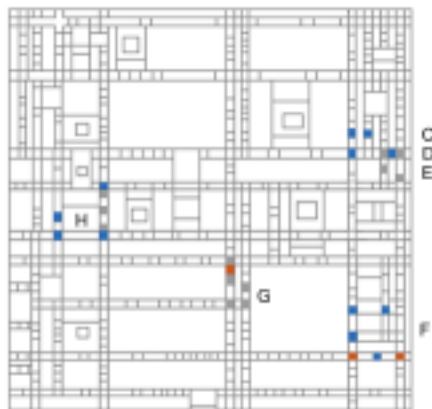
These are the only two fully achieved configurations as against the far larger number of potential symmetries left incomplete. I refer to situations where three small squares of the same color suggest a potential rectangle that is not completed due to the absence of the fourth. This missing part is often to be found in the immediate vicinity so that the eye can pick out an authentic symmetrical arrangement. The element that would have enabled the symmetrical design to attain full completion seems to be swept along by the dynamic movement of the line.

We thus have two opposing tendencies of the same space, which simultaneously expands and contracts, moving toward order and negating it at the same time. It is due to this opposition that the propensity of the small squares to form symmetrical configurations is often only partially realized. The geometry is precariously balanced between a tendency toward closed, static, regular space (symmetry) and another toward opening and movement that comes into operation as soon as the first nears completion.

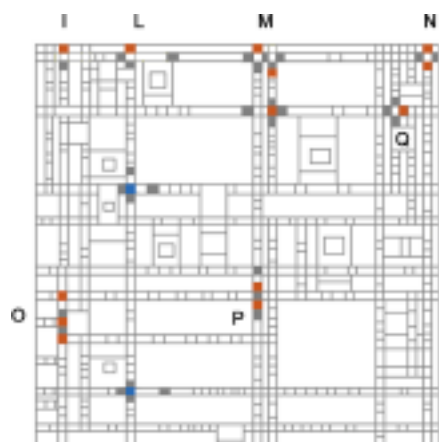
I am reminded of the conditions of human existence, mankind's efforts to introduce stability and certainty, and the way that life always calls our plans into question. The geometry of *BBW* expresses all this in abstract form.



72 d



72 e



72 f

Diagram 72 **e** shows a potential rectangular symmetry in blue (C) that remains incomplete while a linear symmetry of one blue and two grays is attained on the right (D). The latter appears to have appropriated the fourth small blue square from the former. The symmetry of one necessarily entails the asymmetry of the other. On observing the configuration (D), the eye intuitively feels the presence in the lower section of a third small gray square and then a fourth apparently alluding to a rectangular symmetry (E) that is immediately called into question by the small gray square to the right, which is dragged downward.

In the area marked F we see an attempted rectangular symmetry of small blue squares, the fourth of which suddenly moves downward due to the pull of a potential linear symmetry that is attained with two small red squares.

Area G displays another attempt at rectangular symmetry involving four gray elements. This is left incomplete because one of them is attracted by a small linear symmetry with a red center, which is again left unfinished in the upper part.

In area H a linear symmetry composed of three grays pushes upward a small blue square that could instead have served to complete a symmetrical rectangular configuration of four blue squares.

In all these cases, the symmetry of one entails the asymmetry of another.

Translating this geometry into existential terms, we are reminded that there are often situations in social life where the stability of one is a source of instability for another.

Then there are other situations in which the space displays tendencies toward order that remain incomplete.

Sequential observation of points I, L, M, N in diagram 72 **f** reveals the genesis of a small cross-shaped symmetry (N) made up of two reds and two yellows. The dynamism of the line prevails in I, three small gray squares begin to organize the space in L, the small red square above is symmetrically counterbalanced by another below in M, and the process is completed in N.

Other areas present potential cross-shaped symmetries that are left open due to the expansive momentum of the lines.

In O and P we see two sections of space tending toward symmetries that are not quite attained, the missing elements being respectively a small red square and a small gray square, both of which are located higher up.

In Q we see three small gray squares arranging themselves around a small yellow square and apparently intent

on forming a regular cross-shaped configuration. On the right, however, the fourth small square is red and constitutes the center of a small symmetry with two yellows. The second symmetry is an obstacle to the first. Here too, the symmetry of one involves the asymmetry of another.

As previously with **D 4**, all the areas highlighted in diagrams 72 **d**, **e** and **f** display both a tendency of the small squares to generate sections of space endowed with greater constancy (symmetries) and an opposite tendency of the lines toward disorder. As a result, some potential symmetries remain incomplete.

Following the various possible readings, we go from symmetrical to asymmetrical situations that then become new symmetries and so on in a constant alternation of order and disorder, design and "chance".

We thus understand that the transition from the space of the small squares toward the more stable space of the planes (as concisely illustrated in **D 5** and **D 6**) actually draws upon all of the failed symmetries just pointed out. The planes are the result not only of the two symmetries A and B (**D 5**) but also of many other attempts, only a few of which have outcomes in virtue of which the instantaneous and precarious space expressed with the small squares is consolidated in the more constant and lasting space of the planes.

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It will be necessary at this point to clarify an important aspect. When I describe the transformations of space observed in *BBW*, I talk about lines, small squares or planes, and cannot do otherwise than divide and separate one from the other. In reality, however, the geometry of the painting constitutes a whole. Space is expressed simultaneously in *BBW* as motion and as rest, alternating instances of expansion with others of concentration, infinite and finite at the same time.

It is not a question of a small square doing this or that but rather of a single space manifesting itself here in the form of a line and there in the form of a square, first as infinite space and then as finite space; a dynamic structure that concentrates to attain a more stable condition and then opens up and expands once again.

We could describe a small square as seeking, producing or transforming in a certain point but also as being sought, produced or transformed by the continuum of which it forms part. The space does not exist prior to the configurations it generates. It is not the shapes and "objects" that occupy an already given space but the space itself that is born at that moment and displays its metamorphoses through lines, small squares, and planes.

Agent, action, and object acted upon form a single indivisible structure in *BBW*, the symbol of vital energy that envelops and penetrates, flowing from one entity to another and between all the individual elements and natural forms in a unique and incommensurable overall design that human thought can only ever picture by dividing and separating one thing from the other. It is a continuum in which every entity that acts in a certain place is simultaneously acted upon by other entities. It is through necessity that we isolate, break down, and measure parts of the whole, speaking of cause and effect, subject and object, before and after. In *BBW* cause and effect are two aspects of the same process, as encapsulated in the dictum of certain Japanese sages that it is not the author who writes the book but the book that "writes itself" through the author. We believe that we are acting in response to our intentions in everyday life, and this is true. If we were able to observe things from another standpoint, however, we would realize that our intentions are not ours alone and do not depend always and exclusively upon our will.

At the level of everyday life, all individuals and all of their experiences appear as unique facts autonomously conceived and willed. From another viewpoint, however, all the individuals and their continuous interaction are revealed as a single flow of interconnected events that influence one another.

The point is to see the alternation of transient, contingent situations as a set of relations, to see what exists around us and within ourselves as an infinite process of unimaginable variety.

I am thinking of the space in *BBW* (**D 3**), where I see the representation of a constant exchange of energy that is generated between individuals in every

point and at every instant. Each element takes a morsel of energy from another and then passes it on to a third and so on (diagrams 72 **d, e, f**). There are involuntary connections that, unbeknown to us, fuel and partially guide our behavior. The circuits that are formed, the looks and gestures exchanged between individuals that constantly intersect and or go astray, harmonizing or sometimes openly clashing with our inner space, are examples of the continuum in which it is impossible to separate one thing from another.

As individuals, we constitute an infinitesimal part of this sea of events and therefore cannot grasp its reality as a whole, not least because it is an open and constantly changing structure. It is, however, strongly present and exerts an influence on us.

How are we to represent such a reality? Elusive and omnipresent at the same time, it is a flexible structure made up of visible and invisible parts that constantly expands and contracts, ethereal energy in a state of perennial transformation that flows unceasingly between individuals to unite them in one great breath known as *KI* in Japanese wisdom. The pulsating geometry of *BBW* is a visible instant of all this. The painting makes concrete what cannot be pinned down in life by its very nature. Art can make visible what we cannot stop and grasp. Paul Klee used to say that *"art makes the invisible visible."*

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I have often spoken during my explanation of the Neoplastic works about the aspects of change and constancy. Our days are also entities that are repeated but always in a new way (**D 3**) and, as stated above, we therefore seek to organize the unpredictable course of events into a more orderly and constant rhythm (**D 4**). We feel the desire to reduce and control the change that life brings with it, striving to consolidate the flow of our actions and give them concrete shape in artifacts demonstrating that the flux of time has been transformed into something of a comparatively more permanent nature (**D 6, 7, 8**). Works, ideas, children: elements able to give meaning and a sense of greater permanence to our passage through life. Can we not see a visual symbol of this in the chaotic multitude of small squares that come to form a single and more solid entity?

When we are born on this planet as individuals, we partake of an infinitesimal portion of cosmic energy that we must learn to manage, preserve, and consolidate in a more constant structure that we then return to the cosmos when our bodies dissolve. We are responsible for our soul, which is not wholly ours in actual fact. The process observed in *BBW* strikes me as representing this cycle. The ephemeral (the small square) attains greater solidity and duration (the unitary plane) through constant opposition before opening up and returning to the cycle of universal life.

The relationship between what changes and what maintains greater constancy regards not only individual but also collective life. Morality, laws, and institutions are tools that mankind uses in order to regulate and stabilize the unforeseeable flux of existence, to govern the variable relations between individuals and their interaction with the environment in which they live. It is by establishing rules and observing shared rituals that mankind endeavors to transform the instinctive life of the instant (**D 3**) into a more orderly sequence expressing cornerstones or certain values to be taken as points of reference (**D 4, 5, 6, 7, 8**).

The process analyzed in *BBW*-from lines to symmetries, then simple planes, and finally the unitary plane-tells us that life is change (the dynamic lines) but if people are to live, they need to reduce and stabilize the ever-changing flux of existence, which does not, however, allow itself to be governed all that much (the unitary plane flowing back into lines).

As Mondrian put it, *"It is important to distinguish two types of equilibrium in art: 1) static equilibrium and 2) dynamic equilibrium. It is always natural for human beings to seek static equilibrium. This equilibrium is obviously necessary for existence in time. But vitality always destroys this equilibrium in constant temporal succession. Abstract art is a concrete expression of this vitality."* ⁴¹

The lines, which express the maximum degree of energy and continue to infinity, represent vitality. The symmetries and planes, which express a measured space and are endowed with greater permanence, albeit not total immobility, represent the equilibrium required for existence in time.

In this dialectic between what persists and what changes, crucial importance will attach to establishing rules, laws, and institutions capable of remaining open to the changes that existence brings with it and hence of performing their regulatory function without stifling vital demands any more than necessary. When laws and institutions oppose the movement and transformations that life brings with it, all they do is generate greater unrest over time, which in turn generates greater resistance on the part of the institutions and so on in an exhausting vicious circle where it is ultimately life that prevails and not our "symmetrical" stubbornness. This is what human history teaches.

This is what is shown by the geometry of *BBW*, where space arrives at a certain degree of control and then opens up again to becoming.

From a social standpoint, the management of present-day complexities requires the capacity to address the variety of interests animating a modern democracy and at the same time an effort to direct the resources and actions of the social body toward objectives of common interest, to mediate between the various parties and interests so as to attain syntheses effectively representing the complexity of social life. This should be the task of politics, which has instead come to lose its ideal impetus after the so-called collapse of ideologies.

In social life too, greater importance now attaches than ever before to the ability to handle the relationship between the one and the many, moving constantly back and forth between the parts and the whole so as to avoid the predominance of either the multitude of particular interests or the will of the few. The former brings chaos and makes it impossible to work for the common interest; the latter brings the paralysis of democracy if not indeed oligarchy and dictatorship.

In a world that is being brought together through the process of globalization, it is essential to devise flexible systems where the general (the tendency toward synthesis) is in close contact with the particular (multiplicity) and the two terms are wholly interdependent. This is precisely what Mondrian endeavored to express with the constant dialectic between unity and multiplicity right up to his two last works (**72, 73**), where unity coincides with multiplicity.

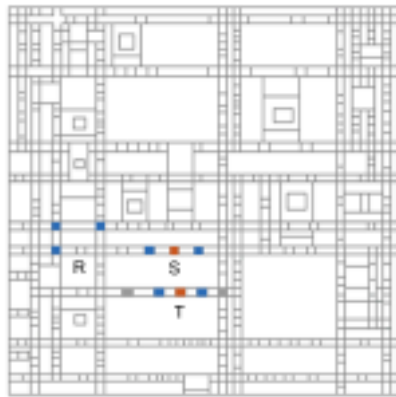
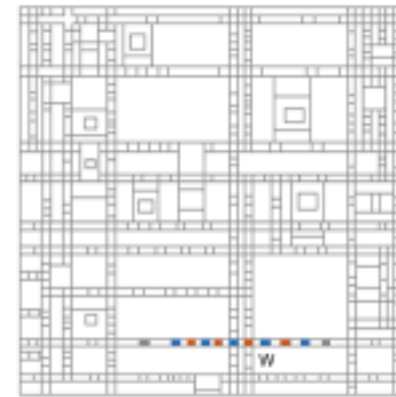
Would the fusion of unity and multiplicity at the social level perhaps mean achieving more effective political representation, manage the life of the polis in real time? This point would merit consideration in greater depth.

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Let us now consider another reading of the image, in which the three diagrams 72 **g**, **h** and **i** are to be seen in sequence as three successive phases of a single process.

I see a potential rectangular symmetry of small blue squares at point R, with the missing fourth element moved to the right to form a linear symmetry with a red center (S). On closer observation, I realize that this symmetry extends at the sides with two grays.

Beneath this I find a similar configuration (T) but with a gray appropriated on the right by a small symmetry with a red center (U). The two symmetries contend for the small gray square needed for the stability of both. Further down (V), I then see that the initial symmetry (S, T) is lost because there is no longer the small square gray to be contended for on the right, its place having been taken by a small red square. The symmetry (S, T) to which I had become attuned and which had remained comparatively stable during the process now appears to be breaking up. On broadening the visual horizon to the right,

72 **g**72 **h**72 **i**

however, I see that a new and larger symmetry is being formed (W). The equilibrium that I believed to have been lost is reasserted in a different and unexpected form.

With the transition from linear to rectangular symmetries and from these to new symmetrical configurations, the geometry of *BBW* urges us to envision our existence in its state of becoming, as a process and not as a static condition. We seek in life to preserve the equilibriums achieved, as though wishing to stop at a single stage along our way and take a certain symmetrical configuration (S and T, for example) as a permanent frame of reference. As Mondrian points out, however, vitality always destroys this equilibrium in the constant flow of temporal succession. Only by broadening our horizons and following pathways that appear unexpectedly can we encounter new situations of equilibrium that, although different, have the same value in the sense that they all express a larger or smaller portion of certain equilibrium, but not the particular situation that we once knew and upon which our previous equilibrium was founded. In life nothing is ever repeated in the same way. The situations change as do the addends; closer examination shows, however, that the substance of the result does not change over time.

When we find ourselves facing new situations, we tend to look for similarities with ones we have already experienced, even though we are well aware that they are something different. Unfortunately, we often fail to move beyond the old pattern, which becomes a "prejudice" with respect to the new.

With the alternation of symmetrical and asymmetrical spaces, *BBW* tells us that while appearing at the time to challenge a certain equilibrium (the small symmetry that appropriates a gray from a larger one), every instance of opposition can subsequently work in a broader context to generate a new and more stable balance (a larger symmetry). What appears negative today can become positive tomorrow.

Our plans are sometimes obstructed by random and apparently extraneous factors that can, however, perform a useful function in prompting us to reformulate a project during its execution and ultimately improve it. The opposition of events should always be welcomed as an opportunity to adjust and develop the initial idea. Only in this way can equilibrium and dynamic unity be attained between individual and universal interests, subject and object, thought and nature.

In everyday life, this presupposes a certain amount of patience, mental openness, and wisdom, qualities that are not always forthcoming among human beings.

The purpose of these reflections is, however, not to explain life but to show the relations between an abstract painting and life.

- Considering every single form of life in its precious and unrepeatable oneness but seeing it at the same time as part of the whole.
- Contemplating solid and void, the visible and the invisible.
- Evoking an infinite totality of which our everyday reality forms no more than a part .
- Contemplating the complex and contradictory nature of the human mind in a search for equilibrium and synthesis between opposing drives.
- Hoping to attain stable and permanent equilibrium while knowing that life is change.

These are some of the themes cherished by every religion and every form of wisdom.

These are themes addressed through forms and colors in *Broadway Boogie Woogie*.

The monotheistic religions see everything as resting on eternal and absolute unity. The polytheistic religions of countries like ancient Egypt or Greece proposed a variety of gods, a certain number of syntheses (figures symbolizing certain fundamental values), and a figure encompassing all the others. This could recall the various planes of *BBW* and the unitary plane expressing all the others in a synthesis.

Confining ourselves for the present to the external aspects of the various religious doctrines, we can say that the symbol of the Jewish religion is made up of two triangles, juxtaposed like Neoplastic lines, which attain an instant of unitary synthesis in a star-shaped configuration (the Star of David). The Ying-Yang symbol is again a synthesis of two opposing entities in a condition of dynamic equivalence. The Christian cross is a fusion of vertical and horizontal, with a predominance of the vertical in the Catholic version and an equivalence of the vertical and horizontal in the Orthodox. The "crescent moon" of the Muslim religion is a visible part of a circle that cannot be seen in its entirety, a unity of which we can glimpse only a part.

Broadway Boogie Woogie can be compared to the image of a cosmic dance of the universe as understood by Buddhism: constant interchange of elements, the ten thousand things that are really one, the illusory boundaries between the different entities, and the continuous melding of one into the other.

It is probably no coincidence that Mondrian's last painting was produced and remains in New York, a city where all of the world's cultures and religions stri-

ve to coexist, where the laboratory for a planetary society of the future has long been in operation.

Michel Seuphor had this to say in his monographic study published in 1956: *"For the first time in history, one of these prophets is an artist, a painter. For the first time, the presence of another world in this world is entrusted to a creator of images. (...) This time it is not a question of reading or interpreting but of seeing. (...) For those who know how to see, I believe that he succeeded in shedding light on the mystery."*⁴²

In point of fact, *BBW* is very close to what can be described as a sacred representation of life.

This thesis will be developed in greater depth through comparison of *Broadway Boogie Woogie* and two frescoes by Raphael in a second work now nearing completion.

Expressing themes of a spiritual nature through pure relationships of form and color means presenting them in a universal way that transcends the different languages and cultures for new human beings and citizens of the world. Here we have a possible spiritual path of modern thought, a sacred vision that is expressed in a precise language and is therefore no longer necessarily in conflict with science and modernity, a rational vision that is well aware of the imponderable aspects of life. All this is of crucial importance for a spirituality of the future.

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Another aspect of existential reality interestingly reflected in *Broadway Boogie Woogie* is the overcrowded space of metropolitan areas. Contemporary urban spaces often manifest themselves aggressively and severely test our ability to maintain balance between external stimuli and our inner world. The space at human height is never the same for more than thirty seconds in big cities. How can we contemplate and feel part of a landscape in a constant state of change?

Mondrian's Neoplastic compositions teach us to conceive harmoniously of space in a state of becoming. Just think of how unharmonious the space of our cities is and how frustrating it is for us as we experience every single thing, moment after moment, in a constant whirl of fragments, no longer able to see the individual parts as a whole. It would be better to make the space of our everyday life more lasting, but this cannot mean bringing it to a halt. We obviously cannot return to the slow rhythms of the human being on foot or horseback, to the more static and monolithic social values connected with the rhythms of life in an agricultural society. More realistically, we can instead work to transform chaotic urban flux into more harmonious patterns, harmony being understood as a more balanced relationship between the parts and the whole, between the dynamic and variable aspects of physical reality and the sense of greater constancy demanded by our inner world. I have spoken of this repeatedly during my explanation of Mondrian's paintings and it was, among other things, the point of departure for Cubism: the representation of dynamic space in a harmonious form.

In speaking about the relations between Mondrian's art and urban space, appearance is often confused with substance and somewhat crude examples are put forward. Comparisons are made and analogies discovered with disarming superficiality between the artist's abstract compositions and the rectilinear façades of modern buildings, thus demonstrating once again an inability to do more than scratch the surface of the Neoplastic vision.

The true link between Mondrian's visual thought and urban space lies not in the façades of buildings with yellow, red or blue windows but rather in the attempt to make the urban environment more homogeneous by transforming the manifold and fragmentary nature of external space into the continuity and

duration of inner space. This becomes possible through deft use of the criterion of equivalence in place of the idea of symmetry. These aspects will be addressed in greater depth in a forthcoming work that also discusses the urban space of New York City.

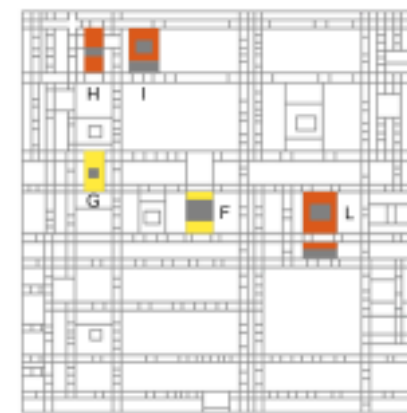
I shall give just one example for the present.

D 7 shows the transition from monochromatic planes to ones that develop an inner space and are therefore made up of two colors. This process begins with plane H (**D 6**), continues with plane L (**D 7**), and is completed with the three planes O, P, and Q.

I shall now reinterpret this process in terms related to the themes addressed in these pages. To this end, I shall use the two new diagrams appearing alongside, 72 **l** and **m**, which reproduce those planes under new designations.

Plane E, which presents a certain degree of vertical predominance, comes into contact with a gray horizontal segment. This juxtaposition of opposing thrusts generates movement (all opposition causes a buildup of tension that is released through movement) and the plane moves downward together with the segment, which thus becomes a gray strip inside plane F (diagram 72 **m**). In plane G the gray strip is transformed into a small square completely surrounded by a yellow plane.

The latter thus seems to represent the conclusion of the sequence initiated with plane E. The three planes E, F, and G would thus be three successive moments of a process through which a yellow plane internalizes a gray segment of line that then becomes a small square.

72 **l**72 **m**

On my reading of the three parts (E, F, G), we have a relational space in which three entities—seen as three different things in a static vision—become a single entity represented in its process of becoming. Multiplicity moves toward unity in a dynamic vision.

We have already shown the four points A, B, C, and D (diagram 72 **l**) as different moments of the same structure undergoing transformation (diagram 72 **f** - p. 142). The same also holds for the three planes H, I, and L (diagram 72 **m**), which can be seen by virtue of analogous colors as different instants of a single sequence through which a plane evolves.

This is how *BBW* should be seen, by contemplating the relational space between the different parts and perceiving the space between them more than the individual things in themselves. Nothing in *BBW* seems to have value other than in its reciprocal relationship with the other components.

If the space of our cities were constructed in this way, then we really could talk about relations between Neoplastic painting and architecture.

If the multitude of objects that make up an urban agglomeration presented some common elements recurring in different places and moments in such a way as to prompt a guiding thread in our mental space, if every architectural work—all of which being fully entitled to free and original expression—presen-

ted visible features shared with others, we would feel that those objects, though different and distant from one another, were constituent parts of a dynamic unity.

What was done in the first half of the 15th century by introducing order and symmetry into the erratic development of medieval façades should be done today, albeit bearing in mind that everything has changed in the meantime. The single viewpoint has multiplied into a succession of different viewpoints, i.e. dynamic sequences, and the concept of symmetry (static space) has thus given way to the concept of equivalence (dynamic space), which can confer homogeneity on a quantity and variety of different volumes that are no longer susceptible of standardization in terms of the older spatial coordinates. Just as every single object was formerly made up of parts gathered together in an organic whole (the façade), every object today becomes part of a continuum (urban space), which can thus be conceived again as a living tissue of interconnected parts.

In this connection, *mutatis mutandis*, I am reminded of the splendid Rome of the baroque era.

Learning from history, but without resting on the laurels of the past, we must address the challenges posed by present-day reality with courage, intelligence, and creativity, not least because we have moved beyond the fundamental modules of classical architecture, based for centuries on the proportions of the human body. Today these proportions are no longer crucial even for human activities, which have come to involve bodily extensions made available by technology. I am thinking, for example, of automobiles, which have come by now to constitute an authentic flow of objects in motion that interacts with the static volumes of architecture as literally understood: a stream of self-moving entities available for use as a rhythmic sequence of shapes and colors that could serve as the basic modules (the individual automobiles) of a developing architectural structure.

Seen all together, the automobiles that crowd our urban spaces create plastic sequences that appear and disappear within a few seconds. What is needed is the capacity to evoke harmony in that rapid development of space. One of the great challenges facing artists and architects today is to make space coincide once again with time. The little time available to us today must be capable of offering us all the mental space we need if our humanity is to manifest itself fully.

In my view, the question of values and content is primarily one of measures, proportions and relations, i.e. a question of form (for those who still believe in the difference between form and content).

It is no longer possible to apply the traditional architectural plans and orders in the dynamic context of the modern urban centers. These worked in the static and potentially symmetrical space of the Renaissance and Baroque eras where, among other things, the external landscape was always perceived at the same speeds (walking or riding). Today we perceive the urban environment at different speeds that cause the form and duration of architectural volumes to expand and contract within our mental space.

If only the complex and variable forms of the city could also evoke something more constant through equivalent proportions and analogies.

It would be necessary to discover an "architectural order" making it possible to reassemble the dynamic and disconnected signals of external space in more durable structures of internal space, an order no longer based solely on external objects but generated in real time between things and us. This would entail education in a new mental space. I regard the Neoplastic vision as constituting an excellent gymnasium for training the mind and spirit in this direction.

One interesting architectural example that not only moves beyond human proportions but also seems to evoke new ones more in keeping with the spirit of the time is the *Citicorp Building* on Lexington Avenue and 53rd Street in Manhattan, which I have no intention of examining at length here. Work in this direction is also being carried out in Berlin with very interesting results. Rome is instead content to settle for the masterpieces produced by past generations. In Italy the past often becomes a good excuse for doing nothing in the present.

Modernism has manifested itself not only in the two-dimensional space of the painting but also in the great efforts of architects to rethink the cities. The ideas of Gropius and Le Corbusier presuppose a new society. In speaking of phenomena as complex as cities, it is necessary to take variety as a common factor, to translate individual imagination, freedom of enterprise, and plurality of intent in terms of architecture and urban planning without losing sight of the overall context. The question of the relationship between change and constancy, multiplicity and unity, then becomes an economic, political, and social issue, and everything thus becomes much more complicated. The continuum evoked by Mondrian, in which each thing loses its particular nature to become part of a context of relations, presupposes a more highly evolved social and economic system than we have at present. So-called postmodern architecture has instead clumsily reintroduced symmetry, restoring the central role of the object and thereby preventing a dynamic vision of greater breadth. What a friend in Berlin used to call "post-mortem" architecture has in fact proved to be the plastic expression of a conception that was only apparently innovative but actually conservative all the way through, developed by potentates intent on maintaining their positions and largely unconcerned with the quality of people's lives in the future. Philip Johnson's *AT&T Building* on Madison Avenue in Manhattan is a clear example of this.

It may not be long before others discover new pathways of greater present-day relevance in line with the true ideals of socialism, a term largely misused in the course of the 20th century.

Mondrian put forward a utopian proposal to abolish art and achieve beauty in real life. Art would no longer be necessary once it had proved possible to attain the harmonies evoked by painting concretely among human beings. While a look around shows that this will take a long time yet, there are some positive signs. The Dutch artist was in no hurry and did not expect to see the world he had in mind established any time soon. He was well aware that it is not only creativity and technical expertise that count in life but also and above all economic, political, ethical, and religious factors. He thus understood that real progress would necessarily be slow and gradual. Others instead believe that certain changes can take place quickly and have no hesitation in proclaiming the failure of a project, whose significance they have barely grasped, if it is not fully achieved overnight.

The modern project foreshadowed by some masters of abstract-concrete art was something more than a fashion, which is what most of our contemporary visual "culture" unfortunately boils down to. In the case of Mondrian, the question was not only aesthetic but also ethical, social, and above all spiritual at the same time.

To tell the truth, a look around leads us to suspect not only that modernism has not been superseded but also that it has not even begun in its deeper sense.