

BBW - Diagram G: Plane 18 is the same size as plane 17 but consists solely of red and gray rather than the three primary colors. The inner space of the plane presents a gray quadrangle and two gray segments, one of which is part of a horizontal line running through the plane. The quadrangle is a sign of permanence and greater equilibrium between the two opposing directions while the two segments, especially the one belonging to the line, are signs of movement that accentuate the horizontal direction in sharp contrast to the vertical layout of the plane itself.

After the equivalence and the synthesis of three primary colors attained in plane 17, the colors are again reduced in plane 18 and the external dynamism of the lines reappears to generate new opposition.

The horizontal line running suddenly through the vertical plane tends visually to disrupt the previously attained equivalence of opposites. After the degree of comparative calm, constancy, and unity achieved in plane 17, spatial movement thus seems to reappear in plane 18. Unity opens up to external space and the colors are separated and flow back toward the more dynamic and variable space of the lines (19, 20).

The indication provided by plane 18 finds further confirmation in plane 19, where blue, yellow, and red are juxtaposed but no longer interpenetrate as they did in plane 17. The juxtaposition produces the impression of three separate planes, whereas the interpenetration combines the three colors in a single structure of greater stability. Note how the yellow on the right of 19 already seeks to cross the perimeter of the plane and flow into the yellow of the surrounding lines. Plane 19 can therefore be seen as plane 17 in the process of dissolution.

Configuration 20 possibly represents the conclusion of the process of reopening the unitary synthesis in that it can be seen as a continuation of the disintegration of 19.

Space proceeds from a comparatively static and wholly internal condition (17) toward one of growing instability (18) that is gradually transformed into the more dynamic and variable external space of the lines (19, 20).

Observe the seven BBW diagrams as a single sequence: The lines are first concentrated into small squares and then into various planes that became a single plane which expresses a synthesis of the composition and then re-opens to a multiplicity of lines. A variety of colored lines become a single plane of those three colors that then returns to the manifold and virtually infinite condition of the lines.

Objective unity (the totality of space, as previously expressed with the oval - **22** - and then with the continuity of the lines - **26** to **38** - becomes a subjective unity (the unitary plane) and then returns to the objective dimension expressed by the lines (formerly the oval). It is the same thing appearing alternately in unitary and multiple form. Mondrian called this process the *subjectivization of the objective*. The brightest colors of the world and its infinite extension become a measured—i.e. thinkable—space that then opens up again to the infinite extension of the world; the physical becomes mental and then reverts to physical. From expansion toward increasing concentration and then from concentration back to expansion: this is the way BBW breathes.

The idea that multiplicity should become unity and that this should then open up again to multiplicity had already been manifested twenty-seven years earlier with **22**, where the unitary synthesis (a drawn square) reverts to duality in the upper section and then flows back to multiplicity. As in **22**, it is again a horizontal in BBW that expands the concentration put into effect by the vertical.

Everything is one and multiple at the same time. We address relations between unity and multiplicity every time we summarize something that strikes us as unduly complex. We create a relationship between the parts and the whole both when we strive to see all the different facets of reality and when we are driven by emotion to trace everything back to a few elements and make generalizations. Though aware that the reality is far more complex, we often tend to make narrow, summary judgments. The reality before us is always more complex than our descriptions but we cannot always concentrate on it and investigate every single aspect in depth, not least because every single aspect is in fact an infinite reality in itself. This has always been true and is even more so today given the level of complexity attained by modern societies. I therefore believe that the question of the one and the many is one of the most relevant to the present day. Nor is this something purely intellectual. We often experience a drive for concentration when rational explanations give way to an urge that transforms all the complexity and fragmentation of a vision thought into the almost absolute synthesis of a vision felt. When we fall in love, for example, the whole of our fragmented daily life seems to come together in a concentrated form of energy that makes us feel in harmony with the world. Here too we can talk of fragmented multiplicity becoming unity. Of course the relationship between the many and the one pertains to spiritual, philosophical and scientific thinking.

In his biography of Mondrian Seuphor writes: *“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.”*

Broadway Boogie Woogie presents a spiritual path that is expressed in a precise language and is therefore no longer necessarily in conflict with rational thinking. 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. More on this at www.pietmondrian.eu.

The process observed in BBW is not the result of a plan of the moment. This is a work constituting the compendium of an entire life, an image in which the artist finally succeeds in adequately expressing the synthesis he had always sought within himself in response to the immensity of the world. A world which was rapidly changing and therefore demanding new ways of visual representation. Reconnecting the outer world with the inner world was the purpose of The Dutch artist's entire life.

I do not believe that Mondrian ever consciously visualized the process showed in BBW even after finishing the work. In his interview with J.J. Sweeney in 1943, he declared his inability to express what he was doing with sufficient clarity. Mondrian did not conceive BBW in the way it is explained here. He painted it, and for a painter, for a true artist, painting is equivalent to thinking. The reflections and explanations come only later, if at all, when it is all over and done with. A true artist is wholly involved in the intuitive interplay dictated by the eye and not in reflective reasoning.

Processes of this nature can certainly not be thought out but only carried through, step by step, following your intuition. If your intuition reaches such depths and succeeds in seeing so far, the results acquire all the astonishing and organic coherence that, it should be recalled, is displayed only upon completion. It is much easier for us today to see the entire work as a whole. It was certainly impossible for the painter to take full cognizance of everything he was creating when he let himself be guided by his eye in addressing the canvas with his brushes.

Mondrian's pictorial evolution shows that, contrary to common belief, the artist had no intention whatsoever of forcing existing reality into rigid geometric schemata but rather of making his geometry as open and flexible as possible. In BBW every form is born, grows and develops as every natural form does. As in natural space, nothing lasts forever; no entity is pre-established but becomes such in that particular situation, in that particular positional relationship with respect to the other forms undergoing reciprocal determination. Every point of BBW is unique and unforeseeable but, at the same time, part of a process that brings all of the elements together like a universal rhythm. A fluid space that gives concrete form to becoming more than being, to relations more than the individual things in themselves; a geometry that is anything but rigid, cold, or exclusively rational; a space that strikes me instead as very similar to life. Neoplastic geometry has very little to do with the rather antiseptic geometric approach of certain forms of abstract concrete art in the second half of the 20th century.

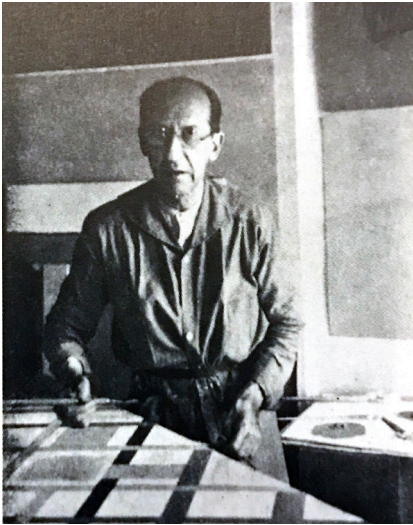
I think it necessary to say a few words also about the title Mondrian gave this painting. It may have been as a tribute to the place that offered him a home, as he had already paid tribute to Paris with a work entitled *Place de la Concorde* and to London with *Trafalgar Square*. The title has, however, given rise to no small number of misunderstandings by suggesting superficial parallels with the outward appearance of New York City. The painting obviously has very little to do with the theaters of Broadway, the lights of the skyscrapers, the traffic or the street plan of Manhattan. If we really want to stick to the city where the image took shape, we could if anything think in terms of its pulsating rhythm, of the contrasts, the constant movement, the infinite variety of humanity, situations, and disparate elements that make up New York City.

I would attach little importance to any direct links with boogie-woogie music, which the painter certainly loved. He pointed out in his interview with Sweeney that he saw true boogie-woogie *“as harmonizing in intention to his own aim in painting: the destruction of melody, which is equivalent to the destruction of natural appearances, and construction through the constant opposition of pure means: dynamic rhythm.”* Always keenly aware of the educational function of art, Mondrian used an analogy with boogie-woogie, as earlier with the fox trot and jazz, to suggest a parallel helping us to understand plastic expression at a different level from the image, with a language, i.e. that of music, which is perhaps the closest to Neoplastic painting, since music has been expressed in abstract terms from the very outset. I do not believe, however, that Mondrian ever intended with BBW, as with other works of his, to give pictorial form to a certain type of music, or indeed that music was the primary source of inspiration for his compositions. What the fox trot or boogie-woogie may have in common with Mondrian's paintings is the fact that both music and images tend to create dynamic sequences. The analogy with music must, however, serve toward the full understanding and enjoyment of painting.

No, *Broadway Boogie Woogie* is not to be understood through reference to its title. The substance of things lies and remains wholly in the visual data. Those capable of seeing in the painting only what the title suggests to them will have to wait until their vision becomes more finely honed and reveals the deeper reality, which lies always and exclusively in images and not in words, at least in the case of the visual arts.

As Mondrian observed, *“A true critic can, simply by drawing upon the depths of his humanity and observing with purity, write about the new forms of art even without a knowledge of the working technique (...). But a true critic is somewhat rare.”*

Victory Boogie Woogie (**40**), (from now on VBW) is a canvas that Mondrian worked on at the same time as BBW and that was to remain unfinished after various episodes of reworking. It should again be stated (for lovers of dates) that Mondrian appears to have begun VBW before BBW. As in other periods of his development, however, the dates on which individual canvases were begun and completed do not coincide with the progress actually achieved, which it is our present concern to indicate and explain. I regard BBW as coming immediately after New York City (**38**) and VBW as a continuation of BBW. My grounds for this will be stated below. The canvas is the same size as the one used for BBW but this time in the lozenge position.



Mondrian working at Victory Boogie Woogie

What characterizes the composition at first sight is a further increase in multiplicity. Another significant difference with respect to BBW consists in the almost complete absence of continuity in the lines, which are reduced to seven horizontal and two vertical rectilinear sequences. The lines appear continuous in BBW because the space between the small squares is predominantly yellow. The rectilinear sequences of VBW are instead made up of a tighter rhythm of small, differently colored rectangles and squares, so closely arranged as to reduce the sense of linear continuity to the absolute minimum.

In BBW the planes are generated by the lines and return to them; in VBW lines and planes seem to become one and the same thing. While the space is nevertheless very dynamic (not least because of the lozenge format), its dynamism is the result of a virtually unlimited number of planes interacting with one another. While the finite dimension of the planes appears to predominate now, their enormous number and variety tend to evoke an infinite space. The infinite space of the lines is now expressed through a very thick space made of finite planes.

Everything varies in VBW, as it does in BBW, but we no longer see any process leading to a unitary synthesis. It is multiplicity that predominates here. VBW appears to present an endless sequence of possible syntheses of yellow, red, and blue manifested in constantly varying forms (Diagram A). In actual fact, this is precisely what BBW tells us: unitary synthesis opens up again to multiplicity. We encounter a great many instances of partial unities in VBW, but not one that holds for the composition as a whole. They are all relative and there is not one that establishes itself as a synthesis of all the others. I am reminded of the multiethnic society of New York, where all cultures and all religions necessarily assume relative value.

A white form verging on the square can be seen in the upper section (Diagram B labeled A). On the left we see a white plane (B) (with the same proportions as the unitary synthesis of BBW) inside which two small notes of color (yellow and red) are born. Opposite linear sequences develop inside a third white area (C), which is analogous in its proportions to the square (A). The synthesis we see in A appears manifold at the same time (C). All the colors (C) blossom from the white (A): first the two small accents of yellow and red (B) and then more substantial sequences of yellow, red, and blue (C). I am reminded of **24** and **26** (PLATE 2) where white was suggesting an ideal synthesis of all the colors.