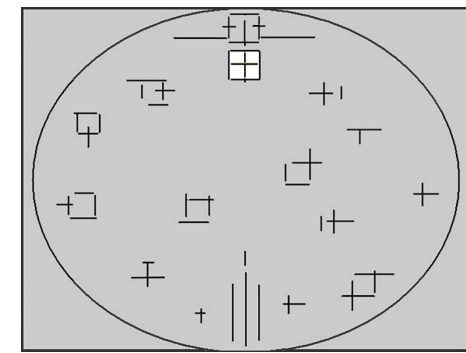


A quick view taking in the composition as a whole picks out a group of yellow planes that seem to evoke something more constant (Diagram C). On closer observation, we note that the nine yellow planes present approximative amounts of color but vary in their proportions or present the same proportions but vary in terms of position and relations with the surrounding parts.

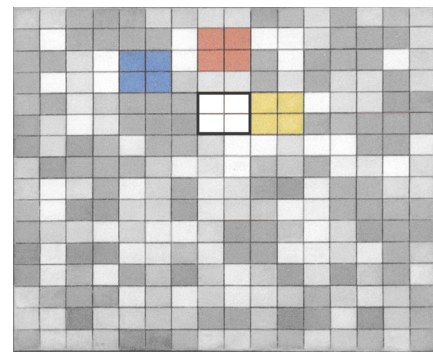
We are thus observing either different entities that are related to the same basic "thing" or the "same" entity in a state of becoming, constantly changing in appearance: the one and the many. The artist shows us this broader variation of yellow in order to suggest that the variety he intends to evoke is in actual fact far greater than the canvas can display. It prompts us to imagine all the other different shapes, sizes, and proportions that the white, gray, red, and blue could also assume in all the possible positions and reciprocal relations: a truly infinite "landscape".

To his friend Charmion von Wiegand, who visited him on January 17, 1944, Mondrian said that in Victory Boogie Woogie everything was in place except for the top part, which still needed to be reworked. A friend visited him to see the painting in progress and stayed late into the night, leaving Mondrian still working at four in the morning.

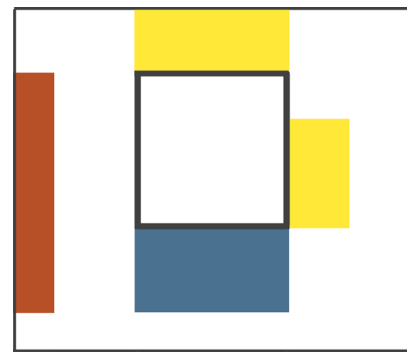
As noted above, VBW is characterized by the almost complete disappearance of lines, a crucial component of Neoplastic space all the way up to BBW. In VBW lines and planes become the same thing and the sense of multiplicity or totality previously expressed through the continuity of the lines now appears to be wholly concentrated inside the canvas. This has a precise meaning upon which it is necessary to reflect. Neoplastic lines were born when the oval of the Cubist period (22) expanded beyond the finite space of the canvas (23) and the planes (24) joined to generate linear segments (25) that then became continuous lines (26). The totality of space expressed by the oval as a whole within the canvas (22) opened up and became a totality manifested through lines that continue uninterrupted (26). The idea of totality conceived in a metaphysical form (the oval) gave way to the assumed totality of real space, to which the canvas belongs and the lines allude. As from 1919 the manifold aspect of space underwent constant reduction (26 to 33). Mondrian's Neoplastic compositions attained greater synthesis during the 1920s because the artist perceived the finite space of the canvas connecting with the infinite space of the world through the endless lines.



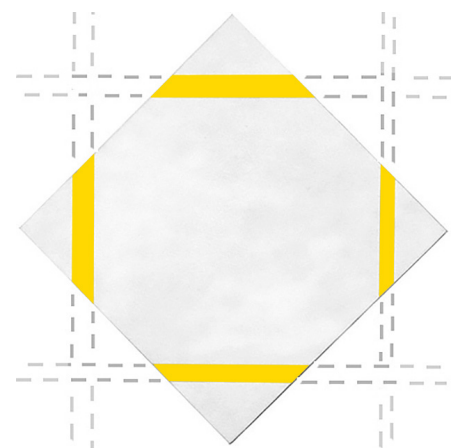
22 - 1915



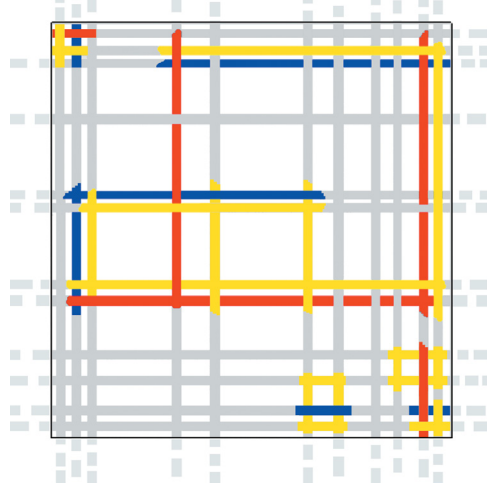
26 - 1919



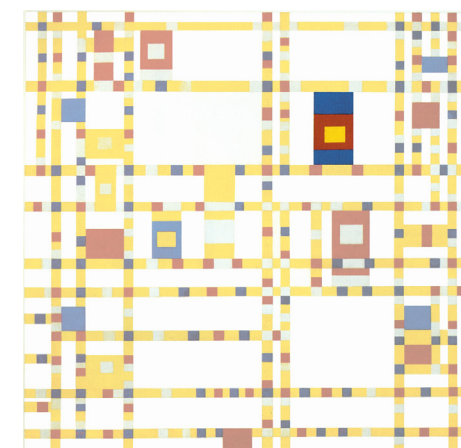
28 - 1919



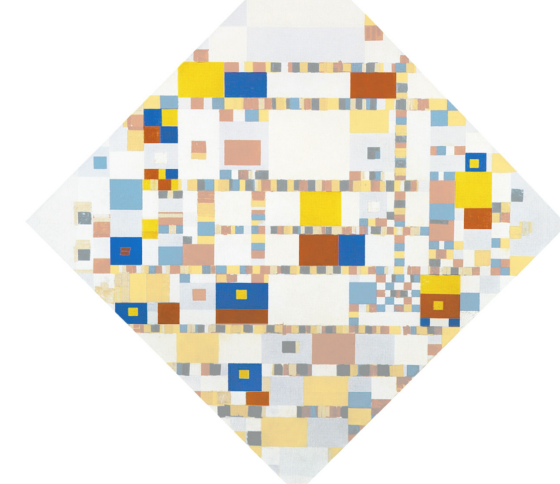
33 - 1920



38 - 1942



39 - 1942-43



40 - 1944

The lines performed the vital function of maintaining an ideal link between the limited space of the pictorial representation and the infinite space of reality. The compositions attained greater synthesis up to the point where everything was expressed by means of four yellow lines (33).

In Fig. 40 (PAGE 10 ) two black lines suggest a "square field" that is no sooner generated than it becomes an infinite space expanding beyond the canvas almost as though in an attempt to coincide with the infinite space evoked by the lines, that is to say, with the totality of space formerly expressed by the oval.

As from 1934, when the compositions gradually opened up once again to complexity (35, 36, 37), the lines blossomed into color (38) and then turned into a multitude of small squares and planes (39), the sense of totality displayed in a virtual way only by the endless lines manifested itself in tangible and concrete form within the canvas (40).

It was as though in this last composition the lines had contracted to draw all of the variety virtually situated outside the painting back into the canvas. Manifold space, formerly expressed as assumed and non-visible infinite extension (the continuity of the black lines), gives way to manifold space understood as the largest amount of variation wholly visible inside the painting: variety that had not been seen since 1919 (26); multiplicity that the painter had endeavored between 1920 and 1933 (28 to 33) to drive beyond the canvas with lines in order to concentrate on a unity designed to express both the one and the many at the same time (33).

From this viewpoint, the Neoplastic lines could be seen as a sort of "memorandum" serving for over twenty years as an ideal link between the representational space of art and the space of reality and then dissolving on the return of the latter (the variety of planes).

While it is unity that alludes to virtual multiplicity in 33, it is multiplicity that alludes to possible unities in 40.

This is probably what Mondrian felt in his heart but was not yet able to explain clearly when he said that there was too much that was old even in BBW. While the painting does express a high degree of multiplicity, he probably saw something old in the fact that it was still necessary to evoke a part of reality virtually through the continuity of the lines. In talking about BBW, the artist is also said to have expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of yellow, which is tantamount to saying the same thing. He must have felt that lines were still excessively present in BBW.

Lines are the primary means of expression in drawing, just as colored planes are in painting.

The lines become planes in Broadway Boogie Woogie and everything is a plane in Victory Boogie Woogie.

Mondrian wrote as follows in a note sent to J.J. Sweeney on May 24, 1943: "Only now I become conscious that my work in black, white and little color planes has been merely "drawing" in oil color. In drawing, the lines are the principal means of expression; in painting, the color planes".

In the European Neoplastic compositions the black lines performed the function of drawing and the fields of color the role of painting. Drawing (the lines) controlled painting (the colored planes) from the outside with no participation, and painting accentuated and varied the proportions pre-established by drawing. Drawing and painting, intellect and emotion, engaged in dialogue but kept their distance. Drawing (the black lines) became color in 1941-42; the drawing is born in paint and the painting is already drawn and when the colored lines became planes with BBW and VBW, there was no longer any distinction between drawing and painting. Thought and emotion became one.

The astounding consistency found in the Dutch master's artistic trajectory brings to mind certain wonderful processes of nature that human thought has to trace back to a precise concatenation of causes and effects, in other words to a designing mind. I do not know whether nature really is based on a "design", but if so then Mondrian, like all true artists, did nothing throughout his life other than act in spontaneous obedience to it.

The regular schemata used by Mondrian during the evolution of his work served to support the construction and definition of the new space that was slowly taking shape. Having taken the steps he felt necessary, the artist freed himself from the schemata just as a building is freed from the scaffolding that served to support it during the various phases of its construction. The center of the composition, which had always been the key point for manifestation of the unitary synthesis (20, 22, 26, 28), lost its importance all along the pathway toward BBW and VBW.

The regular layouts and proportional modules used to curb the uncontrolled development of form (25, 26, 27) dissolved along the way. In the last two Boogies (39, 40) everything is in a state of becoming. One thing calls another and the first two become a third that gives birth to a process in which the only fixed elements are the orthogonal relationship and the five colors (white and gray included). All the rest is a free and unforeseeable development of elements differing from one another. The distinction between color and non-color drawn by Mondrian in the early 1920s had also disappeared by 1943, when everything had become color.

The Dutch artist chose his rules and schemata in complete freedom and followed them for just as long as he considered necessary. This is true freedom. In art, as in life, freedom is not the absence of rules, contrary to what some

people believe. Freedom means being able to choose rules that are in any case necessary.

Mondrian worked throughout his life to adapt the reductive forms of the human mind to the far broader variety and variability of existence so as to maintain equilibrium between thought and nature. Neoplastic space is born out of a vision that takes into due consideration the non-rational aspects of life and is therefore capable of generating a geometry that we can describe as organic but that is nevertheless expressed in the clear and precise forms of rational thought. Neither aspect must ride roughshod over its opposite. This is typical of the artist's way of proceeding: attaining a certain degree of synthesis and control and then opening up again to variability while always seeking to maintain a certain balance between the two aspects. VBW shows that the lines themselves—a crucial element of Neoplastic space for over twenty years—were no longer necessary. It is difficult to imagine geometry more flexible than this, so free in its innermost spirit as to reformulate itself continuously.

The painter worked also on compositions of colored rectangles juxtaposed on the walls of his studio (41, 42).

This can be interpreted as if the space of the canvas would open up to the space of reality.

On the one hand, the multifarious aspect of the world populated the canvas (VBW); on the other, the subjective reality of art left the canvas and was transmitted to the world. Either way, the space of art became the space of life. Victory Boogie Woogie is a sort of spiritual testament containing an exhortation addressed to future artists and mankind in general: art must be able to transform the discord of the real world into plastic harmonies serving as a model for the future developments of life; art must be able to improve the world.

Victory Boogie Woogie remains incomplete because every human action aimed at improving the world will necessarily be left unfinished. It is an open process that will never come to an end.

By a duly notarized act Mondrian instituted Harry Holtzman his universal legatee. There has been much talk about this in the New York art circle even before Mondrian's death since the artist had not made a secret of the donation. This will in favor of an American makes the works remain in their homeland of election where they are also the best protected against the decrees - "degenerated art", "bourgeois formalism" - of the police regimes. (Seuphor) Unfortunately we still have people nowadays who talk about "formalism" when dealing with Mondrian. (my note)

On Monday, 24 January 1944, Hans Richter, a painter and film-maker, receives a card from Mondrian who, due to a bronchitis, declines an invitation to a cocktail. In point of fact at that time Mondrian was already affected by pneumonia. For two days the artist stayed at home all alone. Nobody would go visit Mondrian without making an appointment as the painter disliked being disturbed while working. Fritz Glarner heard about Mondrian's health problems and decided to pay him a visit. He found the artist in very bad conditions, almost unable to speak. Glarner asked Harry Holtzman to call a doctor who certified a very bad pneumonia. Against the artist's will (Glarner and Holtzman will need one hour to convince Mondrian), the artist is brought to the hospital. Once in bed in a private room, he is happy and believes he will soon be cured. But the disease had progressed too far. For five days, Mondrian declined little by little. On January 31, his condition is considered hopeless. Glarner and Holtzman kept watch over him all night. Miss von Wiegand came to visit. No one spoke and you could hear the faint gasp of someone who was working to get out of life. At 5 o'clock in the morning of February 1, we learn that everything is over. (Seuphor)