

PLATE 6

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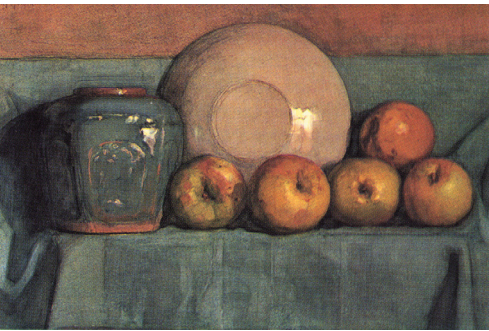
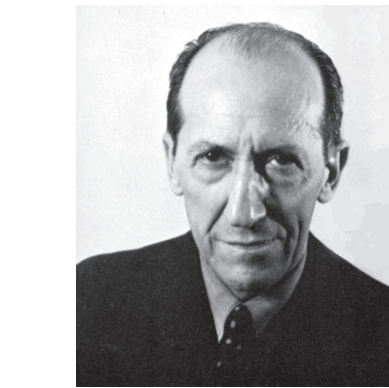


Abb. 13 - Apples, Ginger Pot and Plate on a Ledge, 1901



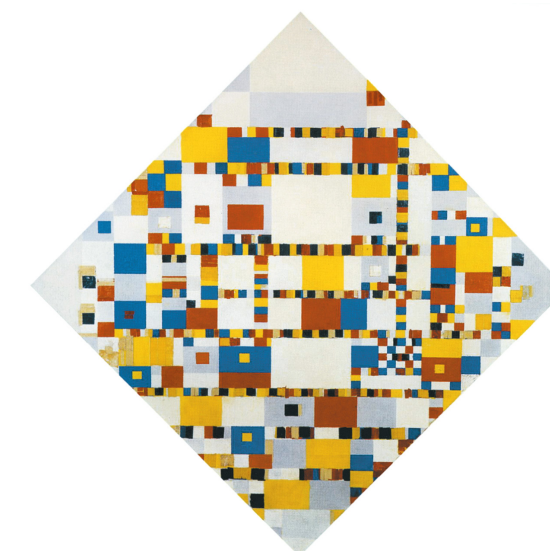
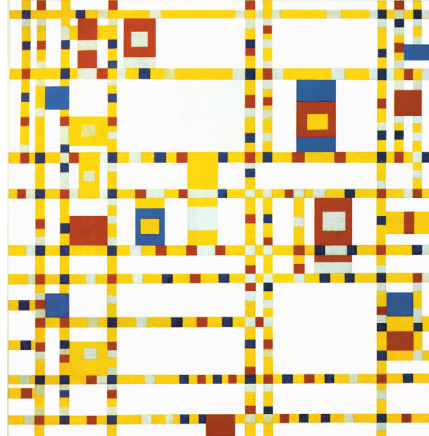
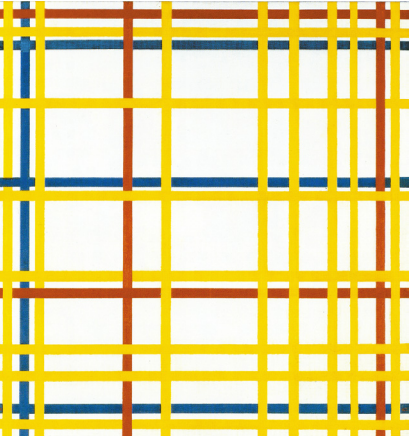
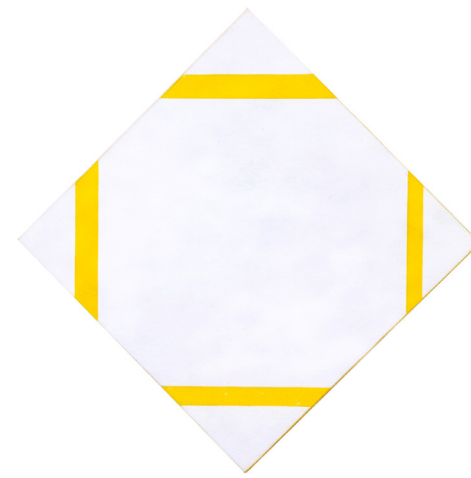
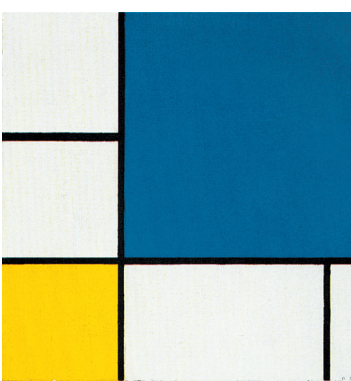
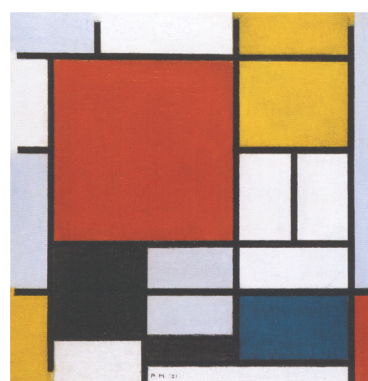
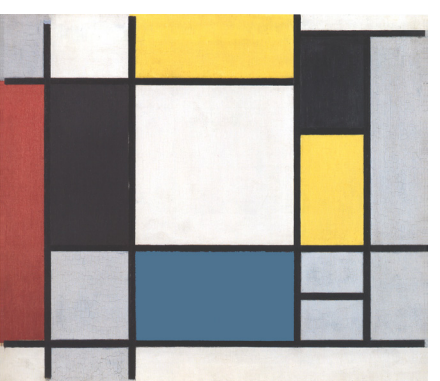
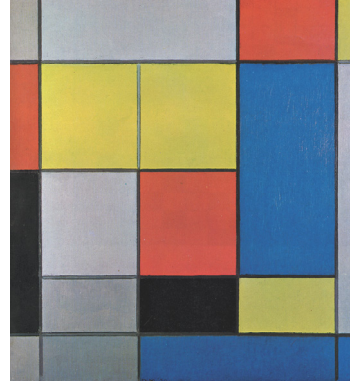
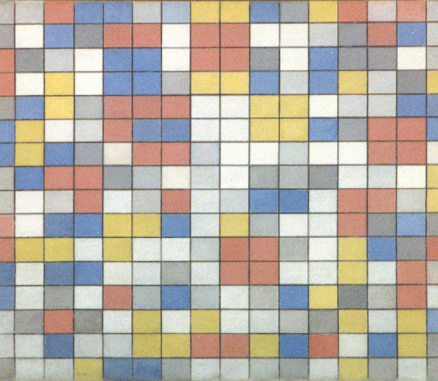
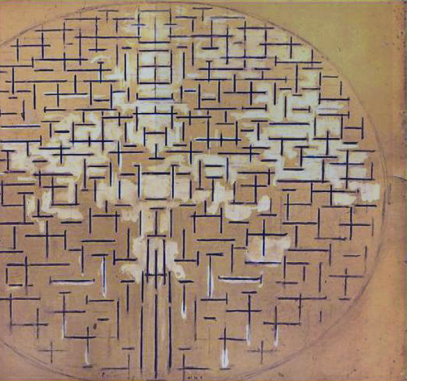
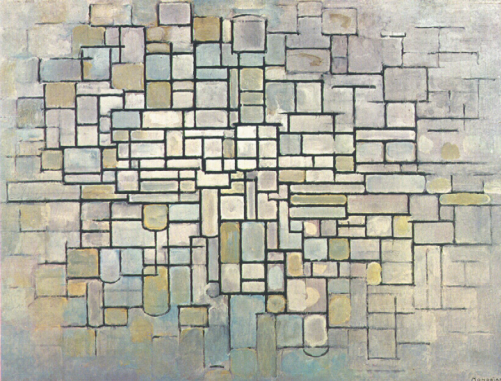
"The development of his work is certainly the most eloquent of this century. No modern painter comes from so far, none has gone so far. This career remains forever unique. The process is of such clear and pure progression that it is a myth in its own right. It comes from Van Gogh - what am I saying - it repeats the whole evolution of Van Gogh himself, then, having painted as a Fauve before the Fauves, it catches up with Cubism, overtakes it, slowly continues a process of dematerialization until a canvas of 1931 that has only two black lines on a white background. Then the curve gradually descends towards the sensitive life, to end in the "boogie-woogies", facing a new land. I know of no other example of such an acute finalism." (Michel Seuphor)

I will now briefly review the process of development of Mondrian's work and follow the thread that can be traced back to a dynamic relationship between the one and the multiple, the constant and the changeable.

Mondrian thinks of a unity that is manifold in itself and a multiplicity that is one because he believes that everything is simultaneously one and multifarious. To give a concrete example: A tree looks like a small green spot from a great distance, but then becomes larger, revealing an increasing number of parts as we get closer, until finally it has an enormous degree of complexity when we look at the microscopic structure of each leaf, which becomes a small universe. The original green patch (which we perceived as one) has become very complex (manifold); the original finite reality now appears infinite. Reverse the process and the tree loses its complexity and turns back into a simple green spot again. What is the "true" reality of a tree?

How can we paint things that change so quickly today, depending on our relationship to them? And how can we define realistic a way to paint the external appearance of things, when every single thing reveals an inherent infinite reality? How can we show at the same time the unity and multiplicity of each thing, if not in abstract form?

This document constitutes an original "format" created by Michele Sciam to explain the work of Piet Mondrian. The explanatory diagrams of Mondrian's paintings are original works created by Michele Sciam in the context of his activity of criticism, discussion, divulgation and teaching.



20 - Composition II, 1913

22 - Pier and Ocean 5, 1915

26 - Checkerboard Composition with Light Colors, 1919

27 - Composition B, 1920

28 - Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, Blue and Gray, 1920

29 - Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray and Blue, 1921

30 - Composition with Blue and Yellow, 1932

33 - Lozenge with Four Yellow Lines, 1933

38 - New York City, 1942

39 - Broadway Boogie Woogie, 1942-43

40 - Victory Boogie Woogie, 1942-44 (Unfinished)

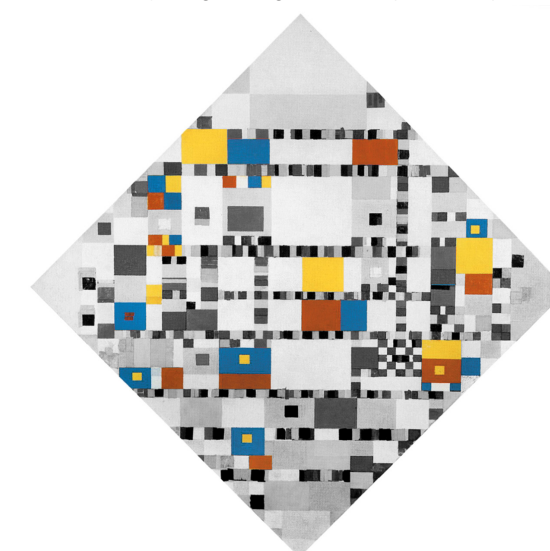
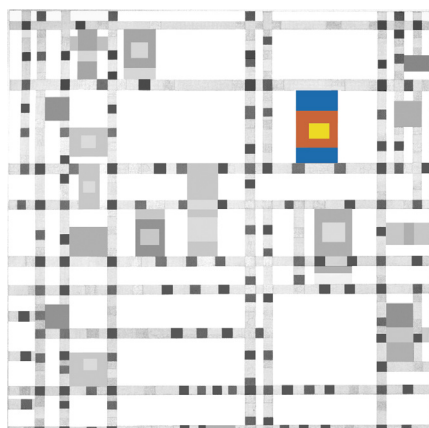
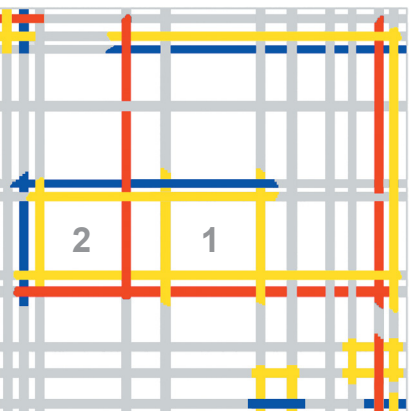
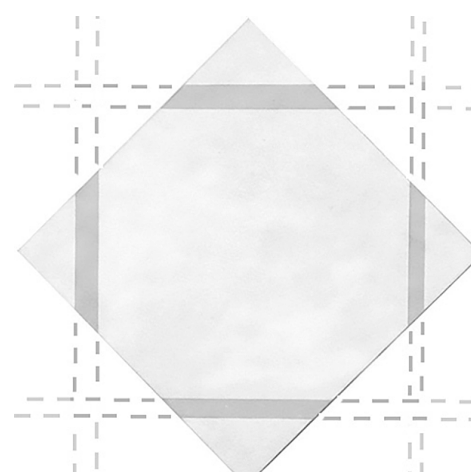
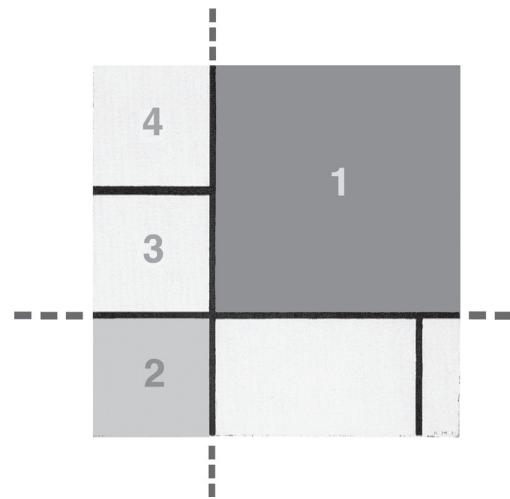
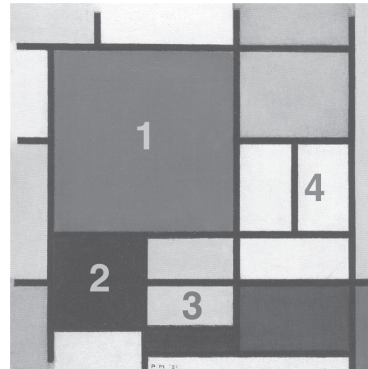
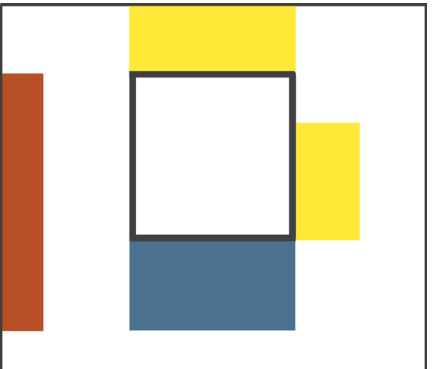
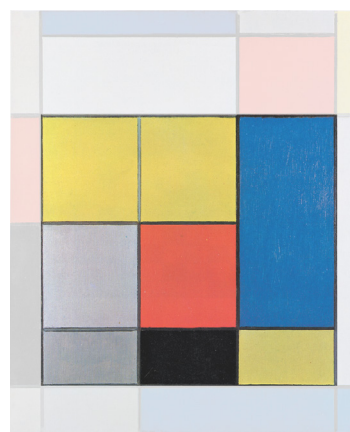
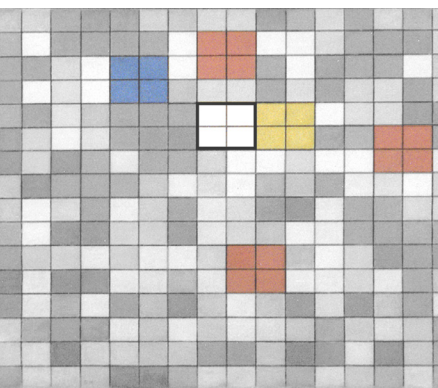
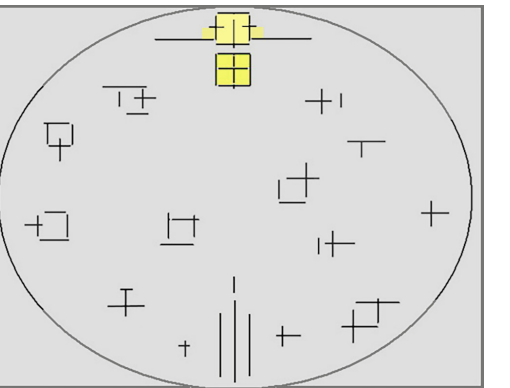


Fig. 13: The relationship between a variety of imperfect circular shapes (some apples) and a perfect circle (a plate in the center) symbolizes a relationship between the manifold and unpredictable aspect of nature and the search for a certain permanence and unity invoked by human beings, or as Mondrian put it, a relationship between the natural and the spiritual. This dialectic is expressed through a variety of unbalanced relationships between horizontal and vertical strokes that find a synthesis in a central rectangle (20) and then in a square (22) that evokes a sense of stability and unity. The progress between 20 and 22 is that in the second work the multiplicity is united in the square and this opens up again to the manifold. A static relationship between multiplicity and unity (20) becomes a dynamic one (22). Any unity generated by thought is necessarily partial and temporary, and therefore must open up again to the multiform and ever-changing aspect of physical reality.

The graphic structure of 22 opens up to colors (26) and to the dynamic straight lines that evoke a more open and continuous space. The relationship between multiplicity and unity is now established through a plurality of colored planes grouped around a white rectangle, reminiscent of the rectangle seen in the central area of 20.

Unity (the square) that opens again to multiplicity (22) becomes, five years later, a large square open to different colors, sizes and proportions, that is, to multiplicity (27). Mondrian is attempting here to present a unified synthesis open to a variety of parts, as if to achieve interpenetration between the white rectangle and the three colored rectangles in its immediate vicinity of 26.

However, the large square that was supposed to express unity (27) cannot be seen clearly enough due to its chromatic heterogeneity. For this reason, on a following canvas, the square transforms again into a clearer homogeneous white field bordered by thicker black lines (28).

It is noteworthy that in Fig. 13 as well as in 20, 22, 26, 27 and 28, a symbol of unity always emerges in the central area of the composition.

The dialectic between the one and the many forms the common thread of the entire rest of the work, in which the unity evoked by a white square (28) is gradually permeated by colors and various proportions (29, 30), that is, by a plastic symbol of the multiple.

The white unity (26) becomes a large colored square (27), returns to white (28), but then opens again to variable colors, dimensions and proportions (29, 30) to then express itself again in a synthetic form (33). As a symbol for the unifying space of consciousness, the square opens to the infinite variety and unpredictable aspects of nature and life, symbolized here by variable proportions and colors. The square opens up to a changing variety without losing its function as an expression of synthesis and permanence.

In the transition from 26 to 30, the number of planes decreases, and the composition now exhibits a higher degree of synthesis, culminating at 33. Four yellow lines of increasing thickness express a sense of relative multiplicity, while an idea of unity is conveyed by a presumed square that lies outside our field of vision. If we consider the varying thickness of the lines, we are dealing with a unity that changes from one side to the other. 33 hits the heart of the problem: to show the multiple in a unified form and the one as multiple without losing sight of it. 33 can be seen as a point of arrival, but at the same time, as in other moments of Mondrian's artistic development, this work represents a new starting point. The painter soon realized that his canvases did not convey the variety that the eye perceives in nature or in urban space, the richness and variety of forms and colors that he had previously captured in 20, 22, 26.

This is why the tendency towards a space of ever greater dilution and synthesis (26 to 33) gradually gave way to the opposite tendency, in which an ever greater degree of articulation and complexity was gradually introduced into the canvases (38). It is worth noting that this process of reopening the one (33) to the multiple (38) took eight years and involved at least 198 paintings. Between 1934 and 1942 the one square (33) opens to a plurality of squares (38), just as in 1915 the one central square opened to a series of uncertain squares all around it (22).

38: Approximate squares of variable size and proportion emerge and dissolve in a variety of combinations between yellow, red and blue lines. The square that united the horizontal and vertical in 22 now also unites the three primary colors with constantly changing color combinations and in varying sizes and proportions (38). The composition thus achieves a high degree of multiplicity.

Yet in 38, the eye barely has time to recognize a square unit before it is immersed in the dynamic and continuous flow of lines. If in 33 there was a need to open up unity (the square) to multiplicity, there was now a need to restore a higher degree of constancy and unity to a space that had in the meantime undergone considerable multiplication and continued uninterrupted with the lines alone.

39 shows a process in which an expanded multiplicity of yellow, red, and blue fragments concentrates into a unity that then opens up again to a multiplicity of smaller fragments of color. In a dynamic process, the many and the one merge and transform into each other, so that we can see the plane suggesting unity as a synthetic version and the entire painting as an analytical, or as complex rendering of the same thing. Again, I think of the tree, which from a distance looks like a condensed point, but on closer inspection shows increasing complexity.

The process of combining multiplicity and unity in a dynamic structure is at the same time a process of progressive internalization of the outer space (of the lines) into a plane that combines yellow, red and blue and then opens up again to the expanded outer space of the lines. The color of the lines (yellow) is the one most internalized within the unitary plane. "Through the internalization of what is known as matter and the divestiture of what is known as spirit - hitherto too separate! - matter-mind becomes one." (Mondrian)

The process observed in 39 (from multiplicity to unity and from unity back to multiplicity) condenses all of Mondrian's work onto one canvas. Looking at the above twelve paintings, we in fact can see how space evolves from multiplicity (20, 22, 26) to unity (33) and from unity back to multiplicity (33, 38, 39, 40). A path that spanned about forty years can be summarized in 39. Broadway Boogie Woogie sums up a whole life, and it is perhaps no coincidence that it is the artist's last finished painting.

The painter worked all his life to express this kind of space: as rich and varied as possible to reflect the richness he saw in external space and felt in himself, but at the same time endowed with the degree of synthesis and unity his consciousness demanded; knowing that his syntheses must always be confronted and reopened to the changing aspects of nature and the course of existence. I think of all the times I have realized that reality is much richer and more complex than the ideas we have of it. Our compelling images of reality - either/or, good or bad, black or white - should be opened to consideration of all the real gradations in between. I think of 33 becoming 40.

The neoplastic vision asks us to open ourselves to the multiple aspects of the world outside and inside, to look at all its diversity without getting lost. This is certainly very difficult in everyday life, because the idea of opening ourselves to diversity

and dealing with the unknown creates so many fears in the human mind. This gives rise to all forms of closed-mindedness, intolerance and racism.

"Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?" Paul Gauguin wrote these questions on a painted picture. Piet Mondrian painted them in colored lines that turn into planes and then back into lines. Lines and planes that the Dutch painter transformed into an authentic wordless discourse on life.

Mondrian made the utopian proposal to abolish art and achieve beauty in real life. Art would no longer be necessary if it were possible to achieve the harmonies produced by painting concretely among people. Although a glance around shows that this will take a long time, there are some positive signs. The Dutch artist was in no hurry and did not expect that the world he had in mind would come into being in the foreseeable future. He was aware that in life it is not only creativity and technical skill that count, but also and above all economic, political, ethical and religious factors. So he understood that real progress would necessarily be slow and gradual. Others, on the other hand, believe that certain changes can happen quickly, and do not hesitate to declare a project, whose importance they have barely grasped, a failure if it is not fully realized overnight. The modernist project that some masters of abstract-concrete art anticipated was more than a fad, which most of our contemporary visual "culture" unfortunately amounts to.

In Mondrian's case, the issue was aesthetic as well as ethical, social and, above all, spiritual.

Truth be told, a glance around suggests that not only has modernism not been superseded, but that in its deeper sense it has not even begun.