Serial images: The Modern Art of Iteration
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Chapter Three

Victory Boogie Woogie and the Mapping of Freedom

Victory Boogie Woogie
Piet Mondrian's unfinished last work, *Victory Boogie Woogie*, 1942-1944 [Fig. 8], was purchased on August 31, 1998 by the Netherlands' Stichting Nationaal Fonds Kunstbezit for NLG 80 million, about 40 million American dollars. The purchase was made possible by the Nederlandsche Bank's donation to the foundation for the purchase of Dutch artworks from abroad for public display in The Netherlands. Since October of that year the painting has been displayed in the Haags Gemeentemuseum as the gem of the world's largest collection of Mondrian's works. The foundation's primary aim is the acquisition of art of "eminent national importance for inclusion in publicly owned collections in the Netherlands" (Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1998). With the then imminent replacement of the guilder by the Euro, this was a unique opportunity for the Nederlandsche Bank and the foundation, for it would be the last time they could purchase an important work of twentieth century art by a Dutch artist with Dutch currency. As a gift for the people of The Netherlands, *Victory Boogie Woogie* is therefore of supreme cultural and national symbolic value.

Not surprisingly, there were many objections to the extravagance of the acquisition of *Victory Boogie Woogie*. Primarily, however, the most difficult objection to address
is the question of the painting's significance.\textsuperscript{1} Basic to Mondrian's late neoplastic paintings is a grid structure of horizontal and vertical lines either composed of or intersecting with black, gray, white, and primary coloured squares and rectangles often on a white or pale gray ground. \textit{Victory Boogie Woogie} shares this grid structure, with the distinguishing feature of smaller squares composing the horizontal and vertical bands rather than black and gray lines. Mondrian's canvases are usually square and he often rotates the square to make the canvas diamond-shaped, as in \textit{Victory Boogie Woogie}. The highly geometrical character of Mondrian's non-objective images distinguishes them from the work of other painters of his time, such as Kandinsky, Picasso, and Malevich. For while even Malevich's black and white crosses can be interpreted in terms of their obvious similarity to the crucifix, Mondrian's geometrical constructions do not invite iconographical readings at all. His late images do not include recognizable subject matter, sophisticated colouration, nor any obvious traces of his activity of making each image, something taken to be central to most modern visual art (Coplans, 1969:44). For

\textsuperscript{1}To my knowledge, the most constant objection to this acquisition is the extraordinary sum of money involved. Considered as a gift to the state, the NLG 80 million spent on the purchase of the painting could arguably have been better spent on more and other gifts to Holland. Further objections are founded on a basic incomprehension of the painting. The press release and documentation about the painting provided by the Haags Gemeentemuseum and the foundation justify the acquisition by focussing on its national importance as the work of a Dutch artist. In the official press release from the museum it is discussed as a work of "eminent national importance", but with little further explanation.
these reasons, it is difficult to define what meaning the viewer can find in Mondrian’s images. This is why, in order to interpret the paintings, commentators usually turn to Mondrian’s prolific writings about the meaning of his art, his neoplasticism, and his theories of the value and purpose of art.²

Linking the theoretical background of Mondrian’s work with the ideas about the actualization of existence as the actualization of the universal presented in his statements and artworks helps us to understand what he aimed to achieve in his art. It helps to explain many of his earlier paintings.³ Furthermore, bringing the fundamental

² Mondrian’s theoretical writings constantly return to the description of the universal structure of reality as relational, teleological, evolutionary, dualistic, hierarchical, dynamic, and essentially harmonious. Yet while I find his writings consistently address the same issues, I do not find their explanations of those issues consistent with each other. Mondrian constantly switches between arguments derived from German idealist philosophy, various types of theosophy, theories of evolution, formalist aesthetics, symbolist aesthetics, romanticist aesthetics, and constructivist mathematics. Often, arguments about similar ideas are contradictory and this makes his writings difficult to decipher. For a sophisticated analysis of the influence of Hegel and Schopenhauer in Mondrian’s writings, see Cheetham. For the Hegelian dimensions of Mondrian’s paintings, see Carel Blotkamp. For what is widely recognized to be an excellent analysis of theosophical influences on Mondrian, see Robert P. Welsh.

³ For instance, a painting like *Evolution* (1911) presents a figure’s awakening consciousness of something divine by way of its title, its triptych structure, the symbolism of closed and open eyes, the androgynous figure, and the evolution of the stars into ovals. The painting offers a certain understanding of evolution which is surely best explained by reference to Mondrian’s statements about the work and the philosophical and theosophical influences on his art.
concerns he sought to express in his paintings into relation with the similar concerns of other artists helps to define basic issues traced through modernism and so situates Mondrian’s specific project in its historical context. Learning why Mondrian painted what he did provides some clues about how to understand what he painted.⁴

Thus Mark Cheetham analyzes the primacy of the concept of purity both in Mondrian’s essentialist accounts of reality and in his neoplastic paintings with reference to the primacy of that concept in the work of Gauguin, Sérusier, Kandinsky, and Klee. Likewise, Paul Crowther analyzes Mondrian in the context of twentieth-century visual art by way of what he calls the common “view that what is fundamental in our perceptual relation with the world consists ... [in] a shifting and unstable reciprocity between [perception and object]” (167). Crowther shows how Mondrian and most abstract and non-representational artists in the twentieth-century are generally concerned with “how the world is structured and how we negotiate it” as embodied beings (3).⁵ Harry Cooper analyzes

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⁴ I do not cite specific statements by Mondrian because ideas such as these are found throughout Mondrian’s writings (1986). Andrew McNamara’s analysis of the avant-garde use of the grid interprets Mondrian’s late images in terms of the artist’s statements and their relation to other avant-garde programmes. I argue the images say something quite distinct from the statements.

⁵ Mondrian holds that there is an essential, hierarchical dualism to existence and this leads to his notion of dialectical self-determination as the structure of the actualization of existence. Throughout his writings, Mondrian opposes the immutable, infinite, universal, spiritual, positive, determinate, abstract, vertical and male to the mutable, finite, particular, material, negative, indeterminate, representational, horizontal
Mondrian’s oeuvre in terms of how his understanding of the structure of time and history develops from a neoplastric attachment to the equilibrium of opposing forces to a Hegelian dialectic process of synthesizing differences. Andrew McNamara and Benjamin Buchloh criticize Mondrian’s De Stijl artwork, along with “the Werkbund to the Bauhaus, Purism, L’Esprit nouveau”, as the urge to impose a rationalist, functionalist universal scheme on the world that assimilates all things. Finally Rosalind Krauss analyzes Mondrian’s grids in the context of those by Picasso, Malevich, Martin, Rothko and others in her discussion of their works as a wholly metaphysical, anti-material expression of spirit, truth, or being, which I considered in Chapter One. These analyses are representative because in different ways they all take Mondrian’s statements about his art seriously and consider his images to present a particular understanding of the nature of the universal activity of actualization.

Nevertheless, it is my contention that viewing an image like Victory Boogie Woogie reveals something other than the meaning Mondrian explicitly attached to it. The image presents a structure, but there is no suggestion that and female. The hierarchy is obvious: the former are positive and the latter are negative. Many writers on the subject have expertly elaborated on how Mondrian’s hierarchical, dualistic ontology is in fact subjectivist because he simply assumes this essentialist, gendered hierarchy. He is considered to offer a significant contribution to the strongly masculinist flavour of the avant-garde’s innovative artistic re-creation. Mondrian identifies abstraction with determination, spirituality, and universality. These positive features are opposed to the mere representations of indeterminate, female nature, negative elements. See Cheetham, Krauss, and Crowther.

6 McNamara (61). See Buchloh (1986).
it is spiritual, teleological, or universal in the sense Mondrian's writings give those terms. Similarly, the viewer is drawn into that structure, but the viewer's engagement with the image is quite contrary to the intuitive, disinterested, or contemplative stance Mondrian seems to suggest. This is because Victory Boogie Woogie presents viewers with a structure that minimally includes iconographic references in its colour scheme by which to interpret that structure. Notwithstanding Mondrian's intentions to present a particular understanding of the structure of the universal or spirit, what we are given by the image is a matrix that is actively organized as viewers visually explore it.

Victory Boogie Woogie is an emphatically two-dimensional image constructed in the strictly geometrical terms of orthogonally oriented points, lines, and planes and the chromatic values of the primary colours plus black, white, and gray. Viewing the image involves nothing other than traversing the vectors which the viewer can construct out of those geometrical elements by way of whatever iconic value can be ascribed to each chromatic presentation. The geometrical structure presents the viewer with an ordered surface, but one that awaits the viewer's visual construction of that order. The points, lines, and planes which define the structure are open to the viewer's serially iterative acts of visually relating them any way she chooses. There is no determinate order to the presentation. Further, this visual relating activity is guided by the meanings viewers can attach to each chromatic difference, speeding up or slowing down the viewer's movement along vectors and through the image. The momentum by which viewers move through the structure and the choices they make in relating one structural
element with another are a matter of visual acts unique to each viewer: the associations they make with various colours and trajectories inspire them to move up, down, or across the image. Hence viewing *Victory Boogie Woogie* involves serially constructing the relational order of the image by iterating, or iteratively actualizing, an order of relations, one after another. The viewer participates in the ongoing activity of actualizing the painting's structure. The order of relations cannot be actualized without the free constructive activity of the viewer. So how the viewer is affected by the chromatic values presented in *Victory Boogie Woogie* is a matter of whatever culturally influenced values she gives to them, and is therefore independent of the image. Here, it is significant that, because the orthogonal structure of *Victory Boogie Woogie* extends beyond the frame of the image, the structure of the image extends indefinitely onto its environment. This suggests that the activity of actualization which occurs when we view the image can be projected beyond the structure of the image and onto the structure of the world.

When the image is seen solely in terms of what it presents, it does in fact bear some relation to Mondrian's descriptions, for *Victory Boogie Woogie* prioritizes issues of activity, structure, tension, balance, and construction. However, there is no suggestion in the image that those issues must be understood according to principles of idealist philosophy or theosophy. Rather, the principles by which the image can be interpreted reside in its very structure, a structure that I will argue presents a particular ontology that situates Mondrian in a modernist tradition of serially iterative art. Where Degas' images were found to define individuals as events of becoming in terms of a
structure of serially iterative activity, Mondrian's *Victory Boogie Woogie* offers an account of the nature of serial iteration itself. For *Victory Boogie Woogie* not only presents a dynamic serially iterative structure. It also stands as the last painting in an oeuvre which is itself defined by seriality, starting from Mondrian's series of paintings of the *Farm at Duivendrecht* (c.1903-1908), through his iteration of Monet's series of haystacks (c.1908), to his neoplastic compositions. *Victory Boogie Woogie* is the integration both of serial imagery and of serially iterative structure.⁷

**Mondrian's Neoplasticism and Constructivism**

Mondrian described his late, non-objective paintings as neoplastic images. Neoplasticism is a crucial term, for in it is found the central principles of his theory of reality and of his paintings. The term neoplasticism comes from a mathematician and key influence on Mondrian ideas, Dr. Schoenmakers.⁸ Schoenmakers introduced Mondrian to the term plastic through his book *Principles of plastic mathematics*, in which he develops ideas about mathematical construction. The term plastic means extension-creation, image making, volume structuring, or simply construction. Neoplasticism is thus to be understood as a reading of art in terms of structure and the activity of structuration, the making of structure. Schoenmakers develops a theory of reality similar to

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⁷ In this respect, the genealogy of Mondrian's series is similar to that of Warhol's, for both refer back to Monet's impressionist serial images.

⁸ See Cheetham, 47, Baljeu, 116, and Blotkamp, 59.
Mondrian's. Both state that there is a duality of counterparts which can be brought together in a unity of equilibration through constructive relationships of tension. Both hold a universal force to be the principle structuring the constructive tension that defines reality, and both hold this structure to be universal and transcendental. As a result, they describe the everyday appearance of the world as illusory, for its apparently chaotic multiplicity hides the fact that the "basic principle of diversity in material reality [is] 'formative' or 'plastic'" (Baljeu, 116).

Mondrian's viewpoint amounts to a particular description of the nature of existence as the activity of actualization. This activity is relational and constructive of order. It is universal in that according to Mondrian it actively structures the existence of all things. It is timeless in that Mondrian holds that it structures the order of time. Mondrian reifies the activity of actualization and calls it the universal force. But as a force Mondrian's universal is the principle of the activity of the actualization of the real. In this way, Mondrian places himself in a tradition of speculative philosophy: he seeks to explain the structure of reality in terms of the activity of actualization that constructs it. The basic argument recurring throughout Mondrian's writings claims that there is an "immutable" principle which generates the differentiating multiplicity of existence. He allows for change, but insists that change is not random. Difference is a matter of the activity of actualization which constructs it. For this reason, Mondrian claims that change follows a certain structure (94).

9 See Chapter One and Bradley (2003a) on the tradition of speculative philosophy.
Without denying that Mondrian's written elaborations of this basic argument are indebted to idealist philosophy and theosophy, I contend that it is only the primary principles of Mondrian's theory of the activity of actualization or the structuration of structure which relate to what is actually presented in his images. Mondrian's visual presentation of the activity of actualization is best understood with reference to the constructive mathematics of the philosopher L. E. J. Brouwer. Although Mondrian was familiar with Brouwer's non-mathematical work Life, Art, and Mysticism (1905) and he employed Brouwer's metaphysical ideas in his own writings, it is not the ideas

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Brouwer's first work, the mystical and non-mathematical Life, Art, and Mysticism, 1905, is thematically referred to in Mondrian's treatise on neoplasticism "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality". See Baljeu (115-8) and Cheetham (47-48). Brouwer and Mondrian share the belief that the universal and nature are opposed: the universal is certain, determinate, timeless, and true, while nature is vague, indeterminate, and false because it veils the true nature of reality in materiality. Knowledge of the universal structure of reality is knowledge of the perfect state of "repose", where all things that exist are held in a relational tension – repose – that is stable, tranquil and continual. Both believe one can only come to know the truth of the universal through aesthetic intuition – the withdrawal into the self and private contemplation of the world.

In Life, Art and Mysticism, Brouwer claims that when one disinterestedly contemplates reality, one realizes the illusory nature of the true material world and the truth of the universal, and finds one's true, purified self (1975:7). Intuition reveals the nature of the self: not as an individual but as an equilibrated instantiation of the eternal, unchanging universal that is the essence of all existence (1-2). Intuition involves a turning inward on the self. With the resignation of the self, one comes to realize the true, universal nature of the world and thus one's own true nature. According to both Brouwer and Mondrian, art above all can help us to perform this intuition and actually express universal repose, but when and only when it is devoid of all
found in this book which help explain the activity of actualization as it is elaborated in his art. Rather, it is key elements in Brouwer’s mathematical philosophy which provide a model for understanding Mondrian’s account of the activity of actualization, especially as presented in his late images.¹¹

Brouwer’s intuitionism conceives of mathematics as an activity of mental construction. Mathematical sentences

cultural, material and natural references. Art which expresses this truth expresses the relational repose of the universal by bringing the material and universal, the most difficult to unify, harmoniously together.

¹¹ Cheetham explains how Mondrian develops his ideas about the universal, about relational counterparts, and about repose in relation to Brouwer’s Life, Art, and Mysticism and how images found in Brouwer are incorporated into Mondrian’s “Natural Reality and Abstract Reality”. Cheetham argues that while “Brouwer’s writings were likely one of the most immediate inspirations for the doctrine that Mondrian espouses... they would only have worked as reinforcements for ideas... that Mondrian learned from an array of neoplatonic, Theosophical and more strictly philosophical texts” (47). For this reason, Cheetham not only downplays the significance of Brouwer’s work in his interpretation of Mondrian’s visual and written production, but he restricts his reading of Brouwer chiefly to his non-mathematical writings. Cheetham’s argument is that Mondrian’s “theoretical texts and paintings are ... equal partners in a common enterprise” (xv). Because he is interpreting Mondrian’s paintings and writings in relation to one another, Cheetham restricts his analysis to the theories and ideas explicitly discussed by Mondrian. Since I argue that Mondrian’s images present an account of the activity of actualization closely related to but nevertheless different from that found in his writings, my analysis is not restricted to what Mondrian claims to be doing in his art, but pays attention to what is actually presented there. Hence, I refer to Brouwer’s constructivist mathematics in my interpretation because it provides a useful model for understanding what is happening in Mondrian’s images.
are considered real; they are meaningful statements to which the notions of truth or falsity can be applied. Moreover, mathematical existence is identical with mental acts of construction and therefore not mind-independent. In order to exist, a mathematical assertion must be constructed. Further, Brouwer insists that mathematical constructions are temporal acts. He defines what he calls the first act of intuitionism as the grasp of the invariant before-after structure of time. The primordial intuition is the perception of what Brouwer calls “two-ity”, the mind’s perception of a “move of time, i.e., of the falling away of a life moment into two distinct things, one of which gives way to the other, but is retained in memory” (1975:510). Two-ity is revealed when the content of perceptions is reduced to the “common substratum” or basic before-after structure ordering all perception. In terms of mathematics, the intuitive before-after relation of two-ity is primarily the genesis of the series of natural numbers. Mathematical construction is serially structured because it follows the given structure of our temporal order of perceptions.

Brouwer's second act of intuitionism is the constructive activity of the mathematical subject. In the serial construction of infinitely proceeding mathematical sequences, the mathematical subject is free to choose how and to what extent any new term added to the sequence derives from antecedent acts of construction. What comes after develops out of what came before without being directed by it. Thus, in Brouwer's intuitionism, time and freedom are the conditions of mathematics (Bradley, 1996:240). Mathematical constructions are identical to mathematical acts of construction. This position has two significant consequences. First, the primacy of construction in
mathematics means that the truth and falsity of mathematical propositions must be constructed. Mathematical proof is an act of constructing a mathematical proposition as true or false. Thus mathematics is the activity of constructing relations that are fallible and subject to continuous revision and change. Secondly, the primacy of construction in mathematics means that there is no real infinity of number or mathematical structure. All infinity of structure is a potential infinity which is realized only by acts of construction.¹²

Brouwer's intuitionism is thus a theory of serially constructive activity that actualizes the potential infinity of structure through a cumulative process of differentiations of that structure. On this account, to exist is to be constructed. Further, the intuition of the serial, before-after structure of reality reveals that every instantiation of that structure always gives way to a further term which builds on the previous two, "one of which gives way to the other, but is retained by memory" in the series of cumulative acts of construction. Every event is the antecedent basis for the next event in a serial structure of acts of actualization.

My claim is that Mondrian's images generalize the free, serially constructive activity of intuitionism as the activity of actualization itself, released from the special domain of Brouwer's theory of mathematical construction. The structure of *Victory Boogie Woogie* encourages

¹² Brouwer's intuitionism draws support from Gödel's incompleteness theorem, which shows that it is not possible to give "explicit expression to all the principles of a proof that we can recognize as correct". This means that "the totality of methods of proof is an indefinitely extensible one and subject to a continuous process of change" (Bradley, 1996:241). See also Dummett.
viewers to participate in the activity of the actualization it presents by positioning the viewer as its principle of freedom and construction. The viewer becomes an element of the relational interplay that constructs the two-dimensional structure of the image and projects that structure onto the world beyond the image. The basic features of the image’s structure can be understood in terms of planar geometry: the two-dimensional surface of the image is articulated in terms of the relations which hold between points, lines and planes.

Planar geometry is usually understood in Euclidean terms as a formal, logical structure based on definitions and rules of how space is organized. Following Hubert Damisch’s description, I would argue that the geometrical aspect of Mondrian’s structure is better understood in terms of the earlier geometry of classical Greece, which is concerned with the boundaries and surfaces relating finite elements (xvii). On this model, the infinity of the structure is not a real but a potential infinity which as such is dependent on its actualization. However, when the viewer is revealed to be the principle which freely constructs those relations, the geometrical structure of the image is found also to be topological, a matter of mapping relations onto those elements.

Generally, topology is the study of shapes and their properties which are not changed by transformations of a particular type. Thus it is the study of the relations of a figure without any reference to height, depth or length. Therefore, unlike geometry, topology is not concerned with measurement but with how relations are ordered in a given structure. Topological transformation involves deforming a structure in any way, providing it retains the same number of vertices, edges, and faces (points, lines, and planes) in
the same relative positions. This can be applied to an understanding of how the viewer actualizes an order of relations within the given matrix of Victory Boogie Woogie: the structure is mapped without changing any of the given properties of the image. Because topology is the study of the properties of topological spaces that do not change when those properties are mapped to relation, or ordered into structure, the viewer can be said to stand in a topological relation to Victory Boogie Woogie. Viewing the image is thus a matter of actualizing an order of relations in terms of the topological possibilities given in the structure of the image and the viewer’s specific position in relation to them.

The Active Structure of Mondrian’s Late Paintings

Victory Boogie Woogie presents the viewer with a dynamic structure of differentiation. The image is composed of a large diamond-shaped canvas overlayed with black, white, gray and primary coloured planes of paper and plastic fragments, oil painting, and black chalk. These rectangular planes are juxtaposed one next to the other to make the numerous grid lines which, as in the slightly earlier Broadway Boogie Woogie, 1942-3 [Fig. 9], structurally dominate the image. But in Victory Boogie Woogie, the continuity of the grid lines is interrupted by the individual planes, for they vary in size and often overlap, while the relations between colours vary the speed of the viewer’s visual attention to them. Further, the organization of the planes raises the white background of the picture plane into the activity of the coloured surface by incorporating the coloured fragments into lines. Surface and ground become indistinguishable in the interplay of horizontal and vertical
articulations of the picture plane. Yet the resulting image is not the delineated grid viewers come to expect of Mondrian’s neoplastic arrangements. *Victory Boogie Woogie* presents a varying structure of differentiating trajectories, speeds, and intersecting relations through the lines constructed by the coloured planes. This structure draws the viewer into the differentiating activity of the picture plane.

Viewing the image is emphatically a matter of following the differentiations of its surface. Because Mondrian’s linear fragments deny naturalistic representation, and with it any development of naturalistic space, there is nothing to appeal to in order to explain the differentiating activity except the differently coloured rectangles juxtaposed beside one another. These present the viewer with different colours which encroach on each other with varying intensities along horizontal and vertical axes. The viewer thus reacts to different parts of the image in different ways as she is led around the picture plane. There are at least four reasons for this.

First, each colour suggests a different speed and intensity to the viewer. While each plane presents nothing but itself, denying even any sense of volume achieved in, for instance, naturalist paintings, the colours do have iconic value. In *Victory Boogie Woogie*, the large red rectangles which punctuate the central area of the canvas draw the viewer. The red rectangles, for example, seem larger than the blue or yellow fragments, as well as brighter and more visually attractive than the large white
and gray areas. However, the colour red suggests different speeds and intensities. This is due to the iconic meanings attached to it. Red can mean stop, and so the viewer's activity of looking at the canvas is momentarily halted. Red can also mean danger, passion, love, and death, for red is the colour of blood. The large red areas initially attract the viewer's attention because of their iconic warning to yield at their presence and watch out for danger, thereby leading the viewer into the structure of which she is part. The large red planes address the viewer by alerting her attention, drawing her into the context of that address. Yet red has also vital and passionate connotations which serve to quicken the viewer's interest in its contextual surroundings. The rectangular shape of the five largest red fragments further activates the viewer's visual participation in the image because, unlike the full stop of a square, the rectangle is a form of line; it has a trajectory. The red rectangles move the viewer's visual attention towards more coloured planes.

The colours blue and yellow bear similarly iconic values. A darker colour, blue suggests depth, darkness (night), and peace (due to its traditional associations with the virgin in blue). In this way, it has less of the punctum effect of red because it slows down the viewer's looking activity. It feels cooler, deeper and absorbs the viewer's attention, even if only momentarily. Yellow, on the other hand, is brighter, hotter, less dangerous than red and more surface-oriented than blue. While blue absorbs the viewer

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13 Regardless of which colours or patterns strike the viewer, my claim is that the dynamic structure of the image is seen to operate in the way that I describe. For another account of the dynamism of Mondrian's images, see Riley.
in the picture plane, yellow brings the viewer back onto the surface of the image. Not surprisingly, iconic readings can be made of white, gray and black as well. White, of course, suggests cleanliness, emptiness, purity, and clarity. It presents a pristine void of colours in the spaces it occupies. Like blue, visually it feels cool; like yellow, it keeps the viewer's eye on the surface of the picture plane. The gray areas are foggier, cloudier, and murkier than the white, giving a certain volume to the picture plane, not least because gray is the only hue that functions here both as the image's ground and as an articulated element of the picture plane. Moreover, gray is the only hue that undergoes adumbrations: there are different shades and intensities of gray throughout *Victory Boogie Woogie*. Understood as a mixture of all three primary colours, each shade of gray fills the visual space at each corner of the diamond-shaped canvas, but gray is included in the repertoire of the fragment hues. Finally, black bears the usual connotations of death, darkness, and depth, as well as infinitely receding space, the emptiness of a void, and a lack of colour in the spaces it occupies. Each hue has its own intensity and as such visually affects the viewer differently: attracting or deflecting the viewer's attention, encouraging the viewer to pass a fragment quickly or to dwell on it longer, absorbing the viewer's visual attention or intensifying the viewer's visual progress toward the next fragment.

The second way by which the viewer's visual attention is differentiated as she sees differently coloured fragments is due to how each fragment is juxtapositionally related to another. The iconic value of each colour is modified both by its placement beside other colours and by the size of each coloured fragment. In the context of an
image composed of five basic colours of rectangular pieces, size and position matter. Larger fragments visually hold the viewer longer than smaller ones do; they also stand out as individual areas within the canvas. They tend not to compose lines as continuously as do the smaller planes, and the short lines they do compose interrupt, and are interrupted by, lines composed by smaller planes.

Like the larger planes, the small ones affect the viewer in terms of the iconic value of each colour. However, they are rarely set off as individual points. Instead, they more readily compose orthogonal lines horizontally and vertically through the picture plane. Except when they are set off by their placement one on top of another, most smaller fragments in *Victory Boogie Woogie* are similar in size and shape and are immediately juxtaposed beside one another, thus constructing the lines which define Mondrian's famous grid structure within the image. Their edges merge to form single-edged horizontal and vertical trajectories which intersect with, halt at, and even move through, the larger ones.

Thirdly, the lines composed by Mondrian's smaller fragments are busy. The activity animating the lines is due not only to the interplay of different colours which define each linear composition, but to Mondrian's practise of pasting on rectangular bits of paper and plastic rather than only painting the shapes onto the canvas. The effect of Mondrian's multi-media pasting technique underscores the constructed aspect of each linear trajectory by visually fragmenting the fluidity of the line with the visible edge of individual rectangles of colour. This fragmentation is supported by the colour differentiations which permeate the similarity of shape that forms the edge of each line and, related to this, the iconic value of each plane of
colour. The construction of linear trajectories by large and small coloured rectangles and by the interrelations between them render the structure of *Victory Boogie Woogie* active.

Fourthly, in addition to colour and size, the diagonal shape of the canvas helps extend the horizontal and vertical axes of the image beyond its frame. There are no diagonal or curved lines that pull back and hold the structure within its frame. The orthogonal drive is projected outward, indefinitely beyond the canvas and into its environment, for lines extend to each edge of the picture plane, rather than the corners of the canvas' diamond. Plans are cut off by the edge as they move up and across the canvas. Yet Mondrian prevents the movement of the coloured planes in particular from following the central axes to each corner. In this way, the orthogonal emphasis of the linear structure cannot mimetically enact the diagonal frame of the canvas and thus projects that structure beyond it. The activity raised by the iconic value of each colour, their linear assemblage, and their mutual intersections and interventions is therefore emphasized by their projection into the context surrounding the image itself.

Mapping the Structure of *Victory Boogie Woogie*

However, the dynamism of the image is above all located in its effect on the viewer. The image presents a plurality of coloured planes juxtaposed in such a way that a grid-like assemblage of lines is formed with differing intensities and continuity. Yet the pattern established by the image is not what gives its various lines their different momenta. It is the viewer who constructs the lines into trajectories.
because it is the viewer who is encouraged to work out the pace of each colour and the linear direction in response to the iconic value, relative size and position of each coloured plane. While the linear continuity formed by the juxtaposition of coloured planes follows horizontal and vertical coordinates throughout the picture plane, the viewer is free to decide how and to what extent a linear path will be followed. The viewer is free to halt a line's trajectory, change direction at any right-angle junction, or merge a slighter line into a larger one.¹⁴

Yet, although visually encouraged to follow the paths of the structure, there is no way the viewer can trace any trajectory without being interrupted. The size and distribution of coloured planes draws the viewer's looking activity through the image at various speeds and in continually changing directions. But the viewer's activity of tracing the structure of the image is continually thwarted. Just when one path seems fixed, it then splinters into others, or it comes to an end and forces the viewer to backtrack, or it moves beyond the canvas entirely. There is no stable resting place for the viewer because there is no determinate pattern to the image. The colour values, linear directions, speeds, and intersecting relations encourage the viewer to continue moving through the image on its surface.

By moving through the image, the viewer constructs the structure of the image by relating lines, planes and colours into patterns of various speeds and

¹⁴ In this respect, I agree with Cooper when he argues that viewing Mondrian's New York images involves time and motion and cannot be undertaken in terms of "classical pictorial goals of unity and instantaneity" (125).
directions. The orthogonal combinations which the viewer can visually construct are innumerable, for *Victory Boogie Woogie*'s tightly organized arrangement of a few basic elements—points, lines, planes, and colour—interact endlessly. Their interaction, however, is precisely what makes the image so two-dimensional. Structure and ground are perfectly harmonized. No matter how they are assembled by the viewer, no line, colour, plane, or pattern is more authentic or primary than any other. For instance, while some coloured planes initially stand out and attract the viewer, such as the large red or yellow rectangles, they immediately direct the viewer's looking activity towards the construction of relationships with other planes. The viewer is brought into the relational interplay of the image's structure. Likewise, no element of the image is raised or reduced beyond any other to create a sense of depth. The geometrical structure of the image notwithstanding, there is neither a linear, geometrical, nor a multi-point perspectival, system operating to create a sense of three-dimensional space in the image. Perspective is denied as a representational structure.

The viewer does not stand in relation to the image as an ordering or unifying principle, as a link relating the spaces of the image and the world with one another, or as a constructive principle building up the space as the viewer moves through it.\(^\text{15}\) The two-dimensionality of the image is

\(^{15}\) In Damisch's discussion of space in neoplastic and suprematist images, he argues that the delimitation of one-point perspective was shattered "into a thousand pieces ... to arrive ... at representing intervals of depth not extensively ... but intensively through the juxtaposition of coloured fields of different values and tonalities" (30). I argue that depth is not a result of the juxtaposition of different colour values and tonalities in *Victory*
maintained even where rectangular planes overlap and their pasted-on edges lift from the surface of the canvas, for in both cases depth is denied in favour of relatedness. The unfinished quality of the image emphasizes the theme of construction because the pasted on pieces of plastic and paper act as traces of the artist's constructive activity. There are often numerous pieces pasted one on top of the other. Rather than adding the dimension of depth to the structure of the image, these pasted-on pieces paradoxically emphasize that it is the two-dimensional space of the image which is under construction. Instead of raising the viewer's looking activity to a foreground space, these pieces encourage the viewer to relate them as planes to the structure of lines, points, and planes in which they are elements. This emphasizes the topological relation between planar surfaces without inviting the viewer into perspectival depths because the plane acts only as a flat plane. Moreover, although certain colours and their combinations can be said visually to "feel" deeper in relation to others, in the context of the image their effect is one of differing intensities, levels of visual absorption, or resonance. They move the viewer's looking activity across the surface of the image without opening a space into the image. In this way, the viewer is brought into the relational

Boogie Woogie; rather, velocity - the speed and the direction of how structure is actualized - is the result of intensive depth. Thus the lines constructed are more properly called vectors, for they produce the speed and direction by which structure is actualized, a speed and direction which continually differentiates.
interplay of the image’s structure as a principle of construction that articulates the surface as pure surface.  

The visual activity of the surface structure of *Victory Boogie Woogie* is not only projected outwards beyond the canvas frame but also centralized quadrilaterally around the centre of the diamond. The linear activity of the structure is balanced within the limits of the canvas as well as indefinitely projected beyond those limits. In this respect, the linear activity determines the extension of only a single surface or plane out from the image onto its environment, but always with reference to the image as its starting point. The structure of *Victory Boogie Woogie* is both extensive and centripetal. In Mondrian’s earlier neoplastic images, Rosalind Krauss shows, the structure functions as a fragmented view of the world, “arbitrarily truncated” but still continuous with the world and so linked to that of the world (21). Yet it also acts as an “internally organized” object of vision, for the structure of the image does not always extend beyond the canvas edge but turns back on itself at the edge of the frame (21). This is most notably the case in the left and right corners of the diamond shape, where the structure of planar contiguity leaves off in a field of gray. These corners are the only place where spatial depth could be implied by the structure, were it not that the top and bottom corners suggest that the gray fields can just as easily be seen to be larger, rectangular planes which are themselves arbitrarily truncated by the frame, like the more obviously

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16 Bois argues that the pasted on pieces reveal part of Mondrian’s intention to shape the viewer’s movement through the image by revealing Mondrian’s own decision-making process in constructing the matrix of the image in a particular way (160, 171, 182).
truncated small and coloured planes. Ultimately, the structure makes the image both an individual object with its own organizational system and a view on, or feature of, the world.

Because it organizes the surface of the image in terms of points, lines, surfaces, and their interconnections, the structure of Mondrian's *Victory Boogie Woogie* can be understood in terms of planar geometry. This is first of all because the image represents nothing but its own structure, which can then be projected onto the surrounding environment of the image without representing that environment. Because the image does not employ a representational system of perspective, it is found to apply to the world without representing it. The image presents how the world external to the image comes to be structured without imposing a specific structure onto the world. The structure presents a matrix of inter-relations which can be endlessly re-organized by the viewer.

Secondly, the structure can be understood in terms of planar geometry because it is ordered by the extension of lines between points which construct various surfaces in the articulation of the two-dimensional space of the canvas. It is a two-dimensional schema of points, lines, surfaces and their endlessly differentiating extensive relations: the points, lines, and surfaces are related differently by the viewer as the viewer visually moves from one area to the next. A change in direction up or down the canvas can re-organize the structure at any point.

The extensive relations which are visually constructed out of the basic elements of *Victory Boogie Woogie* have a further defining property: they are non-quantifiable. Because the orthogonal lines of the image and the canvas edge meet at the frame, the image is
arbitrarily fragmented. This means its structure can be externally projected into the world beyond the frame indefinitely. Thus, although the image within the picture plane can be measured, the differentiating relationships between lines, colours, surfaces, and points are not measurable. There is no determination of the structure as it extends beyond the frame of the canvas. For this reason, the image can be understood in topological terms. It is a structure of extensive relations which can be analyzed without any reference to quantification. Basic topological relations are found in Mondrian’s last image, such as contiguity, overlap, and whole-part relations. These are the relations which inform its structure and which define the construction of its two-dimensional space.

*Victory Boogie Woogie* is a topological structure because the construction of linear order out of its given organizational elements maps its various points, lines and surfaces. Following a linear path involves constructing the coloured fragments into lines which organize the surface of the image in a particular way. Yet no particular organization determines the structure of the image. Because the points, lines, and planar surfaces are fixed, any organizational structure the viewer visually constructs is a topological transformation of the matrix of relations offered by the image. The points, lines, and planes of the image do not alter; but the viewer’s mapping of the relations between those elements differs continually. For this reason, topological transformation is the basis of the

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17 What I refer to as points, lines, and surfaces are referred to in topology as vertices, edges and faces. In the context of this analysis, using the topological terms neither adds nor detracts from the argument, so I use the more familiar terminology in my analysis of the painting.
active or dynamic nature of Mondrian’s image and topological transformation defines the viewer’s looking activity, which is the basic constructive principle dynamically actualizing its structure.

Denied any mimetic system of figuration, perspective, or volume in the image, the viewer of Mondrian’s Victory Boogie Woogie is visually encouraged to construct trajectories of different directions and speeds within its relational structure of coordinates and colours. Both the iconic value of the colours and the planar topological relations of contiguity, overlap, and whole-part urge the viewer to move through the visual elements of the image, one after the other. The viewer’s visual movement from one element to the next is determined by the image’s structure only insofar as she is led either horizontally or vertically through it. The speed with which the viewer visually moves is determined by the way she is individually affected by the colours of the planes, their combinations, and their relative sizes. The viewer is invited to form lines out of certain contiguous planes. For instance, the juxtaposition of small, coloured rectangles aligned at the edge along the same axis encourages the viewer to merge those rectangles into a line. Further, the viewer visually constructs such a line at a varying pace depending on the size and colour of the rectangle, moving more slowly at some places than at others. In addition to this, however, the viewer is also given choices along the construction of her route: she can turn from a horizontal linear construction to a vertically contiguous plane or she can work in the edge of a differently sized rectangle and thus broaden, lengthen, and decelerate the pace of her viewing. As the viewer moves through the image, she is free to choose how, to what extent, and at what speed she
visually constructs the linear structure of the image. The viewer is thus the principle of free construction in the actualization of the structure of the image.

In her commentary on Mondrian's *Victory Boogie Woogie*, Dee Reynolds explains that the "dynamics of perception are transferred onto" the basic elements of the image "which appear to move as the spectator perceives them in different configurations" (185). Thus she claims that activity is given by the viewer to the elements of the picture plane. Yet Reynolds' argument can be made more trenchant: the constructive activity of the viewer makes the structure dynamic because it participates in that structure. Looking activity is not transferred from the viewer to the image. It is involved in the structure of the image. Pulled into the image's topological relationships, the viewer's visual engagement with the structure is made into an active, relational element of its composition. As such, looking activity becomes another feature of the structure's two-dimensionality. Looking activity is involved in the construction of *Victory Boogie Woogie*'s structure and is not the expression of its structure. The viewer's looking activity actualizes the differentiating relations which determine the structure of the image. As already noted, these relations are not stable for there is no end point, telos, or pattern to be generated that is not arbitrary.

Visually to follow the structure of the image is to construct it, and the construction of the image's structure is a matter of the free, constructive activity of the viewer.

In this way, Mondrian's image puts viewers in a curious position. Denied access to the image in terms of linear or geometric perspective, the viewer is denied her traditionally defined relation to the work as simultaneously external to its system of representation but still the
principal axis by which it is ordered. Instead, the viewer is brought into the image as an element of its structure, namely as the principle of free construction which actualizes its order of relations. Because the image is a strictly two-dimensional structure, the viewer is not positioned within the representational space of the image. Rather, she participates in the activity of actualizing its spatial order as the basis of its free construction.

There is no constructive activity to Mondrian's structure without the looking activity of the viewer. But this activity neither determines nor is prior to any other element in the image; it is as essential to the image's dynamic structure as are the points, lines, planes, and colours. Because the activity of the viewer participates as a relational element in the dynamic structure of the artwork, the activity of the viewer is an immanent principle of that structure, not a transcending or directing principle. Moreover, the viewer's free, constructive activity is not any more authentic or important than any other feature, for each element of the artwork operates in relation to every other in the construction of the dynamism of the image. Free, constructive activity is one feature of the work which, among others, makes the artwork what it is: a dynamic and differentiating structure of interrelations. Contrary to Mondrian's own statements about his work, there is no gendered iconography to the image because the viewer is free to "project her own associations onto the colours and forms" presented. This means the viewer's associations are motivated by the iconic value of the colours and forms that impel the viewer to perform different visual acts of relation within the structure of the image (Reynolds, 155). Thus the visual activity of the viewer is the constructive activity of the image's inter-relational structure of
differentiation. It actualizes the differentiating relations between points, lines and planes; it activates the topology.

**Freedom and Serial Differentiation**

Viewing *Victory Boogie Woogie* actualizes the differentiating relations of the image's structure. The order of relations changes as the viewer moves through the image, relating elements of the picture plane to construct trajectories of different orientation and speed. However, this does not imply that the formal properties of the image, such as the position of planes or their colours, change. There are two reasons for this.

First, considered independently of the viewer, the image is a matrix of possible orders of relations for construction. This matrix is not a fixed, necessary, or ideal order. It is an open scheme of possible orders of relations. It represents a potential infinity of possible orders relative to any determined order. Although all elements are fixed in place on the canvas, there is nothing in the image which defines how any one element stands in relation to any other element. Any specific order of relations is actualized only by the viewer. That is, the image is an open universal which is actual only in virtue of its particular realizations. Only because the viewer's acts of construction operate in the context of the given matrix of colours, their relational contrasts, and the orthogonal position of the points, lines and planes on the picture plane, are the potentialities of the scheme of the image actualized. Moreover, because there is no ideal order of complete realization inherent in the given matrix that is the image, the constructive activity
of the viewer has no pre-given telos nor any final end point.\textsuperscript{18}

This leads to the second reason why the activity of actualizing structure does not change the formal properties of the image. While the given matrix of the image does not determine the actualization of any specific order of relations, it does provide a matrix of elements to be relationally ordered and situates the viewer as the principle of the actualization of their order. The process by which the viewer constructs new relations in the image can thus be understood in terms of Brouwer's model of

\textsuperscript{18} Damisch holds that the modernist shattering of one-point perspective leads to axonometric perspective, a system in which perspectives are based on various axes or reference lines associated with geometric elements, and that this implies that the traditional vanishing point is “cast into the infinite” (30). Insofar as this system of representation positions the viewer in an active and changing relation to the image, axonometric perspective holds because the viewer’s position in relation to Victory Boogie Woogie is defined in terms of how the next relation of speed and direction is constructed. But insofar as axonometric perspective casts the viewer’s position into the infinite, I would have to reply that the only infinity presented in the image is the potential infinity of its matrix. The activity of actualizing the structure of the image positions the viewer’s looking activity, but not at an infinite vanishing point or even at a potential infinity of vanishing points. It positions the viewer in relation to the image as a principle of the free, constructive activity of the structuration of the image’s order. There is no space to the image until the viewer participates in its construction. When the viewer participates in the actualization of the image’s structure, she is neither a mastering subject in relation to it nor subject to its matrix. In relation to Victory Boogie Woogie, the viewer is shown to be a free and constructive subject in the specific sense that she participates in the construction of the order of reality without either being reducible to its structure or becoming the point to which the structure itself is reducible.
Any act of relation requires two terms. There cannot be a successor act without an antecedent, nor can there be antecedent acts without successors. Each act of relation is distinct because it is not reducible to the other: it is a free act of construction and as such cannot be exhaustively defined in terms of anything but itself. But each act is intrinsically related to the next because the antecedent is the condition of the successor, developing out of it. In the context of Victory Boogie Woogie, no visual act of relation constructs another, but each act of relation is the basis of what comes after. The activity of constructing relations is therefore serially ordered. Inherent to this serial structure is the activity of the viewer who constructs those relations. Within the given before-after structure, the viewer's act of constructing a new relation develops out of what came before without being directed by it. On this model, the rule of construction presented in the image is one of serially ordered free acts of construction which actualize the structure of the image through a cumulative process of differentiations of that structure.

This involves a further set of concerns regarding seriality. First, in the construction of any visual route through the image, any given antecedent act of construction is fixed, completed, and unchanging. What alters with a successor act of relation are the relations in which the antecedent acts stand. The addition of novel differences, namely successor acts of relation, makes a difference to the antecedent series of relations. Each antecedent member of the series is a completed and so unchangeable act of construction. But the relations of the
antecedent members alter in the light of the new construct, taking on new values or significance in the light of successor acts of relation.

Secondly, for instance, when the viewer freely takes as her starting point the large red rectangle at the top right of the image, she can choose to direct its trajectory further to the right to the small, black rectangle contiguous with its right edge, then move down from that rectangle through successively contiguous planes at the varying speeds with which viewers associate their size and colour. The actualization of that serial order of relations – right, then down – is the constructive activity of the viewer's visual movement through the image. Yet the actualization of each serially ordered relation has as its basis the previously constructed relation. Its construction is both a free act and a development out of the past. The construction of a series of relations fixes those relations as serially ordered terms. For this reason, they are complete and unchanging once actualized: the route has been actualized as right, then down from the red rectangle.

Equally, however, in the third place, each serially antecedent relation is open and vague with respect to its future relations to any successor acts of construction. Antecedent acts are the basis of, but do not determine, the construction of new acts of relation. New acts of relation do not alter the serial order of antecedent relations, but they do alter their value within the series. With the addition of new relations, those defining the antecedent series alter their significance in the construction of that serial order. For instance, in the above route the viewer moves vertically down from the black plane, to the adjacent yellow, to another black plane. The viewing subject can choose to turn left to the yellow plane immediately beside
it, through the next eight planes, then up to the large yellow rectangle. The red rectangle is thus not only situated as the starting point of the serial order but given new significance as the determining edge of a new, broader vertical vector. Similarly, the smaller planes are not only fixed as a route around the red rectangle, but are reconfigured into parts of a larger, multi-coloured whole situated adjacent to the large yellow one in the new, broader line.

Serial order in Victory Boogie Woogie is thus established as a spontaneous, free constructive activity of cumulative differentiations. The viewing subject's acts of relating construct the serially differentiating relational structure of the image. As such, the viewing subject constructs the image's structure in terms of serially iterative acts of differentiation because each act of relation is an act which takes the past act as its basis in the construction of a new one. Each act of relation iterates what came before in a new way; it is constructed out of the antecedent serial order, but as a free act it is not reducible to that antecedent order. Each serial iteration is thus qualitatively different from what came before in virtue of the free act that constructs it, the different serial history drawn upon by each event of construction, and the difference the novel event gives to the antecedent series. The actualization of relations in Mondrian's image is therefore not determined by numerical difference because the addition of new relations qualitatively changes the image's structure.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{19}\) In terms of Mondrian's oeuvre, Victory Boogie Woogie can thus be seen as the apex of his neoplasticism or the new construction in art. As commentators like Cheetham, Crowther,
Thus the activity of actualization carried out by the viewer when she engages with the image is the serially iterative actualization of order, the iterative structuration of structure, which as such is essentially dependent on the viewing subject. It follows that the ordering principle of *Victory Boogie Woogie* cannot be understood to be a rule in the sense of an automatic, algorithmic operation which requires no decision-making process on the part of a subject. The reasons for this are twofold. First, the activity of actualizing the image's structure is performed by the viewing subject who is drawn into the image to participate in its structure as its principle of free construction. This activity has no end, except for the viewer's arbitrary decision to end it, and so her activity continually actualizes the serially relational structure anew as it constructs new relations between the given elements of the image.

Secondly, this activity of actualizing structure is itself serially iterated as the viewer visually moves through the image. The viewer constructs new relations as she constructs her visual route through the image, and with each new relation the order or structure is differentiated into different trajectories, points of intersection, and speeds. The activity of actualization required of the viewer when she engages with the image is the serially iterative

Cooper, McNamara, and Krauss make clear, the primary values to which he adhered in written statements about his work were universality, construction, change or novelty, and relationality. Here, my main contention is that Mondrian's artwork far surpasses his eclectic and often confused written works, for the artwork clearly articulates an account of the nature of the activity of actualization that applies universally to all things. It presents a topology, not just of the dynamic rhythm of boogie woogie music or the busy energy of New York City streets, but of the iterative activity of reality.
actualization of novel order. Crucial to the activity of the actualization of novel order, as it is presented in Mondrian's image, is freedom itself.

Mondrian's written account of universal structure presents an intrinsical and uncompromising hierarchy of gender, race and culture, where male, white, Western culture stands over and above all others (Mondrian, 254, 291, 357). Yet, as I have shown, the account provided in the image of the actualization structure prioritizes freedom and construction as primary values. There is no hierarchy to the serial order of relations. No constructive elements are more important than any other, and without a telos to the activity of the actualization of structure, there can be no determinate hierarchical order. In virtue of its nature as freely constructive, Mondrian's structure is non-hierarchical. In particular, there is nothing in the artwork which leads viewers to see a gendered, racist, class based, or culturally-specific iconography in it.

In the context of Mondrian’s oeuvre, the only evolutionary process to be found there is the emergence out of his neoplastic endeavours of the account of the activity of the actualization of structure articulated in Victory Boogie Woogie. Mondrian develops his early

20 Contrary to Krauss and McNamara, I argue that Mondrian's images work against the evolutionary and developmental ideas in his writings. First, the only telos provided in the structure of the image is the telos of spontaneously free, serially iterative constructive activity; it is not the evolution towards a fixed end point because there is nothing in the image to suggest that anything is developed except the actualization of differences. Secondly, the only structure that is revealed is the continual construction of structure. Thirdly, there is no pre-ordained, determinate order of relations which guides the actualization of structure. Victory Boogie Woogie presents a
explorations of structures of dynamism, relationality, and order, from images like Red Mill, 1910-11, to the increasingly abstract, rhythmic, and orthogonal configurations of his plus-minus paintings, such as Composition 10 in Black and White: Pier and Ocean, 1915. Around 1917 with the chequerboard images like Composition (checkerboard, dark colours) [Fig. 10] and Composition A: Composition with Black, Red, Grey, Yellow and Blue, 1920, Mondrian moves from organic structures constituted by perpendicular lines to entirely orthogonal structures which increasingly employ the repetition of a few basic elements, such as straight lines and the primary colours plus black, white and gray. Where the earlier chequerboard paintings increase the abstraction while still maintaining spatial depth in the distinction between coloured planes and their neutral ground, Composition A presents a two-dimensional surface articulated by rigidly horizontal and vertical vectors up and across the canvas. The dynamic topological structure which comes to define his later works emerges here.

It is with Mondrian’s introduction of double lines into his grid-like structures, in images such as Composition of Lines and Colour III: Composition with Blue, 1937, that his neoplastic compositions take a more active, constructive, and visually engaging turn. The difference between Mondrian’s earlier works and those produced after this point can be described in terms of a sophistication of his concern with topological mapping activity, evident in the structure which has no end-point, other than an arbitrary termination of that activity such as the viewer’s decision to stop. Fourthly, no element in the actualization of the structure of the image is more authentic or important than any other.
way he articulates the surface of his images as simultaneously two-dimensional and actively differentiating. One crucial similarity between the old and new structures is that they are structured by orthogonal lines which construct flat planes. In the earlier works, the planar space of the canvas is exhaustively characterized in terms of two basic variables: Cartesian co-ordinates or the pair of distances (height and width). While this system of planar representation structures the canvas, it does so according to a rigid structure which the viewer can follow, but in which she does not participate. That is, in terms of the viewer’s looking activity, the mapping of the surface as two-dimensional has already occurred. There is nothing new to be constructed, and the viewer’s enactment of the image is just that: a re-enactment of its structure. It is not potentially infinite because the image does not await the actualization of its order. Rather, the order is given and simply extends as it is seen beyond the picture plane. However, later works such as Mondrian’s New York City I, II, 1941-42, are characterized by double lines and increasingly by the fragmentation of those lines with coloured planes. In consequence, the planar space of the canvas is characterized by a different system of planar representation, namely in terms of a single distance plus an angle. In this system, given any original reference point, specifying a specific distance (how far), plus a specific angle (in what direction), determines a second point and thus articulates how the planar representation proceeds. The plane can be thought of in terms of the combination of angle and distance, even if those angles are only 90° and 180°, which produce the orthogonal planar vectors which represent the ultimate character of Mondrian’s surfaces. Yet crucial to such a system of planar representation is the
active principle of its actualization. That is, the structure of the image requires the viewer to specify the distance and the angle in which the vectors will proceed. In terms of an image like Victory Boogie Woogie, this principle is the viewer’s freely constructive activity. The viewer provides the basis for the activity of planar representation actualized by the orthogonal vectors. Thus the viewer is that element which actualizes the open structure of the image. When dynamism, relationality, construction, and novelty are seen to be the primary issues in Mondrian’s neoplasticism, the understanding of the activity of the actualization of structure presented in Victory Boogie Woogie is his ultimate achievement.

Mondrian’s Constructive Subject

Victory Boogie Woogie presents an image of the universal and serially iterative free activity of the actualization of structure. Crucial to this image is a process of freely constructive differentiation whereby novelty and uniqueness are not accidental features but part of the event of the actualization of relations. Understood in terms of the activity of the actualization of structure, any event of actualization or existence is irreducibly unique in virtue of its free act of actualization. But as serially ordered, each event constructs its own causal lineage or genealogy out of the antecedent events from which it emerged. It both develops out of the conditions of the past, and alters the significance of those conditions in terms of its activity of free self-actualization. In addition, each event is intrinsically open to future iterative actualizations of its own structure. For these reasons, Mondrian’s last image provides an account of how the related modernist
concerns of novelty, difference, self-creation, and freedom can be understood in terms of a universal structure of the actualization of all things.

Mondrian can thus be situated in relation to Degas. The later artworks of both artists present accounts of the activity of actualization in terms of serially iterative structure. Degas' account generalizes the activity of actualization over the nature of existence and so provides a way in which the differentiating quality characterizing things can be understood in terms of a durational process of becoming. His account shows how all things perform the activity of existence in terms of their own unique structure, and thus continually construct themselves as unique events of being. As presented in Degas' late images, the nature of existence is understood to consist of a process of serially ordered, novel acts of becoming. The role of the viewer in relation to Degas' images is performative because the viewer iterates the structure of the figure's activity of actualization to reveal her unique activity of becoming.

Mondrian's Victory Boogie Woogie takes Degas' account a step further, for in Mondrian's image the activity of actualization is abstracted from the structure of individual things, like a figure, and universalized as the structure of all things. Mondrian's image applies to the actualization of all orders of reality: not only to the structure of individuals but to the orders of space and time as well. His account of the activity of actualization is thus presented as an account of the actualization of structure as such. It is not just that the structure of all things is the activity of actualization, but that structure itself is constructed in terms of a serially iterative, free activity of actualization. Because he holds freedom to be a supreme
value, Mondrian’s vision shares with Degas’ the emphasis on the primacy of novelty and uniqueness in the actualization of existence. And like Degas’, Mondrian’s image presents the activity of actualization to be a cumulative, finite and revisable process of differentiations. Once constructed, things or structures are actualized as what they are, but nevertheless are open to change and revision.

However, the viewer of Mondrian’s Victory Boogie Woogie plays a crucially different role than the viewer of Degas’ images of bathers and dancers. The viewer is not led to identify with any element in Victory Boogie Woogie in order iteratively to perform the activity of actualization that makes it what it is. Rather, the viewer is situated in relation to the image as the very principle of the actualization of its structure. As the principle of free, constructive activity, the viewer participates in the activity of the actualization of structure without determining the constructive process either from a position as mastering subject or as wholly determined by the given matrix. From this perspective, Mondrian’s account of the activity of the actualization of structure supposes the viewer to be a freely constructive subject. Generalized in terms of the universal activity of the actualization of structure, Victory Boogie Woogie defines the subject as free, constructive and inherently situated in the matrix of the world.