

**PIET MONDRIAN'S NEO-PLASTIC COMPOSITIONS
(1917-1944) AND HIS SIX PRINCIPLES OF NEO-
PLASTICISM. AN ANALYSIS OF HIS AESTHETIC IDEAS
BASED ON A STUDY OF HIS ESSAYS AND PAINTINGS.**

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**CULTURAL CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

2020

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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE
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IDEAS BASED ON A STUDY OF HIS ESSAYS AND PAINTINGS.**

ABSTRACT

Amongst the modern artists of the beginning of the 20th century, Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) is considered a pioneer of pure abstract painting. The result of his consistent intuitive experimentations on canvas during the 1910's was the proposal of his new artistic style in 1919 called Neo-Plasticism, *nieuwe beelding* in Dutch. Throughout his Neo-Plastic period (1919-1944), he aimed to depict a universal expression of 'equilibrium' (new term for harmony) and a vital rhythm among his universal elements of painting called plastic means or means of imaging. Besides being a pure abstract painter, Mondrian was also a prolific writer of his theories. His theoretical writings, the majority of them written in the form of essays, articles, and notes, are indeed posterior outcome of his intuitive experimentations on his canvases. Scholars generally agree that his writings outline the evolution of his artistic vision of Neo-Plasticism. Considering the importance of Mondrian as an iconic pure abstract painter in the history of modern art, many scholars have emphasized on the contribution of this Dutch painter to modern art. However, previous researches did contextual analysis investigating his Neo-Plastic art and theory in relation to his artistic and philosophical influences such as De Stijl, Theosophy, Hegel, and Platonism. Contrary to the previous researches, this thesis looks at Mondrian's writings and paintings, focusing on the evolution of his aesthetic ideas based on his artistic experimentation on the canvas. First, in order to explain the development of Mondrian's artistic vision, his paintings were divided into three stylistic periods. Then, the important concepts of Neo-Plasticism found in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism are identified and compared to

the paintings of the three periods. Secondly, the theoretical development of these concepts is analyzed, using both Mondrian's paintings and texts, produced and written roughly at the same time. This thesis shows that a thorough examination of an experimental modern artists' writings, like those of Mondrian, although difficult and complex, in parallel with a visual study of his artistic experimentation on the canvas can expand our understanding of their aesthetic evolution and bring something new to Art History of Modern Art.

Keywords: Piet Mondrian, Neo-Plastic painting, Neo-Plasticism, six principles of Neo-Plasticism, equilibrium, rhythm.

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KOMPOSISI NEO-PLASTIK PIET MONDRIAN (1917-1944) DAN ENAM PRINSIP NEO-PLASTICISME. ANALISA IDEA ESTETIKA BERDASARKAN KAJIAN PENULISAN DAN CATAN BELIAU.

ABSTRAK

Di antara seniman moden yang terdapat pada awal abad ke-20, pelukis Belanda iaitu Piet Mondrian (1872 - 1944) adalah merupakan pelopor kepada lukisan abstrak tulen. Eksperimentasi atas kanvas yang konsisten sewaktu 1910-an adalah merupakan hasil daripada gaya artistik beliau yang dicadangkan pada 1919 yang dipanggil Neo-Plasticisme, atau *nieuwe beelding* dalam bahasa Belanda. Sepanjang tempoh Neo-Plastik (1919-1944), beliau bertujuan untuk menggambarkan ekspresi 'keseimbangan' (istilah baru untuk 'keharmonian') yang universal dan mengetengahkan ritma penting yang terdapat pada elemen-elemen universal tersebut yang dipanggil *plastic means* atau kegunaan pengimajian. Selain merupakan seorang pelukis abstrak, Mondrian juga merupakan seorang penulis yang prolific dalam teori-teorinya. Penulisan teoritikal beliau kebanyakannya berbentuk esei, artikel dan nota, yang sememangnya merupakan hasil daripada eksperimentasi intuitif beliau pada kanvas. Pengkaji secara umumnya bersetuju bahawa penulisan beliau menonjolkan evolusi yang berlaku dalam visi artistik Neo-Plasticisme. Mondrian dianggap penting sebagai pelukis abstrak tulen yang ikonik oleh pengkaji dan sejarawan sejourus mengakui sumbangan pelukis Belanda ini dalam sejarah seni moden. Walau bagaimanapun, penyelidikan terdahulu telah menganalisa secara kontekstual terhadap seni Neo-Plastik beliau dengan teori kesenian atau falsafah seperti De Stijl, Teosofi, Hegellisme, dan juga Platonisme. Berbeza dengan penyelidikan terdahulu, berdasarkan penulisan dan juga karya yang dihasilkan, tesis ini akan memberi fokus kepada evolusi idea, hasil daripada eksperimentasi atas kanvas beliau. Pertama, untuk menjelaskan perkembangan visi artistik Mondrian, catan beliau dibahagikan kepada tiga fasa/era penggayaan. Kemudian, keenam-enam konsep penting

Neo-Plasticisme akan dikenal pasti dan dibandingkan bersama catan sewaktu tiga fasa ini. Kedua, perkembangan teoritikal dalam konsep-konsep ini dianalisa menggunakan kedua-dua catan dan penulisan, yang secara kasarnya dihasilkan dan ditulis pada tempoh yang sama. Tesis ini menunjukkan bahawa penyelidikan yang menyeluruh terhadap penulisan seorang pelukis experimental seperti Mondrian, walaupun sukar dan rumit, selari dengan kajian eksperimentasi artistik visualnya pada kanvas dapat mengembangkan pemahaman kita tentang evolusi estetika beliau dan membawa sesuatu yang baru kepada Sejarah Seni Moden.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I aim to analyze Piet Mondrian's (1872-1944) aesthetic evolution in regards to his core Neo-Plastic concepts identified in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism¹. Indeed, I have examined Mondrian's theoretical maturation in his key formal concepts and theories through the analysis of his Neo-Plastic compositions², and in his writings³. In order to analyze the transformation of Mondrian's artistic vision, the Neo-Plastic paintings (1917-1944) are divided into three stylistic periods: early Neo-Plastic period - De Stijl years (1917-1923), middle period - post De Stijl years (1924-1931) - and late Neo-Plastic period (1932-1944). Next, the key Neo-Plastic concepts, discussed in six principles of Neo-Plasticism, are targeted and examined in paintings of the three periods. Lastly, the maturation of Mondrian's ideas toward these concepts are analyzed, adopting his paintings and texts, created and written approximately at the same time. Overall, at the end of this thesis we are able to theoretically explain the emergence, development, and alterations of the Neo-Plastic concepts in Mondrian's artistic vision in three periods of his Neo-Plastic oeuvre and his writings.

Considering the widely acknowledged fact that Mondrian's writings are posterior outcome of his experimentations on his Neo-Plastic compositions, in this thesis the aesthetic development of Mondrian based on his Neo-Plastic concepts in his paintings is

¹ These six principles are repeated in two 1926 essays of Mondrian. These rules were first published in response to a questionnaire Del Marle (editor of magazine *Vouloir*) had distributed in a circle of De Stijl artists to explain the characteristics of Neo-Plasticism and Elementarism. Unfortunately, only Mondrian's response survived, dating December 1926 (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 213). Mondrian's answer to Del Marle's questionnaire was originally written in a French essay entitled: *Principes généraux du Néo-Plasticisme - General Principles of Neo-Plasticism* - which remained unpublished during Mondrian's life. However, Mondrian wrote those six principles in his another 1926 essay *Home-Street-City* that was published in magazine *Vouloir*.

² Mondrian, called his paintings 'composition.' For it is through arrangements of the abstract means of imaging (plastic means) that equilibrium and rhythm as universal is expressed.

³ In the outset, it is essential to explain that the general term 'writings' in this thesis refers to Mondrian's texts that were written in the form of essays and articles between 1917 and 1944. In addition, his short notes written between 1938 and 1944 as well as his autobiographical texts (mainly found in his post-1938 corpus of his writings) are used in this thesis.

explained. This is under the light of his writings and not vice versa. I have used intertextuality as my research method to examine Mondrian's theoretical writings. Through examining his writings in different periods in relation to each concept, I have found the continuity, development, or transformation of his aesthetic ideas. Throughout the visual as well as textual analysis of his pre-1926 Neo-Plastic paintings and writings, I will demonstrate the emergence of core Neo-Plastic concepts in Mondrian's artistic vision before writing his aesthetic ideas as his six principles. Moreover, during the examination of his post-1924 paintings and post-1926 writings, I will explicate on the development, maturation, of Mondrian's artistic thoughts in respect to his Neo-Plastic concepts after writing his 1926 principles of Neo-Plasticism. Lastly, by examining his 1932-1944 paintings and writings, I will clarify Mondrian's the alteration and deviation from his principles of Neo-Plasticism alongside what he had demonstrated prior to 1932.

Contrary to the previous approaches, in my analysis, I have not used the inspirational sources such as Theosophy, Hegelian ideas, Platonism, De Stijl and so on which Mondrian used for the development and maturation of his aesthetic vision. Instead, I mainly look at his writing, focusing on his six principles of Neo-Plasticism related to aesthetic theories. They inform us about methods and conditions required to express 'equilibrium' - new term for harmony - and 'rhythm' in Neo-Plastic paintings. As I will show, these six principles holistically articulate prerequisites and methods for the expression of the equilibrium and rhythm as universal in Neo-Plastic compositions. At the end of this thesis, I demonstrate that by using a context-independent approach to examine the development and transformation of Neo-Plastic theory in different periods, we reach to new conclusions which are either complimentary or contradictory to the previous interpretations and findings of scholars. Within a broader perspective, such

context-independent approach later can be used to examine other abstract theories of painters such as Kandinsky, Kupka, and Malevich.

The result of this study shows that while Mondrian more or less applied the six principles of Neo-Plasticism in his 1917-1932 compositions, we cannot explain the visual characteristics of late Neo-Plastic compositions (particularly post-1935 compositions) based on the premises of the six principles. This thesis will show that the post-1932 compositions do not seem to follow the six principles of Neo-Plasticism anymore. Therefore, we need to revise and update these six principles to be able to interpret and understand the visual characteristics and tactics used in these post-1932 paintings and, in this way, express equilibrium (harmony) and rhythm. As it will be shown, Mondrian in his post-1932 writings also talked about his transformed aesthetic ideas, regarding his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories which are in line with his 1932-1944 experimentations on his canvases.

In the first place, this thesis proposes a novel perspective, using a context-independent approach, to examine the theoretical evolution of Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism. In the second place, this study will expound theories and concepts pertaining to the principles of Neo-Plasticism which are in line with what Mondrian discussed in his 1917-1944 theoretical writings. The findings can further be expanded to examine the applicability of the components of Neo-Plastic principles in other disciplines⁴. Moreover, these findings can further be used to compare the components of theory and principles of Neo-Plasticism with the theories of other pure abstract painters – such as Fritz Glarner, Jean Gorin, Marlow Moss, and Cesar Domela – whose aesthetic ideas and their paintings are more or less intimate to the principles of Neo-Plastic and De Stijl styles.

⁴ Although, some scholars have examined the application of principles of Neo-Plasticism on some disciplines, notably architecture and photography, there are many other areas on which these universal principles can be applied.

Lastly, this thesis furthers our understanding of core theories of abstract art, particularly pure abstract art, through excavating one of the most enriched and principled theories of abstract art (Neo-Plasticism) in the 20th century. In the third place, this thesis will explore Mondrian's early ideas of his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories before he recapped them as his six principles of Neo-Plasticism in 1926. This thesis also reveals Mondrian's transformed artistic standpoint during 1932-1944 in regard to what he wrote in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism as well as what he demonstrated in his pre-1932 paintings and writings. By having a thorough knowledge about Mondrian's stylistic evolution of his Neo-Plasticism, these data can further be compared to other abstract and pure abstract painters' stylistic developments. Moreover, knowing the relation between Mondrian's paintings and writings in different periods of Neo-Plasticism will help us to further scrutinize the rationales for such relations. Those rationales will further aid us to better understand the artistic development of Mondrian's theories in different periods of his Neo-Plastic career.

1.2 Background of study

An important artistic movement in the history of modern art is the introduction of Neo-Plastic art by Dutch artist Piet Mondrian (1872-1944). His artistic endeavor is an important example of stylistic development during the first half of the 20th century. From 1887 to 1912, he experimented with various art movements of his time such as Dutch Hague school of Impressionism, Luminism, Symbolism, Pointillism, and Cubism. However, after 1912, and in line with the influence of the cosmic and metaphysical teachings of Theosophy, Mondrian deeply felt the need to express a universal content as pure truth in his art. Hence, from 1914 to 1916, he started monumental revisions of his artistic theory that eventually resulted in the invention of a new art which he first called 'abstract-real' and then after 1919 branded it as 'Neo-Plastic.'

Mondrian formulated his Neo-Plastic art theories through years of experimentation and observation. He was an experimental artist who was always receptive to the philosophical and artistic trends of his time. In this regard, Milner acknowledged Mondrian as a philosopher whose artistic vision is depicted in his Neo-Plastic artworks: “[t]his enigmatic and impressive man was a philosopher who painted and a painter given to philosophical thought. His influence lay in his thought and the example that his paintings provided” (1992, p. 7). He constantly explored new methods to express harmony (equilibrium), rhythm, and beauty as pure and universal as possible. In his long artistic quest, Mondrian always sought to reveal the hidden and universal beauty through what he called ‘relationship’ between his abstracted, purified elements of painting. In his Neo-Plastic theory, he emphasized that a universal expression of beauty in art had not yet been fully realized due to the imitation and mimesis of objects in representational art. Beauty, for Mondrian, was not based on beauty found in the physical appearance of objects in nature. Instead, beauty for him was related to ‘truth’ and ‘absolute’ which were universal concepts. In this respect, Milner outlined the universal aesthetic vision of Mondrian as follows:

The mystic, the philosopher, the Utopian and the painter were all united in the Mondrian. [...] His vision, as he repeatedly insisted in his writings, was universal. It was a vision of harmony in the universe, uniting man with the cosmos. (Milner, 1992, p. 224)

In his Neo-Plastic paintings (1917-1944), Mondrian aimed to express the harmony as equilibrium, rhythm, and more importantly, beauty as universal and pure truth. He came to the idea that universal content in art (beauty as truth) in representational painting was expressed as veiled and vague due to the subjective and individual expression of the naturalistic forms. To uncloak such universalism, from 1912 to 1917 he completely departed from his previous representational style of painting. To this end, he abstracted

or, as he said, intensified or purified elements of paintings - line, color, and form - into vertical and horizontal lines, primary colors and noncolors, and flat plane. He, influenced by the Hegel's dialectic of oppositions, deduced that the equilibrium, rhythm, and beauty could only be expressed as universal through mutual 'relationships' and opposition between among such abstracted elements of paintings, called 'plastic means' or means of imaging. As such, he wished to express harmony, rhythm, and beauty as universal through the neutralization of relationships between dual oppositions in his paintings. He further aimed to implement his aesthetic principles into broader domain of life as in culture, environment, and society for wellbeing of mankind.

Indeed, Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism was introduced not only as a new style and theoretical standpoint toward art but also as a new life for all future mankind. That is to say, the aesthetic rules of his Neo-Plasticism are indeed principles of universal way of life which aims to help people (and nations) to live in peace and unity. As such, Mondrian aimed to construct a utopian culture and society through his principles of Neo-Plastic painting filled with universal unity, peace, freedom, brotherhood, and justice. He envisioned his art to be as significant as religion in leading humanity away from materialism. To put it differently, he believed that his art, as a new religion, is a vehicle for the evolution of mankind from their material (individual) state to their spiritual (universal) one. As he stated: "[i]f art transcends the human sphere, it cultivates the transcendent element in mankind, and art, like religion, is a means for the evolution of mankind" Mondrian (as cited in James, 1986, p. 18). Indeed, the equation of art and religion in Mondrian's vision stems in Hegel's philosophy, pertaining to concept of the absolute. For Hegel art is considered "as a sensitive-intuitive-manifestation of the absolute," and religion is "the objective representation of the absolute" (Bris-Marino, 2014, p. 496). Mondrian, similar to Hegel, considers art as a vehicle to intuitively experience the absolute. In respect to Hegel's account on relation between art and

religion, Mondrian wished to use his art to create an ‘earthly utopia’ (Kruger, 2008, p. 46). Mondrian in his first essay in *De Stijl* magazine talked about the analogy between art and religion. He believed that art like religion can help people experience the universal: “[a]rt although an end in itself, like religion — is the means through which we can know the universal” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 42).

Mondrian’s aesthetic principles of Neo-Plasticism are indeed social, moral, and cultural ones for modern life. Threlfall (1978) expressed this matter as follows: “[h]is theoretical writings were in their most essential form metaphysical philosophy originated formerly in Western metaphysical philosophy and in their essence in the religious urges of all cultures” (p. 292). Mondrian even considered his art a true manifestation of the esoteric teachings of Theosophy and Anthroposophy. He envisaged these doctrines as series of cosmic and theoretical principles to guide people to attain balance between man and nature. Throughout his writings, he tried to propagate this notion that unity between man and nature can be attained through the implementation of the aesthetic principles of his new art - particularly the Neo-Plastic art - in life. Indeed, Mondrian visualized the core values of such doctrines - unity of matter and spirit - through the portrayal of equilibrium and unity between universal elements of his paintings. In this regard, Mondrian in 1922 stated:

Theosophy and Anthroposophy—although they already knew the basic symbol of equivalence—could never achieve the experience of equivalent relationship, achieve real, fully human harmony. Art, on the other hand, sought this in practice. It increasingly interiorized natural externality in its plastic expression until Neo-Plasticism, where nature actually no longer dominates. Its expression of equivalence prepares the way for full humanity and for the end of ‘art.’ (Mondrian, 1922b, p. 169)

Besides the role of Mondrian’s Neo-Plastic style and his theory of the development of abstract art in the 20th century are indeed his writings. From 1914 to 1944 and

throughout the various stages of the creation of Neo-Plastic paintings, he constantly wrote his aesthetic theories in various contexts such as art, life, ethics, and culture. During almost three decades, Mondrian wrote hundreds pieces of essays, notes, responses to letters or surveys, autobiography, literary works, educational texts, and annual reports (Veen, 2017a). According to the majority of scholars and Mondrian himself, his writings are the outcome of his intuition and experimentation on his Neo-Plastic paintings. As Mondrian indicated, his theories always came after the creation of his paintings and not vice versa: “[i]t is logical for the artist, after creating the new art, to try to become conscious of it” (as cited in Reynolds, 1995, p. 156). Similarly, we find another instance when he confirmed the posteriority of his act of painting over his act of writings. For instance, when Charmion von Wiegand saw Mondrian’s innovative use of lines and colors in his New York composition in his studio, he asked Mondrian if these paintings were not related to what he had previously stated in his principles of Neo-Plasticism. Then Mondrian replied: “[f]irst, I do the painting; then I make the theory” (Rembert, 1970, p. 81).

Although, his theoretical writings - particularly his essays - were criticized by scholars like Blotkamp, Golding, Chandler, Henkel, and Veen as perplexing in structure, the use of language, and adoption of self-invented words, the majority of Mondrian scholars widely acknowledged the close connection of his theoretical writings and his Neo-Plastic compositions. In contrast, some scholars like Champa and Querido believe that Mondrian’s paintings should be analyzed in isolation from his writings. According to these scholars, works of art should directly communicate with the spectator without any need for extraneous words. Nevertheless, a majority of scholars, namely Jaffé, Threlfall, and Reynolds, hold that Mondrian’s writings help us decipher his aesthetic ideas that are intuitively applied in his Neo-Plastic compositions. Moreover, they acknowledged that

Mondrian's writings and paintings are evolved in parallel with each other. In this respect, Threlfall stated:

It cannot be said that Mondrian's writings achieved the stature of his paintings, especially his New York series, but what can be said is that the writings evolved through a process that is analogous to the manner in which the paintings evolved. (Threlfall, 1978, p. 62)

Similarly, Blotkamp believes that Mondrian's both paintings and writings were reciprocally developed during his life: "neither Mondrian's theory nor his practice was static. Both were constantly evolving and developing in a mutually enriching interaction" (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 11). Interestingly, Mondrian himself in his 1917 essay, and in relation to the 17th-century Philosopher Benedict De Spinoza's (1632—1677) account, pointed out to the power of the words that facilitated understanding his Neo-Plastic theories: "[t]ruth reveals itself, says Spinoza, but knowledge of truth can be speeded and strengthened through *the word*" (Mondrian, 1917, p. 41). A few lines later, he further stated that, although using words to explain Neo-Plastic theory was a difficult task, it helped the artist crystallize his aesthetic ideas and rendered him aware of his own artistic development:

That is why the contemporary artist gives explanations about his work but not of it. Clarification demands strenuous effort, but at the same time it furthers one's own development. Explaining means that one has reached clarity along the path of feeling and intellect by working and thinking about what has been achieved. Explaining means gaining consciousness, even through clashing thoughts—through conflict. Thus explanation about plastic expression indirectly makes it more profound and more precise. (Mondrian, 1917, p. 41)

In general, such standpoint as 'art without word' seems not very effective for analysis of aesthetic theories of modern paintings, particularly pure abstract paintings of artists like Kandinsky, Malevich, Kupka, and Mondrian. Indeed, Mondrian, like many of his fellow artists, wrote his aesthetic theories to further spectators' artistic knowledge to appreciate

the beauty in his Neo-Plastic paintings. He was well aware of the apparent cold and emotionless appearance of his Neo-Plastic paintings to the eyes of the public who were still in favor of the representational painting. According to Wallace (1968), Mondrian's non-figurative art was very unfamiliar to the majority of his contemporary spectators to the extent that some art critics even called his art a non-art. Therefore, he strongly felt this need to write and explain his devised aesthetic rules to heighten the public and art critics' artistic taste to appreciate the beauty he had expressed in his Neo-Plastic paintings. In this regard, Holtzman emphasized on the importance of Mondrian's writing to decipher the evolution of his aesthetic thought:

But no one is free of language, and Mondrian's unprecedented perception obliged him to complement his art with the essays that show the evolution of his way of speaking about art and life. [...] The paintings are the result of "pure intuition," of direct experience through the means of expression—for which there can be no substitute; the writings were his efforts to fulfill the constant demand for verbal rationalization. (Holtzman, 1986, p. 1)

In 1926, Mondrian recapitulated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism what he had theorized as his theory of Neo-Plastic art throughout his pre-1926 experimentations. These six principles were published in his 1926 essay titled *Principes généraux du Néo-Plasticisme - General Principles of Neo-Plasticism*. According to the majority of scholars, Mondrian formulated his own theory of Neo-Plasticism through several revisions and reconsiderations of his philosophical and formal teachings which he had received during 1910's. According to Veen's recent article (2017b), the six principles of Neo-Plasticism that Mondrian wrote with the editorship of Michel Seuphor are the upshot of Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism. Moreover, these principles are indeed the summarization of what Mondrian discovered throughout his earlier experimentations, mostly during 1917-1926, on canvas. That is to say, the six principles of Neo-Plasticism were in Mondrian's thought, although immature, prior to writing

these aesthetic rules. In this regard, Seuphor (1956) asserted that Mondrian, as early as 1920, had in advance pointed out to the premises of these principles:

The little essay he wrote with my help in 1926 for the magazine *Vouloir* (which did not publish it) is definitely an advance over the pamphlet of 1920. I think it is the best formulation of his fundamental ideas about Neo-Plasticism. It also has the merit of being brief. (Seuphor, 1956, p. 166)

In spite of scholars' acknowledgment - such as Seuphor, Blotkamp, Threlfall, Chandler, and Veen - of the significance of Mondrian's writings as well as the close relation between his writings and paintings, his theoretical essays, particularly his principles of Neo-Plasticism, have yet to be used to analyze the pictorial evolution of his Neo-Plastic paintings. Indeed, Mondrian's theoretical writings, as posterior outcome of his experimentations on canvas,⁵ had been so far overly used by scholars to explain the philosophical or artistic roots of his artistic thought in relation to concepts such as universal beauty, evolution, equilibrium, and unity in diversity. As such, reading on Mondrian's literature, we realize that whenever his theoretical texts were used by scholars, they were adopted to further elucidate the relation between his Neo-Plasticism and philosophies such as Theosophy, Hegel, Platonism, and Neo-Platonism. Hitherto, his writings and his theory of Neo-Plasticism, visualized in his Neo-Plastic paintings, were mainly analyzed separately. In this regard, the relation between paintings and writings - particularly in respect to the key concepts discussed in the six principles of Neo-Plasticism - has not yet been satisfactorily demonstrated. Scholars either examined the Neo-Plastic paintings completely in absence of Mondrian's writings, as Carmean, Schapiro, and Champa did, or Mondrian's writings was analyzed in isolation from the paintings, like in the works of Arthur Chandler. Reynolds mentions the reluctant attitude

⁵ Mondrian himself, indicated that he wrote after he experimented. That is to say, Mondrian's writings are slightly subsequent to the creation of his paintings.

of scholars to analyze Mondrian's paintings in relation to his writings as follow: "[a]s with Kandinsky, there is a tendency among art critics to dismiss Mondrian's writings and to separate a pictorial practice seen as revolutionary from a theory seen as retrograde" (Reynolds, 1995, p. 156). In the few attempts at using his writings to analyze his art, scholars have either used his writings, but not in chronology with the paintings, or they have explained artistic evolution of Mondrian in his art, mainly based on the examination of the pictorial characteristics of his paintings. Indeed, his theoretical writings (particularly his essays, articles and notes) were not excavated in relation to his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism and its principles along with the pictorial development of the paintings.

1.3 Problem statement

Undeniably, previous investigations have significantly contributed to the understanding of different causes or sources (whether theoretical, philosophical, or historical) of Mondrian's artistic maturation. Nevertheless, in the previous studies, the development of Mondrian's artistic ideas on his formal theories and concepts of Neo-Plasticism were not examined in relation to his paintings and writings and in parallel with each other. His paintings and writings either were excavated separately. Or in rare instances where his writings were used along with his Neo-Plastic paintings, scholars treated Mondrian's writings as a secondary source to reinforce their interpretation on what they observed in his paintings. Besides, to understand the major and minor pictorial changes in Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings, we need to assess his aesthetic evolution, using his theoretical writings and paintings as the integrated body of his Neo-Plasticism. In many instances throughout his writings, Mondrian talked about his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism in relation to his paintings. Although in many instances he also explained his theory of art within a socio-cultural context and in relation to life, he explicitly talked about his theory of Neo-Plasticism in regard to his pure abstract style that he branded as

Neo-Plastic art. Besides, in his writings we find a recapitulation of the formal theories of his art in the six principles he wrote in 1926. Although a few scholars, such as Seuphor (1949; 1956), Jaffé (1967; 1970), and Holtzman and James (1986), discussed or republished Mondrian's essay titled *General Principles of Neo-Plasticism* (1926) in a few notable publications, these scholars republished these six principles without a comprehensive analysis of their content. More importantly, these six principles had not yet been used to analyze Mondrian's Neo-Plastic oeuvre. Only Veen in his recent article, published in 2017, shed light on these six principles. Interestingly, he demonstrated a close relation between these principles and two 1927 Neo-Plastic compositions. He then shortly concluded that these 1927 paintings are in agreement with what Mondrian had postulated in his six principles. Nonetheless, Veen was not extended his analysis on other Neo-Plastic compositions created prior to or after writing the six principles of Neo-Plasticism.

In fact, we have now reached a point of stagnation and redundancy in the current literature written about Mondrian's Neo-Plastic art and theory. When we look at the previous literature written about analysis of Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism, we realize that majority of the earlier publications overly explicated on causes, origins, or source of inspiration of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic concepts rather than investigate the development of those theories and concepts in Neo-Plastic oeuvre. Moreover, I argue that looking at the development of Mondrian's artistic ideas through examination of his inspirational sources such as Theosophy, Hegel or influences from different art circles results in overgeneralization in the analysis of the development of his ideas in different periods of Neo-Plasticism.

As a matter of fact, Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism discussed in his writings, is the outcome of constant reconsiderations and revisions of ideas he received through

contact with friends, artists, thinkers, as well as his interest in Theosophy and Hegel's philosophy. That is to say, his Neo-Plastic theory is the result of a fusion of different theoretical, artistic, and theological approaches that cannot be disconnected.⁶ In addition, the influences of such philosophies and art styles on Mondrian were mainly confined to the first two decades of the 20th century. Except influences of De Stijl aesthetic ideas which were dominant in his thought until around 1924, Mondrian after 1917 ceased to use those philosophies - particularly Theosophy - as part of his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism. Therefore, it is important to analyze the evolution of Mondrian's artistic vision in relation to his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism through the examination of the paintings and writings which were created based on a holistic rendition of all those philosophical or formalist influences. Furthermore, in order to theoretically explain the maturation of Mondrian's aesthetic vision, I will look at the development of his ideas, regarding his key Neo-Plastic concepts – recapitulated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism – that are found in his paintings and writings and are created within a similar time-span. Hence, in this thesis, I aim to demonstrate that the examination of Mondrian's paintings and writings helps us understand his major and minor aesthetic transformations better and in respect to the key Neo-Plastic concepts and principles expressed in different periods of his artistic career.

1.4 Thesis statement

Hitherto scholars have used Mondrian's perplexing and quasi-philosophical writings to investigate the source of his inspiration in regards to the formation of his philosophical, ethical, and formalist Neo-Plastic concepts and theories. Moreover, his artistic evolution in regard to his theory of Neo-Plasticism has so far been primarily examined through the

⁶ In this regard, we find that Mondrian in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting* referred to 19 philosophers. (Veen, 2017). According to Tosaki (2017), Mondrian was under the influence of many philosophers and thinkers such as Hegel, Plato, Aristotle, Goethe, Spinoza, Voltaire, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, and Bergson. This was to develop his own theory of Neo-Plasticism (p.7).

exploration of pictorial changes found in his paintings. However, I believe that Mondrian's theoretical writings are crucial for understanding his aesthetic evolution pertaining to his key Neo-Plastic concepts depicted or expressed in his Neo-Plastic paintings. Moreover, I maintain that the maturation of Mondrian's artistic vision toward his formal concepts and theories can be further explained by using a context-independent approach and considering paintings and writings - particularly in relation to what he had stated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism - from different periods of Neo-Plasticism.

1.5 Research questions

1. How was Mondrian's artistic vision, as crystalized in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism, formed, developed, and refined in three different periods of his 1917-1944 Neo-Plastic oeuvre and writings?
2. How Mondrian's artistic vision was formed prior to 1926 in respect to his core Neo-Plastic concepts, considering their later appearance in six principles of Neo-Plasticism in 1926?
3. What are the aesthetic transformations of Mondrian pertaining to his core Neo-Plastic concepts in his post-1932 paintings and writings?
 - 3.1 To what extent Mondrian departed from the premises of his six principles in his post-1932 paintings and writings?
4. How Mondrian's paintings and writings are related in regard to the core aesthetic Neo-Plastic concepts - recapped in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism - in three periods of Neo-Plasticism?

1.6 Research objectives

- 1- To analyze Mondrian's Neo-Plastic 1917-1944 paintings and writings to further understanding and explain the aesthetic components of the theory of Neo-Plasticism.
2. To study Mondrian's pre-1926 Neo-Plastic paintings and writings: early Neo-Plastic period, prior to writing his art theories as six principles, to find out and explain the emergence and formation of his aesthetic ideas in relation to his core Neo-Plastic concepts and theories.
3. To analyze Mondrian's 1924-1932 paintings and writings – after writing his six principles of Neo-Plasticism: middle Neo-Plastic period - to further understanding about the changes or developments of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in relation to his principles of Neo-Plasticism.
4. Considering drastic changes in the appearance of Mondrian's post-1932 Neo-Plastic paintings, this thesis also aims to identify and explain the transformations and departure of Mondrian from his 1926 six principles of Neo-Plasticism by examining his late Neo-Plastic paintings and writings (1932-1944).
5. By scrutinizing Mondrian's 1917-1944 paintings and writings in relation to his core aesthetic principles and concepts, this thesis also aims to find and explain the relationship between Mondrian's paintings and writings in relation to each principle and concept.

1.7 Statement of significance

This thesis proposes a novel perspective to look at Piet Mondrian's aesthetic evolution in regard to his key Neo-Plastic concepts and principles in different periods of the 1917-1944 Neo-Plastic oeuvre. Contrary to the previous approaches which were context-dependent, this thesis scrutinizes the evolution of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in

exclusion of all those contexts. More importantly, in this study all the humanistic and philosophical (social and ethical consequences of Neo-Plasticism) contexts are excluded. The thesis mainly focuses on what was absent in earlier publications. In this regard, in this study I examined the development of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas regarding Neo-Plastic concepts and principles that are related to what Mondrian experimented and demonstrated in his Neo-Plastic paintings. The importance of such context-independent approach is that this method of looking at abstract artworks, first proposed by Crowther and Wünsche in 2012, is free from inconsistencies found in other common approaches such as those proposed by Roger Fry and Clive Bell (significant form), Greenburg (flatness of elements of painting: figure and ground), as well as Herbert Read and John Golding (spiritual and emotional values of abstract art). According to Crowther and Wünsche, all these approaches heavily depend on the personal intentions of the artist or historical evidences, which are external to the work of art itself. Indeed, this thesis compliments the previous context-based approaches of scholars who looked at art and theory of Neo-Plasticism from different contexts such as historical, philosophical, and humanistic lenses. Contrary to the previous approaches, this thesis examines the art and theory of Neo-Plasticism by using Mondrian's theoretical writings and paintings that are the outcome, effect, and the final result of the all external factors in formation and development of Neo-Plasticism. As such, in this thesis I look at those final results (Neo-Plastic paintings and writings) in relation to the six Neo-Plastic principles to examine Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism. As such, the importance of this thesis is its new lens to examine Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings and his theoretical writings. We will see that by adopting such context-independent approach to examine the pure abstract art of Mondrian in relation to what he painted and wrote, we come up with new and interesting conclusions about Mondrian's theoretical developments in regard to his core formal theory in different

periods of his Neo-Plasticism. The findings of this thesis will reveal new arguments and conclusions which are in contrast or complimentary to what previous scholars had found throughout the context-based approaches. At the end of this thesis, and by looking at Mondrian's paintings and writings through a context-independent lens, I will be able to explain - which was almost absent in previous publications - about the development of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas regarding each of his key Neo-Plastic concepts, principles, and the components that are demonstrated in his 1917-1944 Neo-Plastic paintings. Within a wider scope, this thesis will pave the way to analyze and testify the efficiency of using a context-independent approach to examine the development of other abstract painters' theories such as those of Kandinsky, Malevich, and Kupka.

Lastly, this thesis expands our understanding of abstraction and pure abstract art of Mondrian which is considered as one of the main tendencies of abstract art in the modern art history. According to majority of art historians, pure abstract art of Neo-Plasticism is one of the three main branches of Abstract art which is derived from the heritage of Paul Cézanne and Cubism (Wiegand, 1943). In his writings, Mondrian talked at great length about the theories of modern paintings and their relation to his own theory of Neo-Plasticism. Indeed, the significance and contribution of Neo-Plasticism to modern art history is that Mondrian devised Neo-Plasticism through deep engagement and the influences he received from major modern styles (Impressionism, Luminism, Pointillism, Fauvism, Futurism, Cubism, Constructivism, De Stijl, and so on) in the first two decades of the 20th century. More importantly, as Clement Greenberg indicated, Mondrian was an exception among masters of modern painting. Among modern painters rarely we find a painter like Mondrian, with such principled and distinct aesthetic ideas about his art. When we study the modern art history, we find that majority of the modern painters frequently changed their style and artistic ideas in response to new and innovative art trends during the first decades of the 20th century.

Only a few modern painters, notably Mondrian, remained faithful toward their own theory and tried to consistently refine and enrich it throughout almost three decades. According to the Wiegand, only Mondrian succeeded to fully develop his style to its final result. Even great artists such as Kandinsky and Malevich could not fully develop what they proposed at the beginning of their abstract career, and their artistic progress was not consistent, dynamic, and developing (p. 63). Therefore, the excavation of the development of core theory of Neo-Plasticism will help us to explain the development of one of the most enriched theories of Abstract art in the first half of the 20th century.

Another importance of studying Neo-Plastic principles and theories is that they consist of major core premises and characteristics of modernism and modern painting; the painting which emerged as a result of many social, economic, political, philosophical, technological, and scientific advancements in Europe in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Examples are revolutionary changes such as Industrial Revolution, rapid mechanization of tasks in factories, invention of machines in industries, rapid wave of urbanization and formation of metropolitans, invention of camera, dissolution of the atom, theory of relativity, modern ideas of philosophers such as Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx as well as the widespread wave of spiritualism and theological doctrines that were introduced through Occult (particularly Theosophy and Anthroposophy) tradition in Europe. These all along with many other factors noticeably changed the worldview of people and especially artists. As such, artists found that they should define new set of principles to depict form and space and find new methods other than those traditional rules that were used since Renaissance, to express beauty, harmony, and rhythm in their artworks. In this regard, when we read Mondrian's writings, we find that he is a fervent exponent of many aspects of modernism such as progress and movement, breaking from traditional rules in paintings used to depict form and space, embracing everything as 'new' and abolishing the 'old' concepts, ideas, and consciousness in art, evolution from

matter to spirit (spiritualism in art), flatness of form and space (the heritage of Paul Cézanne as father of modern painting), urbanization, advancements in technology, life, and culture, desire to express - and not to represent – the beauty, appreciating the beauty apart from corporeality of naturalistic forms and subject matters, and so on. In fact, theory of Neo-Plasticism is a perfect reflection and gist of the majority of modern tenets of the pioneers of modern painting, notably Paul Cézanne, who were founders of modern and, particularly, geometrical abstract art. Overall, in theory of Neo-Plasticism we find demonstration of the all facets of a modern life, culture, and society in the 20th century that are the foundation block of modernism. In many cases, Mondrian emphasized that his Neo-Plastic paintings and their aesthetic principles are indeed rules of a utopian and modern culture, life, and society. In Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism, modern art is a logical product of the new and modern culture.

Apart from important role of Mondrian and his theory of Neo-Plasticism in the history of modern art, what matters is our knowledge about core premises and principles of Neo-Plasticism as one of the main theories of pure abstract painting. Despite the emphasize of scholars on significance of Piet Mondrian as the pioneer of pure abstract art in the history of modern art, today we know little about the components of his Neo-Plastic theories and principles in relation to his paintings. Having a clear and exhaustive knowledge about the theory and principles of Neo-Plasticism is fundamental for art critics and art historians to compare and analyze various components of Neo-Plastic theory in relation to other modern art theories. When we read the past and recent sources, we gain a thorough knowledge of Mondrian's ethical, social, and humanistic consequences of his Neo-Plasticism. However, the underlying formal theory of Neo-Plasticism and its six principles in relation to what we see in Neo-Plastic paintings remains vague and somehow confusing. Although, some scholars tried to shed light on some aspects of the theory of Neo-Plasticism, those attempts are either limited to a

certain period of Neo-Plasticism or scholars are mostly inclined to explain Neo-Plastic concepts through historical or philosophical contexts. Therefore, the results of such scrutinies are heavily mixed with scholars' personal interpretations of the theory of Neo-Plasticism rather than interpreting such theory from the standpoint of Mondrian as the one who created Neo-Plasticism. To fill such gap, in this thesis I have tried to contribute to the understanding of the components of Neo-Plasticism and its principles in different periods of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic career. To this end, I mainly focused on Mondrian's own paintings and writings, excluding previous contextual approaches to gain as much new results as possible, regarding the painter's own rendition of his Neo-Plastic theory and principles. The significance of this study, compared to earlier studies, is that Neo-Plastic paintings and writings are studied altogether and as integrated body of Neo-Plastic oeuvre in time with each other. By reading his thesis, we learn about the aesthetic tactics Mondrian used in different periods of his Neo-Plastic period to express harmony (equilibrium) and rhythm in his Neo-Plastic paintings. This thesis also explains the methods Mondrian used in different periods of his Neo-Plastic career to attain the balance between abstracted, intensified form and space. Lastly, this thesis provides us with an exhaustive discussion on the Neo-Plastic methods and aesthetic conditions introduced, used, and developed by Mondrian to purify and denaturalize his elements of painting in immature 1917-1919 Neo-Plastic, mature and post-De Stijl Neo-Plastic, and late (post-1932) Neo-Plastic paintings.

1.7.1 The importance of studying Neo-Plastic principles

As a matter of fact, the six principles Mondrian wrote in 1926 are universal aesthetic rules which can be used in variety of disciplines such as music, architecture, design, interior design, fashion, sociocultural studies, photography, psychoanalysis, and so on. Therefore, having a good understanding of these principles, their components and, more importantly, their development and transformations throughout different periods of

Neo-Plasticism are significant. The findings of this thesis also help us to understand how Mondrian's core theory of Neo-Plasticism, as one of the seminal theories of pure abstract art, was formed, developed, and transformed in different periods from 1917 to 1944. Having a concrete knowledge about various turning points in Mondrian's artistic vision toward his core Neo-Plastic concepts and principles will assist us to examine these data through a historical, sociocultural lens to further explain the rationale of those changes in Mondrian's theoretical ground in different periods of Neo-Plasticism. The findings of this thesis can be further used to analyze the stylistic and theoretical evolution of Mondrian, as one of the pioneers of pure abstract painting, in relation to other pure abstract fellow artists of his time such as Kandinsky, Kupka, and Malevich. Moreover, the results of this thesis aid us to conduct, through a theoretical lens, an exhaustive analysis of artistic achievement of other pure abstract artists such as Fritz Glarner, Burgoyne Diller, Jean Gorin, Marlow Moss, Vantongerloo, Cesar Domela, and Marcelle Cahn who painted closely or partially in agreement to principles of Neo-Plastic art.

Another importance of studying the very core theory of Neo-Plasticism is the fact that the pure geometric abstract art of Neo-Plasticism is considered as one of the most long-lasting art styles in the first half of the 20th century. According to Masha Chlenova (2013), when we examine the early history of abstraction, rarely we find an artist, either as a relative, partially, abstract artist or a pure abstract artist, who is consistent in his/her abstract style throughout his/her life. The majority of pioneers of abstract painting did not consistently practice pure abstraction for a long period of time. In line with the sociocultural or political changes in Europe, particularly during 1920's and 1930's, these painters returned to their naturalistic or partial abstract style of painting in order to find a better market for their paintings, or to seek a more stable and comfortable position in the circle of artists. In such social and political upheavals throughout 1920's

to 1930's, it was Mondrian who really remained faithful toward his very avant-garde, spiritual, ethical, and formal theory of Neo-Plasticism. He never stepped backward or gave up despite the negative criticism of his artworks and his avant-garde principles of Neo-Plasticism, which he crystalized in 1926. He knew that his universal art principles of Neo-Plasticism were far ahead of public's taste and even many of art critics of his time. In the whole history of abstract painting, we rarely find such a great determination of an artist who consistently practices and refines his art theories and, more importantly, propagates and records his art principles in his paintings and writings. Today, we observe the wide spread influence of Mondrian's universal art and theory of Neo-Plasticism in diverse fields and disciplines such as graphic design, interior design, typography, fashion, architecture, photography, sociocultural and ethical studies, and so on.

1.8 Limitations

The first limitation in this thesis is using Mondrian's translations of his writings. Piet Mondrian wrote the majority of his pre-1938 essays in Dutch and French. It was only after 1938 that he wrote his essays in English (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. xvii). In 1986 the majority of his writings were translated from Dutch and French into English by Harry Holtzman and Martin James in the book titled: *The new art-the new life: the collected writings of Piet Mondrian*. However, no translation receives universal approval. For instance Veen (2011; 2017) disagreed with some minor and major aspects of the previous translations. This matter is of special importance in the case of Mondrian's writings for two reasons. In the first place, one cannot overlook the complex and uncommon style of Mondrian's writings. He often expressed various ideas related to art, life, culture, and society in an interwoven manner and repetitive style of writing. After all, Mondrian was a painter and not a writer. As Seuphor stated, Mondrian was extremely engrossed to find the best word - sometimes even he invented

terms - to express his ideas. He revised, deleted, and replaced many words in his writing process. Such extreme obsession with deletions and additions of his ideas is particularly evident in the original manuscripts which he wrote in English in New York (Veen, 2017a, p. 40). Indeed, any translation of his text requires keen attention to the words or phrases he used in his original manuscripts. In the second place, as Veen and Champa also pointed out, although Mondrian wrote in three languages, Dutch, French, and English, he was thinking in Dutch even when writing in French or English. According to Veen (2011), Mondrian even wrote the structure of sentences and wordings in his English texts based on the structure of Dutch wordings (p. 10). Veen (2017a) further argued that some Dutch terms such as '*de nieuwe beelding*' and '*verhoudingsbeelding*,' which were translated by Holtzman and James as 'the new plastic, Neo-Plastic' and 'to establish relationships' respectively, do not accurately convey their Dutch meaning (p. 54).

Another important consideration is inaccessibility of Mondrian's paintings in Malaysia. However, as Mondrian's paintings are diversely scattered (particularly his Neo-Plastic works) throughout various art museums around the globe, the assessment of all paintings would require many overseas trips which are out of my time schedule and research budget. However, I have benefited from valuable catalogues written by Marty Bax, Yve-Alain Bois, and Robert P. Welsh and J. M. Joosten in finding the right chronological order of the Neo-Plastic paintings. I have also tried as much as possible to obtain the original high resolution image of paintings from respected art galleries or museums around the world.

1.9 Delimitations of study

1.9.1 Criterion for use and selection of Mondrian's writings

In this thesis, I confined myself to two valuable publications which are the most complete collections of Piet Mondrian's writings up to present. In the first place I used *The new art-the new life: the collected writings of Piet Mondrian*, jointly translated and edited by Mondrian's friend Harry Holtzman and art historian Martin James in 1986. The second source is the exhaustive scrutiny of Louis Veen⁷ (2017a), who presented a complete corpus of Mondrian's writings in their original Dutch, French, and English. This source of information is very beneficial because it has the merits of completeness, precise representation of texts, supplementary information, and comments about Mondrian's writings (Veen, 2011, p. 14).

According to Veen (2017a), up to now there are 11 literary collections (translated and edited) of Mondrian's writings in eight languages including Italian, German, English, French, Spanish, Czech, Japanese, and Portuguese (p. 42). According to Veen (2011), the edition of Holtzman and James is the most complete one, compared to the editions in other languages (pp. 13 & 26). I confined myself to this edition, as it is the most complete collection of his body of writings available in English. Furthermore, for this thesis, I also restrained myself to Mondrian's theoretical writings which are mainly written as essays and articles from 1917 to 1944. Besides, this study focused on Mondrian's 1938-1944 short notes which he wrote at the end of his life. Mondrian's personal letters to his friends, fellow artists, editors of journals, and art critics are excluded in this thesis. Firstly, because, these letters are already analyzed in earlier publications, notably in Blotkamp's book titled *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*

⁷ It is noteworthy that this edition of Mondrian's writings was published based on Louis Veen's (Lodewijk Albert Veen) Ph.D. thesis (2011). In his thesis, Veen provides us with an exhaustive historical and documentary scrutiny of title, date of publication, origins of text, sources, other published versions, and public or critical reaction toward Mondrian's writings.

(1994), in relation to the pictorial developments in Neo-Plastic paintings. Secondly, because in these letters Mondrian rarely talked about his aesthetic ideas in relation to the concepts discussed in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Therefore, in this thesis, I have used the aforementioned editions of Mondrian's writings as two complimentary academic sources to analyze the development of his key Neo-Plastic principles and concepts in his 1917-1944 paintings and writings.

1.9.2 Key Neo-Plastic concepts targeted in this thesis

For this thesis, I have confined myself to the formal aesthetic rules and concepts of Neo-Plasticism that are demonstrated and discussed by Mondrian in his 1917-1944 paintings and writings. Such Neo-Plastic theories are the rules and conditions – recapitulated in six principles of Neo-Plasticism in 1926 - that were used to express a universal equilibrium (harmony) and rhythm in Neo-Plastic compositions. In this thesis, I have not discussed the social and ethical implications of Neo-Plasticism in the domain of life and culture. Firstly, because in the previous publications Neo-Plastic concepts such as equilibrium, rhythm, unity in diversity, universal beauty, and evolution have been discussed in abundance under the light of his theological writings. Secondly, I believe that inclusion of Mondrian's philosophical and ethical writings overshadows the analysis of the core theories of Neo-Plasticism that are found in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Thus, in this thesis I have restricted myself to what Mondrian discussed in his 1917-1944 writings, regarding his Neo-Plastic principles and their components in relation to his paintings.

1.10 Data Collection Method

In this thesis, a qualitative method is used to collect the data required for the analysis of the development and transformation of Mondrian's artistic ideas in regard to key Neo-Plastic concepts. In this regard, I examined the secondary sources such as books,

articles, as well as Master and Ph.D. dissertations. In this thesis, Mondrian's writings, published by Holtzman and James (1986) and Veen (2017a), are deeply examined and all the relevant quotes in regard to the Neo-Plastic concepts and theories are extracted and categorized accordingly.

1.11 Analysis Method

The method of analysis or the methodology of this thesis is intertextuality⁸. In this regard, I have interpreted Mondrian's theoretical writings by first identifying his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories embedded in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Then, the relationship of these concepts and theories to the pre-1926 and post-1926 writings of Mondrian is examined. Through the investigation of relationship between the texts, we will understand about the emergence, maturation, development, and transformation of these concepts and theories in different periods of Mondrian's theoretical writings. Therefore, the method of this analysis of Mondrian's theoretical writings is based on finding the interdependence and refinements of his statements in the case of each of his concepts, within the scope of this thesis, in different periods of his 1917-1944 Neo-Plasticism. That is to say, I have examined the relationship between my interpretation of a direct quote by Mondrian, related to a particular concept or theory, and his earlier statements in order to come to a conclusion about the continuity or transformation of his artistic ideas in relation to each of his key Neo-Plastic concepts. As my 'intertextual figures,' I have used Mondrian's direct quotes, written in original language or translated, as well as my own understanding of other scholars' quotes or their interpretations in regards to the identified Neo-Plastic concepts and theories.

⁸ Intertextuality first introduced as a concept and method, was commonly used in literary and cultural studies by Julia Kristina in 1960's and was developed by others notably Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Philippe Solar. One of the main principles of intertextuality is that every piece of text is indeed a pre-text. That is to say, there is no standalone text and each text for its meaning and content depends on its previous texts. Moreover, each texts is mostly written in reference to earlier texts. As such it is possible to find overlapping ideas and statements between several texts written about a subject. In an intertextual study, the researcher seeks to examine the presence of a text in another text in order to identify the continuity or transformation of a particular concept or idea (Allen, 2000). Simply, the intertextuality refers to a ratio of a text to another text. In this regard, there are different ratios of a text which are called intertextual figures: quotation, allusion, plagiarism, calque, translation, pastiche and parody.

Besides, using intertextuality as the main method of this thesis, I conducted a visual analysis of the paintings in line with my interpretation of Mondrian's texts. Such visual analysis also compliments and reinforces the interpretation of what we find as the development of Mondrian's artistic vision toward his core aesthetic concepts and theories, identified in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism.

In this thesis, I have also used a context-independent approach toward my analysis. Such context-independent approach is a way of looking at an artwork through a neutral lens and the exclusion of earlier standpoints of art critics. According to Crowther and Wünsche (2012), some art critics such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell interpreted abstract art based on what they called a 'significant form.' Exponents of the theory of 'significant form,' notably Clive Bell, believe that pure formal elements of paintings – the relationships between colors, lines, shapes – are most important factors in a work of art. As such, this group of art critics believes that when one looks at a painting, his aesthetic emotion is primarily evoked by such 'significant form' rather than the interpretation of subject matter. That is to say, appreciation and value of an abstract painting is merely bounded with viewer's emotional response to purely formal properties rather than the content of an artwork. Whereas, some art critics, particularly Clement Greenberg, interpreted the abstract art through painting's planar essence (p. 1). That is to say, Greenberg considers 'flatness' as one of the essential properties of modern art, which is unique to the medium of painting. As such, the success of an abstract painter to express the beauty is mainly assessed based on his artistic skill, to depict all elements of painting in unity on a two dimensional surface of the canvas. According to Crowther and Wünsche (2012), the main problem with the former two approaches for the analysis of paintings is the fact that we cannot explain why such abstracted form is 'significant,' or find its best interpretation as flattened planes. Another group of art critics, particularly those such as Herbert Read and John Golding,

interpreted abstract artworks based on spiritual and emotional values. Such spiritualist approach to interpreting abstract paintings also results in shortcomings. Most importantly, interpreting abstract artworks through a spiritual lens lacks a fundamental and universal theoretical ground. Accordingly, these interpretations heavily depend on the personal intentions of the artist or historical evidences, which are external to the work of art itself. Crowther and Wünsche (2012) stated that they have proposed a new approach for analyzing abstract art, which is not context-dependent. In their book, they interpreted abstract art based on the relationship between abstract art and nature. When we look at abstract paintings like those of hermetic Cubism of Picasso or Braque, we realize two aspects. Firstly, we see that they distorted, abstracted, re-arranged, or decomposed the natural objects, such as a guitar or human figure, into unfamiliar appearances. In works of some other artists such as Hans Arp, Joan Miro, and William Latham, we see these artists painted forms which have no relation to what we see in the nature. Indeed they abstracted nature into a new nature (Crowther & Wünsche, 2012, p. 2). Besides such first aspect of relation of abstraction to nature, there is another more perplexing aspect, which is creating some new forms through creative process of mind. Samples are those works of Surrealist painters. There are two methods to the second aspect. In the first approach, the Surrealist painters, such as Dali, create uncommon and new forms through using their unconscious mind. In another approach, some artists such as Jackson Pollock refer to their conscious mind in their act of painting. In both cases, whether consciously or unconsciously, a creative impulse of the artist is the main factor for artistic creation. In works of artists such as Pollock, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko – in contrary to Mondrian - we see the physical presence and self-expression of the artist is the main driving force for the creation of the painting. We see that by using a context-independent approach, we are able to interpret the modern paintings via a neutral standpoint, and explain the process of abstraction.

Using a context-independent approach, in this thesis I have examined Mondrian's Neo-Plastic compositions by looking at the changes in use and role of the formal elements (particularly lines and planes of color and noncolor) in different periods of Neo-Plasticism. Moreover, I have further investigated the relation of the key Neo-Plastic concepts and principles to the visual characteristics of Neo-Plastic paintings. In order to explore the development and transformation of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas, firstly the Neo-Plastic paintings (1917-1944) are divided into three major groups. The criterion for the division of the paintings into three stylistic periods was based on two major turning points in Mondrian's Neo-Plastic oeuvre in respect to the role and use of plastic means, that is to say means of imaging (i.e. his abstracted elements of form, line, and color) in his compositions. Above all, the division of paintings is based on the similarities of their visual characteristics. The first group of Neo-Plastic paintings is early 1917-1923 compositions which were more or less executed following De Stijl principles. This first group of paintings includes the immature Neo-Plastic paintings, created between 1917 and 1919. Due to the more or less different characteristics of these paintings, I have re-divided the 1917-1923 group into three sub-groups as follows: 1917 abstract-real compositions, 1918-1919 abstract-real compositions, and early Neo-Plastic, abstract-real compositions (1919-1923).⁹ The second group of paintings is the one including those painted between 1924 and 1931 after he separated from De Stijl. Finally, the third group of works includes the ones painted after 1932. The paintings which were created after 1932 are put together as the year represents a major shift in the use of different visual elements, particularly the lines.

⁹ It is noteworthy that Mondrian in his early - especially in his 1917-1920 - essays used phraseology of 'abstract-real' art. It was only after 1921 that he started using the term 'Neo-Plastic' art. As it will be discussed later in more details, although these two terms slightly differ, both represent Mondrian's pure abstract style. In fact, Mondrian used abstract-real as the style of his early (ca. 1917-1920) experimentation on his canvas.

In the second place, the key Neo-Plastic concepts are identified in the six principles of Neo-Plasticism. The recognition of the key terms is done through the analysis of six principles both in their original French and translated versions. As such, in this thesis, Mondrian's artistic evolution will be analyzed through the investigation of his aesthetic ideas on the following core Neo-Plastic concepts and aesthetics rules, stated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism:

1- Abstracted, purified elements of paintings

- a. The visual characteristics of painterly elements in Neo-Plastic art.
- b. The 'equivalence' of the means of imaging, and the balance between form and space.

2- Aesthetic Neo-Plastic theories to express harmony as 'equilibrium' and rhythm

- a. Dual opposition in elements of paintings and in the composition.
- b. Method and conditions to express the harmony or 'equilibrium.'
- c. Method and the conditions to express the rhythm.
- d. Symmetry and repetition between the elements of painting.

The above mentioned concepts are distinguished from the content of the six principles of Neo-Plasticism which is translated by Veen (2017b) based on the original French manuscript *Principes généraux du Néo-plasticisme*:

1. The means of imaging must be the rectangular plane or prism in primary color (red, blue, and yellow) and in non-color (white, black, and gray). In architecture, empty space is considered as non-color. Material may count as color.

2. The equivalence of the means of imaging is necessary. Size and colors may differ, but they must be of equal value. In general, equilibrium results from large surfaces of non-color or empty space, and rather small surfaces of color or material.
3. The opposing duality is required within the means of imaging and also within the composition.
4. The constant equilibrium is achieved by the relationship of position, and is expressed by the straight line (limit of the means of imaging) in its principal opposition (rectangular).
5. The equilibrium, that neutralizes and annihilates the means of imaging, is possible by the relationships of proportion in which they are placed and which create the living rhythm.
6. All symmetry shall be excluded.

Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6)

In the third place, I have read Mondrian's 1917-1944 writings thoroughly. Further, all the related texts in relation to the above mentioned concepts are extracted and, then, thematically categorized. Next, the thematic groupings of Mondrian's writings are chronologically sorted based on the division of Neo-Plastic paintings. In fact, the division of the body of Mondrian's writings (1917-1944) followed the three periods of his Neo-Plastic paintings. Nevertheless, considering the fact that Mondrian's writings mostly came after the creation of his paintings, the writings are chronologically divided as larger time span. For example, to analyze 1917-1923 compositions, Mondrian's 1917-1926 - extracted and categorized - texts are used under study. In the next step, each portion of Mondrian's extracted writings - i.e. in each period - are grouped based on the various discussed ideas he discussed in relation to a particular concept. Then, the writings in relation to each concept are arranged within a coherent order.

In the fourth place, Mondrian's visual characteristics of Neo-Plastic compositions in each period is further examined in relation to the key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories. In case of the 1917-1923 compositions, these paintings - since they are created before writing the six principles of Neo-Plasticism - are assessed against the concepts and not directly with the six principles. In this phase of analysis, we find about the relationship between the characteristics of the Neo-Plastic paintings and what Mondrian stated about his theory of Neo-Plasticism in his writings.

In the fifth place, the findings, either as the agreement or disagreement of the paintings of each period with the targeted concepts or theories, are further explained through the examination of Mondrian's writings. In fact, in this stage of the analysis we come to a well-rounded understanding of Mondrian's development of his artistic vision in relation to his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories. Throughout this phase of analysis, I have tried, as much as possible, to examine Mondrian's quotes and paintings within a similar time period. For instance, to analyze Mondrian's artistic standpoint toward his concept 'equilibrium' in his late 1920's Neo-Plastic period, I have studied his 1927-1929 paintings and 1928-1931 writings in relation to each other. However, my first priority in selecting from Mondrian's texts has been the relevance of a selected excerpt of his text to the identified key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories.

Lastly, in the sixth phase, a conclusion is written about the findings, which is a recapitulation on the development or transformation of Mondrian's aesthetic vision in respect to each of his key Neo-Plastic concepts or theories. This section provides reader with an upshot of Mondrian's theoretical standpoint toward his key Neo-Plastic concept or principle in a particular period of time.

1.12 Chapter division

This thesis is written in a conventional form. In the first chapter, readers get familiar with the topic, the gap in the research, research objectives, the expected results, and the significance of the thesis. In the subsequent sections followed by the 'introduction,' the components of the research, such as background information, problem and gap, thesis statement, research objectives and questions, significance of the study, limitations, delimitations, method, and methodology are discussed. In the second chapter, the prerequisite knowledge necessary to decipher Mondrian's foundation of his Neo-Plasticism is discussed. This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, the key Neo-Plastic terms, primarily borrowed or invented by Mondrian in his writings, are defined. In the second part, Mondrian's pre-Neo-Plastic artistic career is outlined. The aim of this section is to explain the various philosophical and artistic influences - such as Theosophy, Hegel, Cubism, and De Stijl - on the stylistic transformation of Mondrian's naturalistic paintbrushes in the case of his pure abstract Neo-Plastic style. Having the necessary Knowledge of his aesthetic transformation, particularly between 1912 and 1917, is significant to understand the underlying foundation of his artistic vision on his Neo-Plastic concepts prior to the analysis.

The third chapter is Literature Review which covers a critical study of previous publications related to Neo-Plastic art and theory. The aim of this chapter is to come to a clear knowledge about the current state of the literature written in regards to the analysis of Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism. Besides, in this chapter, the gaps and shortcomings of previous publications are remarked and identified. In the end of this chapter, I will summarize the current state of the literature, and the identified gaps are crystalized to be addressed in this thesis.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are related to the analysis of the development of Mondrian's aesthetic vision of his core Neo-Plastic concepts. In each chapter, one group of Neo-Plastic compositions, together with Mondrian's writings, written in the same period, is studied. The rationale for dividing the analysis of the data into three chapters is to propose a clear-cut and organized analysis of Mondrian's aesthetic vision in three periods of his Neo-Plastic career. In chapter Four, Mondrian's artistic standpoint on his key Neo-Plastic concepts are explored through the analysis of his early Neo-Plastic paintings (1917-1923), created during the De Stijl period and his 1917-1925 writings. In Chapter Five, his crystalized aesthetic vision of his core Neo-Plastic concepts - which are encapsulated in his six principles as well - are examined in relation to what he depicted in his 1924-1931 paintings and what he wrote during 1926-1932 about those concepts. Lastly, in chapter Six, transformation of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas during late Neo-Plastic period, and in relation to his core Neo-Plastic concepts, is investigated through the examination of his 1932-1944 Neo-Plastic compositions and writings.

Lastly, Chapter Seven is a conclusion of what is found in regard to the formation, development, and maturation of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas on his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories. In fact, in this chapter all research questions are answered according to the order they are proposed in Chapter One. Through this chapter, readers come to a holistic and transparent understanding of Mondrian's aesthetic evolution toward each of his key Neo-Plastic concepts in three periods of his Neo-Plastic career.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Introduction

Prior to the analysis of the formation and transformation of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas on his core Neo-Plastic concepts and principles, it is necessary to know the definition of some of his key terms, either borrowed or invented, related to his Neo-Plasticism. Familiarity with the meaning of key Neo-Plastic terms facilitates our understanding of Mondrian's vision of his art and helps us to decipher the development of his artistic vision that is expounded throughout Chapters Four to Six. Moreover, in this chapter, I have outlined an overview of Mondrian's early naturalistic period (1887- 1907) and, particularly, his transitional period (1908-1917) when he steadily departed from his representational style of paintings. Knowing about his pre-Neo-Plastic period and the steady process of the abstraction of the elements of painting in Neo-Plastic painting from 1908 to 1917 will further our understanding in respect to the aesthetic maturation of the elements of his paintings (i.e. 'plastic means' or means of imaging).

2.2 Definition of the key concepts of Neo-Plastic art

2.2.1 Terms Neo-Plastic/New Plastic and plastic means

In order to become familiar with the core components of Neo-Plasticism, one should first know the meaning of 'Neo-Plastic' and 'plastic means.' Although the meaning of the previous terms seems simple, different translations of Mondrian's texts complexities its meaning. Indeed, majority of scholars, including Seuphor, Welsh, Holtzman, and James, pointed to the inaccurate English translation of 'Neo-Plasticism,' a term which originates in German. In English, the term is often described as simply being 'new' or a 'new form.' Yet the term is more complex.

According to Veen (2017a), Mondrian used Dutch term '*nieuwe beelding*' throughout the essays he wrote in Dutch¹⁰ (1917-1938). In his essays and articles that he wrote in French between 1920 and 1938, he used '*le Neo-Plasticisme*.' In his post-1926 essays, he also used other Dutch term such as '*zuiver abstracte kunst*' and '*czuiver beeldende kunst*' - meaning pure abstract art. In his post-1938 writings, Mondrian started using English term 'Neoplasticism' - or in some cases 'pure plastic art,' 'abstract art,' or 'new realism' - that is English equivalent to his Dutch term '*nieuwe beelding*' (p. 43). Although Mondrian used various terms throughout his writings to refer to his pure abstract style, scholars believe that the true meaning of 'Neo-Plasticism' is embedded in Dutch term *nieuwe beelding*. Mondrian borrowed the Dutch term 'beelding' or 'beeldend' from M. H. J. Schoenmaekers' book *nieuwewereldbeeld or Het Nieuwe Wereldbeeld - The New Image of the World* (Seuphor, 1956, pp. 133-134; Chang, 2003, p. 46). He adopted this term from Schoenmaekers who believed that the essence of the 'natural object' is immutable and fixed. As such, Mondrian's reluctance to represent natural forms is akin to the meaning of the term *nieuwe beelding*.

The analysis of the compound Dutch term '*nieuwe beelding*' makes it clear that as two separate terms, the first part simply means 'new' in English or 'neo.' The latter originates in Greek. The second part 'plastic' is a Dutch word - *beelding* - which means 'forming' or 'bringing to form,' 'tangibility, mass, volume' (Edwards & Wood, 2004, p. 255; Dennis, 1970, p. 298; Chang, 2003, p. 45). Welsh defined term '*beelding*' (Plastic) as follows: "[t]his [i.e. the word 'beelding'] is best translated as form-giving and closer in definition to the German word 'Gestaltung' than to the English word 'image' or 'plasticism'" (as cited in Chang, 2003, p. 45). According to Edwards & Wood (2004),

¹⁰ According to Veen, in his post-1920 writings, Mondrian wrote in Dutch and interchangeably used '*het Neo-Plasticisme*' for '*nieuwe beelding*.' Obviously, '*het Neo-Plasticisme*' does not root in Dutch and it is borrowed from his own equivalent French term '*le Neo-Plasticisme*.'

the German word '*Neue Gestaltung*' is the closest translation of the Dutch and French terms *nieuwe beelding* and *neo-plasticisme* (p. 255). When we interpret the root of the term Neo-Plasticism, we understand that Mondrian's new style of Neo-Plasticism means creation and construction of a 'new' imagery of form. Such 'new' imagery of form indeed is a pure abstract representation of element of paintings: line, color, and form.

Knowing the meaning of Dutch term *nieuwe beelding*, now we can understand the meaning of his other key Dutch term '*beeldingsmiddel(en)*' or its French equivalent '*moyen(s) plastique(s)*.' Mondrian frequently and commonly used these two terms in his 1917-1938 Dutch and French texts. These terms are translated by Holtzman and James (1986) as 'plastic means' or 'plastic elements.' Interestingly, it seems Mondrian himself could not find any better term. As such, in the first essay he wrote in English in 1936 - *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art* - and in all his subsequent post-1938 writings he used term 'plastic means.' However, as it was discussed, the term 'plastic' is not accurate translation of the Dutch term '*beelding*.' Veen (2017b) more accurately translated the French term '*moyens plastique*' as 'means of imaging.' Indeed, 'plastic means' for Mondrian are the universal elements of paintings that are used to express a universal expression of equilibrium, rhythm, and beauty. Mondrian found these universal means of imaging in three visual elements: lines, colors, and forms. In his Neo-Plastic theory, he defined his means of imaging as opposing straight lines at right angles (vertical versus horizontal), primary colors (red, blue, and yellow), non-colors (white, grey, and black), and flat planes as abstracted versions of natural forms.

2.2.2 Old and new art: figurative and non-figurative art

The opposite concepts 'old' and 'new' are commonly used in Mondrian's essays. These two terms were borrowed from the De Stijl art movement and their manifesto was

published in 1917. However, Mondrian used the terms ‘old art’ and ‘new art’ simply to distinguish figurative art from non-figurative one. The ‘new art’ in Mondrian’s writings means pure abstract art, particularly his Neo-Plastic one, whereas ‘old art’ refers to representational painting.

2.2.3 Individual/particular and universal/absolute

Notions of ‘individual’ and ‘universal’ are commonly found in Mondrian’s essays. Historically speaking, the concept of universal is related to the Platonian concept of form where the non-physical form or idea is the ideal, perfect one. This interest in an ideal non-physical form is also found in Theosophy. There are similarities between Mondrian’s concepts of the ‘particular/individual’ and Plato’s philosophy of the ideal form as a non-physical entity. In short, Plato believed that all particulars/individuals are mutable and transient whereas in his philosophy the universal is immutable (unchangeable) and it is akin to pure knowledge. Although the concept universal in Neo-Plasticism roots in Platonic ideas, Mondrian was directly influenced by a theosophical critics of Plato.

For Mondrian, there are two types of ‘universal.’ The first connotation of universal in Mondrian’s writings is related to the formal elements of Neo-Plastic painting such as perpendicular lines, primary colors, non-colors, and flat plane. Universal plastic means are, thereby, pure abstract versions of naturalistic forms. The second meaning of the term ‘universal’ in Mondrian’s essays is akin to the metaphysical and esoteric notion of beauty as pure truth, which can be experienced through the use of intuition, intellect, and instinct of the artist or the spectator of the art (Threlfall, 1978, p. 12). Hence, Mondrian considered Neo-Plastic art to be “the most direct aesthetic manifestation of the universal possible” (Kruger, 2007, p. 24).

2.3 Mondrian's art prior to the invention of Neo-Plastic art

Moving on from the explanation of a few key Neo-Plastic terms, in this section I will look at Mondrian's artistic life prior to the proposal of his Neo-Plastic art. Mondrian, a Dutch artist, was born in 1872 in Amersfoort a middle-class town in Netherland. Mondrian's father, a Calvinist, was the principal of a Protestant primary school in Amersfoort. He was his son's first tutor in both religious teaching and drawing lessons. Influenced by Theological and Calvinist teachings of his father, Piet initially realized that beauty exists as a universal concept and such conception of beauty should be represented in painting. Mondrian advanced his artistic skills through the art lessons he received from his uncle Frits Mondrian (1853-1932), who was a professional landscape painter in Dutch Hague school of Impressionism. Piet started to paint in 1886 at the age of 14. Three years later in 1889, at the age of 17, he succeeded to obtain a certificate to teach art at primary level. Subsequently, in 1892 he also received a certificate to teach drawing to secondary level art students. From 1892 to 1897 he continued his academic education in drawing and painting at Rijksacademie (the Academy of Fine Art) in Amsterdam (Holtzman & James, 1987, p. xix).

Early in his career, Piet Mondrian was influenced by different artistic movements. At first, he was influenced by the Dutch realism of The Hague and the Impressionist Schools which were common among artists in Amsterdam. As such, his early works (1887–1907) are naturalistic landscape paintings that were painted under the influences of French Post Impressionism and Symbolism (Edwards & Wood, 2004). Among the subject matters of Mondrian's painting in this period of time are windmills, moonlight nights, cows in pastures, boat, a single house in fields, and a group of trees (Deicher, 1999, p. 17; Seuphor, 1956, p. 48).

Between 1908 and 1911, Mondrian further influenced by modern art movements such as the Dutch Luminism, Pointillism, and Fauvism. This period of time (1908-1911) is referred to as Mondrian's modernist period. The impact of such modern styles on Dutch artists was common at the time. As such, in this time we see similar rapid stylistic transformation of Mondrian's fellow artists such as Jan Sluyters, Kees van Dongen, and Otto van Rees (James, 1986, pp. 12-13). Besides the impacts of various modern art movements on Mondrian, one should not overlook the advancements in industrialization, politics, science, and particularly philosophy during 1900's. The new discoveries in different fields such as the dissolution of the atom, the invention of camera that came earlier, and the theory of relativity changed aesthetic vision of many artists such as Matisse, Picasso, Kandinsky, Kupka, Malevich as well as Mondrian. Interestingly, these advancements in technology resulted in a widespread wave of spiritualism among many artists who sought novel methods to express beauty in a way different naturalism. Furthermore, modern tenets of philosophers and thinkers such as Freud, Charles Darwin, and Friedrich Nietzsche furthered the mentality and self-awareness of modern artists who were interested in the 'new.'

2.3.1 The influence of Theosophy on Mondrian's artistic ideas after 1900

After 1900, Mondrian became acquainted with the teachings of Theosophy. Theosophy, as a mystical and esoteric doctrine, was founded in 1875 by Russian Occultist Madam Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) and gradually lost its popularity after 1915. When Theosophy was important in Europe, it affected many painters like Gauguin, Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, and Pollock (Fingesten, 1961, p. 2; Nixon, 2007, p. 3). Blavatsky's published books, among them *Isis unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), highly influenced some modern artists who were seeking to represent a metaphysical and universal expression of beauty. These artists believed that pure beauty could not be fully experienced due to the dominance of matter over spirit. That is to say,

universal beauty can only be expressed and realized through transcending from material aspects of life to spiritual ones. Mondrian's statement on this matter is as follows: "[b]ecause all particularity of appearance has a particular content and produces a particular sensation which, when expressed through the naturalistic appearance of things, does not move us with the force of reality itself" (Mondrian, 1917, p. 33).

Theosophy was the outcome of two Western philosophical traditions of German idealism and Positivism. In the one hand, Positivists believed in the dominance of matter over the spirit. On the other hand, German Idealists believed in the sovereignty of spirit over matter. Taking from both, theosophists' main goal was to make a balance between the two extremes of matter and spirit (Bris-Marino, 2014, p. 494). Influenced by Theosophy, artists like Kandinsky and Mondrian shifted their focus from representing matter (corporeality) to express the spiritual in their art. In this respect, Robert Rosenblum described modern artists of the early 20th century as 'spiritual seekers' and 'mystics' (Kokkinen, 2013, pp. 14-15). According to Holtzman and James (1986), Mondrian's interest in Theosophy goes back to 1900 when he initially got familiar with Albert van den Briel, Edouard Schureas and their Symbolist ideas. Schureas' book *The Great Initiates* was very influential as Schureas steadily replaced Mondrian's Calvinist ideas with the cosmic doctrine of Theosophy (Jaffé, 1985, p. 11). As a result of these theosophical impacts, Mondrian came to this idea that beauty should be sought as a universal and pure truth. Mondrian's interest in Theosophy gradually increased to a point that in 1909 he joined the Theosophical Society in Amsterdam.

Mondrian's interest in Theosophy was further expanded through the teachings of other thinkers such as Schoenmaekers and Rudolf Steiner in the second decade of the 20th

century.¹¹ As a result of these teachings of Theosophy, Mondrian painted symbolic theosophical motifs in his 1908-1912 artworks. One of the most Theosophical artworks of Mondrian is his *Evolution* (figure 2.1). In this work, Mondrian depicted the evolution of a nude woman (physical) on the left to a spiritual symbol on the right. This work is a good visualization of the core principles of theosophists. However, after 1912, Mondrian stopped symbolic reference to theosophist notions. Instead, he deduced that beauty as pure as well as spiritual truth could best be expressed through the abolition of the representation of natural form (what he called particular form). Thus, after 1912, he gradually started purifying the elements of painting such as form, line, and color in his artworks.



Figure 2.1: Piet Mondrian. 1911. *Evolution*. Oil on canvas. Triptych. 178 x 84, 184 x 87, 178 x 84 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

¹¹ According to Tosaki (2017), Mondrian was influenced by the teachings of many theosophists such as “H. P. Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, Mabel Collins, J. Krishnamurti, Sir Joséphin Péladan, C. W. Leadbeater, and Annie Besant” (p. 8).

2.3.2 Cubism and its impact on Mondrian (1912-1914)

While influenced by Theosophy, Mondrian also acquainted with the works of modern Cubist artists through an exhibition in Amsterdam in autumn 1911. Mondrian moved to Paris in 1912, when he dropped one 'a' from his surname to make it easier for the French people to pronounce it. In Paris, he acquainted with Dutch painters such as Lodewijk Schelfhout, Otto van Rees, the pianist-composer Jacob van Domselaer as well as the painter Fernand Leger (Holtzman & James, 1986). The modern tenets of Cubist artists further motivated Mondrian to depict abstract natural forms in his 1912-1914 paintings. In Paris, artists such as Leger, Marcoussis, Metzinger, Gleizes, and Villon were part of a circle of artists working with masters of Cubism, Picasso and Braque. During his stay in Paris in 1912-1914, Mondrian was mostly influenced by Cubism of Picasso and Braque rather than coloristic Cubism of Leger and Delaunay. According to Sweeney (1945), when Mondrian arrived in Paris in 1912, Cubism was at its full flourishing period. Conrad Kickert, one of Mondrian's friends who also admired Picasso's works, introduced Mondrian to the Cubist painter's works in Paris (p. 4). Kickert and Schelfhout brought Mondrian to Leger's studio, where he first saw works of cubist artists such as Leger and Picasso. Interestingly, when Leger offered Mondrian to take him to Picasso's studio, Mondrian refused. Indeed, Mondrian did not want to be just a blind follower of Picasso. Mondrian later expressed his rationale for the rejection as follows: "because Picasso was a man of such strong personality that I felt he would dominate me and so I did not go to meet him" (cited in Sweeney, 1945, p. 5).

At the time, Mondrian was noticeably influenced by Analytical Cubism of Picasso and, particularly, the oval-canvas artworks of Braque (Holtzman, 1986; Deicher, 1999, p. 31). As a matter of fact, Cubism made Mondrian's artistic ideas more transparent toward valuing "order, discipline and sobriety" (p. 96). In 1913, Mondrian participated

in twenty-ninth Salon of the Article by Apollinaire Independents. In November 1913, Mondrian also exhibited his cubist works in Circle of Modern Art in Amsterdam. According to Léal (2010). Mondrian's cubist paintings were different from those of Braque and Picasso. In this regard, the art critics found his cubist paintings more abstract than those of Picasso and Braque. Getting familiar with the modern premises of Cubism, Mondrian steadily tried to abolish contrast between foreground and background in his paintings. Furthermore, he limited his pallet to ochre and grey which was similar to earth tone pallets of Picasso and Braque (Schiff, 1995, p.3; Bois, 1994). It is noteworthy that among all the modern movements, he found the most degree of similarity between his artistic vision and the modern principles of Cubism (Holtzman, 1986). In a letter to Brenner in 1914, Mondrian clearly expressed the impact of Cubism, particularly Picasso's paintings, on his vision:

I was influenced by seeing Picasso's work, which I very much admire. I am not ashamed to mention this influence for I think that it is better to hold oneself open to improvements than to remain satisfied with one's imperfection. Mondrian (as cited in Fauchereau, 1994, p. 18)

2.3.3 Mondrian's return to Holland and Post-Cubist works, 1914-1919

In the summer of 1914, due to his father's sickness, Mondrian had to leave Paris and move to Laren, a village near Amsterdam and close to the sea. He first stayed with his friend Jacob van Domselaer. However, soon he rented his own studio in Laren. There he acquainted with Salomon B. Slijper, who purchased many of Mondrian's paintings which are now kept in Slijper collection at the Gemeentemuseum at The Hague (Milner, 1992). When Mondrian left Paris, he planned for a short trip to Netherlands and he wanted to come back to Paris within a few weeks. However, with the outbreak of World War I, he could not come back to Paris. According to Blotkamp (1994), in 1914 or 1915 Mondrian could possibly return from various routes to Paris, but he preferred to stay in

Netherlands. He even paid for his Paris studio's rent throughout the war period (1914-1919). According to Blotkamp, Mondrian was reluctant to return to Paris. Firstly, because he had found Paris an insecure and unstable market for selling his artworks. Secondly, during the War period, the artistic atmosphere of Paris was not in favor of Abstract artists.

During the war, many Dutch artists such as Piet Mondrian, were isolated from the latest artistic and stylistic developments in Paris. As a result, during World War I, very few Dutch artists could exhibit their works beyond the boundaries of Netherlands. Fortunately, during 1914-1919 Mondrian found good opportunities in Netherlands to sell his artworks as well as to introduce his abstract art to the circle of artists. For example, in his solo 1914 exhibition in The Hague at the Walrecht gallery Revd. H. van Assendelft and Bremmer bought some of his artworks. In January 1915, he also succeeded to exhibit his works, with other artists such as Peter Alma and the French painter Le Fauconnier, at the Rotterdamsche Kunstkring. Moreover, in October 1915, Mondrian exhibited his works at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam along with other artists such as Gestel, Schelthout, Sluyters and Le Fauconnier (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 82). Around 1916, Mondrian met Dr. H. P. Bremmer who helped Mondrian (until 1919) with a monthly payment and, in return, Mondrian gave some of his paintings to him.

In Holland, Mondrian soon realized that by depending on the aesthetic values of Cubism, he could not fulfill his goals to annihilate the natural form and corporeality in his art. Hence, after 1914 he moved from his Cubist style to a complete non-figurative type of painting that remarks his neo-Cubist period. Nevertheless, Mondrian always acknowledged the importance of Cubism as the theoretical foundation of Neo-Plasticism: "Neo-Cubist is not a bad term, for the New Plastic is a consequence of Cubism" Mondrian (as cited in Chang, 2003, p. 54). However, the modern premises of

Cubist artists could not satisfy Mondrian's expectation and, therefore, after 1914, Mondrian moved away from Cubism: "I, for my part, maintain that they [the cubists] are not on the right path, but that we are different" Mondrian (as cited in Chang, 2003, p. 53). According to Wallace, the aesthetic tenets of Cubism led Mondrian to look for objective representation of form based on the inherent laws in nature: "his experience with cubism in Paris led him to search for the essential structural principles of nature in the spirit of objective analysis rather than subjective interpretation" (Wallace, 1968, p. 54). It is noteworthy that Mondrian's quest for the annihilation of form is not an act of destruction. Instead, by the annihilation of naturalistic forms Mondrian tried to unveil a universal unity and balance that he believed are veiled in natural forms. Later in his Neo-Plastic period, he called such unveiled expression of unity or harmony 'equilibrium.' To this end, he gradually abolished all pictorial references to motifs in his 1914-1919 paintings, which are considered as his post-cubist and 'abstract-real' oeuvre. Indeed, it was after 1914 that he realized that in order to express universal beauty and pure truth in his art, he should abstract the curve and oblique lines into opposing elements as vertical and horizontal lines. As a result, he gradually abandoned using curved lines since he believed that curved lines - as he called it 'line of beauty' or S shape (Mondrian, 1917, p. 47) - in painting represent a subjective expression of beauty. Instead, he started painting series of paintings by using short vertical and horizontal lines that are commonly called his 'plus-minus' works. He believed that the right angle (90 degree) between vertical and horizontal lines is the most objective and abstract portrayal of relationships to express unity, harmony, and beauty as universal. In a letter to Bremmer in 1914, he argued that 'universal beauty' could be attained by using vertical and horizontal lines that he called an 'essential of things':

I construct complexes of lines and colours on a flat plane so as to plastically express *universal beauty* — as consciously as possible. Nature (or the visible) inspires me, arousing in me the emotion that stimulates creation, no less than with any other painter, but I want to approach truth as closely as possible; I therefore abstract everything until I attain the essential of things. With the use of horizontal and vertical lines constructed consciously but without calculation, under the guidance of higher intuition, and brought to harmony and rhythm with these elements of beauty. Mondrian (as cited in Fauchereau, 1994, p. 20)

Overall, the gradual change of curved and oblique to straight perpendicular lines in Mondrian's paintings was very significant in the development of his oeuvre. His method for the abstraction of line was based on the 'intensification' of the curve and oblique lines. As such, Mondrian in his essays called the straight line a 'tensed curve.' In fact, after 1914, he used straight lines at right angle as universal means of painting to portray a universal expression of immutable laws in nature (balance) or what Bois (1994) referred to as 'essence of all things':

Above all, he [Mondrian] feels confirmed in the process of digitalization: nature is everywhere the same, despite the diversity of its appearances; in order to arrive at the essence of all things, therefore, this diversity need only be reduced to the "primordial and absolute" relation (the vertical and the horizontal). (Bois, 1994, p. 334)

After Mondrian returned to Holland in 1914, he started painting based on his previous motifs such as small church, the ocean, and the piers (Bois, 1994, p. 314). In fact, during compulsory 1914-1919 stay in Holland, Mondrian experimented more with the abstraction of painterly motifs in his paintings. Sweeney described this matter as follows: "[f]rom his observation of sea, sky and stars, he sought to produce pictorial equivalents of their physical relationships through a multiplicity of crossing vertical and horizontal lines" (Sweeney, 1945, p. 6). It is noteworthy that Mondrian during 1914-1916 was not productive as he was during 1912-1914 in Paris. In Paris, he had painted over forty paintings whereas during 1914-1916 he could only finish two paintings. Blotkamp explained Mondrian's lack of interest toward painting in this period. Firstly,

Mondrian throughout 1914-1916 was in the period of radical change. That's why Mondrian preferred to write his radical artistic ideas rather than to paint. He needed a period of contemplation on what he came through as his new aesthetic rules. Another reason for the decline of Mondrian's productivity in this period is that he was less motivated by his surroundings (Holland) compared to Paris (Blotkamp, 1994, pp. 83-84).

In his post-Cubist works, Mondrian depicted the parts (short crossing lines) in relation to space as a whole. Good examples of his plus-minus works that are executed between 1914 and 1916 are: *Composition in Oval with Color Planes 1* (figure 2.2) and *Composition in Oval with Color Planes 2* (figure 2.3). What is apparent in both works is the dominance of straight, intensified curves.

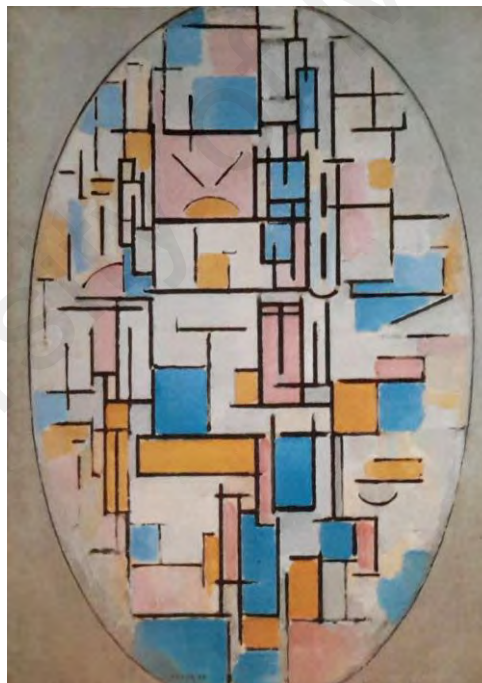


Figure 2.2: Piet Mondrian. 1914. *Composition in Oval with Color Planes 1*. 1914. 107.5 x 79 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase, 1950.



Figure 2.3: Piet Mondrian. 1914. *Composition in Oval with Color Planes 2*. 113 x 84.5 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Haags Gemeentemuseum, the Hague. Object number: 0334318.

His series of paintings called *Pier and Ocean* are indeed his mature plus-minus paintings. In these works, he further tried to depict unity through abolition of the contrast between background and foreground. Among the best works of this period is *Composition 10 in black and white* – figure 2.4. This work is created through the asymmetrical positioning of short crossing horizontal and vertical lines which are similar to plus and minus signs. Indeed, Mondrian in *Composition 10 in black and white* succeeded to totally abstract the appearance of ocean and pier.



Figure 2.4: Piet Mondrian. 1915. *Composition 10 in black and white*. Oil on Canvas. 85.8 x 108.4 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands.

In *Composition 10 in black and white* we see that the vertical and horizontal lines are multiplied and so a pulsing rhythm of lines is represented. This is an abstract interpretation of the movement of waves in the ocean. In 1941, in retrospect, Mondrian explained the reduction of the elements of his paintings. This is related to his 1914-1916 experimentations:

More and more I excluded from my painting all curved lines, until finally my compositions consisted only of vertical and horizontal lines, which formed crosses, each one separate and detached from the other. Observing sea, sky and stars, I sought to indicate their plastic function through a multiplicity of crossing verticals and horizontals. Impressed by the vastness of nature, I was trying to express its expansion, rest, and unity. At the same time, I was fully aware that the visible expansion of nature is at the same time its limitation; vertical and horizontal lines are the expression of two opposing forces; these exist everywhere and dominate everything; their reciprocal action constitutes 'life'. Mondrian (as cited in Fauchereau, 1994, p. 21)

Following *Composition 10 in black and white*, Mondrian painted *Composition, 1916* (figure 2.5). In this painting, he added the element of color. Also, the lines are scattered

asymmetrically throughout the composition in the very painting. However, in contrast to the previous monochromatic Cubists paintings, he started using triad of primary colors, though the colors are not yet pure in hue. Overall, in *Composition, 1916* Mondrian represented a rhythmic pattern between line and color. Interestingly, in this painting the lines partially delimit the planes of color. As we will see in Chapter Four, he expanded this tactic of the ‘determination’ of colors in his post-1918 compositions. Yet, in these works we feel a sense of depth and perspective due to the extension of colors to the linear structure. In *Composition, 1916*, we see a pulsing and buoyant movement of the linear structure and colors. Wallace described this effect as follows: “lines seem to be floating above a pulsating, changing, illusionistic, volumetric space formed by the various tonal distances of the colours” (Wallace, 1968, p. 60).

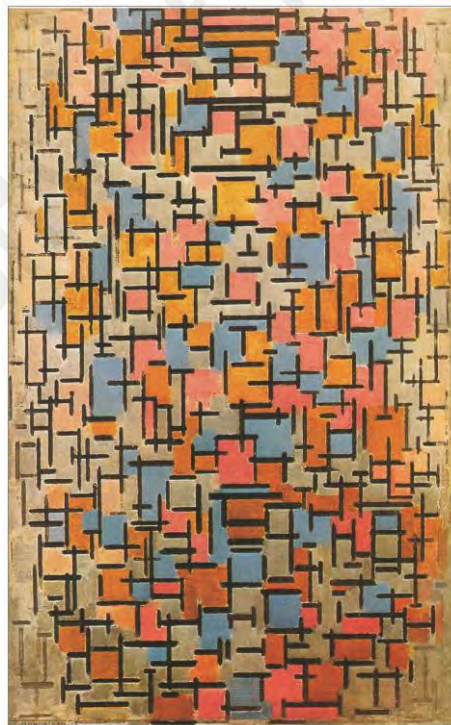


Figure 2.5: Piet Mondrian. 1916. *Composition, 1916*. Oil on canvas, 47 ¼ x 29 ½. " The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

In the following paintings such as *Composition in line, second state* (figure 2.6) the element of color is totally absent. Mondrian in his experimentations in this period sometimes skipped the element of color to abolish contrast between background and foreground. We see that in *Composition in line, second state* (figure 2.6) all pictorial references to subject matters (depicted, resembled, or used as a title) are removed. Bois (1994) interpreted this work as follows: “any perception of a figural form is rendered impossible there, for the white ground is optically coopted, activated by the diffuse geometrical relations that virtually interconnect the discrete elements of the picture” (p. 315).



Figure 2.6: Piet Mondrian. 1916-1917. *Composition in line, second state*. Oil on Canvas. 108 x 108 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands.

2.3.4 De Stijl's influence on the development of Mondrian's artistic vision

Between 1914 and 1917, Mondrian became acquainted with the radical ideas of artists such as Theo van Doesburg, Bart Van der Leck¹² and architect J.J.P Oud who all wanted to create a 'new' art. They called their new vision De Stijl. The De Stijl (new style) was founded in 1917 by Mondrian and Doesburg,¹³ to fulfil the common goals of the Dutch collective avant-garde group of artists. According to Seuphor, friendship between Mondrian and Doesburg was due to an article Doesburg had published in October 1915 in a Dutch newspaper called *De Eenheid*. In this article, Doesburg had praised Mondrian's paintings and therefore it was an initial point when two figures got acquainted with each other. Doesburg was well-aware about the latest avant-garde approached of artists in Europe.

During 1917-1924 Mondrian contributed to De Stijl group through the theoretical essays he published in De Stijl magazine - founded by Theo van Doesburg in 1917 in Holland.¹⁴ The first issue of De Stijl magazine was published in October 1917. According to Seuphor, Mondrian significantly contributed, particularly during the first three years of De Stijl magazine's operation, to De Stijl magazine. Seuphor believes that what Mondrian wrote as long theoretical essays in De Stijl magazine are among the most rigorous theories of abstract art movements in the 20th century. Such theories are considered as the foundation abstract art theory. Amongst the primary members of De

¹² Interestingly, Seuphor argued that it is possible the initial seeds of Neo-Plasticism be planted by van der Leck. Indeed, Mondrian and Doesburg, as early as 1913, had seen van der Leck studio in Holland and they were inspired by his abstract geometric art.

¹³ According to Nixon (2007), the foundation of De Stijl art movement stems in earlier art movements such as Art Nouveau, Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, Constructivism and Separatism. We find that in all these art movements the emphasis is on the transformation of 'old' to 'new' (p. 2).

¹⁴ According to Blotkamp, the influences of van Doesburg and Hungarian painter Vilmos Huszár on Mondrian during 1916-1917 were very significant. These two painters had seen paintings of Mondrian and van der Leck at Kröller-Müller exhibition. During 1917-1918, there was close discussions between four painters, van der Leck, Vilmos Huszár, van Doesburg, and Mondrian. In this regard, they discussed many questions among themselves such as the use of colors, vertical and horizontal lines, use of intuition or intellect, and so on. However, each artist finally came up with his own solutions to these questions.

Stijl group were Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg, Bart van der Leck, Vilmos Huszár, designer: Gerrit Rietveld, architects: J.J.P Oud, Robert Vant Hoff, and Jan Wils, Dutch poet Anthony Kok, and sculpture Georges Vantongerloo (Kleiner, 2013, p. 830; Monroy, 2011, p. 116, Chang, 2003). Michael White (2003; 2011) conducted a thorough scrutiny on De Stijl art movement and particularly its roots in the country of its origin, Netherlands. According to White (2003), the premises of the De Stijl art movement had a great influence on modern art such as “the development of abstract art, the interwar avant-gardes, international style architecture, modern design, modernism in Netherlands” (p. 1). One of the main concerns of De Stijl group was the integration of all arts and the collective interdependence of their artists in different fields. The goal of these artists was to find, firstly, the most abstract, purified elements of their art and, secondly, a way or method to use, arrange, and compose all those purified elements in a united whole or what Bois called “a syntactically indivisible nonhierarchical whole” (p. 3). According to White (2003), the term De Stijl,¹⁵ finally used by Doesburg, by itself reflects the collective goal of the artists to bring their avant-garde ideas under a united umbrella to produce a new and modern style in art, architecture, designing, environment, and so on. White argued that the premises and spirit of modernization in Netherlands, in relation to the all aspects of life and art which led to the creation of De Stijl in 1917, goes back to the late 19th century and is seen in the works of artists such as Jan Toorop. In this regard, the all artists who made wall painting, stained glass, and monumental sculptor, sought to achieve a stylistic unity between architecture and visual art (White, 2003, p. 6). As White further described, one of the initial ideas of De Stijl in Netherlands roots in modern ideas of Dutch architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage. Indeed, many of De Stijl architects, notably Oud and Wils, later followed the modern ideas of

¹⁵ According to White, Doesburg first wished to call his journal ‘The Straight Line.’ However, he finally called his journal ‘De Stijl’ – the style - to expand the scope of his journal from art of painting into all modern tendencies in arts, applied art, design, and so on (White, 2003, p. 7).

Berlage. The ideas of Berlage were also influential on van Doesburg as well as van der Leek. One of the most seminal architectural works of Berlage was the building of Amsterdam Stock Exchange, opened in 1903, which was built through the collaborative spirit of artists. This building was the product of the collaborative work of three painters: Antoon Derkinderen, Richard Ronald Holst, and Jan Toorop; two sculptures: Joseph Mendes da Costa, and Lambertus Zijl; as well as the poet Albert Verwey (White, 2003, p. 7). The stark design of Berlage's building, as the outcome of collective endeavor of the artists, and the ideas of Berlage and other artists in the late 19th century were indeed important signals which later created the foundation of De Stijl ideas in Netherlands in the beginning of the 20th century.

De Stijl was a Modernist Dutch movement (1917-1932) which members aimed at creating a new art with universal aesthetic rules in machine age (Nixon, 2007, p.1). Overall, De Stijl artists aimed to reconstruct a new world and way of life. They declared the birth of the new world in accordance to the growth in technology, science, and philosophy in the early 20th century (Kramer, 1995, pp. 5-6). They aimed to integrate all arts as well as architecture and design under common aesthetic rules. Regardless of the various approaches and medium De Stijl artists used, they had a common goal. They aimed to show, visualize, and express a universal harmony in art that was indeed a prototype of a universal reality and unity in life, culture, and environment. In fact, the De Stijl artists wished to express the underlying principles of harmony and equilibrium in nature in their artworks. In this respect, Kleiner stated that De Stijl artists wanted to visualize the unity and balance found in cosmos through geometric elements in their paintings.

The utopian spirit and ideals of the Suprematists [...] in Russia were shared by a group of young Dutch artists. They formed a new movement in 1917 called De Stijl (The Style). The name reflected confidence that De Stijl revealed the underlying eternal structure of existence. Accordingly, De Stijl artists reduced their formal vocabulary to simple geometric elements. (Kleiner, 2012, p. 408)

Indeed, we should note that many of formal concepts and theories regarding what Mondrian branded as Neo-Plastic style after 1919 was indeed formed based on his reinterpretation and refinements on De Stijl principles. That is to say, the very foundation of Neo-Plasticism was built on the premises of De Stijl which by itself was the offspring of many artistic and philosophical tenets such as Suprematism, Constructivism, Hegel, Platonism, and so on. In this regard, Theo van Doesburg, one of the founders of De Stijl art movement, stated that the mission of modern artist is to use the very formal elements of the paintings to express the reality: “to give form to his aesthetic experience of reality” (as cited in Harrison & Wood, 1992, p. 280). Painterly means for Doesburg are abstracted colors, forms, lines, and planes rather than represented forms such as natural appearances. Doesburg asserted that throughout the development of modern styles in the 20th century, the painterly elements gradually became more and more purified and abstract to express the pure reality. Doesburg further explained that in such a pure abstract De Stijl art, which he called ‘formative’ art, the elements of paintings cancel each other. Moreover, he maintained that everything in this universe is subordinated to the laws of harmony and equilibrium. It is the task of artist to unveil such veiled harmony in objects in nature. As Doesburg stated: “the (truly exact) work of art is a metaphor of the universe obtained with” (as cited in Harrison & Wood, 1992, p. 281). In such formative work of art, the equilibrium is achieved through the reciprocal cancelation of pure means (line, color, form, and plane) that oppose each other. Hence, we see that, though Neo-Plastic principles were formulated by Mondrian based on several stages of refinement and development of De

Stijl ideas as well as other esoteric and mystical doctrines, part of the foundation of formal theory of Neo-Plasticism was borrowed from theoretical premises of De Stijl artists, particularly van Doesburg.

It is noteworthy that the tendency of De Stijl artists such as Mondrian to visualize a universal harmony found in life, nature, and environment was mainly formed under the influence of philosopher and mathematician Schoenmaekers who believed that a universal expression of beauty is possible only through the use of pure geometric forms and purified colors. He postulated the idea that such geometric forms are immutable and they exist beyond the physical reality. Mondrian borrowed this idea of Schoenmaekers, encapsulated in De Stijl, and approached it by the strict abstraction of the all elements of paintings and forms into their essential form.¹⁶ Hence, the initial formation of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic aesthetic ideas is greatly indebted to the formal and philosophical premises of De Stijl.¹⁷ According to Jaffé, Neo-Plasticism was formed based on what Mondrian got from De Stijl principles and his experimentations in the transitional years 1914-1917.

The new style, for which Mondrian coined the name neo-plasticism, was not the work of a single man. Mondrian made his own contribution to it by approaching the limits of total abstraction in his cubist-based works of the years between 1914 and 1917. Van der Leek's contribution, as Mondrian himself pointed out, was a geometrical architecture of forms linked with the use of primary colors. (Jaffé, 1985, p. 26)

¹⁶ According to Denker (1982), Bart van der Leek was the first De Stijl artist who started painting with the De Stijl pallet: black, white, and primary colors. He was also the first artist who arranged his abstracted elements of painting in his hard-edge geometric paintings in rectangular angle.

¹⁷ Mondrian's Neo-Plastic art and theory in relation to De Stijl was scrutinized by many scholars, namely Jaffé, Blotkamp, Bois, Hoek, and White.

Mondrian separated from De Stijl group after 1924. The gap between Mondrian and De Stijl group started in 1924 when van Doesburg¹⁸ used oblique lines in his paintings. One of the main reasons Mondrian left De Stijl was Doesburg's new style called Elementarism,¹⁹ which was also published as a manifesto in 1926. Doesburg in his Elementarism freely used diagonal line as a means of imaging in his paintings. The adoption of diagonal lines by Van Doesburg in compositions was not in accordance with Mondrian's Neo-Plastic principles. Therefore, Mondrian abandoned the De Stijl group after 1924. Nevertheless, the departure from De Stijl group and Van Doesburg, helped Mondrian to further refine his artistic concepts and theories which resulted in writing his six principles of Neo-Plasticism in 1926. Furthermore, it motivated Mondrian to demonstrate the applicability of his Neo-Plastic principles on more lozenge canvases which was commonly practiced by Doesburg in this period.

Another more important conflict between Mondrian and van Doesburg happened during 1923-1924. Blotkamp argued that contrary to the common belief that the conflict between Mondrian and Doesburg was mainly due to the use of diagonal lines, such discrepancy was indeed due to disagreements in regards to the use of Neo-Plastic principles in architecture. In this respect, Mondrian refused to attend the exhibition of De Stijl artists held in the Leonce Rosenberg's gallery in Paris. The main reason for such conflict between Doesburg and Mondrian was indeed the theory of van Doesburg in relation to the architecture on which he had written and published some articles and manifestos. Central to this theory of architecture was that a 'color architecture,' as he

¹⁸ Blotkamp (1994) also pointed to other rationales for the separation of two figures, Mondrian and Doesburg, during 1923-1924. Doesburg's avoidance for the application of Neo-Plastic principles into architecture (similar to the case of De Stijl architect Oud) and proposal of the fourth dimension (time-space continuum - relativity between time and space) by Doesburg were amongst the most important gaps between two figures. In this regard, Mondrian emphasized that architecture design should not be perceived within relativity of time and space. This standpoint of Mondrian was mainly related to the esoteric teachings of Theosophy, which considered expression of truth and beauty emancipated from the limitations of present time and space.

¹⁹ It should be noted that, as Bois delineated, Mondrian criticized van Doesburg's elementarist paintings as early as 1920 and 1921. However, it was not after 1924 that these conflicts between Mondrian and Doesburg turned into a permanent separation.

had coined, is a concrete manifestation of time-space which is related to the concept of fourth dimension. In contrast, Mondrian hold that architecture is made of multiplicity of flat planes of primary colors. Moreover, he considered that observer should perceive a three dimensional design, as in architecture, within a timeless and space-less container (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 147). Blotkamp further expressed the conflict between Mondrian and Doesburg in this way:

It is obvious where the two men came to a parting of the ways: van Doesburg interpreted colour architecture as concrete and dynamic, and believed it could be realized in the present; Mondrian saw colour architecture as an abstract concept, an object of meditation devoid of time and dimension, and projected his ideal into the future. (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 148)

Although Mondrian's influence from De Stijl art movement was relatively short, it had a noticeable impact on the formation of Mondrian's artistic theories. Therefore, it is necessary to have an overview on the idealistic goals of De Stijl group in regard to art and life that resulted in the aesthetic maturation of Mondrian's art after 1917. By knowing these De Stijl influences, we come to a better understanding of his Neo-Plastic concepts and formal theories that he later proposed in his post-1919 writings and paintings. In the following section, the key De Stijl concepts and theories which were formative in the development of Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism is explained.

2.3.4.1 Utopian goals of De Stijl and Mondrian

The goal and mission of De Stijl artists was declared by Theo van Doesburg²⁰ in *De Stijl Manifesto I*. It was first published in November 1918 in De Stijl magazine in four languages Dutch, French, English and German (Veen, 2011, p. 441; Veen, 2017a, 598). Based on the manifesto, there are two main oppositions: 'old consciousness and 'new

²⁰ Based on the scrutiny of Veen (2011), prior to the publication of De Stijl manifesto Doesburg sent its draft to some of the members of De Stijl and asked their comments and revisions. From the letters Mondrian sent to Doesburg in this time, it is clear that Mondrian also revised and edited the text to some extent (p. 441).

consciousness.’ The ‘old’ is related to the concept of ‘individual.’ Whereas the ‘new’ is related to the concept ‘universal.’ Doesburg, as well as Mondrian, believed that the main cause of World War I as well as all sufferings and turmoil in the world are due to the disequilibrium between the two oppositions: individual and universal. In fact, Mondrian borrowed concepts such as old art, new art, individual, universal, and necessity for equivalence between these oppositions from the principles of De Stijl. Throughout his writings, Mondrian always discussed about the conceptions of the ‘evolution’ of old mentality and consciousness of new mentality. He also emphasized, in many instances, on the necessity of achieving a balance between these oppositions of life.

Furthermore, in De Stijl manifesto it is indicated that the disequilibrium between individual (old consciousness) and universal (new consciousness) is represented or expressed in art through the representation of corporeality and naturalistic forms. On the other side, the new consciousness and universal - balance between individual and spiritual - can be expressed through the new art. Indeed, one of the key ideas of the De Stijl movement was movement from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ in both domains of art and life. De Stijl artists, inclusive of Mondrian, believed that everything as dogmas or tradition that retards modernization in life, culture, and society is ‘old.’ In his aesthetic vision, Mondrian considered De Stijl conception of ‘old consciousness’ and individual as subjective appreciation of beauty that is assessed based on the traditional principles of painting such as harmony, proportion, balance, and linear and aerial perspective. As such, in his writings, Mondrian in many instances distinguished ‘new art’ - best exemplified in his Neo-Plastic painting - from its opposite ‘old art.’ By ‘old art’ Mondrian refers to all those artistic tendencies (even modern paintings such as Cubism) in which beauty is expressed - whether completely or not - based on corporeality or what he called ‘particular form.’ Furthermore, he always exemplified his Neo-Plastic

paintings as a perfect prototype of such 'new art' - De Stijl conception of 'new consciousness', or universal. He postulated the idea that he could depict such universal rules of harmony in nature in his Neo-Plastic paintings through his abstracted means of imaging and plastic means.

In fact, the terms 'old' and 'new art' are derived from the viewpoint of De Stijl artists who introduced the conception of 'new art' as a new aesthetic vision toward the appreciation of beauty based on formal elements of paintings. In this regard, Doesburg proposed De Stijl as an autonomous art where the formal elements of paintings (abstracted line, color, and form) themselves became the means of the expression of beauty. Doesburg in his first issue of De Stijl magazine referred to the new vision of De Stijl artists pertaining to the appreciation of beauty: "[t]his periodical hopes to make a contribution to the development of a new awareness of beauty. It wishes to make modern man receptive to what is new in the visual arts" (as cited in Chang, 2003, p. 64). Indeed, similar to Theosophy, De Stijl was further used to develop Mondrian aesthetic vision to appreciate an inner and metaphysical beauty beyond the corporeality of the naturalistic forms.

In De Stijl manifesto, it is also indicated that all traditional dogmas and conventional rules or beliefs in life are obstacles on the way of attaining new art and life. As such, De Stijl artists aimed to reform art and culture to abolish all those impediments: old consciousness and individual on the way of attaining the universal consciousness in art and life. Indeed, Mondrian's - as well as some other De Stijl artists' - interpretation of these social and ethical ideals of De Stijl manifesto, regarding art and life, was to consider his Neo-Plastic art and its formal principles as a perfect sample of a utopian life, culture, and society. In his writings, Mondrian always tried to propagate the idea that by using Neo-Plastic principles people could live based on the idealistic moral

values such as universal brotherhood, unity, peace, and justice. In fact, De Stijl group aimed at creating a new art for a new life. Such close relation between two domains of art and life is emphasized by Mondrian in his writings. He always considered his Neo-Plastic aesthetic principles as universal rules for creating a utopian life. De Stijl artists postulated the idea that art and life are not separate domains. They believed that a new life can be created based on fixed principles found in nature. As Kleiner (2012) stated:

We must realize that life and art are no longer separate domains. That is why the “idea” of “art” as an illusion separate from real life must disappear. The word “Art” no longer means anything to us. In its place we demand the construction of our environment in accordance with creative laws based upon a fixed principle. These laws, following those of economics, mathematics, technique, sanitation, etc., are leading to a new, plastic unity. (p. 408)

In line with the premises of De Stijl group, Mondrian stated that the principles of his Neo-Plastic art can be used to reconstruct a new life and culture where people can live in pure equilibrium and unity. Influenced by De Stijl ideas, Mondrian came to this idea that to achieve such universal, social, and ethical values, the individual (material) and universal (spiritual) values should be expressed in balance. Moreover, De Stijl artists, and particularly Mondrian, who were influenced by the theory of dialectics of Hegel, inferred that such balance is achieved through equilibrium between dual oppositions.

Adams (1999) indicated this matter as follows:

They [De Stijl artists] were idealists searching for a universal style that would satisfy human needs through mass production. The spiritual goal of world peace, they believed, would also be fostered by the ‘equilibrium of opposites’ that was part of De Stijl's credo.²¹ (p. 902)

As such, Mondrian in his early essays (1917-1920) defined the elements of painting as dual oppositions: straight lines at right angle and triad of primary colors (red, blue,

²¹ The words in the bracket were added to the original text.

yellow) and noncolors (white, grey, black). He postulated that the pure equilibrium or unity, which he expressed in his Neo-Plastic painting, was indeed a representation of the underlying harmony and unity in the universe. He considered the pure equilibrium, attained through opposition between his means of imaging (plastic means), equal to universal beauty, reality, or truth in life.

Overall, one of the most important influences of De Stijl on Mondrian was the reinforcement of the idea that the unseen and metaphysical reality, truth, or universal in life could be represented or visualized through abstracted elements of painting: line, color, form, and plane. Furthermore, in his theory we find that universal truth and reality are, indeed, a representation of fundamental and ancient laws of nature - a universal harmony or equilibrium - that is attained through using the means of imaging as dual oppositions. De Stijl artists posited this idea that such universal beauty as pure equilibrium in new art could only be achieved through formal relationship between abstracted elements of paintings. According to Jaffé, De Stijl artists proposed a pure pictorial abstract language - confined to the purified element of paintings - to express a “true vision of reality” through the articulation of equilibrium, unity, as universal beauty. Indeed, the goal of De Stijl artists such as Mondrian was to find such inner and universal beauty beyond the corporeality of the objects. To express such spiritual, universal beauty in his art, Mondrian after 1917, as we will see in Chapter Four, purified his element of painting in order to articulate a purer expression of equilibrium through his distilled means of imaging. Overall, we should consider De Stijl as an important art movement which established the foundation of Mondrian’s Neo-Plastic theory. It should be noted that Mondrian’s philosophical foundation of his Neo-Plasticism was mainly formed through his earlier acquaintance with Theosophy and Hegel (ca. 1908-1915). However, getting familiar with De Stijl circle of artists helped him to find a foundation of a formal theory to apply it on his canvases. For Mondrian, De Stijl was a radical art

movement which showed him the way of using elements of his paintings in a universal unity and balance. As a result, as we will see in Chapter Four, after 1917 he further confined elements of his painting into straight lines at right angle and planes of color and noncolor. Indeed, Mondrian implanted the idea of using the primary colors and noncolors as well as a pure abstraction of form – which De Stijl artists borrowed from philosopher Schoenmaekers - in his artistic vision during 1915-1917 through contact with circle of De Stijl artists, especially Theo van Doesburg. Nevertheless, later in his life - particularly after 1920 - Mondrian revised these philosophical and formal principles of De Stijl when he developed his own Neo-Plastic style of painting. As result of the influences of De Stijl, he could finally introduced the first personalized version of his ‘new art’ after 1919, which he branded as Neo-Plastic art.

2.4 Conclusion

To sum up, in this chapter I explained the meaning of the key Neo-Plastic terms Mondrian used in his essays. Furthermore, I expounded the influences of Mondrian from philosophers, thinkers, and circle of the artists of his time that resulted in the development of his aesthetic vision. It was due to such influences from his environment that he steadily, between 1912 and 1917, departed from his former representational painting.

As a result of these impacts, particularly De Stijl, Mondrian gradually realized that he should seek non-representational ways to depict forms as universal expressions of beauty or pure truth. Such departure from representational art was initially due to the impact of cosmic and metaphysical teachings of Theosophy. Influenced by Theosophy, Mondrian deduced that he should express beauty as universal that is as an ideal non-physical form. His contact with Cubism after 1911 was also an important factor which led him to gradually abolish the representational motifs in his 1912-1917 paintings. As a

result of such influences, Mondrian steadily stopped using the traditional principles of paintings such as perspective in his paintbrushes. The first thing he started to abstract was element of line. In his 1914-1917 experimentations, he tried to depict line as objective and universal as much as possible through the abstraction - or what he called 'intensification' - of curve and oblique lines into the oppositions of vertical and horizontal lines. In the works executed from 1914 to 1917, commonly referred as his plus-minus works, he started using short crossing lines at right angle to express universal beauty in his art.

As it was discussed, using vertical and horizontal lines as two contraries was partly related to the influences he received from Hegel's dialectic of oppositions, a concept he became familiar after 1915. He also started purifying the spectrum of natural colors into triad of primary colors. Lastly, he started minimizing the contrast between the background and foreground in his paintings. De Stijl art movement, which he co-founded with Doesburg in 1917, was also very important factor in the development of his aesthetic ideas. Indeed, it was through the philosophical and formalist tenets of De Stijl that Mondrian realized the aesthetic principles of a 'new art' are indeed a new way of life and it can be used to construct a utopian life for mankind filled with a universal unity and beauty.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will examine the recent and past viewpoints of scholars in respect to Piet Mondrian's writings, the nature of his writing style as a painter, and his rationale for writing his theories in line with the creation of his paintings. In addition, the various approaches of scholars on the analysis of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic art and theory will be critically studied.

As it will be discussed in this chapter, although past and recent publications on Mondrian contributed to the better understanding of his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories, there are some gaps in the analysis of artistic evolution of Mondrian in relation to his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism. In the first place, the analyses of his Neo-Plasticism are almost fully narrated within context-dependent approaches such as historical, philosophical, humanistic, and stylistic lenses. The scholars' emphases have been so far on what stimulated Mondrian during his life, such as circle of his friends, artists, thinkers (his social and artistic life) as well as the inspiration he received from the teachings of Theosophy, Hegel, Platonism, and De Stijl. As a result, in many cases we see relatively individualistic, personal approaches of scholars in examining Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism. Although looking at Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism through different contextual lens, like any other artist, greatly helped us understand the formation of his artistic theories in discourse of history, it also impedes us to come up with a refined analysis of his core theory of Neo-Plasticism in relation to his paintings; Neo-Plasticism was formed through contact with all those external stimuli (i.e. his social life, philosophies artistic styles he influenced, and so on). Secondly, the artistic development of Mondrian's ideas toward his Neo-Plasticism was mostly

demonstrated and expounded based on what scholars observed in his Neo-Plastic paintings as pictorial development of the elements of his paintings in different periods of his Neo-Plastic career. As such, his theoretical writings (mainly his essays, articles, and notes) were not used as primary sources as his paintings to further explain and excavate the underlying theory of Neo-Plasticism in different phases of the development of Neo-Plastic oeuvre. His paintings were either analyzed in isolation to his writings; they were not analyzed in relation to the formal theory of Neo-Plasticism, particularly in relation to the six principles of Neo-Plasticism, and to what was depicted in the paintings. That is to say, scholars have not paid as much attention to the theoretical writings of Mondrian as they paid to his Neo-Plastic compositions. As a result, in many cases we come to understand the development of Mondrian's artistic vision toward his art within a fairly individualistic, and to some extent limited, interpretation of his paintings. Regarding his writings, majority of the scholars scrutinized Mondrian's theoretical writings from different angles to further shed light on the implication of his Neo-Plastic principles in various domains such as different arts, architecture and life. His utopian and social artistic concepts and theories have been well explained under the light of various artistic and philosophical angles. Yet, his theoretical writings are not used as primarily as his paintings to expound the development of his own principles of Neo-Plasticism. As I argued, for a more universal interpretation of the development of Mondrian's formal theory of Neo-Plasticism and its related concepts - particularly in relation to his Neo-Plastic principles - his 1917-1944 paintings and theoretical writings should be examined within a context-independent approach, paralleling each other in different stages of his Neo-Plastic oeuvre.

3.2 Scholars' standpoints on Mondrian's writings

3.2.1 Mondrian's interest in writing his aesthetic ideas

One of the unique characteristics of Piet Mondrian was his consistent effort in writing his art theories as early as 1914 (Holtzman & James. 1986, p. xvii). According to Fauchereau, Mondrian enjoyed writing his art theories while he painted. As early as 1914 when Mondrian was in Laren – a village close to Amsterdam – he always had a notebook (Deicher, 1999) in which he wrote his ideas based on his artistic experimentations, as well as discussions he had with his circle of friends and thinkers such as van Der Leek and Schoenmaekers. Part of this enthusiasm toward writing goes back to Mondrian's early acquaintance with van Doesburg as a writer and painter who wrote about Mondrian's art in one of his articles.²² Soon afterward, Mondrian continued to write his theoretical ideas in essays and articles for the monthly periodical *De Stijl*, launched by van Doesburg in October 1917. Mondrian wrote several essays and articles for *De Stijl* magazine, mainly between 1917 and 1924. After separation from *De Stijl* group, Mondrian continued to write for many journals and newspapers like *Vouloir*, *Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne*, *Cahiers d'art*, *Cercle et Carre*, *Bulletin de L'Effort moderne*, *Manometre*, *Noi*, *Neue Ziircher Zeitung*, and *Werk*. According to the categorization of Dutch scholar Louis Veen, Mondrian wrote for many reasons. The majority of his writings - mostly written during 1917-1938 - is about his theory of Neo-Plasticism and its implication on other areas, particularly life and culture (Veen, 2011, p. 9). There are also other texts, mostly written between 1924 and 1935, that are written in response to a couple of surveys, upon the request of the journals.²³ Throughout the

²² In 1915, Doesburg published an article in a Dutch newspaper *De Eenheid*. Within this article, Doesburg had praised Mondrian's artworks.

²³ According to Veen (2017a), during 1924-1935 Mondrian wrote thirteen responses to surveys. The longest and most important one was titled *Cubism and Neo Plastic* that was published in French periodical *Cahiers d'Art* in defense to a harsh attack to Neo-Plasticism in a daily French paper (p. 44).

interwar period, many journals asked artists to write about their aesthetic ideas and the role of art in relation to the life and society. Some of Mondrian's writings, mainly the ones he wrote during 1940-1943, are about politics. In these writings, he emphasized on the role of his Neo-Plastic principles in facing the evil consequences of regimes such as Nazism and Soviet Communism. Some of his other texts - mostly written throughout 1941-1943 - are autobiographical texts as along with his interviews. Regardless of the different contexts of his writings, in majority of these categories of texts, Mondrian expounded the principles of his Neo-Plastic art in relation to his paintings. In his writings, he also talked about the universality of his artistic principles as socio-cultural principles of life.

In addition to the encouragements of his fellow artists and friends to write his ideas, the thing that really motivated Mondrian to write was the need to justify the very radical theories which he was putting on his canvases. Mondrian was well aware of many negative criticisms he received by the art critics for the exhibitions he held in Holland and Paris. As Reynolds stated, painters like Mondrian and Kandinsky needed to seriously think about justifying their very stringent and disciplined formal aesthetic ideas which were beyond the common public's aesthetic taste: "Kandinsky and Mondrian were aware that their painting could not succeed without a new kind of spectator, and used their theoretical writings to further this aim (Reynolds, 1995, p. 216). Indeed, Mondrian felt the need to explain his aesthetic ideas to be able to defend them and respond to art critics, such as De Meester-Obreen, who interpreted his paintings as cerebral, cold, and without feeling (James, 1986, p. 15). He also needed to find buyers for his artworks. Golding referred to Mondrian's drive in writing his aesthetic ideas as follows:

Mondrian wrote extensively about art, as also — at even greater length — did Malevich and Kandinsky. At the same time each painter insisted that in practice he proceeded purely intuitively and was not primarily a theoretician. [...] In their writings they were not so much justifying their own art, and not one of the three men discusses his own art in any depth; rather they were in their different ways proclaiming the arrival of new sensibilities which could speak of new pictorial truths. In this respect their art had a moral cast in a way that the art of the Impressionists, to take a single example, did not. (Golding, 2000, p. 13)

Overall, we realized that Mondrian, similar to some of his fellow artists, needed to write about his theory and philosophy of art to further public's taste for appreciation of his pure abstract art and to propagate his universal Neo-Plastic principles as ethical, cultural, and social principles of life. In this regard, Veen (2017a) pointed to Mondrian's interest to write his theories of Neo-Plasticism as universal principles of a utopian life for well-being of mankind. Veen further added that Mondrian wrote to further explain his underlying aesthetic ideas which he expressed through a pictorial language in his paintings. He referred to an interview by Mondrian in 1922 where he stated: “[i]t is hard to explain the intention of my paintings. In the works themselves I have expressed things as well as I could [...] the reverse side, what remains unspoken, can be better set forth in an article.” Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017a, p. 15). This statement makes it clear that Mondrian believed in the capability of words in explaining his artistic intentions in which he used a pure abstract pictorial vocabulary to paint on his Neo-Plastic compositions.

Despite the importance of Mondrian's writings, when we look at his academic literature, we find only one more or less complete translation of his writings in English that were chronologically organized and published by Holtzman and James in 1986. According to Veen, amongst all the exciting 11 anthologies of Mondrian's writings (up to 2017),

edition of Holtzman & James is the most complete English translation of his writings.²⁴ Only recently in 2017, Veen published a complete body of Mondrian's writings (1904-1944) in their original languages Dutch, French and English.²⁵ Indeed, Holtzman and James (1986) and Veen's (2017a) academic endeavors are seminal steps forward to further motivate the current researchers on Modern Art to conduct more analysis on various aspects of Neo-Plasticism. Veen (2017a) compiled a complete body of all Mondrian's published, unpublished, complete, and incomplete writings - chronologically arranged from 1904 to 1944 - in their original languages Dutch, French, and English. One of the many benefits of this complete anthology of Mondrian's writings, besides being published in the original languages, is indeed the supplementary useful comments pertaining to each text that was written in Dutch by Veen in his 2011 Ph.D. thesis. In this regard, Veen (2011) discussed the origins, context, and rationale of Mondrian behind each of his essays, articles, notes, and so on during his time. Veen also mentioned various available manuscripts or titles (if any) found in Mondrian's archives of his writings. Moreover, Veen (2011) expounded the origins, aim, subject, and process of the editions and corrections of Mondrian's writings by analyzing the letters he sent to the editors of the journals or his friends. Veen also discussed the reaction of his contemporary friends, fellow artists, or art critics to Mondrian's writings. Moreover, Veen in his Ph.D. thesis extracted the new words or figures (from philosophers, artists, and so on) Mondrian used in each of his texts - if any - as well as the photo(s) and painting(s) which appeared in the original published version of his texts. Lastly, Veen also considered a bibliographic list of exiting publications written in regard to each text. As a result, by reading Veen's compilation we obtain a well-rounded and genuine

²⁴ As it was discussed in chapter 1, Veen (2011; 2017) delineated some inconsistencies in the translations of Holtzman and James from Dutch and French writings of Mondrian as well as the correction of English corpus of his writings.

²⁵ In fact, Mondrian's theoretical writings are those written between 1914 and 1944. However, in his publication Veen published Mondrian's first pieces of writings - available in archives - that are short letters or notes he wrote to his friends during 1904 and 1914.

knowledge about the importance and context of each of Mondrian's writings in different periods of his Neo-Plastic period. Overall, recent scrutiny of Veen (2011; 2017a) significantly contributed to the body of Mondrian's literature through providing scholars with an exhaustive documentation of his original writings. Veen's compilation of Mondrian's original writings and his comments on each text should be considered an academic reference book to motivate more scholars to dig into the analysis of his theory of Neo-Plasticism not only in the field of aesthetics, history of art, and art criticism, but also in a variety of other disciplines.

As it was studied in Chapter 1, Mondrian's writings are posterior product of his experimentations on his Neo-Plastic paintings. Moreover, there is a close relation between his paintings and theoretical writings. Indeed, his writings, as his paintings, are considered as the body of his Neo-Plastic art and theory. As many scholars such as Threlfall and Blotkamp indicated, the artistic evolution of Mondrian is found both in his paintings and writings. Therefore, we realize the importance of Mondrian's theoretical texts which he wrote as a result of experimentations with his paintings in different phases of the development of his Neo-Plastic career. Nevertheless, as we also see in this chapter, scholars paid little attention to Mondrian's theoretical writings, particularly in relation to the analysis of the artistic maturation of his formal principles of Neo-Plasticism that is depicted in different periods of his Neo-Plastic oeuvre.

3.2.1.1 The complex nature of Mondrian's writing

As a matter of fact, Mondrian was as much disciplined in writing as in his paintings. According to Seuphor, Mondrian's friend and editor, sometimes it took him a whole afternoon to write two or three sentences for finding the appropriate words to convey his intention (1956, p. 166). Veen (2017a) in his recent enquiry demonstrated that Mondrian made many deletions and additions in his writings (p. 41). When we look at

his original manuscripts, especially the post-1938 essays he wrote in English, we find frequent instances where a word or phrase is crossed and replaced with a new word or phrase. It seems he was never satisfied with his writings. In fact, Mondrian was first a painter and not a writer. He always needed to polish and edit his texts before final publication. His process of writing like his painting was based on many stages of trial and error, and it was a strenuous task. Fortunately, he found a few dedicated editors who were patient enough to work on his writings and meet Mondrian's expectations. As Veen (2011) stated, Mondrian throughout his life benefited from many editors such as Theo van Doesburg (for *De Stijl* magazine), later Michel Seuphor, a Belgian writer, and Marinus van Eck in Paris who helped him polish and correct his French texts. After 1938, in London and New York, Winifred Nicholson and Charmion von Wiegand assisted Mondrian to polish his text. According to Henkels, Mondrian mostly was in a difficult situation when it came to express his artistic experimentations in words:

A man who *expresses* himself not only in his paintings but also in writing, in magazines and pamphlets. Struggling to find words for things barely definable when the conversation touches on matters close to his heart, the things that fill his life, his art. (Henkels, 1987, p. 26)

Similarly, Seuphor pointed out to such sensitivity of Mondrian in searching the best synonyms to express his ideas as follows:

For several years, from 1925 on to be exact, I corrected his French, as later Harry Holtzman and Miss Charmion von Wiegand edited his English in New York. Mondrian often severely tried the patience of his helper. He had a phobia for certain words; when a given word had no adequate synonym, he argued for hours about the necessary paraphrases. Such linguistic excursions led us far afield: two or three sentences sometimes took a whole afternoon. His text was revised many times, and the results were far from satisfactory. (Seuphor, 1956, pp. 164-166)

As Seuphor stated, Mondrian's edition of his writing turned out to be awkward in terms of language use. I believe Mondrian's extreme preoccupation with words to express his aesthetic ideas is one of the reasons which makes his writings enriched - although hard-to-fathom - and worthwhile to be analyzed. Indeed, in contrast to his writings are his stark and simplified Neo-Plastic paintings. However, as Veen also indicated, we should not forget that, similar to his obsession in finding appropriate words and revision of his text, he did several stages of trial and error in each of his Neo-Plastic compositions until he was satisfied with the final result.

Another important point about Mondrian's writings is the lack of coherence and a logical flow of ideas within his sentences and paragraphs. Despite his extreme obsession with finding the most appropriate words to articulate his aesthetic thoughts, he could not arrange various ideas in a logical and coherent manner. As a result, his writings - particularly his essays - ended up long-winded and structurally complex. In his essays, he often wrote various ideas without any logical organization. Blotkamp in the preface of his book pointed out to the difficulty of understanding Mondrian's writings:

Mondrian's theoretical writings are extremely difficult to fathom, even for those who are fluent in the three languages he employed, Dutch, French and English. The arguments are so laborious and long-winded that the reader's staying-power is often sorely taxed. Even the most persevering devotee is forced to admit, after repeated readings, that not everything in these texts is clear to him. (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 9)

In his essays, he discussed key Neo-Plastic concepts such as unity, equilibrium, rhythm, intuition, universal, individual, evolution, dialectics of oppositions, and beauty in various contexts including art, society, culture, and life. It is therefore hard to find coherence of ideas in his essays. The most difficult-to-fathom writings of Mondrian are those early 1917-1920 long essays he wrote for De Stijl magazine when he wanted to introduce various philosophical, formal, and ethical aspects of Neo-Plasticism.

Therefore, one should use a particular amount of time to analyze Mondrian's writings by organizing his ideas thematically into various concepts he discussed.

Another reason for the difficulty of Mondrian's writings is related to the fact that Mondrian used to invent words to convey his ideas. As Veen asserted: "[i]n his writings Mondrian often makes use of self-made words or groups of words" (Veen, 2017b, p. 6). Such use of 'self-made' words was greatly due to Mondrian's extreme obsession to find the most appropriate word to express his ideas. Moreover, as Veen explained, Mondrian in his writings used a lot of adjectives, interjections, repetitions, and neologisms (Veen, 2011, p. 9). Therefore, the readability of his texts is not in a satisfactory level. According to Veen, Mondrian mainly wrote his sentences in French and English based on the structure of sentences in Dutch. As a result, his French and English text are hard to fathom. Chandler (1972) indicated the abundance of the invented words in Mondrian's essays which makes it difficult for readers, particularly those non-specialists, to understand his Neo-Plastic theory:

At the outset it must be confessed that many of Mondrian's key terms are, on the first encounter, elusive and vague. Only by encountering such terms as "universal emotion," "balanced relation," and "mutually equivalent" can the reader gradually discern their denotation and connotation. Mondrian was a complete, but not a systematic thinker — not systematic in the sense of verbally ordering his thoughts sequentially in a single cohesive argument. His written thoughts, like his painted ones, are unified more by the intuitive vision than by rigorous logic. He wrote in blocks of thought, and often allowed transition and definition to fend for themselves. (Chandler, 1972, p. 9)

Indeed, the difficult nature of Mondrian's writings motivated some scholars to shed light on his philosophical concepts such as beauty as truth and universal, evolution, unity in diversity, intuition, theory of the dialectic of oppositions, and so on. However, as we will see in this chapter, his writings were not used to examine the development of his artistic vision with a look at formal elements and theories in different periods of his

1917-1944 Neo-Plastic period. Undeniably, as Blotkamp also indicated, Mondrian's apparent emotionless and stark Neo-Plastic compositions and difficult-to-understand writings were some of the reasons for the reluctance of the scholars to analyze his writings as well as paintings. As a result, noticeably little were written on the analysis of his core aesthetic concepts and theory of Neo-Plasticism, compared to other artists such as Picasso, Matisse, and van Gogh. Regardless of the difficult nature of Mondrian's writings (particularly his essays), his theoretical texts are significant sources of information, a philosophical and aesthetic ground of Neo-Plastic art. In this respect, Blotkamp said:

Today Mondrian's art is known and accepted worldwide. The characteristic compositions he created can be seen all around us [...]. But the philosophy he was striving to express in his work has been largely ignored, or dismissed as an oddity. Odd as it may appear, it is at the same time utterly fascinating to see how this philosophy helped shape one of the most impressive bodies of work in twentieth-century art. (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 17)

Similarly, Tosaki in his recent interdisciplinary (philosophical-theoretical) scrutiny of Mondrian's concept of rhythm indicated the importance of Mondrian's writings, although hard to understand, for decoding what we cannot read in his stark compositions:

It should be kept in mind, then, that Mondrian's own text, while equivocal and idiosyncratic at times, is the source to which we must refer, and that a certain flexibility of mind will more likely allow the sense of what he wrote to come through to the contemporary reader, rather than a rigid insistence on one absolute meaning for each term. (Tosaki, 2017, p. 42)

Indeed, in the past and recent researches, Mondrian's Neo-Plastic art and theory was chiefly introduced and emphasized on as one of the most influential modern art styles in the development and perfection of the pure abstract art. As we will see in the following

sections, Mondrian's paintings, and more importantly his Neo-Plastic theory, were mainly explored based on historical, philosophical, and social contexts. Indeed, the analysis of his Neo-Plastic theory and paintings was overshadowed through scholars' emphasizing on Mondrian's source of inspirations (causes) rather than critical analysis of his paintings and writings (effects of those external stimuli) in line with each other.

3.3 An overview of academic literature on Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism

3.3.1 Formal analysis of Neo-Plastic art and theory and Mondrian's writings

Looking at the past and recent academic literature on Piet Mondrian and his Neo-Plastic art and theory, we find two distinct standpoints among scholars. The first group of scholars examined Mondrian's art and theory through focusing on the formal elements found in his paintings. As such, these scholars mainly looked at the pictorial development of plastic elements (lines at right angle, primary colors, non-colors, and plane), relation between form and space, and employment of symmetry and repetition in the Neo-Plastic compositions. What is common among the majority of these sources is that these researches are heavily conducted within different historical, philosophical, stylistic, and humanistic contexts. Among this group of publications are endeavors of scholars such as John Milner (1992), Carel Blotkamp (1994), Yve-Alain Bois (1988; 1994), Kermit Champa (1985), Michel Seuphor (1956), Hans L.C. Jaffé (1985), Meyer Schapiro (1978), Herbert Henkels (1987), Susanne Deicher (1999), Rosalind Krauss (2004), E. A. Carmean (1979), Michael White (2003), Hans Janssen (2011), van Bommel (2012), Spronk (2012), Serge Fauchereau (1994), Virginia Pitts Rembert (1970), and Ian Hugh Wallace (1968). Among these sources, I should mention the recent exhaustive enquiry of Tosaki (2017) in relation to the concept of 'rhythm' in Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings.

It is noteworthy that some of these scholars also used Mondrian's theoretical writings, particularly his letters as in the case of Blotkamp, to further support their visual analysis of Mondrian's paintings. However, regardless of the fact that Mondrian's writings were used or not, what is common amidst all these sources is the tendency of scholars to examine the historical and philosophical causes as well as the origins of the theoretical components of Neo-Plasticism rather than emphasizing on the explanation of those Neo-Plastic theories and what Mondrian theorized in his writings. In this regard, whenever his writings were used, they were employed as a support to explain the relation between Neo-Plasticism and what Mondrian got - especially throughout 1910s – from doctrines such as Theosophy and those of Hegel, Plato, and De Stijl. As such, in this kind of publications scholars explored Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism based on the influence of his surrounding as well as circle of friends, artists, thinkers, and critics. For example, Blotkamp, Milner, and Seuphor each chronologically examined Mondrian's life and works based on the influence of his surrounding environment. Interestingly, some of the best works related to the formal analysis of Neo-Plastic paintings were published during 1990s, and particularly in 1994, the 50th memorial year of Mondrian's death. In fact, 1990's was a motivating time for Mondrian's scholars to publish a few concurrent publications in this time. Among these works is comprehensive monograph of John Milner who analyzed Mondrian's artworks from his early figurative paintings to Neo-Plastic compositions. Among other academic publications are books published by Blotkamp, Fauchereau, and Bois' essay titled *Iconoclast*. Commonly, in majority of these publications, Mondrian's artistic thought in regard to his theory of Neo-Plasticism was explicated based on the artistic and philosophical influences he received during his life.

Another common characteristic of this type of publications, which is more discernible in works of Blotkamp, Milner, Holtzman & James, Henkels, Deicher, and Fauchereau, is

the use of visual and historical evidences like photos of Mondrian's exhibitions, his studio, and circle of friends and artist whose influence is seen in his works. For example, Henkels in 1988 introduced Mondrian's art for a series of exhibitions held in a few cities of Japan and a subsequent exhibition held in Gemeentemuseum in Netherlands in 1988. To this end, Henkels published a few of Mondrian's interviews and essays in his book. Henkels further visualized Mondrian's life in pictures pertaining to his life and his studio. Henkels' attempt is worthwhile as a well-arranged catalogue of Mondrian's photos. Among this category of sources, we should point to the remarkable endeavors of scholars such as Robert Welsh, Joop Joosten, Marty Bax, Cooper and Spronk, and Blok, who published a complete or partial catalogue of Mondrian's paintings - from his earliest naturalistic paintings in 1890's to his last Neo-Plastic painting created in 1944. Among these publications, Cooper and Spronk (2001) in their book *Mondrian: The Transatlantic Paintings* conducted a very interesting scientific and artistic scrutiny on the surfaces and texture of Mondrian's so-called transatlantic paintings, the ones he started in Paris but repainted them in New York. Similarly, in 2012 van Bommel together with Spronk and Cooper have done a very interesting scientific scrutiny of the surface of the last painting of Mondrian *Victory Boogie Woogie*. In fact, after 1979 scrutiny of Carmean on diamond paintings of Mondrian and two articles of van Asperen de Boer as well as Pien van der Werf, these scholar's work should be considered an exhaustive technical analysis of transatlantic paintings in terms of their material and working method of Mondrian.

Undeniably the meticulous collection and publication of Mondrian's photos, and collection of his paintings is very significant for understanding the development of his Neo-Plastic art. Nevertheless, looking at Mondrian's art and theory through historical, biographical lenses as catalogue raisonné (as in the publications of Welsh, Joosten, and Bax) mainly explains the pictorial development of Neo-Plastic compositions as well as

the external artistic and theoretical stimuli which led to the creation of Neo-Plastic art. When we read these sources, we are not able to explain - particularly in regard to his post-1924 art and theory – about the development of Mondrian's core theory of Neo-Plasticism and its related concepts based on a Neo-Plastic vocabulary.

Beside the previous approaches, some scholars analyzed Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism through aesthetic lens of De Stijl art movement and its principles. Inevitably, this group of scholars in their examination of the artistic vision of Mondrian toward his Neo-Plasticism referred to the teachings of western doctrines like Theosophy, Hegelian ideas, Platonism, and Neo-Platonism as philosophical origins for the formation of aesthetic principles of De Stijl. Majority of these sources are either written in Dutch or English. Some scholars like Hans Jaffé, Hans Janssen, Paul Overy, Alfred Barr, Michael White, Serge Lemoine, Els Hoek, Michel Seuphor, Maarten Doorman, and Serge Fauchereau explained and focused on the history of the De Stijl art movement, its fundamental philosophical roots, its utopian principles and goals, and its impacts on the development of abstract art in the work of painters such as Mondrian. In this regard, Michael white, in 2003, in his book *De Stijl and Dutch modernism* provided us with a through scrutiny of the roots of De Stijl art movement in relation to its country of origin, Netherlands. In this book, White discussed the role of De Stijl on the development of abstract art, modernism in Netherlands, architecture, modern design, advertisement, and so on. In another book, White published, along with Hans Janssen in 2011, *The Story of De Stijl: Mondrian to Van Doesburg*. In this book, White and Janssen mostly emphasized on two key figures of De Stijl art movement in the context of history. The authors discussed various aspects of De Stijl art movement as an avant-garde magazine, a utopian and new idea toward art and life, as well as the contribution of De Stijl to modern art history. When we read this book, we come up with a good understanding of Mondrian's role and the influences he received from De Stijl art movement, particularly

during 1910's and 1920's. In this group of publications, I faced the recent exhibition catalogue which was edited by Brigitte Léal in 2010 and was curated by Hans Janssen and others. This exhibition catalogue was published in relation to the big exhibition of Mondrian's paintings, particularly his 1912-1938 paintings, that was held from December 2010 to March 2011 in Pompidou Center in Paris.²⁶ In this exhibition catalogue, we find the relation between Mondrian's artistic career, as one of the prominent abstract artists in the 20th century, and De Stijl art movement. Throughout this catalogue, firstly the artistic development of Mondrian from his Cubist period (1912-1914) to his late Parisian Neo-Plastic compositions was examined. Secondly, the relation of Mondrian's art with the De Stijl in the course of 1910's and 1920's was clarified. When we read this catalogue exhibition, we find that all the essays written in this catalogue by curators of the exhibition are, similar to the previous publications, in relation to the influences Mondrian received from his environment rather than analyzing his paintings and writings in line with each other. As a result, Mondrian's paintings and his utopian aesthetic theory of Neo-Plasticism are examined within context of his environment, particularly De Stijl group and its fellow artists.

Other scholars such as Elder (2009) and Fitzpatrick (2004) focused on the implication of De Stijl principles on the formation and development of aesthetic tenets of Neo-Plasticism. Elder in his Master thesis investigated the role of color in relation to the space in Mondrian's paintings through lens of De Stijl principles. Similar to Elder, Fitzpatrick in his Master thesis questioned the authentic law of neutrality in relation to art and space based on the premises of the late 19th and early 20th century art theories, particularly De Stijl art movement. Overall, Fitzpatrick examined the architectural aspects of space relevant to the ideas of the De Stijl circle of artists such as Van

²⁶ Exhibition of Mondrian's paintings in Pompidou Center in Paris indeed was the largest exhibition of his artworks in Paris after 1969.

Doesburg. Overall, in these groups of publications we find that Mondrian's Neo-Plastic theory and paintings were analyzed through De Stijl principles which influence is seen in his works during 1917-1924. When we read these scholarly publications, we find that Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings, examined through De Stijl principles, in many cases are not truly in line with what Mondrian painted in his compositions, particularly those post-1924 paintings. As a matter of fact, Mondrian separated from De Stijl group after 1924. Even before 1924 and as early as 1920, we can see departure of Mondrian from De Stijl principles. Mondrian after 1920 tried to propose a personalized artistic signature, as he branded Neo-Plastic painting - and this trend was accelerated after 1924. Therefore, approaching analysis of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic painting through the lens of De Stijl results in overgeneralization of the analysis of his paintings. Nevertheless, I believe that those scholars who looked at Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism through the lens of De Stijl principles provide readers with more transparent analysis of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic art compared to those who tried to look at philosophical origins of Neo-Plastic theories and concepts. In both cases, scholars significantly contributed to the understanding of the origins of De Stijl art movement, its utopian ideas, as well as the influences of De Stijl formal theory and its utopian ideals on the development of Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism.

Amongst all previous publications, we can refer to works of scholars such as Champa, Carmean, Troy, Schapiro, Spronk, and van Bommel who examined Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism based on a formal critical study. In their study, they merely focused on a formal analysis of Mondrian's paintings and they did not use Mondrian's philosophical and artistic influences as their point of departure. While Carmean and Shapiro confined their studies to a portion of Neo-Plastic oeuvre and a selection of Mondrian's paintings, Champa proposed a comprehensive formal analysis of both naturalistic and Neo-Plastic oeuvres. Champa stated that Mondrian's theory of his art cannot be merely explained

through depending on the influences he received during his life: “one ultimately learns very little about Mondrian's own artistic worth from examining his contextual role in the art circles of the period” (Champa, 1985, p. xiv). As Champa delineated, similar to Blotkamp, Mondrian’s theory of art was influenced by such external factors (circle of friends, thinkers, and so on), but the influence of those inspirational sources on Mondrian was short and transient. Champa asserted that all previous attempts of scholars like Jaffé, Robert P. Welsh, Robert Rosenblum, Joop Joosten, and Michel Seuphor overwhelmingly focused on Mondrian’s sources of inspiration (causes) that were seminal for the formation and development of his theory of Neo-Plasticism. As such, Champa studied the evolution of Mondrian’s paintings excluded from those factors. Indeed, Champa’s research should be considered as one of the rare context-independent approaches toward the analysis of Neo-Plastic paintings. Champa in the introduction of his book, in contrast to Blotkamp, argued that any attempt to analyze Mondrian’s art based on the influences of other artists like Picasso, Matisse, and Van Der Leek on Mondrian cannot truly explain the development of the aesthetic vision demonstrated in his paintings:

Contact with other artists on a routine basis was certainly important to Mondrian—at least in the early stages of his career—but like all truly great masters he exhausted the utility to himself of other artists' work very rapidly. [...] One ultimately learns very little about Mondrian's own artistic worth from examining his contextual role in the art circles of the period. (Champa, 1985, pp. xiii-xiv)

Therefore, Champa analyzed Mondrian’s Neo-Plastic art and theory based upon what was shown in the paintings rather than what caused him to paint in a certain way in a particular period of time. Nevertheless, in majority of other academic publications on Mondrian, we find the analysis of his art is heavily overshadowed with the analysis of what he was influenced by during his life and not with what he theorized and practiced

based on those artistic and philosophical influences. Moreover, when we read works of scholars such as Champa, Schapiro, and Carmean who in their analysis excluded the social, artistic, humanistic, and philosophical influences of Mondrian from his environment, we understand that each of these scholars analyzed Mondrian's paintings based on a personalized formal lens of scrutiny. As a result, we cannot truly re-explain the pictorial development of Mondrian's paintings - particularly his Neo-Plastic oeuvre - based on theory and principles of Neo-Plasticism. In absence of Mondrian's theoretical writings, particularly his essays as important body of Neo-Plasticism, the reader feel himself isolated from what Mondrian himself explained about the formal theories and concepts of Neo-Plasticism in different periods of the development of Neo-Plastic oeuvre. That is to say, we cannot come to a universal and genuine understanding of development of Mondrian's artistic vision toward his core Neo-Plastic theory and his paintings. I believe that the lack that is really felt in the remarkable analysis of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings in the works of scholars such as Champa, Schapiro, Carmean, Blotkamp, Seuphor, Bois, Milner, and Jaffé is the absence of a parallel and exhaustive analysis of Mondrian's paintings with his theoretical writings. As it was discussed in previous section and in Chapter 2, Mondrian was not only a prolific writer but also a writer of his theories in line with the creation of his paintings. Although his writings often are a posterior product of his experimentations on canvases, in his 1917-1944 quasi philosophical writings, in some cases hard-to-fathom, he talked in abundance about the formal theories of Neo-Plasticism. Moreover, in 1926 he wrote a crystalized, refined version of his formal theory within six principles of Neo-Plasticism. As I clarified in the beginning of this chapter, majority of scholars such as Blotkamp and Threlfall believe that there is a close relation between Mondrian's writings and paintings. When we read Mondrian's writings, we see that his writings - especially his essays and articles - are part of an inseparable body of Neo-Plastic paintings, and these

two should be analyzed in relation to each other. I argue that the influences Mondrian received from his environment - either philosophical or artistic - are portrayed both in his paintings and writings as inseparable theory and art of Neo-Plasticism. Such closure between Mondrian's writings and paintings stimulated a few scholars to use his writings as a source to support their visual analysis. In the following sections, these approaches are examined to further crystalize the gaps in the analysis of his formal theory and Neo-Plastic paintings.

3.3.2 Scholar's approach toward the analysis of Mondrian's paintings and writings

There are two major standpoints toward the formal analysis of Mondrian's paintings. The first group of scholars believe that Mondrian's writings and paintings evolved parallel to each other. As it was discussed in Chapter 2, scholars such as Threlfall and Blotkamp stated that there is a close connection between Mondrian's paintings and his theoretical writings. As such, the first group of scholars, which are in minority, such as Blotkamp, Bois, and Wallace used Mondrian's writings to support their explanations on the pictorial changes found in different periods of his Neo-Plastic compositions. To this group of publications we should add the recent scrutiny of Tosaki on Neo-Plastic rhythm. Tosaki interestingly examined Mondrian's development of his artistic ideas regarding his concept rhythm in his 1921-1932 paintings and writings. Although he used Mondrian's writings and paintings as his source of analysis, in his research we see that his analysis is heavily contextualized with the philosophical and musicological roots of the formation of abstract, inward, and rhythm in Neo-Plasticism. Wallace mostly used Mondrian's early texts - the notes Mondrian wrote in 1914 in his two sketches books, his letters, and some of later theoretical essays - to analyze Mondrian's formation of his theory during 1908-1920. Indeed, Wallace in his analysis targeted the critical years when Mondrian steadily departed from his naturalistic style to a complete pure abstract art of Neo-Plasticism. Blotkamp used Mondrian's writings to analyze a

wider range of his paintings, including his Neo-Plastic oeuvre. In a similar way, Bois in his *Iconoclast* discussed the theoretical elements of Neo-Plastic art such as unity, equilibrium, and beauty in relation to the premises of Theosophy and Hegelian ideals. While both scholars significantly contributed to the understanding of the artistic evolution of Mondrian in different period of Neo-Plasticism, Blotkamp in his book proposed a more organized analysis of Neo-Plastic paintings. Blotkamp's grouping of paintings help us better understand the minor and major pictorial changes in Neo-Plastic compositions. In his 1994 book titled *Mondrian: The art of destruction* he used Mondrian's letters in line with the paintings to support his analysis of Mondrian's artistic evolution toward his art. Indeed, Blotkamp's approach, though it uses Mondrian's paintings and writings (his letters) through a historical context in line with each other, should be considered as one of the novel and contributing approaches in Mondrian's literature. Blotkamp stated that Mondrian in his letters talked about his art through a more direct tone compared to his theoretical essays, which were mainly written through a philosophical tone. Blotkamp mainly focused on the analysis of the pictorial development of the means of imaging, plastic means, and various experimentations Mondrian did on his means of imaging to express equilibrium and rhythm in different period of Neo-Plasticism. Blotkamp showed how the role and use of the lines and planes of color and noncolor were changed in different periods of Neo-Plasticism. He demonstrated how Mondrian after 1932 started annihilating his means of imaging - through his tactic of plurality - to express a purer expression of equilibrium and rhythm in his paintings. Similarly, Bois in his *Iconoclast* indicated Mondrian's destructive approach toward his means of imaging - particularly during the post-1932 compositions. In both cases, we see a personalized and to some extent generalized interpretation of Mondrian's development of his theory in different periods of his Neo-Plasticism. Overall, these scholars mainly explored Mondrian's artistic evolution

through a formal and visual analysis of his paintings rather than using his theoretical texts as body of his Neo-Plastic oeuvre. Veen (2011) talked about this gap in Mondrian's literature. He stated that Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings had been so far analyzed in abundance in relation to many fields such as science. However, his writings have not received as much attention as his paintings. Veen further considered the difficulty of Mondrian's writings as a factor in the reluctance of the scholars to analyze his text. Despite the complex style of Mondrian's writing, Veen emphasized that his theoretical texts worth to be analyzed as one of the seminal artists of the 20th century (p. 12). We find that Blotkamp also preferred to use Mondrian's more facile-to-understand letters rather than his theoretical essays and articles. However, as we read Blotkamp's publication, we find that Mondrian in his letters did not expand and describe his core Neo-Plastic concepts such as the expression of equilibrium and rhythm in line with pictorial changes we see in the paintings. In a nutshell, in his letters Mondrian usually did not expound his core theory of Neo-Plasticism. As a result, scholars who used Mondrian's letters as an evidence to what is seen as pictorial changes in his paintings, in most cases had to confine themselves to a personalized interpretation of Mondrian's artistic ideas based on what they found in the paintings.

Although, Blotkamp's analysis of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings in line with his letters is one of the innovative approaches toward visual examination of Neo-Plastic paintings, we observe some inconsistencies. Throughout his letters, as it was mentioned in Blotkamp's book, Mondrian mainly indicated some of his experimentations on his means of imaging (plastic means). For example, he referred to his innovative use of double lines in one of his letters to De Stijl architect Oud in 22 December 1932 (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 215) and informed him about his new experimentation with double lines that he was applying on his canvases at the time. However, as Blotkamp also endorsed, Mondrian in his letters usually shed little light on the various

experimentations he did in his paintings. In his letters, he did not talk in detail about his core theory of Neo-Plasticism. Therefore, when we read Blotkamp's publication, we come up with a good understanding of the pictorial changes in Neo-Plastic paintings that are due to the changes in the use and role of his means of imaging. However, in most cases we cannot Neo-Plastically explain how these changes in means of imaging and plastic means resulted in a different expression of equilibrium and rhythm in various periods of Neo-Plasticism. As a result, Blotkamp's explanation on the development of Mondrian's artistic ideas, particularly in regards to the core theories of Neo-Plasticism - theory of dialectics of opposition, equilibrium, rhythm, form-space equivalence and so on - is mainly based on the interpretation of what he observed in the paintings and to what Mondrian, in some cases shortly, referred in his letters. We can find a similar approach, within a smaller scope, in use of the letters of Mondrian in works of scholars such as Seuphor, Welsh, Bois, Henkels, and Threlfall. As a result, in many cases the artistic evolution of Mondrian toward his Neo-Plastic concepts and means of imaging or theories was explained by scholars through the analysis of the pictorial characteristics of the paintings. Indeed, when we read all these publications, we came up with different interpretations of scholars derived from what they had seen in the paintings and what they understood from short references of Mondrian in his letters (particularly in case of Blotkamp) or in some cases - such as Bois - from his theoretical writings. Although each of these academic publications significantly contributed to the understanding of Mondrian's artistic development in different phases of his Neo-Plastic period, these publications do not provide us with a universal and theoretical understanding of Mondrian's artistic evolution toward the concepts and theories found in his paintings and writings. I never tend to underestimate the previous endeavors of scholars who analyzed Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism. However, I argue that Mondrian's aesthetic development toward his Neo-Plasticism can also be more

universal. This is through the examination of a Neo-Plastic language through a context-independent approach and using Mondrian's paintings and what he wrote as the result of those experimentations in his 1917-1944 essays, articles, and notes.

Moving to the second group of publications, some scholars analyzed Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings almost excluded from his writings. Among this second category of sources are academic publications written by Champa, Schapiro, Cooper, Spronk, van Bommel, Deicher, and Carmean. Regardless of the different approaches of scholars into analyzing Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism from a formalist standpoint, what is common amongst all these sources is the exclusion of Mondrian's writings for the analysis of his paintings. Champa and Deicher analyzed a wide range of Mondrian's paintings from his naturalistic period to his latest Neo-Plastic paintings. Yet, Schapiro, and particularly Carmean, paid more attention to the analysis of lozenge shape compositions of Mondrian. Although these scholars excluded Mondrian's writings in their research and they mainly focused on a formalistic analysis of the paintings, these scholars looked at Mondrian's Neo-Plastic art through a historical, social, or humanistic context. Therefore, in this group of publications we face the similar inconsistencies mentioned in regards to the first group of publications such as individualistic interpretation of the paintings based on their pictorial characteristics. As such, by reading these sources we are not able to explain the development of Mondrian's theoretical ideas in regards to his universal principles of Neo-Plasticism in different periods from the painter's standpoint. All these interpretations, though contributing, novel, and exhaustive, tell us little about Mondrian's own intention and theory of Neo-Plasticism, particularly the six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Indeed, Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism were formulated based on a rigorous, formal principles of Neo-Plasticism and it steadily, sometimes abruptly, evolved into different periods of Neo-Plasticism. It is noteworthy that such stringent principles of Neo-Plasticism are the

result of many stages of intuitive and experimental attempts of Mondrian on his paintings as well as his contact with many philosophical and artistic tendencies, mostly during 1900's and 1910's. Besides, the principles of Neo-Plasticism are also Mondrian's theoretical writings which in them he expounded the components of his theory of Neo-Plastic painting through different contexts such as art, life, society, and culture. I assert that a coinciding analysis of Mondrian's writings (his self-invented terms, concepts, and theories) and his Neo-Plastic paintings results in a more universal and genuine understanding of the development of his theory of Neo-Plasticism in different periods.

Champa argued that Mondrian's writings provide one with little, insufficient knowledge about what is actually shown by Neo-Plastic paintings. He stated that Mondrian's philosophical or artistic influences from his environment during are depicted in his paintings in different periods of his artistic career. Champa further asserted that the evolution of Mondrian's art - similar to Paul Klee's - is best shown in his paintings. He considered Mondrian's writings as 'self-justifying,' 'defensive,' and 'after the fact.' Therefore, Champa in his 1985 book *Mondrian Studies* proposed a critical study of Mondrian's paintings rather than approaching Mondrian's analysis of his art based on a historical or humanistic context. Champa's formal scrutiny of Mondrian's paintings, particularly in his Neo-Plastic oeuvre, should be considered as one of the most comprehensive studies of Mondrian's paintings in isolation from his writings.²⁷ Despite many contributions of these strict formal studies - such as Champa, Carmean, and Schapiro - of Mondrian's paintings segregated from the body of his writings, we face a similar gap that was previously discussed. Indeed, in the absence of Mondrian's writings in these sources, we should limit ourselves to a personalized interpretation of

²⁷ Noteworthy that Champa in *Mondrian Studies* in rare instances used Mondrian's writings as a support to some major pictorial changes in the appearances of Neo-Plastic paintings.

what is found in the paintings rather than a neutral and universal analysis of his theory in relation to what he painted and wrote during his life.

3.3.3 Analysis of Mondrian's writings in isolation to his paintings

When we look at Mondrian's academic literature, we realize that his writings were analyzed through various contexts in relation to the philosophies he was influenced with during his life. Examples are Theosophy, Hegel, and Platonism. Indeed, in the past and recent publications, scholars investigated the philosophical concepts discussed in Mondrian's writings. As we saw, only a few scholars such as Blotkamp, Schapiro, Carmean, Milner, Champa, Spronk, van Bommel, and Bois approached a formal analysis of Neo-Plastic paintings. In these rare instances, scholars did not analyze Mondrian's paintings and writings as an integrated body of his Neo-Plasticism. Instead, the scholars chiefly expressed their findings through what they observed as pictorial characteristics of the paintings. Indeed, Mondrian's theoretical writings were examined by majority of scholars in relation to the philosophical and non-formal concepts, or the writings were used to show the formation of Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism in relation to the philosophies he was influenced with, mainly during 1910's. Truly, Mondrian's writings were scarcely excavated and examined in relation to his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism and what he demonstrated in his Neo-Plastic paintings. As it was studied, scholars usually examined Mondrian's artistic evolution through the analysis of the pictorial changes found in his paintings rather approaching it through a parallel analysis of his paintings and writings as an integrated body of his art. In contrast, we found that scholars paid a particular attention to the explanation and interpretation of Mondrian's writings in relation to the philosophies and artistic theories he was influenced with during his time.

Among those scholars who examined Mondrian's philosophical or artistic origins of Neo-Plasticism are John Golding (2000), Mark A. Cheetham (1991), Moshe Barasch (1998), Michel Seuphor (1956), Maarten Doorman (2003), White (2003; 2011), Janssen (2011), J. D. Bratt, (2013), Harry Cooper (1998), Robert P. Welsh (1971), Joop Joosten (1969; 1971; 1998; 2002), Yve Alain Bois (1994), Bennett Simon (2013), Pablo Brismarino (2014), and Mike King (1998). Furthermore, we can point to the Masters and Ph.D. theses published by Diana Elizabeth Tedeschi, (1962), Tim Threlfall (1978), Charles A. Cramer (1997), Marek Wieczorek (2000), Mina Roustayi (1998), Ashley Elder (2006), Alan Keith Newberg (1968), and Jisso Kim (2003). What is common in all these publications is the goal of these scholars to explain the relation of Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism to the philosophies such as Theosophy, Hegel, and Plato. In some cases, such as works of Cheetham, Golding, and Cramer, the essentialist theories and reductionist pure abstract of Mondrian were analyzed in relation to these philosophies. Or in some cases such as scientific approaches toward Mondrian's painting, Spronk, Cooper, and van Bommel analyzed the surface of the late Neo-Plastic paintings, particularly those created in New York. Among this group, we should include the recent exhaustive analysis of Luis Veen (2011; 2017) on collecting and examining the source of Mondrian's original writings. Veen in his 2011 thesis conducted an exhaustive analysis of Mondrian's original writings (excluding his letters). In it, he discussed important information in regard to each text such as the process of writing, publication, title, origins of text, date of the publication, public or critic's reaction for each of his paintings. This is along with a bibliographic list regarding the sources which used each text up to 2011. Veen in his 2017 book published all Mondrian's writings - spanning from 1904 to 1944 - complete or incomplete, published or unpublished. Veen's contributing endeavor should be considered as an exhaustive reference for researchers, translators, and art critics to write more articles and books about

Mondrian's writings. In the following sections, I have categorized various approaches of scholars toward the analysis of Mondrian's writings that were conducted through different perspectives.

3.3.3.1 Theosophy and Neo-Plastic art and theory

Amongst the previous group of the publications, we face scholars who mainly focused on impact of Theosophy on Mondrian and its influence on transforming his figurative art into Neo-Plastic art and theory. In their research, they have discussed the influence of the esoteric texts of Theosophy and Theosophists such as Schoenmaekers, Rudolf Steiner, Leadbeater, Besant, and Blavatsky - mainly during 1910s - on Mondrian. Among good examples of this group are books published by Seuphor, Blotkamp, Milner, Golding, and Barasch; Ph.D. theses of Threlfall and Ankowitsch; Master thesis of Hardeveld; and articles of Welsh, Bris-Marino, King, and Bois' long essay titled *Iconoclast*. These scholars took diverse approaches to examine the relation of the Neo-Plasticism to Theosophy. Scholars such as Blotkamp, Milner, and Seuphor mainly showed the relation of Mondrian to Theosophy through a historical lens. In these works, they conducted a chronological analysis of Mondrian's influences from Theosophist texts or lecturers like Schoenmaekers, Rudolf Steiner, and Blavatsky in Netherlands in the first decades of the 20th century. Quite differently, Welsh, Bris-Marino, and Threlfall mainly scrutinized the relation between the esoteric and theological teachings of Theosophy with the root of Neo-Plastic concepts and theories such as unity between matter and spirit and the evolution of material to spiritual/universal. In contrast, scholars such as Golding, Barasch, and King excavated the philosophical origins of abstraction through mystical lens of Theosophy and Occult creed. Within this last category of works, I would like to mention new standpoint of Cramer (1997) in his Ph.D. thesis which unlike that of Golding, Barasch, and King, examined the reductive theories of Mondrian within a larger historical scope of the 18th and 19th century tenets of

Classicism and Empirical Idealism. Overall, by reading these sources, regardless of their various approaches, we understand the philosophical and cosmic roots of Neo-Plastic theory. These sources have not expanded their scope into the principles of Neo-Plasticism and the development of Mondrian's theoretical ideas, regarding what he practiced in his paintings.

3.3.3.2 Hegelian scrutiny of Neo-Plastic art and theory

Some scholars looked at theory of Neo-Plasticism and Mondrian's artistic thoughts in relation to Hegel's philosophy. Among this group of publications, which also overlaps the previous group of works, are books published by Cheetham (1991), Golding (2000), and recent exhaustive scrutiny of Tosaki (2017); articles of Cooper, Krukowski (1986), Bois (1987; 1988); Ph.D. theses of Threlfall and Wieczorek; Master thesis of Jisso Kim; and long essay *Iconoclast* written by Bois. Both Golding and Cheetham in their books examined the essentialist theory of abstraction among pioneers of Abstract painting such as Malevich, Kupka, Mondrian, and Kandinsky. They analyzed the reductivist approach of Mondrian within a Hegelian standpoint, regarding the annihilation of particularity form and attainment of the absolute and pure beauty as universal. Golding in his book titled *Paths to the Absolute* studied the puritan vision of Mondrian in respect to consideration of his art as equal to religion. As such, Golding studied concepts such as 'absolute' and 'universal' in theory of Neo-Plasticism. In his research, while Golding, similar to Blotkamp, referred to the short-lived premises of Theosophy in Mondrian's thought, he mainly examined, within a theosophical lens, the idealist vision of Mondrian pertinent to the concepts of absolute and universal. Within a more historical perspective, Threlfall, and Bois each explored influence of Hegelian ideas of thinkers such as Bolland and Schoenmaekers on Mondrian's artistic vision, mainly throughout 1910's, which led to the creation of Neo-Plasticism after 1920. However, Threlfall's discussion about development of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas was heavily

overshadowed with premises of Theosophy. Threlfall mainly traced Mondrian's aesthetic vision toward his key concept, 'evolution,' in various periods of his Neo-Plasticism. Undeniably, Threlfall's research significantly contributed to the understanding of Mondrian's conceptions of 'evolution' and 'unity in diversity' in Neo-Plastic theory. Quite similar to Threlfall's approach is the Ph.D. thesis of Wieczorek. In his thesis, he investigated the concept of space in pre Neo-Plastic artworks (1915-1919) through a philosophical lens in regard to the dialectic of Hegelian idealism. Contrary to Threlfall, Wieczorek confined himself to a smaller historical scope and narrower lens of scrutiny focused on the concept of 'space determination' and expression of the space and form in plus-minus and abstract-real artworks of Mondrian. Wieczorek in his thesis suggested a new debate pertaining to the concept of space (commonly discussed as flatness) in Mondrian's pre Neo-Plastic works. He argued that space in Mondrian's works is perceived based on a dynamic relational interplay of perpendicular lines accompanied with a vibrant force of expansion and recession of planes in various layers rather than the two dimensionality of the surface of canvas. Wieczorek in his thesis pointed out to the lack of research to examine the relation between Mondrian's writings and Hegelian texts on thinkers like Bolland and their books such as *Pure Reason* as well as Schoenmaekers' Theosophical texts such as *Positive Mysticism*. In another Master thesis Kim (2003) used a specific aesthetic lens in order to compare Kant's and Hegel's aesthetic stances toward the judgment of beauty. The main aim was to show whether the judgment of beauty is based on imagination, or it is based on a long analytical process as Hegel argued. For exemplification of such hypothesis, Kim referred to the modern works of Picasso and Mondrian. Kim showed that the process of the judgment of beauty is beyond imagination, as Kant asserted, and it is closer to Hegel's analytical process. Kim also aimed to explain the intuitive and rationalist method of abstract painters such as Mondrian for decoding the natural appearances into

abstract elements of painting to express beauty as universal. Kim argued that Mondrian used a combination of his intuition and transcendental level of logics for digitalizing the natural appearance into the pure abstract forms in his Neo-Plastic art.

Quite differently, Cooper (1998) in his article examined the relation of the Neo-Plastic concepts such as continuity, progress, dynamic interaction of oppositions, and rhythm with the latest New York artworks of Mondrian. Cooper further defined the key Neo-Plastic concept 'dynamic equilibrium' - best expressed in in New York Neo-Plastic compositions - through the dialectic of Hegel as perennial interplay between dual oppositions. Moreover, Cooper investigated the concept of evolution in Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism through a Hegelian lens. In this regard, he discussed the evolution of matter to spirit in the container of time. Cooper deduced that Mondrian, in line with Hegelian interpretation of Plato, considered the pure truth/reality and beauty as immortal and timeless entity. Cooper related such timeless and immortal concepts of beauty and truth in Hegel's philosophy to what Mondrian called an 'essential now' in his Neo-Plasticism. Such universal beauty is expressed and realized differently compared to the prevalent perception of time as past, present, and future. Quite similarly, within a broader scope, Krukowski (1986) in his article *Hegel, "Progress," and the Avant-Garde* discussed the influences of Hegel's philosophy on the vision of abstract and avant-garde artists, particularly Mondrian and Kandinsky, who lived in the first decade of the 20th century. Krukowski focused on the critical 1900-1947 period when Hegelian ideas were developed and flourished among the avant-garde artists in Europe. Krukowski in his article emphasized on the reliance of the avant-garde artists, especially Mondrian, on Hegelian concepts 'progress, and 'transcendence.' Krukowski tried to posit this idea that avant-garde artists such as Mondrian indebted to the Hegelian conception of the 'evolution of spirit in time.' In this regard, Hegel considered the developments in art as part of the evolution of 'self-consciousness' of spirit in the

history. Such evolution in Hegel's worldview occurs through many stages of occurrences. Indeed, Hegel considered various episodes of the history when the matter is transcended to spirit or spirit overcome the matter. That is to say, when a particular episode of art history reaches its peak of expression, a new episode starts to renew, redefine, complement, and develop the summit of preceding historical episodes. In short, Krukowski showed how Mondrian's concept of evolution of matter to spirit and transcendence of self-consciousness and culture is related to those Hegelian ideas he discussed in his article.

In relation to the philosophical approaches of the scholars toward the analysis of Mondrian's theoretical concepts, Japanese scholar Eiichi Tosaki conducted series of researches on the concept 'rhythm' in Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism. One of the notable works of Tosaki that is also a good collection and upshot of his earlier academic publications, is his recent book *Philosophy of Visual Rhythm: Phenomenology, Wittgenstein, and Eastern Thought* published in 2017. In this book, Tosaki examined the influences of Western philosophies such as Hegel and Theosophy as well as music and dance on the formation and development of conception of rhythm in Mondrian's early mature Neo-Plastic paintings (1921-1932). Tosaki argued that up to 2017 there was no exhaustive attempt to philosophically define the concept of rhythm as what he called a 'non-kinetic schema' – represented rhythm on the surface of canvas – in early mature Neo-Plastic paintings. Tosaki asserted that most of the attempts of scholars such as Cooper, Spronk, and Els Hoek were on the analysis of rhythm in the late Neo-Plastic artworks, especially New York paintings, and there is no deep excavation, particularly through a philosophical lens, on the definition of rhythm in Mondrian's early Neo-Plastic compositions. Interestingly and unlike to the arguments of former scholars, Tosaki argued that the concept of rhythm in different periods of Neo-Plasticism has different definitions for Mondrian. In order to address various influences Mondrian

received from different sources, Tosaki used variety of approaches such as historical, philosophical, classical, musicological, and analytic linguistic. Tosaki in last chapters of his book also analyzed Mondrian's conception of rhythm through philosophies of Wittgenstein and Husserl. In relation to the philosophy of Hegel, Tosaki stated that the affinity of the concept of rhythm with balance and equilibrium roots in the influences Mondrian received from Hegel's teachings. Overall, Tosaki's novel and contributing research, a philosophical examination of the concept of rhythm in Neo-Plastic art and theory, shed more light on the ontological roots of the concept of rhythm in Neo-Plastic theory and art.

When we read all the previous publications, we realize that scholars, regardless of differences in their approach, have examined the causes, roots, or sources of Mondrian's inspiration for the creation of his Neo-Plastic art and theory. What remains here as a gap is the effect or end-result of all those philosophical and artistic influences on the formation of the theoretical components of Neo-Plasticism.

3.3.3.3 Plato and Neo-Plastic art and theory

Beside the previous perspectives, some scholars examined the components of the theory of Neo-Plasticism through the philosophical lens of Platonism and Neo-Platonism. Among these sources are books published by Cheetham (1991), Tedeschi's Master thesis, (1962), Threlfall's Ph.D. thesis (1978), and Simon's interdisciplinary article (2013). The approaches of Cheetham and Tedeschi's are very similar; both scholars examined the essentialist theories of abstraction in Mondrian's vision. In this regard, both scholars demonstrated the kinships between Plato's non-imitative standpoint toward appreciation of beauty as truth in art and Mondrian's reductivist approach toward the abolition of naturalistic forms in his Neo-Plastic compositions. Tedeschi

examined the philosophical roots of the concept of 'ultimate truth' - discussed by Mondrian in his theory of Neo-Plasticism - through Plato's philosophy. Cheetham focused on the relation of Plato's metaphysical standpoint, regarding the expression of beauty as a universal and idealistic 'Form,' to Mondrian's aesthetic vision. Within a different perspective, Threlfall investigated the philosophical roots of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic concepts (inclusive of Platonism) within a historical context. In fact, Threlfall in his thesis aimed to demonstrate the influences of various Western philosophies on the maturation of Mondrian's artistic vision that led to the development of his figurative painting into Neo-Plastic painting. Moreover, Threlfall discussed origins of the concept of 'unity in diversity' - discussed in Mondrian's writings - under the light of these philosophies. I believe that Threlfall and Cheetham conducted a more exhaustive analysis of Mondrian's influences from Platonic thought compared to Tedeschi. Among the innovative sources of this category is the interdisciplinary article of Simon who investigated the gender specification of male-female - in respect to the two elements of vertical and horizontal lines - in Neo-Plasticism through the lens of Platonism.

3.3.3.4 Analysis of aesthetic theory of Neo-Plasticism and Mondrian's writings

Looking at the previous academic publications, we realize that whenever scholars examined Mondrian's writings, rarely they focused on and expounded the core aesthetic theories and principles of Neo-Plasticism. As we saw in the previous sections, Mondrian's writings were commonly used as a support or evidence to show the relation of his Neo-Plastic art and theory to philosophers or artistic movements such as Theosophy, Hegel, Plato, and De Stijl. Although scrutinizing some scholars' works - discussed in the previous sections - as the origins or roots of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic theory more or less shed light on the understanding of the formal concepts related to his paintings, such as equilibrium and rhythm, by reading these sources we arrive to a generalized and partial understanding about the evolution of the formal theory and

principles of Neo-Plasticism. As a result, we are unable to explain the artistic evolution Mondrian's formal concepts and theories - depicted in his paintings and writings as an integrated body of his Neo-Plastic oeuvre - through a universal and Neo-Plastic vocabulary.

Interestingly, Mondrian in his writings frequently discussed his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism. In 1926 he published a crystalized, refined version of his theory of Neo-Plasticism within six principles. However, scholars either used Mondrian's theoretical writings in a limited time span to interpret some major turning points in his artistic career, or whenever his writings were used as primary source under analysis, the scholars focused on the explanation of the philosophical and artistic roots of Neo-Plasticism within a historical context. Overall, scholars hitherto scrutinized Mondrian's writings to further excavate the utopian aspects of his Neo-Plasticism such as beauty as universal, evolution, unity, intuition as well as the social and ethical implications of his theory of Neo-Plasticism. When we read previous publications, we understand a great deal about the philosophical origins and roots of his Neo-Plastic art. Nonetheless, we find very little about the minor and major artistic evolution of Mondrian toward his formal principles and theories of Neo-Plastic painting that are found and written in his 1917-1944 paintings and writings. Whenever scholars focused on the explanation of formal concepts such as plastic means, equilibrium, and rhythm - either in Mondrian's paintings or writings - they looked through these concepts from a philosophical or historical standpoint rather than looking at these concepts through a theoretical lens. The evidence to this claim is palpable in little attention of scholars to critically analyze what Mondrian, in 1926, stated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism in relation to his paintings. Although a few scholars referred to or republished the six principles of Neo-

Plasticism in a few notable sources²⁸ such as in the works of Seuphor (1949; 1956), Jaffé (1967; 1970), Douroux (1980), Holtzman and James (1986), these scholars did not use these principles as a theoretical ground to examine the development of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in different periods of Neo-Plastic oeuvre. Only Veen (2017b) in his recent article shed light on the analysis of the six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Veen also briefly demonstrated the close relation between these principles and two 1927 compositions. However, Veen did not examine the relation of the six principles to other early and late Neo-Plastic compositions.

In the past and recent literature, scholars also discussed the significance and applicability of Neo-Plastic concepts and theory in variety of other fields such as photography (Sawalich, 2001), architecture (Bois, 1987; Holdren, 2016), literature and poetry (Reynolds, 1995; Reynaud, 2012), psychology (van Haaften, 2003), psychoanalysis and feminism (Simon, 2013), and so on. However, it is surprising that the evolution of Mondrian to his formal theories and its related components was not examined through a coinciding analysis of his writings and paintings in different periods of Neo-Plasticism.

Among Mondrian's academic literature, Arthur Chandler (1972) in uncommon instances and approaches, Theosophy, Hegel, De Stijl, Plato, and so on, examined the theory of Neo-Plasticism through the analysis of Mondrian's writings. In the beginning of his book, Chandler pointed to the noticeable lacks in regard to the analysis of Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism compared to other artists of his time. In his book, he aimed to shed light on the key concepts and theories of Neo-Plasticism. Nonetheless, there are a few shortcomings in Chandler's work. First and foremost, Chandler merely

²⁸ The following sources are based on a delicate research of Veen (2011) in his Ph.D. thesis about Mondrian's writings (p.196) and a book he published in relation to his thesis in 2017.

analyzed the aesthetic theory of Neo-Plasticism and not Neo-Plastic paintings. It is another instance in which Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism is examined in isolation from the body of his Neo-Plastic paintings. Secondly, Chandler in his analysis confined himself to a limited number of Mondrian's essays, mainly his late essays written after 1936, and Seuphor's analysis of Mondrian's art published in 1956. Thirdly and in relation to the earlier point, Chandler defined concepts such as equilibrium, rhythm, or beauty as truth within a very generalized and static standpoint without considering the dynamic nature of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in different periods of Neo-Plasticism. That is to say, Chandler did not discuss how theory of Neo-Plasticism and its related concepts evolved in different periods of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic career. When we want to interpret Mondrian's early 1917-1919 compositions, particularly his late 1935-1944 ones, by using Chandler's explanation of the theory of Neo-Plasticism, we find that in many cases the theory which Chandler explained roughly fits into a certain number of Mondrian's paintings created during his classic period of Neo-Plasticism (ca. 1921-1931). As many scholars indicated, Mondrian's paintings and writings evolved together throughout his Neo-Plastic period. Therefore, I argue that the analysis of Mondrian's writings in isolation to his paintings leads only to a generalized and limited understanding of the formal concepts and theory of Neo-Plasticism, which is mainly related to classic Neo-Plastic paintings (1921-1931). In the following section, I have expounded the gaps found in the previous publications written in relation to Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism.

3.4 The gap found in the Mondrian's literature

According to the above-mentioned analysis of Mondrian's literature, we understood the strong tendency of a majority of scholars to examine components of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic art and theory through a historical or philosophical context. Moreover, Mondrian's writings and paintings, in most cases, were analyzed in isolation from each

other. In a few instances when scholars analyzed Mondrian's Neo-Plastic oeuvre through a formal lens, the development of Mondrian's artistic theories were mainly explained based on what was found in the paintings rather his paintings and writings.

Undeniably, persistent inclination of scholars to examine elements of Neo-Plastic art based on the premises of Theosophy, Hegel, Platonism, and De Stijl helped us understand the philosophical origins of the theory of Neo-Plasticism. Yet, such monotonous reliance of scholars on these philosophical and historical contexts also resulted in a noticeable degree of redundancy in the content of the analysis of Neo-Plastic art and theory. Furthermore, the analysis of Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism - either in relation to his formal or philosophical concepts or theories - under the light of these philosophies resulted in a generalized understanding of these concepts. That is to say, the formal concepts such as equilibrium, rhythm, means of imaging, and so on were mainly analyzed within a fixed standpoint in relation to the influences Mondrian received during his life. By reading the former publications, we are unable to theoretically, within a Neo-Plastic vocabulary, explain the artistic development of Mondrian toward his formal theories and concepts in different periods of Neo-Plasticism. As a matter of fact, the theory of Neo-Plasticism was constantly developed by Mondrian in various stages of his artistic career in contact with thinkers and philosophers, circle of friends and artists, as well as the modern art theories of his time. More importantly, the tendency of Mondrian toward the premises of these philosophies and art movements was limited to a short period of time. In this regard, Bois pointed to the attention Mondrian paid to the doctrines such as Theosophy during his life: "Mondrian was no philosopher, but he did draw on various systems of thought, the first of which (and it has been much discussed) was theosophy" (Bois, 1994, p. 327).

I never deny the undeniable and significant role of the esoteric teachings of Theosophy in the formation of the key concepts like 'evolution' - move from matter to spirit - in Mondrian's theoretical and theological thought. However, I, similar to standpoint of scholars such as Blotkamp and Golding, believe that the interpretation of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic concepts and theories, evolved in various stages of his Neo-Plastic oeuvre in relation to the fixed premises of Theosophy as well as Hegel or Plato, results in a generalized recognition of the theory of Neo-Plasticism. I have two reasons for this argument. In the first place, Mondrian never remained biased to a certain philosophy or artistic style during his life. Instead, he constantly updated and revised his ideas to further refine his own theory of Neo-Plasticism during his prolific artistic career. Secondly, and in connection to the first rational, Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism was in dynamic state of the development based on the personal rendition of the philosophical and formalist teachings he received throughout his time.

In respect to my first argument, there are historical evidences that after 1919 Mondrian's artistic vision toward theological teachings of Theosophy was replaced – at least to a noticeable degree - with the idealist philosophy of Hegel. Indeed, Mondrian after 1915 steadily departed from cosmic and complex teachings of Theosophy. He further became interested in the idealist canon of Hegelian ideas through the lectures of thinker, Bolland, in Holland. As Golding delineated, the departure from the doctrine of Theosophy to Hegel's philosophy smoothly occurred during Mondrian's stay in Holland from 1914 to 1919. For this ideological shift, one should not ignore Mondrian's acquaintance with van Doesburg, a Hegelian man whose ideas was very influential on Mondrian, in 1915.

Indeed, the influence of Theosophy on Mondrian from 1900 to 1915 was indisputable in transforming his previous Positivist, Calvinist, and rationalist vision into a theological

and esoteric one. However, after 1915, theosophical ideas in Mondrian steadily declined in favor of Hegelian ideas, particularly in relation to Hegelian theory of dialectics of oppositions. In this regard, Seuphor delineated the ephemeral and short-lasting presence of all philosophical teachings like Calvinism and Theosophy in Mondrian's thought. As Seuphor stated, 'art' for Mondrian was considered as a new and pure religion. Indeed, Mondrian tried to express beauty as absolute and pure truth through his pictorial language of Neo-Plasticism:

His [Mondrian's] Calvinism was replaced by theosophy, then theosophy itself was absorbed (after 1916) by Neo-Plasticism, which for him was to be capable of expressing everything without words. For him, religion finds a final refuge in art, which, freed of its inessentials, and become purely plastic, or pure image of the absolute, is identical with religion. (Seuphor, 1956, p. 58)

Therefore, it is certainly true to examine the aesthetic elements of Mondrian's symbolic oeuvre (1908-1911) based on the doctrine of Theosophy as Robert Welsh analyzed in 1971. Nonetheless, for those paintings created after 1920, one cannot make such connection with certainty. Bris-Marino (2014) pointed out to such ambiguity in the connection of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas - after 1920 and during Neo-Plastic period - to the doctrine of Theosophy: "there is no consensus on how much influence Theosophy had on Mondrian's neoplastic period, even though that influence has been accepted" (pp. 490-491). In fact, after the separation of Mondrian from De Stijl group in 1924 and cessation of his contribution to De Stijl magazine after 1927, he renewed his theological ideas with Hegel's idealism which was a critique of Platonic ideas related to the concept of beauty as an idealistic 'Form' or truth and universal. Therefore, there is little conformity between theory of Neo-Plasticism - particularly as it is manifested in his post-1920 paintings and writings - and cosmic teachings of Theosophy. At this point, I would like to highlight Blotkamp's viewpoint toward the irrelevance of esoteric texts of

theosophists like Blavatsky, Leadbeater, and Annie Besant to the aesthetic values of Neo-Plastic paintings of Mondrian:

There is no demonstrable connection between the cosmological schemas which illustrate *The Secret Doctrine, or the traditional symbols from various ancient cultures discussed in the book* and the constellations of lines and colour planes in Mondrian's paintings. These schemas and symbols have nothing to do with his Cubist works — here I part company with Welsh — and still less with the later Neo-Plastic paintings. Nor do his paintings have anything to do with the auras and thought-forms that appear in the books of the theosophists C. W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant. Apart from the triptych *Evolution . . .* and a few other works dating from c. 1910, Mondrian seldom employed symbolism of a clearly theosophical nature. (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 15)

In fact, Blotkamp (1994), like Golding (2000), believed that Mondrian just borrowed concept of 'evolution' as a key term from Theosophy. It is clear that Theosophy should be considered as part of the arrays of philosophies (Calvinism, Puritanism, Neo-Platonism, Hegel, and so on) in which Mondrian never delved into, but he used them to formulate his own Neo-Plastic art and theory. Veen (2017a) in his scrutiny of Mondrian's writings also argued that there is no relation between Mondrian's writings and paintings with doctrine of Theosophy particularly Madam Blavatsky's cosmic ideas and her book *The Secret Doctrine*. Veen stated that Mondrian in his long and quasi-philosophical essay *The New Plastic in painting* pointed to 19 philosophers without any reference to Blavatsky. This shows that after 1917 he was no longer immersed into theosophical teachings of Blavatsky. It is noteworthy that even Mondrian's Hegelian ideas was changed and refined. According to Blotkamp, in the late 1920's Mondrian's interest toward Bolland's Hegelian teachings gradually declined due to his acquaintance with the new ideas of philosopher Louis Hoyak in regard to the cosmic laws of society and culture (Blotkamp, 1994, pp. 13-14). As a result, we see that in his 1930s and 1940s essays, in many instances he discussed his theory of Neo-Plasticism in relation to society and culture. In general, we should consider a certain expiry date (at least to a

noticeable degree) for Mondrian's interest in respect to the premises of philosophies and artistic styles during his life. These were all influential in the development of his artistic vision and the creation and refinement of the theory of Neo-Plasticism.

I believe, employing the philosophical or historical lenses to interpret Mondrian's theory of his Neo-Plasticism, that using different contextual approaches contributed much to the understanding of his theory of Neo-Plasticism. However, the explanation of Mondrian's writings (particularly his essays) through the complex nature of doctrines such as Theosophy, Hegel, or Platonism also complexified the understanding of his very formal theory of Neo-Plasticism. Moreover, the examination of Mondrian's art and theory of Neo-Plasticism from fixed philosophical or historical standpoints resulted in a limited approach and redundancies in the content of the analyses of his art. In this regards, Raynold believes that Mondrian's writings, inseparable from his paintings, have so far been monotonously analyzed in relation to his influences: "[a]s with Kandinsky, Mondrian's theories are in fact intimately related to his pictorial innovations. However, criticisms of his writings as excessively naïve, dogmatic and repetitive, are all too often justified" (Raynold, 1995, p. 555). In fact, hitherto Mondrian's theoretical writings as well as his Neo-Plastic paintings are mainly examined through the exploration of the influences Mondrian received from his environment. Due to the dynamic evolution of Mondrian's artistic vision toward these philosophies, the analysis of his theory of Neo-Plasticism based on these philosophies results more or less in a static interpretation of his theory, which is limited to a particular period of time. Furthermore, Mondrian's personal synthesis of those philosophies is genuinely found in his paintings as well as writings that were steadily created in line with each other throughout the Neo-Plastic period. Actually, it is important to examine the development of Mondrian's artistic vision toward his formal

theories and concepts through a context-independent approach by using his paintings and writings.

3.5 Conclusion

In the outset of this chapter, I had an overview on scholars' viewpoints on the pros and cons of the nature of Mondrian's writings as well as the importance of his writing for the aesthetic interpretation of his Neo-Plastic paintings. We understood that Mondrian was a prolific and consistent writer of his theories, throughout almost three decades of his Neo-Plastic career, that were the posteriori product of his experimentations on his canvases. He wrote to further explain and propagate his very radical pure abstract theory, to the public and to defend against the negative critics he received for the apparent cold appearances of his paintings. However, he mainly wrote his ideas to introduce his Neo-Plastic principles as not only universal principles for all arts but also as social and cultural ones for a new life and culture. In his writings he always pointed to the implications of his Neo-Plastic principles in other arts as well as to the domain of life. We realized that Mondrian's writings, though difficult-to-fathom, are as important as his paintings that manifest his aesthetic evolution toward his artistic concepts and theories throughout his Neo-Plastic period. We also found that Mondrian wrote in a complex style and incoherent manner, and he used self-invented words.

Surveying Mondrian's literature, we understood that scholars mainly analyzed his art and theory of Neo-Plasticism within three major standpoints. The first group of publications, such as those of Champa, Schapiro, and Carmean, examined Neo-Plastic paintings based on a formalist stance apart from Mondrian's writings. We saw that in this group of works, the formal theory and concepts of Neo-Plasticism were explained based on the static and generalized interpretations of visual characteristics of the paintings. In absence of Mondrian writings, in these sources we could not explain the

evolution of Mondrian's core theory of Neo-Plasticism through a genuine and Neo-Plastic language in different periods of the development of Neo-Plastic oeuvre. The second group of scholars, like Chandler, Golding, and Cheetham, took an opposite approach by exploring the philosophical origins of Neo-Plasticism and Mondrian's puritan vision toward his pure abstract art. They examined the influences of Western doctrines such as Theosophy, Hegel, and Platonism on Mondrian's theoretical ideas, separated from the Neo-Plastic paintings. Although the aim of these scholars was not to examine the refinement and development of formal theories of Mondrian toward his Neo-Plastic art, we saw that the reliance of these scholars on series of overly acknowledged philosophies resulted in a certain degree of repetition and limited approach in the analysis of Mondrian's writings. In the third category of the works, scholars such as Blotkamp, Milner, and Seuphor examined the theory and art of Neo-Plasticism within a historical context in regard to the influences Mondrian received from his environment and sources of inspiration. Although, these scholars also analyzed Mondrian's paintings through a formal lens of scrutiny, in these publications Mondrian's writings were not used as primary as his paintings. More importantly, scholars analyzed his writings as a support to demonstrate the relation of Mondrian's ideas to those philosophies or modern tenets of artistic styles - external stimulus of Neo-Plastic art and theory – rather than examining his writings in relation to the core theory of Neo-Plasticism and its principles. Overall, we find that the very infrastructure and underlying formal theory of Neo-Plasticism has been so far examined very little in relation to the Neo-Plastic paintings. In this regard, Chandler pointed to this gap as follows: “[i]n the field of aesthetics, however, Mondrian's work has been almost completely ignored. In the light of his influence in other areas it is strange that so little writing on his aesthetic theories exist” (Chandler, 1972, p. 7). To fill this gap, scholars such as Blotkamp, and to some extent Bois, tried to approach a coinciding study of

Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings in accordance with his writings. However, for analyzing the aesthetics evolution in Neo-Plastic paintings, Blotkamp confined himself to Mondrian's letters and the influences of environment on him. As we saw, in his letters Mondrian did not expand his theories of Neo-Plasticism. As a result, we found that Blotkamp in many cases had to depend on what Mondrian shortly indicated in his letters about some of his innovative artistic ideas rather than explaining such pictorial changes (such as double lines in his paintings) based on a coinciding study of paintings and writings.

Undeniably, all the former publications greatly helped us further understand Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism from different angles. Nevertheless, in majority of the previous publications, Mondrian's concepts in relation to his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism, demonstrated in his paintings, were heavily examined under the light of the philosophical and artistic origins of Neo-Plasticism. As it was discussed, Mondrian's artistic vision toward his theoretical concepts and principles constantly changed throughout his Neo-Plastic artistic career. Theosophy, Hegel's philosophy, Platonism, and De Stijl - as most commonly acknowledged influential philosophical and artistic sources of Mondrian's inspiration for the formulation of his Neo-Plasticism- were mainly dominant in Mondrian's vision during 1910s and early years of 1920s. Therefore, interpreting Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism (1917-1944) through or in relation to these philosophies or artistic movements impedes a genuine evaluation of his artistic evolution in relation to his formal concepts and theories of Neo-Plasticism.

Moreover, in the previous publications whenever scholars analyzed Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings, the focus was mainly on the analysis of pictorial changes in different periods. In this respect, scholars, namely Blotkamp, Milner, Bois, and Champa, explained how changes in the use or role of the means of imaging and plastic means in

different periods of Neo-Plasticism resulted in the expression of harmony - equilibrium - and rhythm in the paintings. In these publications, Mondrian's artistic evolution toward his paintings was expressed based on series of Mondrian's reformative experimentations on his paintbrushes in different periods. What is more or less absent in these remarkable publications and it needs to be addressed is how Mondrian himself in line with the development of his Neo-Plastic paintings, verbally explained the development of his ideas pertaining to his formal theories and concepts, demonstrated in his paintings through a Neo-Plastic pictorial language. To fill the gap in Mondrian's literature, I argue that aesthetic development of Mondrian's formal theory and key concepts can also be more genuinely explained through an integrated analysis of his Neo-Plastic compositions and theoretical writing (mainly his essays, articles, and notes). That is to say, Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings and writings, as a holistic body of his Neo-Plasticism, should be analyzed in line with each other. As Blotkamp explained:

What Mondrian maintains in an autobiographical text dating from 1942 cannot be seen as a full explanation or motivation for the work he did back in 1908 or 1916. To gain a proper insight into the interaction between theory and practice, the two must be examined together, in relation to 'the moment.' (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 11)

CHAPTER 4: FIRST NEO-PLASTIC PERIOD:

DE STIJL YEARS (1917-1923)

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, Mondrian's early artistic standpoint in regard to his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories are examined. They include the characteristics of the elements of his painting, equivalence between form and space, his theory of oppositions, harmony or what he called 'equilibrium,' rhythm as well as the use of symmetry and repetition to express harmony and rhythm. This is done through the analysis of his 1917-1923 paintings and 1917-1925 writings. The early abstract-real paintings (1917-1919) are divided into two groups.²⁹ The first group is his 1917 paintings that are similar to the hard edge paintings of Bart van der Leek. The second group of paintings is his lozenge compositions (1918-1919), two Checkerboards, and composition of 1918 *Colour Planes and Grey Lines*. I referred to Mondrian's artworks prior to 1920 'abstract-real'³⁰ rather than using the term 'Neo-Plastic.' In his 1917-1925 essays Mondrian talked about his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism in relation to painting as well as other arts. As we will see, what he explained as his theory of art in this period is indeed his emerging aesthetic ideas which he later, in 1926, crystalized within the six principles of Neo-Plasticism. The results will show the formation and development of Neo-Plastic concepts and theories in Mondrian's early paintings and writings prior to the writing of his theory of Neo-Plasticism in 1926 as six principles. Interestingly, and unlike to the widely acknowledged belief that Mondrian's writings are posterior product of his paintings, in most cases we find a reverse relationship between 1917-1919 paintings and writings.

²⁹ Mondrian commonly called his early immature Neo-Plastic compositions (1917-1919) as real-abstract paintings throughout his writings. After 1919, he used the term 'Neo-Plastic' to describe his style of paintings.

³⁰ Although those 1917-1919 paintings are not considered as part of official legacy of Neo-Plastic oeuvre, I included these paintings in my analysis. Indeed Mondrian used his Neo-Plastic theories in these early premature paintings (1917-1919) as he also discussed those aesthetic rules in his 1917-1919 essays.

We deduce that Mondrian during early years (1917-1919) of his Neo-Plastic period was more immersed in writing the aesthetic theories he had found during 1914-1919 in Holland. As a result, he had not yet succeeded to fully apply what he had theorized in this period on his compositions.

4.2 Abstract-real paintings: Compositions with Color Planes (1917)

4.2.1 Selected essay to analyze Mondrian's artistic development during 1917

To analyze the 1917 abstract-real compositions, I confined myself to the essay titled *The New Plastic in painting - De Nieuwe Beelding in de schilderkunst*.³¹ Mondrian wrote this long essay as his first contribution to *De Stijl* magazine. In this essay, he discussed his aesthetic rules in relation to De Stijl manifesto which talks, for example, about the abolition of 'old' in favor of the creation of a 'new' in art as well as in other domains, especially in life and society. In this long piece of writing, Mondrian discussed various concepts and theories such as the necessity and rationale behind abstracting the naturalistic forms in painting, elements of his Neo-Plastic art or means of imaging, and aesthetic rules that should be applied on his pure means of painting in order to express the equilibrium (harmony), rhythm, and beauty as universal. Furthermore, he distinguished his new style of painting as a universal style - abstract-real painting - from old tradition of representational painting.

4.2.2 Mondrian, circle of artists in Holland, and the 1917 compositions

As it was discussed in Chapter 2, in 1914 Mondrian returned from Paris to Netherlands and he stayed there until 1919. As a matter of fact, years 1914-1919 for Mondrian were the most fruitful historical period of artistic career. According to Edwards and Wood,

³¹ Mondrian wrote a significant part of this essay from January 1915 to October 1918 (Veen, 2011, p. 79) in Laren - a village close to Amsterdam - when he was in contact with the most influential thinkers and painters like M. H. J. Schoenmaekers, Theo van Doesburg, and Bart van der Leek (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 27). This essay is one of his longest writings which Mondrian initially planned to publish as a book in six chapters. However, Theo van Doesburg persuaded Mondrian to publish it in his newly opened monthly magazine *De Stijl*. Finally, this long piece of writing was rearranged and shortened by Mondrian and was published in 12 installments in *De Stijl* magazine from October 1917 to October 1918 (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 27).

this period of isolation (1914-1919) helped Mondrian to explore and gradually transform from his cliché abstraction to a “complete abstract art.” Indeed, Mondrian’s five-year compulsory stay in Holland transformed his previous Theosophical thought into Hegelian philosophy. In this period, Mondrian also met circles of Dutch avant-garde artists in his hometown. Among these artists, Mondrian’s acquaintance with Van Doesburg in 1915 and Van der Leek in April or May 1916, noticeably shifted Mondrian’s aesthetic vision. On the one hand, Mondrian found close affinity between his aesthetic values and Van Doesburg’s autonomous art. His great passion in respect to Doesburg’s ideas soon led to the co-foundation of De Stijl art movement in 1917 by two artists. Based upon De Stijl principles, Mondrian asserted that all figures have the capability to be abstracted and intensified into vertical and horizontal lines depicted on a flat surface. On the other side, the hard-edge color planes of van der Leek directed Mondrian’s attention toward the element of color. As a result, Mondrian painted series of works in 1917 and 1918, which are floating and overlapping color planes on a white background.

After a brief overview on Mondrian’s position around 1917, I move on to describe the characteristics of the 1917 compositions. As it was discussed in Chapter 2, Mondrian during his 1914-1919 stay in Holland steadily departed from his Cubist style. He found that vertical and horizontal lines, compared to curve and oblique lines, could represent a purer expression of balance and beauty in his paintings. He also started confining his Cubist palette to a mixture of primary colors with grey in his post-cubist, plus-minus paintings. When we look at Mondrian’s 1917 paintings, we find that the colors are no longer the previous Cubist pallet of greyish and ochre hues; they are verities of primary colors slightly tinted with white and grey. These characteristics are found in those

paintings that were painted in the first half of the 1917:³² *Composition with Colours A* (figure 4.1) and *Composition with Colours B* (figure 4.2). In both works, we also see the trace of a sparse linear structure which was a dominant feature in his previous plus-minus compositions.

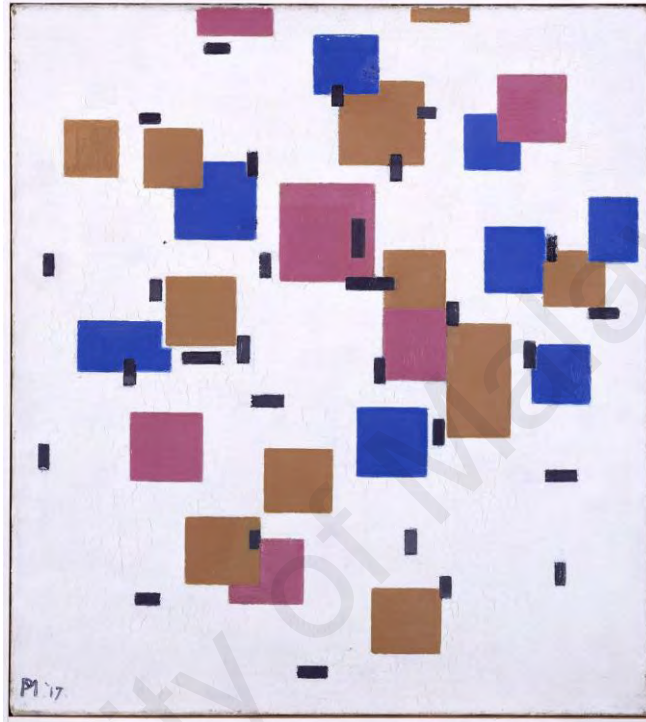


Figure 4.1: Piet Mondrian. 1917. *Composition with Colours A*. Oil on Canvas. 50.3 x 45.3 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands.

³² These two early 1917 paintings, as Blotkamp suggested, were painted through the influences Mondrian received from hard edge paintings of van der Leek. According to Champa, Mondrian had become familiar with van der Leek as early as April or May 1916 (Champa, 1985, p. 47). However, Mondrian gradually, after 1918, departed from van der Leek's style and he devised his own style in his subsequent works (see figures 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5) by tinting the primary hues with white, arranging the color planes in regular columns and rows, and extending the color planes beyond the edges of the canvas.

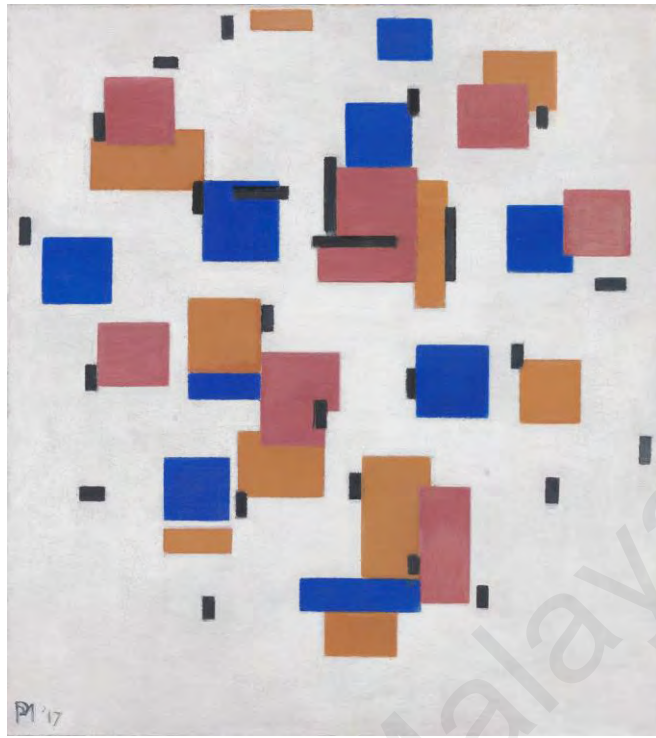


Figure 4.2: Piet Mondrian. 1917. *Composition with Colours B*. Oil on Canvas. 50.5 x 45 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands.

In the next painting *Composition with Color Planes* (Gouache on Paper) in 1917 – figure 4.3, we see that the colors, similar to hard edge paintings of van der Leek, are purer. Moreover, in these paintings the short vertical and horizontal lines that were scattered in previous works (see figures 4.1 & 4.2), disappeared. We also see that the planes no longer overlap. Due to the regular arrangement of the color planes, the white surface, as space in this painting, is perceived as what Blotkamp called a ‘continuous field.’ In the absence of scattered short lines, now the ground is perceived as an endless white space.

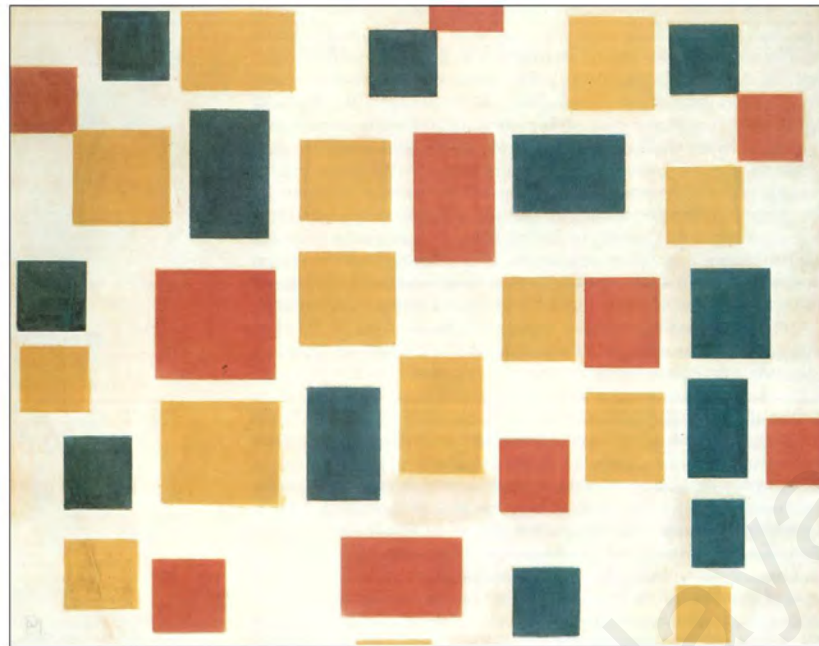


Figure 4.3: Piet Mondrian. 1917. *Composition with Colour Planes*. Gouache on paper, 47 x 59.5 cm. Private Collection (© 2018 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust - info@mondriantrust.com)

In other two 1917 paintings *Composition with Color Planes* (1917) - figure 4.4, and *Composition III with Color Planes* (1917) – figure 4.5 - the color planes were painted larger and they were arranged closer to each other. More importantly, thanks to the similarities in the size of the color planes, the white background appears more as somewhat a white grid to the eyes of the viewer rather than a white continuous field (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 100). As a result, the viewer perceives the planes in a dynamic interrelation with the space. I agree with Blotkamp and Wallace (1968) who asserted that the irregular white intervals in these works, particularly in *Composition III with Color Planes*, between the planes, resulted in the expression of a volumetric and infinite space in which they host planes of color.

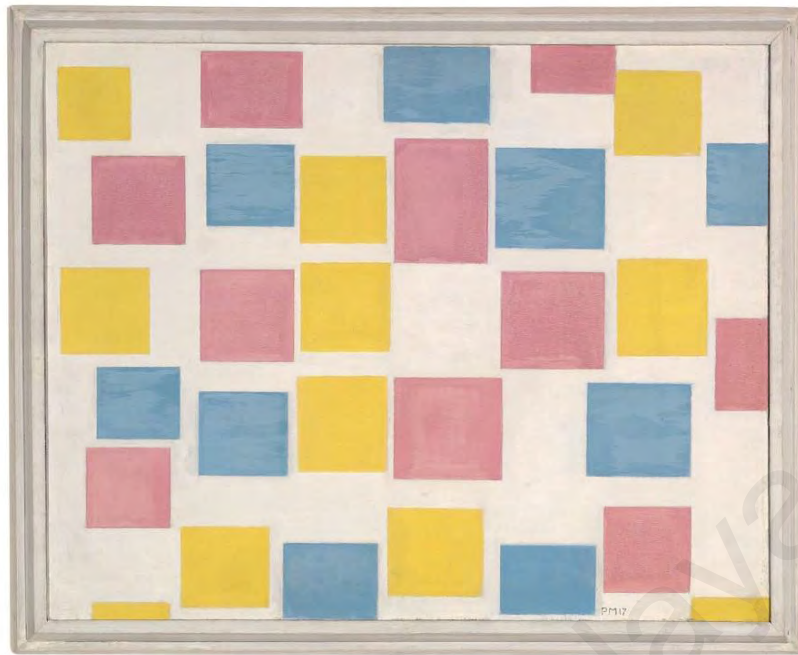


Figure 4.4: Piet Mondrian. 1917. *Composition with Colour Planes*, 1917, oil on canvas, 48 x 61.4 cm. Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam. (© 2018 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust - info@mondriantrust.com)



Figure 4.5: Piet Mondrian. 1917. *Composition III with Color Planes*. Oil on canvas. 18 7/8 × 24 inch. Reproduced with the permission of Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

4.2.3 Analysis of the key aesthetic concepts in the 1917 compositions and writings

After reviewing the visual characteristics of 1917 compositions, now I move to the analysis of Mondrian's artistic vision toward his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories in this period. I will do this through the analysis of his 1917 paintings and 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*. The goal is to examine Mondrian's emerging aesthetic ideas - targeted in this thesis - in respect to his key Neo-Plastic concepts depicted in his 1917 abstract-real paintings and explained in his early 1917 essay.

4.2.3.1 Characteristics of the means of imaging or plastic means

When we read Mondrian's 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*, we find that in many instances he talked about his abstract elements of painting, means of imaging. Mondrian in his 1917 essay introduced his means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of primary colors. He talked in many occasions about the significance of these abstracted elements for expressing the equilibrium and beauty as universal. He also discussed about the conditions required to purify the colors found in the nature. However, we will see that the characteristic of his 1917 paintings is not in accordance to what he explained in his 1917 essay about his means of imaging. Interestingly and in contrast to the overly acknowledging fact that Mondrian's painting came first, I will surmise that Mondrian in his 1917 essay indicated to concepts and theories in relation to the elements of his paintings which we cannot find their true manifestation in his 1917 compositions. At the end of this section (4.2.3), such reverse relation between Mondrian's 1917 paintings and writings is justified.

As it was studied in Chapter 2, Mondrian called the abstracted elements of his painting *beeldingsmiddelen* in Dutch that is roughly translated as 'means of imaging' or 'plastic means.' For Mondrian these means of imaging are essential to express the harmony, or what he called 'equilibrium,' as well as rhythm as universal. As we understood in

Chapter 2, in his paintings he sought to express a universal beauty which was beyond the beauty found in the corporeality or the natural forms. The prerequisite to express such universal and inner beauty is to distill all the representational qualities of lines, color, and form (elements of painting). In the introduction of *The New Plastic in Painting*, Mondrian emphasized on the necessity for such purified elements in his art: “[t]he new plastic cannot be cloaked in what is characteristic of the particular, natural form and color, but must be expressed by the abstraction of form and color—by means of the straight line and determinate primary color” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 28). In the previous statement, Mondrian defined his means of imaging, plastic means, as straight lines and triad of primary colors.

In line with his experimentations on the purification of color in his 1917 compositions, Mondrian in *The New Plastic in Painting* also emphasized on the element of color. He postulated that naturalistic colors, colors found in the nature, should be ‘determined’ and transformed into triad of primary colors - as abstracted version of form - in abstract-real paintings: “[t]hus color became the plastic means of abstract-real expression, because form (the concrete) is dissolved into color, and color is freed from the naturalistic” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 39). From this statement, we find that the distillation of the naturalistic colors into three hues of primary colors is a prerequisite to express colors as universal and objective in painting. That is to say, the subjectivity, particular expression, of natural colors is impediment to achieve and express a universal beauty and balance in Neo-Plasticism. In *The New Plastic in Painting*, Mondrian distinguished the universality of primary colors from individuality of naturalistic colors as follows:

In abstract-real painting primary color only signifies color appearing in its most basic aspect. Primary color thus appears very relative—the principal thing is that color be free of individuality and individual sensations, and that it express only the serene emotion of the universal. (Mondrian 1917, p. 36)

Mondrian in his 1917 essay also pointed to the conditions required to purify the natural colors to the primary hues of colors. The determination of color, as he stated, is achieved in three steps: “[t]o determine color involves, first, *the reduction of naturalistic color to primary color*; second, *the reduction of color to plane*; third, *the delimitation of color—so that it appears as a unity of rectangular planes*”³³ (Mondrian, 1917, p. 36). From this statement, we infer that the abstraction of natural colors, unlike to scholars’ common interpretation, to the primary colors is not merely fulfilled through the confinement of the artist's palette to the triad of primary hues. Looking through the previous endeavors of the scholars, we realize that scholars mainly emphasized on one or two of the above-mentioned three steps in their studies. For example, Blotkamp, and particularly, Bois mostly talked about the level of the purity of colors in Mondrian’s early Neo-Plastic pallet as well as digress of Mondrian’s success to paint the colors in one flat layer (first and second condition for the purification of colors in Neo-Plasticism). Or in another example, Cooper and Spronk paid more attention to the planarity, surface, and texture of the colors (second condition for the purification of colors in Neo-Plasticism). However, at this point, we understand that for evaluating Mondrian’s purity of colors in his early 1917 paintings, we should examine Mondrian’s level of mastery in regards to the above-mentioned three steps. Indeed, in Neo-Plastic theory, the naturalistic colors can only be purified firstly through the reduction of colors to triad of primary colors. Besides, the primary colors should be represented as flat planes, and they also should be delimited by the lines. It should be noted that Mondrian never meant to close the perimeters of planes like in the case of the enclosure of naturalistic forms in representational painting. Instead, the lines only ‘determine’³⁴ and make the planes more concrete in relation to their dimension and proportion as he

³³ All the words in italics appeared as such in the Dutch text and translation of Holtzman and James.

³⁴ By ‘determination’ Mondrian means an objective, non-subjective, representation of the planes.

emphasized: “[p]erpendicularity delimits color without closing it” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 38). Mondrian, in his 1917 essay, in some instances emphasized on the importance of the determination of colors by lines. Hence, we infer that, from the three aforementioned steps, the third step is the most important one. In fact, lines in Neo-Plastic theory have an essential role to delimit, or what Mondrian called, to ‘interiorize’ the particularity of the forms and colors: “[o]f the three determinations of color, perpendicular delimitation expresses the *most precise* relationship. It also involves the other determinations of color: *planarity* results directly from delimitation” (Mondrian, 1917, pp. 38-39). As Mondrian stated, the third phase (use of lines to delimit the color planes) also is a prerequisite to depict the colors as flat planes. We see that in relation to the third phase for the purification of colors, in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in Painting*, he defined his means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of primary colors. He stated that the transformation of the elements of painting into abstract means of expression is fully achieved through the depiction of lines and colors as flat rectangular planes. As he further explained, such universal means of imaging are in unity as rectangular planes: “[t]he new plastic—consistency of style in the manner of art—begins when form and color are expressed as unity within the rectangular plane” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 34). As we saw, Mondrian in his 1917 compositions also depicted the colors in form of rectangle. However, he had not yet bounded and delimited his planes by lines.

When we look at the elements of paintings used in the 1917 compositions, we realize that the means of imaging in these paintings are not depicted in accordance to what he defined in his 1917 essay. Firstly, the element of line is almost absent in these paintings. As a result, the colors are not completely purified through the lines. Secondly, the colors are not in pure hue of red, blue, and yellow. Instead, colors are either similar to what Mondrian previously used as earth tone ones in his Cubist paintings or they are primary

hues which are heavily mixed with white. Nevertheless, we see that the colors are painted as hard edge rectangular planes. This is almost in agreement to what Mondrian explained in his 1917 essay.

We understand that Mondrian in his 1917 paintings (see figures 4.1 to 4.5) used colors as the main pictorial element of painting. However, in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in Painting*, he provided us with a more sophisticated definition regarding his elements of painting. In this essay, he introduced his means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of primary colors. He pointed to three distinct phases required to purify the natural colors into triad of primary colors. Nevertheless, in these paintings colors are not fully purified by the lines (the third condition for the purification of colors). Out of the three conditions that Mondrian articulated in his 1917 essay for the purification of colors, only the second condition was completely fulfilled in the 1917 compositions. We, however, see that in late 1917 compositions (see figures 4.3 to 4.5) the planes were painted as rectangular forms.

Overall, we found that Mondrian in his 1917 essay provided us with some theories about his means of imaging that are, interestingly, not completely demonstrated in his 1917 paintings. Such noticeable difference between Mondrian's paintings and writings in 1917 suggests that the acknowledged fact that Mondrian's writings came after the creation of his paintings is not true in the case of his 1917 paintings and writings. That is to say, Mondrian's artistic ideas about his means of imaging are ahead of what he experimented in his 1917 compositions. Considering the fact that Mondrian started to write his long essay *The New Plastic in Painting* as early as 1915, it is interesting that during his 1914-1917 experimentations in his Cubist and plus-minus works (see figures 2.2 to 2.6) he also had not painted his elements of paintings as he described in his 1917 essay. It can be inferred that, although Mondrian had not used primary colors until

1919, during 1914-1917 he already identified that the most universal colors are triad of primary colors which should be represented as flat rectangular planes. Interestingly, we find that Krauss et al. (2004) in a book titled *Art since 1900* raised an argument about this matter which is to some extent not in agreement to what is discussed in this section. Krauss et al. (2004) argued that, as early as 1916, Mondrian was already well aware of the essential elements of the triad of primary colors and noncolors in his theory of Neo-Plasticism. However, he did not use pure colors since he was not certain how to cope with the inevitable receding or forwarding effects of primary hues, in relation to the Goethe theory of colors, in his paintings. Only after 1920 he started using pure hues of colors in his paintings (p. 150). Regarding to the primary colors, similar to Krauss et al. (2004), I found that Mondrian in his 1917 essay endorsed the triad of primary hues (red, blue, yellow), but he did not use such primary hues in his 1917 paintings. However, contrary to the argument of Krauss et al. (2004), I found that Mondrian in 1917 was not really aware of the triad of ‘noncolors.’ At least we can certainly state that Mondrian in no instances in his 1917 essay, pointed to the term of ‘noncolors’ or triad of black, grey, and white. Moreover, he did not use noncolors in his 1917 paintings. Therefore, we come to this hypothesis, in contrast to the idea of scholars such as Krauss and Bois, that by 1917 the concept of noncolors as opposing triad of primary colors had not yet been formed in Mondrian’s aesthetic vision.

4.2.3.2 The equivalence between form and space

Beside his elements of paintings, Mondrian in his 1917 essay talked about the concept of ‘equivalence’ in relation to his means of imaging. As a matter of fact, the conception of balance and harmony, articulated through the terminology of ‘equilibrium’ in Neo-Plastic theory, is a key term discussed by Mondrian in many instances in his theoretical texts. When we read his 1917 essay, we find that the ‘equivalence’ is an exact demonstration and representation of dual oppositions between means of imaging rather

than similarity in size of the planes or their appearance. Moreover, Mondrian in this essay discussed the balance between form and space which, as he explained, is attained through a balance between two forces: 'limitation' and 'expansion.' However, when we look at his 1917 paintings, we do not contend that Mondrian used his means of imaging in such a distinct duality. In contrast, we will see that he expressed the equivalence between his means of imaging through similarity in size and arrangement of the planes. Such inconsistency between Mondrian's paintings and writings suggests that the commonly accepted belief that Mondrian first painted and then wrote his artistic theories is not really true in the case of his 1917 paintings and writings.

Mondrian in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in Painting* discussed the concept of 'equivalence' in relation to his means of imaging.³⁵ This is a prerequisite to fathom his artistic vision about balance between form and space. In this respect, Mondrian stated that 'equivalence' of the elements of painting is not assessed based on similarity in size or appearance of the elements of painting. Instead, he explained that the balance or equality is an exact duality and opposition of the means of imaging in respect to each other. He postulated that in abstract-real art the relationship between vertical and horizontal lines at right angle results in a perfect balance since they are in a distinct duality in respect to each other. In the fifth part of *The New Plastic in Painting*, he stated that such equality and unity is the result of the 'equal manifestation' of means of imaging (particularly lines at right angle) in distinct duality: "[t]hus we see that because the duality contains two distinct elements, their unity can come into being through their equal manifestation, that is, the degree of equal purity in which the two extremes are opposed" (Mondrian, 1917, p. 56). From this statement, we deduce that Mondrian in 1917 rendered the balance of the elements of painting the equality of their distinct

³⁵ Becoming familiar with Mondrian's terminology in regard to his abstracted elements of painting, from this point onward, the term 'means of imaging' will be used. This is the closest translation by Veen (2017b) from the French term '*moyens plastique*'.

‘opposition’ in which lines, planes, and colors, as universal means of imaging, opposed each other.

In his 1917 essay, Mondrian also discussed the concepts of form and space and their balance in his abstract-real art. He introduced space and form as two dual forces called ‘expansion’ - *uitbreiding* in Dutch - and ‘limitation’- *beperving* in Dutch. The term ‘expansion’ is indeed a new and abstract rendition of the conventional term ‘space’ in representational painting. That is to say, ‘expansion’ is the spatial expression of the intensified, abstracted form (i.e. flat planes of colors) on space. ‘Limitation,’³⁶ on the other hand, is related to the naturalistic forms - as outward appearance of objects in nature. Indeed, Mondrian in 1917 stated that the equivalence between form and space is achieved through the attainment of the balance between expansion (space) and limitation (form). In a nutshell, in his 1917 essay, he emphasized on the creation of a more exact and universal ‘form’ and ‘space’ in his painting. By 1917, he already achieved abstract, or what he called ‘interiorize’ the corporeality of form. Nonetheless, the space (as expansion force) still remained particular and as an atmospheric space. Therefore, he tried not to depict the space, expansion, as a three dimensional, illusionistic, and atmospheric entity in painting. In order to express two contrasting forces, expansion and limitation, in balance, Mondrian abstracted the corporeality of form, morphoplastic,³⁷ and exteriorized - made concrete - the atmospheric concept of space into a flat surface. As Mondrian further explained, the abstracted forms (as planes of color: limitation) can express themselves only on a flat, abstracted - interiorized - space (expansion): “[b]ecause color appears as pure, planar, and separate, the new

³⁶ It is noteworthy that limitation is a limited version of expansion (space). In this respect, in his post 1919 essays Mondrian considered the space as ‘empty space’ while form is counted as ‘filled space’ or ‘limited space.’

³⁷ According to Holtzman and James (1986), Mondrian in *De Nieuwe Beelding in de schilderkunst* used Dutch term ‘*vormbeelding*,’ which literally means ‘the plastic of form.’ This term denotes to physical form or any representational or symbolic reference to naturalistic form. However, Holtzman and James translated *vormbeelding* as ‘morphoplastic.’ Mondrian originally used ‘morphoplastic’ as such term only in his 1920 French Pamphlet *Le Néo-Plasticisme* (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 394).

plastic directly expresses expansion, that is, directly expresses the basis of spatial appearance. [...] Form results when expansion is limited” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 38).

When we look at his 1917 compositions, we realize that to achieve a pure expression of unity and balance between his means of imaging, Mondrian started eliminating the contrast between form and space in his 1917 compositions. Such abolition of contrast between ground and figure was indeed a heritage of modern tents of the late 19th century painters such as Paul Cézanne and, then later, the Cubist artists. Following such tradition, Mondrian in his Neo-Plastic paintings stopped depicting the space through using traditional rules such as perspective. In order to express the form in the space and more universal, less subjective, and illusionistic, he started representing the form as flat planes of color. In fact, Mondrian in his 1917 compositions achieved to depict the depth and perspective through a pictorial abstract language as balanced relationships between dimension, proportion, and color values of planes. In *The New Plastic in Painting*, he introduced such interiorized, abstract space in his abstract-real art which is expressed through relationship between the dimension and value of the planes:

These planes, by both their dimensions (line) and their values (color), can express space without the use of visual perspective. Space can be expressed in an equilibrated way because the dimensions and values create pure relationship: height and breadth oppose each other without foreshortening, and depth is manifested through the different colors of the planes. (Mondrian, 1917, p. 38)

From the above-mentioned quote, it is clear that the relationship between dimensions of the planes is a new substitute for traditional rule ‘foreshortening’ in painting. Moreover, the relationship between values of the planes (different hues of colors) is also a Neo-Plastic equivalent to traditional rule of ‘depth of field.’ Indeed, in Neo-Plastic painting the equivalence between abstracted form (limitation) and space (expansion), as Mondrian painted in his 1917 compositions, was expressed through relation between

color planes in respect to each other. Moreover, the space in his abstract-real paintings was not depicted through using perspective as an illusionistic or atmospheric space. In this respect, following the previous statement, Mondrian stated as follows: “[t]he new plastic expresses the essential of space through the relationship of one color plane to another; perspective illusion is completely abolished, and pictorial devices (such as the rendering of atmosphere, etc.) are excluded” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 38). At this point, we come up with another counter-argument about relation between form and space in early Neo-Plastic paintings, which is against the standpoint of some scholars such as Deicher and Bois. Contrary to the previous standpoints of scholars, Wiczorek is an exception, the form and space (the color and noncolor planes) in Mondrian’s paintings are not flat. As Blotkamp also endorsed, in spite of Mondrian’s consistent experimental attempts in his Neo-Plastic period, he rarely could represent his planes as absolute flat surfaces.³⁸ This is mostly because of the inherent forwarding and receding characteristics of yellow and blue that is demonstrated in Goethe’s theory of colors. As we realized Mondrian in his 1917 essay affirmed the ‘depth of field’, although thorough his abstract way: relationship between color values of his planes exists in his Neo-Plastic paintings. Therefore, as early as 1917, he himself was aware that as long as primary colors are present as his means of imaging, he cannot attain an absolute flat composition of the planes.

When we compare Mondrian’s 1917 compositions with what he postulated about his concept balance in his means of imaging, we observe some inconsistencies. We deduce that in 1917 compositions the equivalence between means of imaging is obtained through sameness of the color planes. Nevertheless, in his 1917 essay, Mondrian defined the equivalence of his means of imaging as a distinct representation of

³⁸ Only in some of Mondrian’s stark 1926 and 1931 compositions we find that planes are in one layer. Nevertheless, the varieties in the thickness of lines in these paintings eliminated any possibility to consider the lines and planes in one flat layer.

oppositions. In all 1917 compositions, even in those two early paintings *Composition with Colours A* (figure 4.1) and *Composition with Colours B* (figure 4.2), we see that the planes are in unity through their similarity of size and color value.

Regarding the balance between form and space, we see that in 1917 compositions the unbounded planes of color are not in a very stable unity in respect to the white surface. In fact, Mondrian during 1917 was wrestling to find the best method to depict the form and space in unity. However, in the absence of the lines to delimit and determine the colors, the colors seem floating in space. In these compositions (especially in figures 4.3, 4.4. and 4.5) color planes almost spread the entire canvas area and, in some cases, they are cut off by the edges of the canvas. As a result, we see a dynamic interaction between what Mondrian called expansion and limitation forces in these paintings. In the first two 1917 compositions (figures 4.1 & 4.2), Mondrian followed the Cubist rules of centripetal force and, thereby, we see that the planes tend to move toward the center of the composition. According to scholars such as Bois and Fauchereau, Mondrian after his first two 1917 compositions (figures 4.1 & 4.2) gradually stopped using the aesthetic principles of Cubism in his paintings. Therefore, in his 1917 compositions (see figures 4.4 and 4.5) Mondrian distributed the planes evenly and in almost regular pattern. This subsequently resulted in the abolition of such centripetal force in these paintings. As Jaffé argued in the late 1917 compositions such as *Composition III with Color Planes* (figure 4.5), viewer experiences a 'centrifugal' - instead of 'centripetal' - movement of the planes (Jaffé, 1987, p. 96). Such centrifugal force is perceived as the extension of the planes to the outer space of these compositions. Due to the existence of such centrifugal and centripetal forces, we infer that unity between form and space in these 1917 paintings is partially achieved based on constant and dynamic interaction between a centrifugal, what Mondrian referred to as 'expansion,' force and, to some extent,

centripetal - limitation - movement of the planes in respect to the white surface of these compositions.

4.2.3.3 Dialectic of oppositions and concept ‘relationship’

In his 1917 essay, *The New Plastic in Painting*, Mondrian explained his theory of oppositions which is fundamental to his Neo-Plasticism. We find that duality of the means of imaging is a prerequisite to establish what he called ‘relationships’ as well as to express the equilibrium, rhythm, and beauty as universal in his abstract-real painting. Nevertheless, we will infer that in his 1917 paintings, he had not shown such duality between his means of imaging as he described in his 1917 essay. Therefore, we once again come to the conclusion that, during 1917, Mondrian wrote his artistic ideas even before he fully experimented with and demonstrated them on his canvases.

In his 1917 essay, Mondrian, in many instances, informed us about the necessity to represent his means of imaging in exact duality and opposition in his compositions. As it was discussed in Chapter 2, influenced by Hegel’s dialectics, Mondrian envisaged everything in relation to its opposite. That is to say, for him everything exists in relation to its opposite as a binary entity: mater-spirit, vertical-horizontal, male-female, individual-universal, and so on. Mondrian in his 1917 essay discussed two levels of oppositions. He stated that, firstly, the duality exists in his elements of painting - means of imaging - (line, color, and plane). In the second level, he emphasized that his means of imaging are in duality - or what Mondrian called ‘relationship’ - in respect to the composition. In this regard, in *The New Plastic in Painting* he pointed to these two levels of duality as follows: “[i]f the new plastic is dualistic through its composition [...], the composition is also dualistic” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 39). As we will see in Chapter 5, this statement about his dialectic of oppositions remains as one of the most immutable aesthetic rules of Mondrian, which later he also wrote about in his third

principle of Neo-Plasticism in 1926. It is noteworthy that the conception of 'relationship' is not something new in Neo-Plastic painting. In representational painting also we have relationships between represented naturalistic forms. However, concept of relationship in Neo-Plastic theory is rendered through philosophical rules, mainly Hegelian dialectics of opposition between the most intensified, abstracted, elements of painting.

As we read Mondrian's 1917 essay, we find that means of imaging and plastic means are necessary but they are not sufficient to express harmony (equilibrium) and rhythm as universal in abstract-real paintings. Besides the distilled element of paintings, there is 'relationship' between those universal means of imaging. To establish and represent the relationships, there should exist two entities which oppose each other. That is to say, 'relationships'³⁹ in the composition are established through oppositions of the means of imaging. In *The New Plastic in Painting*, Mondrian emphasized on the significance of such distinct duality between oppositions and plastic means for expressing the unity and equilibrium as follows: "[t]o know unity, we must recognize duality in all of life. [...] Only by seeing it as duality can we see how unity (or equilibrium) is achieved" (Mondrian, 1917, p. 58). The importance of the establishment of relationships between oppositions is to the extent that Mondrian defined his abstract-real painting as "determinate plastic expression of aesthetic relationships" (Mondrian, 1917, p. 29). By 'determinate' - *bepaalde* in Dutch - Mondrian means concrete and objective expression of the relationships between contrary means of imaging which are devoid of all subjective and individual expression of the artist. Mondrian distinguished such determinate and exact relationships in abstract-real paintings from vague and

³⁹ In original Dutch manuscript of essay, *De Nieuwe Bedding in de schilderkunst, The New Plastic in Painting*, the term 'verhouding' was used that was translated as 'relationship' in English. While *verhouding* alone can be translated as 'relationships,' however, according to Veen, the translation of Holtzman and James (1986) in this essay as "to establish relationships" for compound Dutch term *verhoudingsbeelding* is not accurate. A closer translation for this term would be 'to represent' relationships or 'the imaging of relationships' (Veen, 2017a, p. 54).

indeterminate - *onbepaalde* in Dutch - expression of relationships in the representational painting. From his texts it is inferred that all compositional elements such as harmony and rhythm result from the interaction and resolution of relationship - dual oppositions - between means of imaging. In the outset of *The New Plastic in Painting* where Mondrian introduced his abstract-real painting, he emphasized on two main components of his new art as means of imaging and their relationships:

These universal plastic means were discovered in modern painting by carrying through the process of consistent abstraction of form and color: once these were discovered there emerged, almost of its own accord, *an exact plastic of pure relationships*, thus the essence of all emotion of plastic beauty. (Mondrian, 1917, pp. 28-29)

In the above-mentioned quote, Mondrian considered the abstract state of his means of imagine as a prerequisite for the representation of relationships. From Mondrian's 1917 essay we also realize that how these dual oppositions result in unity in the composition. As Mondrian ascribed in Neo-Plastic theory, each side of a dual opposition reciprocally acts upon the other side and resolves the duality between themselves into unity and harmony, or what Mondrian called equilibrium. In his 1917 essay, Mondrian revealed Hegelian source of his inspiration, regarding such dynamic interaction of oppositions: "[o]pposites in general, in their deepest sense, have no stability either in themselves or in their opposites. On the contrary, they are destroyed by their mutual opposition" Hegel; Bolland (as cited in Mondrian, 1917, p. 48). For example, vertical line acts upon horizontal - as its opposite side - and both are ultimately perceived in unity and harmony. Veen (2017b) interestingly related Mondrian's doctrine of his dual oppositions to the ideas of the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c. 540 – c. 480 BC), who envisaged the whole universe as a perpetual interplay between oppositions. For instance, there is no day without night, no good without evil, and so on. Moreover, the harmony and balance was achieved through a dynamic movement of all

these oppositions that Heraclitus called '*panta rhei*' in his philosophy (p. 6). We see that Mondrian's theory of dual opposition is close to Heraclitus in a way that Mondrian always emphasized on his writings and tried to compose his means of imaging in his paintings, in a dynamic and constant oppositions or relationships.

Moving from a short philosophical survey on Mondrian's theory of dual oppositions to his paintings, in his 1917 essay we also find that relationships are categorized into two groups: relationship between lines and relationships between planes and colors. In the theory of Neo-Plasticism, the relationship between position of lines at right angle is the most primary and balanced relationship which is essential to achieve a universal unity as equilibrium. However, the relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes are the outcome of relationships between position of lines in perpendicular opposition and, thereby, they are secondary:

The abstract plastic of relationship expresses this prime relationship *determinately*—by the duality of position, the perpendicular. This relationship of position is the most equilibrated because it expresses the relationship of extreme opposition in complete harmony and includes all other relationships. (Mondrian, 1917, p. 30)

From the above-mentioned statement it is surmised that the relationship between positions of the lines is the most principal, exact, and equilibrated representation of the relationships in Neo-Plasticism. In contrast to such determinate and primary expression of the relationships in abstract-real painting is disequilibrated and subjective depiction of relationships between elements of painting in the representational painting. Mondrian for the first time called this subjective representation of relationships 'tragic' in his 1917 essay. In short, tragic expression is related to the representation of particular form or what he called 'morphoplastic.' According to Mondrian, such tragic expression -

uitdrukking der tragiek in Dutch - in painting could only be minimized through confinement of the artists to the most universal means of imaging:

The tragic adheres to all form and natural color, for the impulse toward freedom is expressed by the tension of line and the intensification of color as a struggle against a stronger counterstruggle. Only when line is tensed to straightness and naturalistic color is intensified to pure plane color—only then is it possible to reduce tragic expression to a minimum. (Mondrian, 1917, p. 54)

According to the above-mentioned statement, the most of the elements of painting are abstracted and the most tragic, individual, and subjective expression is minimized in the painting. At this point, we find about one of the rationales behind Mondrian's reductionist approach toward his art. In this regard, he came to this idea that the elimination of all representational references to the naturalistic forms is the best method to portray an objective and universal representation of the relationships in his Neo-Plastic paintings. It is noteworthy that Mondrian never was an opponent to the emotion and feeling of the artist. He believed that the artist should use his universal emotion and consciousness to create a Neo-Plastic art: "*[a]esthetic emotion is strong to the degree that relationship is plastically expressed determinately; and it is profound to the degree that its plastic expression is equilibrated*" (Mondrian, 1917, p. 71). From this statement we also learn that relationships should have two main characteristics: determinate and equilibrated. Indeed, a Neo-Plastic expression of the relationships should be expressed as 'determinate' (objective) and 'equilibrated.' For Mondrian the most 'determinate' and 'equilibrated' relationships are the straight lines in perpendicular, rectangular opposition.

Moving to 1917 painting, we see that the duality in 1917 paintings is not represented as determinate and equilibrated as Mondrian emphasized in his 1917 essay. Although in the first two compositions (see figures 4.1 & 4.2) he used a few short vertical and

horizontal lines, those lines are not crossed upon each other as they did in plus-minus works. As a result, the lines are not represented in exact duality. Colors are also not in exact dual oppositions since the colors are impure in hue (see figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.5). Moreover, there is no opposing pair for the triad of colors to be opposed. Such inconsistency is most palpable in the first two 1917 compositions (see figures 4.1 & 4.2) where planes overlap and it seems they are in a three dimensional space. In late 1917 compositions, thanks to the regular arrangements of color planes - distributed in two directions as rows and columns - the duality and relationships of size, and especially the relationship between color values of the planes, appeared more determinate and equilibrated. In general, we see that in 1917 compositions, Mondrian did not yet consider - whether intentionally or not - to show his means of imaging in a distinct duality. The dual oppositions in these paintings were mainly depicted through the contrast between triad of colors and the white surface of the composition. Overall, we saw that by analyzing Mondrian's 1917 essay and paintings, we found out about new theoretical knowledge in regards to theory of oppositions, such as different kinds of relationships and the main characteristics of relationships, which was absent in the previous analysis of scholars.

4.2.3.4 Method and conditions to express the 'equilibrium'

Mondrian in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in Painting* talked in abundance about his key concept harmony which he called 'equilibrium.' He stated that equilibrium in abstract-real painting was primarily achieved through invariant relationship between position of lines as well as variant relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. He called his concept harmony as 'equilibrated relationship' that is the offspring of the interaction of relationships between position, dimension, and proportion of the lines and planes. Nevertheless, we will see that in the 1917 paintings the equilibrium, harmony, is not expressed in the way Mondrian expounded in his 1917

essay. In the absence of lines in these paintings, the equilibrium could not be expressed as universal and objective. Thus, we once again surmise that Mondrian in his 1917 compositions had not yet demonstrated what he theorized about his concept equilibrium in his 1917 essay.

‘Equilibrium’⁴⁰ is one of the key Neo-Plastic terms frequently used throughout a majority of Mondrian’s writings. In fact, for Mondrian the term ‘equilibrium’ is a Neo-Plastic equivalent for terms used as harmony, or balance, in the representational art. Mondrian in his 1917 essay stated that ‘equilibrium’ is the universal expression of ‘relationships’ between means of imaging in the composition: “the universal is plastically expressed as the absolute—in line by straightness, in color by planarity and purity, and in relationships by equilibrium” (Mondrian, 1917, pp. 31-32). From his text we realize that relationship between the positions of lines is substantial in composition to neutralize the duality of plastic means and other relationships between dimension and proportion of the colored planes.

The equilibrium as Mondrian further explained in his 1917 essay is achieved through what he called ‘equilibrated relationship’ that is established through a holistic interaction of opposing means of imaging and their relationships. From Mondrian’s explanation we infer the ‘equilibrated relationship’ as equilibrium expressed through relationship between position of the lines and the relationships between dimension and color values of the planes. In *The New Plastic in Painting* he pointed to this matter: “[w]hereas in nature equilibrated relationship is expressed by *position, dimension, and value* of natural form and color, in the "abstract" it is expressed through *position, dimension, and value* of the straight line and rectangular (color) plane” (Mondrian,

⁴⁰ Mondrian used Dutch term ‘*evenwicht*’ in the essays he wrote in Dutch that is translated into English as ‘equilibrium.’ In the essays he wrote in French, he used *L’équilibre* that is translated as equilibrium.

1917, p. 30). As Mondrian stated, the harmony in both representational and abstract-real painting is achieved through relationships among position, dimension, and color value of forms, lines, and colors. However, the difference is that the harmony as equilibrium in Neo-Plastic painting is only achieved through exact and equilibrated relationship between flat rectangular planes of color and straight lines at right angle.

As it was discussed, Mondrian believed that the inexact and disequilibrated duality, or opposition, between elements of painting in naturalistic painting results in vague and subjective or what he called 'tragic' expression of the relationships. He stated that the representation of the exact relationships in painting is cloaked due to the dominance of the corporeality or what he called 'morphoplastic' naturalistic expression in art. As he mentioned, only in abstract-real painting the tragic expression of relationship is minimized through the representation of determinate (exact) and 'equilibrated' relationship between universal means of imaging.

Only unity in the expression of content and appearance can abolish the tragic in the work of art. And this unity is approached through the, exact, equilibrated plastic of relationship. Exact plastic expression of relationship (through universal plastic means) is necessary, since plastic expression of relationships through form and natural color still have tragic expression; equilibrated expression of relationship is required, because only the equilibrium of position and size (through universal plastic means) can diminish the tragic. (Mondrian, 1917, pp. 54-55)

Moving our focus from Mondrian's writings to his paintings, when we look at 1917 compositions we argue that equilibrium is not expressed through exact and equilibrated relationships as Mondrian indicated in his 1917 essay. As we saw in absence of the lines and, thereby, the primary relationship between position of the lines, the planes seem to be fluctuating in an atmospheric space. Similarly, we see that the relationship between dimension and proportion of the planes is not articulated exactly and equilibratedly.

Although in the first two compositions (see figures 4.1 and 4.2) Mondrian used a few short crossing lines, the lines are so short and distributed randomly that they barely represent any exact and equilibrated relationships. Thanks to the more regular arrangements of color planes in figures 4.3 and 4.4, the relationship between dimension and proportion of planes was represented more palpably in these paintings. Overall, we contend that the equilibrium in 1917 compositions is not expressed through relationship between position of lines at right angle and relationship between the dimensions of the planes. As a result, in these paintings we perceive a relatively tragic, subjective, and individual expression of the equilibrium between unbounded color planes and the white ground in these paintings.

Overall, we realize that similar to what we argued in relation to the previous concepts, Mondrian in his 1917 essay pointed to some theories in regard to equilibrium which were not palpable in his 1917 paintings. Although it is wrong to surmise that Mondrian first wrote and then painted during 1917, we come to this idea that during 1917 Mondrian had already in his mind a sophisticated theory of his art of which he was not yet certain or did not find enough time to implement it in his paintings. The evidence to this argument is that Mondrian in his 1914-1916 plus minus paintings was also hesitant to enclose the planes of color with lines. At his best attempt in his 1916 composition (figure 2.5), he partially delimited some of the planes with lines. Moreover, the lines in those compositions are short and majority of them are painted in form of a plus sign rather than enclosing four sides of the planes. This suggests that during 1914-1917 Mondrian came to understanding on the significant role of the lines at right angle to express equilibrium as universal. However, during this time he had not yet found a method for composing the lines in a way that they completely delimited the planes. He also had not achieved a pure expression of the equilibrium.

4.2.3.5 The articulation of the ‘rhythm’ as well as symmetry and repetition

Mondrian in his 1917 essay wrote about the concept of rhythm in Neo-Plastic art which is totally different from rhythm in the representational painting. He theorized that the rhythm, in contrast to the equilibrium, in abstract-real painting is relative and an individual expression in the composition. He emphasized that such new rhythm could not be expressed through old laws of harmony: symmetry and repetition. Instead, he postulated that rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting was attained through mutable relationship between dimension and proportion of the flat rectangular planes. However, when we look at 1917 compositions we contend that barely the rhythm expressed the way Mondrian explicated in his 1917 essay. On the contrary, the rhythm in these paintings was created through traditional rules of harmony, especially repetition of unbounded planes of color. Therefore, it is argued that Mondrian in his 1917 paintings had not yet manifested what he theorized in his 1917 essay about his concept of rhythm.

Rhythm is another important concept in Neo-Plasticism. Mondrian's in many cases in his writings talked about this concept. However, in *The New Plastic in Painting* he did not explain element of rhythm as much as other concepts. He discussed rhythm in relation to the expression of harmony, or equilibrium, in his abstract-real art. In the first place, it should be emphasized that Mondrian considered rhythm as an interiorized and abstract concept in contrast to naturalistic rhythm used in representational painting. For him, the harmony in his abstract-real art could not be achieved through rhythm of the elements of painting in symmetry or repetition. Therefore, he introduced a new definition for rhythm in his abstract-real paintings. In the third part of *The New Plastic in Painting*, he stated that the determinate relationship between dimension, proportion, and color values of planes is the new Neo-Plastic replacement for the traditional rules of harmony such as symmetry and repetition. He believed that the naturalistic rhythm of repeated motifs in symmetry results in the subjective, individualistic, or tragic

expression of harmony, equilibrium, in painting. In his 1917 essay, he stated that rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is achieved through relationship between the proportions of the flat rectangular planes of color:

Through this plastic expression of composition, the rhythm, the proportion, and the equilibrium (which replaces regularity or symmetry) can be perceived clearly. The exactness with which the new plastic expresses these laws of harmony allows it to achieve the greatest possible inwardness. (Mondrian, 1917, p. 39)

According to the above-mentioned statement, the expression of equilibrated relationships as equilibrium is an inward, abstract, substitute for the traditional laws of harmony: symmetry and repetition. As Mondrian further continued, such harmony, equilibrium, in the absence of symmetry or repetition is achieved through resolution, or neutralization, of relationships between the size and proportion of universal means of imaging: “[a]bstract-real plastic has to transform symmetry into equilibrium, which it does by continuous opposition of proportion and position; by plastically expressing *relationships* that change each opposite into the other” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 40). From this statement, we infer that the expression of the equilibrium in Neo-Plasticism is a new rendition of symmetry which is used in representational painting.

Beside his discussion about the concept rhythm in *The New Plastic in Painting*, Mondrian also introduced the rhythm⁴¹ as the mutable and relative component of the composition. Rhythm for him is a relative element in the composition that intervenes with the absolute expression of the equilibrium. In Neo-Plastic theory, the individual and subjective expression of the rhythm should be interiorized, or abstracted, as much

⁴¹ Interestingly, Tosaki (2017) in his scrutiny of Mondrian’s concept of rhythm highlighted an eastern-oriented interpretation of Mondrian on rhythm in his early 1917 essay. Tosaki indicated that Mondrian in his 1917 considered the rhythm, similar to the premises of the ancient Chinese, as flowing ‘through all things’ and as ‘the life-fluid.’ In this respect, Mondrian envisaged the rhythm as the rhythm found in people’s old and modern life. Rhythm for him was beyond the time and space and it is the rhythm found in the cosmic system (p. 43).

as possible. Such interiorization of rhythm is not attained by using symmetry or repetition of the elements of painting. Instead, as we deduce from his writings, the rhythm could only be created as concrete and objective through the unity, or equilibrium, in the composition: “[r]hythm interiorized (through continuous abolition by oppositions of *position and size*) has nothing of the *repetition* that characterizes the particular; it is no longer *a sequence* but is *plastic unity*”⁴² (Mondrian, 1917, p. 40). It is inferred here that rhythm is one of the most relative and mutable components of the composition in Neo-Plastic theory that Mondrian tried to minimize its relativity. As he expressed, the rhythm ‘relativizes’ the absolute and equilibrated expression of the relationships: “Abstract-Real painting can express the elements in an equivalent plastic manifestation, but it relativizes this unity through the composition's rhythm” (Mondrian, 1917, p. 57). That is to say, rhythm slightly makes the universal and objective representation of relationships of position of lines as tragic, indeterminate, or disequilibrated expression. In his 1917 essay, Mondrian pointed out to these kinds of expressions; an individual expression (rhythm) and a universal expression (equilibrium):

The composition expresses the subjective, the individual, through rhythm—which is formed by the relationships of color and dimensions, even though these are mutually opposed and neutralized. At the same time it expresses the universal through the proportions of dimension and color value, and through continuous opposition of the plastic means themselves. It is precisely this duality of composition that makes abstract-real painting possible. (Mondrian, 1917, p. 39)

According to the above-mentioned statement, the constant opposition of means of imaging minimizes the subjective and tragic expression of the rhythm in abstract-real painting. Mondrian postulated that the more relationship between positions of the lines

⁴² According to Tosaki, Bois’ interpretation of Mondrian’s rhythm as ‘non-repetition’ and ‘non-sequentiality’ are key terms which characterize Mondrian’s static rhythm in his pre-1932 paintings.

expressed exactly and equilibratedly, the less the relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes (i.e. rhythm) are expressed relative and, thereby, tragically. That is to say, the relative, subjective, tragic, expression of the rhythm can be suppressed by the constant neutralization of the opposing lines:

Position and dimension *plastically expressed in multiple relationships* of straight lines and rectangular color planes can still have tragic expression through the rhythm thus created; but neutralizing opposition can make the rhythm more inward and to some extent destroy this tragic. (Mondrian, 1917, p. 54)

Mondrian in the above-mentioned statement implicitly pointed to the method of the expression of the rhythm as well. He stated that rhythm is the outcome of the relationships between positions of lines and the dimension of planes. This means that rhythm in the composition is the offspring of equilibrium. That is because, as it was discussed, the relationships between dimension and proportion of plane are, by themselves, the offspring of the relationship between positions of lines at right angle.

Overall, Mondrian in *The New Plastic in Painting* discussed his ideas about his concept of rhythm and defined the rhythm as a universal and relative element in the composition. Moreover, he informed us that rhythm is the outcome of relationship between dimension of planes - i.e. the relationship between dimension and color values of planes. Furthermore, he postulated that rhythm is a relative and so individual expression in the composition, which is in contrast to the exact and equilibrated relationship between positions of lines at right angle. In fact, the aforementioned findings about Mondrian's early theoretical standpoint toward his concept of rhythm are compliment to the previous endeavors of scholars. When we look at Mondrian's publications, rarely we see any exhaustive scrutiny on the concept of rhythm in Neo-Plasticism. According to Tosaki (2017), only Cooper, Spronk, and Els Hoek have done

a satisfactory scrutiny on the concept of rhythm that is mostly related to Mondrian's late Neo-Plastic compositions. As such, in this section, we discussed early stance of Mondrian toward his concept of rhythm during 1917 that shows his emerging aesthetic ideas toward what he later, in 1926, formulated in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

Moving to the 1917 paintings, when we look at these compositions we contend that the rhythm is not expressed through relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. In absence of the lines, the relationships between means of imaging were not represented exactly and purely. This inconsistency is most visible in the first two 1917 compositions (see figures 4.1 & 4.2) where the planes overlap each other and, thereby, there is no concrete relationships between sizes, colors, and the proportion of planes. In the last two 1917 compositions (see figures 4.4 & 4.5) where color plane was arranged in a regular pattern in columns and rows, we see that rhythm is partly expressed through relationship between dimension and proportion of planes. Nevertheless, due to the almost similar sizes of planes in 1917 compositions (especially in figures 4.4. and 4.5), the relationships between proportion of the planes was expressed very vaguely and inexactly. The rhythm in these paintbrushes was indeed expressed through color variation and repetition of similar-sized planes of color.

In these paintings we also find that, contrary to what Mondrian stated in his 1917 essay regarding symmetry and repetition as conventional rules of harmony in painting, in some cases the planes are repeated and they are positioned in symmetry. Nevertheless, we should note that Mondrian in his 1917 paintings never used a mathematical method or formula to repeat his planes. Firstly, the planes are not exactly similar in size. Secondly, there is randomness in the intervals between the planes. Indeed, throughout his 1917 experimentations he sometimes repeated his means of imaging, as part of his

quest, to annihilate the duality of the means of imaging in order to express rhythm and equilibrium as universal. For example, in figures 4.4 and 4.5, a few similar-sized squares were repeated, which are arranged in an almost regular pattern in rows and columns. In addition, we see that some of the unbounded color planes in figure 4.3, where Mondrian depicted groupings of larger planes in the center of the composition and grouping of smaller color planes on two sides of the composition, are repeated. The repetition of different groupings of color planes is also palpable in the first two 1917 compositions (see figures 4.1 & 4.2) where rectangular planes could be easily grouped into three or four types as small squares, larger squares, and long vertical or horizontal rectangles.

4.2.4 Conclusion: 1917 compositions and Mondrian's writings

Mondrian in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in Painting* offered the definition of his key Neo-Plastic concepts. These were significant in understanding how equilibrium and rhythm are expressed as universal in his paintings. Indeed, we understood major and minor gaps between what he stated in *The New Plastic in Painting*, as his early formal theory of Neo-Plasticism, and what he painted in his 1917 compositions. It was evident that, in line with his experimentations with element of color in his 1917 compositions, in his 1917 essay he also more extensively discussed the element of color as well as its purification process in art. Regarding the characteristics of his means of imaging, we saw that Mondrian had not used the pure hues of primary colors. Moreover, in absence of lines, the colors were not purified as he had postulated in his 1917 essay. We also found that Mondrian in his 1917 experimentations was not yet fully committed to what he had stated about conditions of equivalence in the means of imaging: exact and equal manifestation of oppositions between means of imaging. Instead, he expressed the equivalence in his means of imaging based on similarity in the appearance of his means of imaging.

In respect to the theory of dialectic of oppositions in his means of imaging and in the composition, we understood that the oppositions and relationships were not depicted as exact and equilibrated in 1917 compositions. In the absence of fundamental oppositions of lines and lack of an opposite pair for the triad of colors, we could not find distinct oppositions in these paintings. We also realized that the equilibrium in 1917 compositions was not expressed as equilibrated, exact relationship between position of the lines and relationships between dimensions, proportion, of the planes. Similarly, the rhythm in these paintings was also not articulated through the relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes, as Mondrian informed us in his 1917 essay. Lastly, we contend that in contrast to what Mondrian stated in his 1917 essay, he used repetition and symmetry in his 1917 paintings to express equilibrium and rhythm. Overall, we found that, in contrast to the widely accepted fact about relation of Mondrian's paintings and his writings, what he wrote in relation to his theory of Neo-Plasticism in his 1917 essay was not demonstrated in his 1917 compositions. Indeed, in this period, Mondrian dedicated more time to writing his theoretical ideas rather than painting. Moreover, Mondrian in 1917 was still hesitant to put his works on exhibitions. In 1917 he had found a great opportunity to publish his long pieces of writings in *De Stijl* magazine. As a result, he could not fully experiment with what he had in his mind as his theory. Therefore, we find that some of the theoretical ideas he mentioned in his 1917 essay are not demonstrated in his 1917 paintings.

4.3 Abstract-real paintings (1918-1919)

4.3.1 Selected essays to analyze Mondrian's artistic development during 1918-1919

For the analysis of abstract-real compositions created between 1918 and 1919, Mondrian's essays *Dialog over de Nieuwe Beelding - Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natuurlijke en abstracte realiteit - Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* were used. In contrast to his first essay *The New Plastic in painting*, which was written as a perplex

and philosophical text in relation to art, life, new spirit, and consciousness, Mondrian in *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* more exclusively explained the components of his Neo-Plastic theory in isolation from such De Stijl ideals (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 131).

Dialogue on the New Plastic was published in two subsequent issues of De Stijl in February and March 1919 (Veen, 2011, p. 99). This essay is considered as one of the most Platonic writings of Mondrian - both in content and style of writing. In this text, Mondrian discussed his theories of Neo-Plasticism particularly in regard to his theory of the dialectics of oppositions (Threlfall, 1978, p. 324). In this essay he also explained his concept 'harmony' - equilibrium - and its expression in abstract-real painting. The dialogue is between two characters A and B that are respectively 'a singer' and 'a painter' (Mondrian himself). Indeed, character A in this dialogue acts as an artist (musician) who appreciates the beauty and harmony within his subjective vision. Throughout the dialogue, character A (the singer) criticized Mondrian's pure abstract style regarding his abstract, interiorized, means of imaging and tried to convince Mondrian that his naturalistic paintings were more interesting and meaningful. In contrast, 'B' (Mondrian) tried to convince 'A' that his intensified and purified elements of painting and their relationships are essential to express a pure and universal harmony and beauty in painting.

In his essay *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*, published in 13 installments in De Stijl magazine from June 1919 to August 1920 (Veen, 2011, p. 105), Mondrian also discussed his artistic theories in a triologue between a layman (Y), a naturalistic painter (X), and an abstract-real painter (Z: Mondrian). In this essay, Mondrian emphasized on the relation between art and nature (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 82). Throughout various scenes, he (Mondrian: Z) analyzed his previous naturalistic paintings (mainly

executed during 1900's) through lens of his Neo-plastic principles. In this essay, Mondrian (Z) mainly tried to rationalize and justify his Neo-Plastic theories and concepts such as universal expression of harmony, equilibrium, and beauty in painting for the other two characters. In this essay he also talked about his theory of oppositions. Overall, Mondrian in dialogue extensively talked about his core theory of Neo-Plasticism, especially in respect to the importance of 'relationships' between dual contraries for the universal expression of equilibrium and beauty.

4.3.2 The 1918-1919 abstract-real compositions

As we have seen, Mondrian's experimentations to express equilibrium and rhythm as universal was not entirely fulfilled in 1917 compositions. In fact, Mondrian, as early as 1918, was well aware of the inconsistencies in his 1917 paintings. He knew that the unbounded planes of colors were fluctuating in space. In this respect, Blotkamp (1994) pointed out to Mondrian's dissatisfaction with his 1917 compositions by highlighting his letter in February 1918 to Bremmer (p. 104).

Continuing his experimentations, in 1918 Mondrian took one decisive step further by using the element of line in his compositions. In his post-1918 paintings we see the presence of the lines which delimited the planes of color. One of the good examples of such change in Mondrian's painting in this period is *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (figure 4.6). In contrast to the plus-minus paintings (1914-1916) in which short crossing vertical and horizontal lines were used, in the 1918 composition (see figure 4.6) we see the lines are completely enclosed within the planes of color. It should be noted that, as Champa also stated, Mondrian in his Cubist works (1912-1914) had already used the lines. However, in those Cubist works, lines were not perfectly intensified to straight lines and they were not positioned at perpendicular angle in respect to each other. Moreover, the lines in his cubist paintings were painted in

different tones in a way the lines in the center of the canvas were darker, while the lines in the borders were faded away to the greyish or ochre background of the composition. Such inconsistency in hue and thickness of lines is also, to some extent, palpable in *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines*. As such, not all lines are pure grey and, mostly, lines in the periphery of these compositions are lighter.

Although lines in this 1918 painting - *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* - are not in a sharp contrast with color planes (i.e. in black), using lines to determine the color planes in this painting (figure 4.6) is considered a crucial step forward in theory of Neo-Plasticism. By enclosing the planes, Mondrian succeeded to further delimit and express the planes more objectively. As we realized, Mondrian in his 1917 essay had also indicated that colors could only be completely purified by delimiting and enclosing planes by lines. Indeed, the grey lines in *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (figure 4.6) suppressed and minimized the vague visual perception of color planes in relation to the white space of the composition. Subsequently, the ground and figure in this painting, as Wallace also indicated, is represented in one consolidated layer. In retrospect in 1941,⁴³ Mondrian explained his method for delimiting his color planes through lines. This is palpable in the majority of his 1918-1919 compositions:

Feeling the lack of unity, I brought the rectangles together: space became white, black or grey; form became red, blue or yellow. Uniting the rectangles was equivalent to continuing the verticals and horizontals of the former period over the entire composition. (Mondrian, 1941, p. 339)

The above-mentioned quote is actually the gist of Mondrian's solution for integrating the color planes with the ground which is manifested in *Composition with Colour*

⁴³ Here I had to exceptionally break away from my strict rule applied in the whole thesis for analysis of Neo-Plastic compositions and theoretical essays of Mondrian in a similar period. Because there are a few passages with direct reference to works of this period (1917-1919) which Mondrian explained about these paintings in his late 1941 essay.

Planes and Grey Lines. In this statement, Mondrian also defined form as purified colors, and space as black, grey, and white. Yet, as we see in his 1918-1919 compositions, he did not use colors and noncolors as pure as he described in his writing in this period.

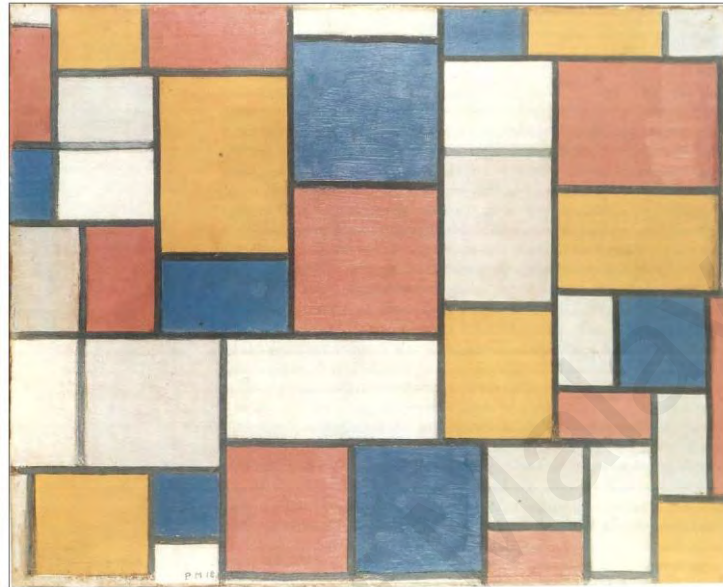


Figure 4.6: Piet Mondrian. 1918. *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines*. 1918. Oil on canvas, 49 x 60.4 cm. Max Bill collection, Zumikon, Switzerland (© 2018 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust - info@mondriantrust.com).

Beside *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines*, during 1918-1919 Mondrian painted series of four paintings in lozenge format:⁴⁴ *Composition with Grey Lines* (figure 4.7), *Composition in Black and Gray* (figure 4.8), *Composition with Planes in Ochre and Grey* (figure 4.9), *Composition with grid 6: lozenge, composition with colours* (figure 4.10). According to Bois, the abrupt turn into a very modular grid black lines was a runaway experimentation to cope with the lack of unity in *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (see figure 4.6). Similarly, Wallace (1968) argued that Mondrian used modular grid lines in his 1918-1919 paintings as a solution to the lack of

⁴⁴ Critics such as Champa related Mondrian's interest in painting in a 45 degree rotated canvas (lozenge canvas) to the 'diamond-shape coats of arms' painted in the 17th century for church interiors by artists like Pieter Saenredam. However, Blotkamp stated that Mondrian painted in lozenge canvases due to his influence from De Stijl artists and to experiment the possibilities of the application of lines at right angle in lozenge canvases (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 117).

a structure and unity found in his previous works (see figure 4.6). Regardless of various debates of the scholars on Mondrian's source of interest for painting a very dense modular grid, what is important is his decisive step to unite the color and noncolor planes through lines. According to Blotkamp (1994), the proposal of the diamond paintings was a crucial milestone in Mondrian's artistic career. It was in this 1918-1919 period which he gradually distinguished his way and opinions from the rest of his fellow artists.

What is apparent in all these four lozenge paintings is division of the whole composition into regular 16 x 16 units each of which share similar shape to the composition. Moreover, Mondrian painted an irregular pattern of the thicker lines over the 16 x 16 regular grid system. The irregular pattern is more asymmetrical in the second lozenge painting (see figure 4.8). Therefore, the regularity of lines was diminished in *Composition in Black and Gray* to some extent. In both compositions (figures 4.7 & 4.8), the two regular and irregular linear structures were closely correlated.

The repetitive pattern of lines in the first two diamond compositions soon raised criticism of Mondrian himself as well as van Doesburg. In the first place, dense structure of grid lines in these paintings created an intense white flickering spots in the intersection of the lines (Bois, 1994). Secondly, the lines, in parallel with the diagonal edges of the lozenge composition, are inevitably translated as diagonal lines. This diagonal angle was against Mondrian's aesthetic theory, which considered only lines in perpendicular position as the universal and most exact opposite means of imaging in painting. Mondrian's dissatisfaction, regarding the diagonal lines, with his first two diamond works (see figures 4.7 & 4.8) is evident in a letter he wrote (ca. May 1918) to van Doesburg (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 120). Due to such negative criticisms which Mondrian received in respect to his regular and very structured compositions (figures

4.7 & 4.8), in the other lozenge canvas (see figure 4.9) he painted the grid lines (16x 16 units) very pale. In respect to the use of colors, in the third diamond (figure 4.9) the colors are close to his Cubist palette (mainly grey, brown, and ochre). Lastly in his fourth diamond composition (see figure 4.10), he completely removed the regular pattern of lines and used purer hue for colors.

Mondrian's attempt for omitting the regular grid system in his 1918-1919 paintings was in part due to the criticism of van Doesburg. The first critic of van Doesburg was Mondrian's impure color hues in his diamond paintings. Nevertheless, Mondrian defended against such criticism in a letter dated 13 February 1919. Second criticism of van Doesburg was the existence of too much regularity in Mondrian's 1918-1919 diamond paintings. Doesburg believed that too much of 'system' is palpable in Mondrian's work, which by itself resulted in the repetition and lack of contrast between lines and the planes. Due to such criticism of Doesburg, Mondrian decided to abandon using a regular grid lines in his paintings. Ultimately, Mondrian himself also conceded that Doesburg's criticisms in regard to the lack of contract between colors in his diamond paintings were right. In this respect, when one of his diamond paintings in Ochre and Grey was published in August 1919 in De Stijl magazine, he finally admitted that Doesburg's criticism was right. As such, in a letter to Doesburg on 6 September 1919 he stated:

I now believe what you [van Doesburg] wrote at the time, that there is still an element of "repetition" in that work; this was much less the case in the original, probably as a result of the colour values. But I am now trying to avoid that in my new things. Mondrian (as cited in Blotkamp, 1994, p. 126)

Regardless of the aforementioned inconsistencies in relation to the diagonal angle of lines as well as impurity in color hues in his 1918-1919 lozenge paintings, the special characteristic of the diagonal edges of the canvas was a new tool for Mondrian to

express purer relationships between vertical and horizontal lines. According to Carmean, diamond, compared to other forms such as circle and square, visually looks larger due to the larger distance from one point to the other. Hence, the 'equilibrated relationship' - harmony - between means of imaging can be expressed more distinctly in the diamond surface. Indeed, the paradoxical floating position of lozenge corners and stable nature of the perpendicular lines were the best gift for Mondrian to express the most exact and interiorized expression of form and space. As Champa stated:

The perpendicular relationship appears nearly as an apparition in the lozenge, where it is no less compelling and/or "real" than it is in a conventional rectangle, [...] As a shape the lozenge *floats*, while the rectangle *sits*, and in this opposition there develops for Mondrian a nearly mystical excitement over the prospect of generating specific expression in both these absolute conditions of position, each one "real," each one *abstract*, and each one *a potentially natural home of the perpendicular relationship*. (Champa, 1985, p. 71)

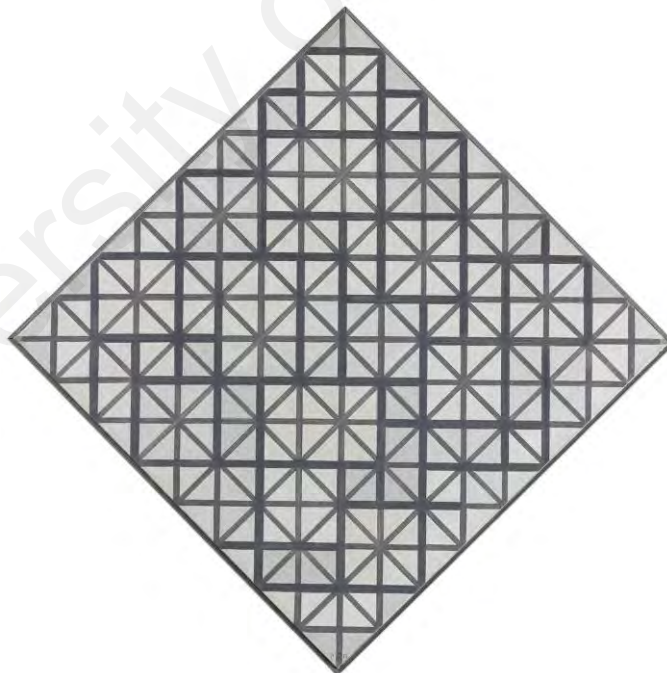


Figure 4.7: Piet Mondrian. 1918. Composition with Grey Lines. Oil on canvas. Diagonal 121cm. Reproduced with the permission of Haags, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

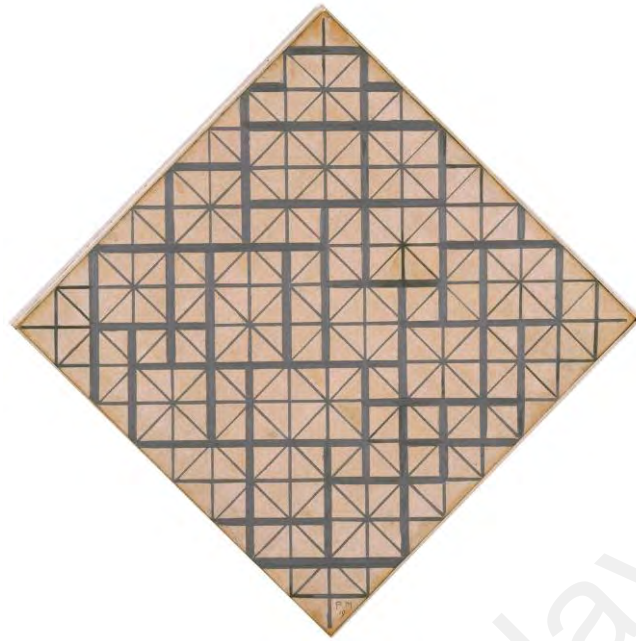


Figure 4.8: Piet Mondrian. 1919. Composition in Black and Gray. Oil on canvas. 23 5/8 x 23 11/16 inches (60 x 60.2 cm). Reproduced with the permission of Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950-134-151.



Figure 4.9: Piet Mondrian. 1919. Composition with Planes in Ochre and Grey. Oil on canvas. Diagonal 84 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands.



Figure 4.10: Piet Mondrian. 1919. Composition with grid 6: lozenge, composition with colours. Oil on canvas. 49 x 49 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, the Netherlands.

In the next two paintings of 1919, we see the regular system of lines, as it was ostensibly present in the diamond paintings, is noticeably minimized. These two paintings are: *Checkerboard, Dark Colors* (1919) – figure 4.11 - and *Checkerboard, Light Colors* (1919) – figure 4.12. *Checkerboard, Dark Colors* was painted in spring of 1919 - before the second move to Paris - in Holland and almost a year prior to the creation of the first Neo-Plastic composition. In these two works, lines are thin and grey and they have sliced the composition into similar-sized tiny planes. In these paintings, the colors are not pure hue of primary colors. As Blotkamp and Bois both indicated, the random groupings of color planes (in groups of 4 to 6 planes) in yellow, blue, red, grey and white in form of zigzag, or in form of letters ‘L,’ ‘T,’ and ‘S’ are read as a very constant, somehow irritating, illusion of movements of the planes in the composition.

Overall, the two checkerboards are very significant in Mondrian’s oeuvre because they were executed at the end of 5 years non-stop (1914-1919) endeavor in which its fruit was the proposal of the first Neo-Plastic painting in late 1919. It was in these two

Checkerboards which Mondrian succeeded to unite the figure and ground in one layer. As a result, we see that the space in these two checkerboards is no longer expressed as an atmospheric, illusionistic, vague or what Blotkamp called a ‘spatial ambiguity’.

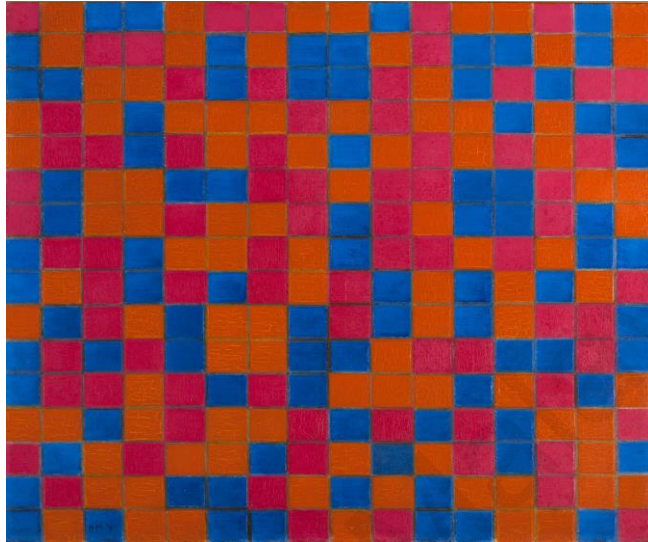


Figure 4.11: Piet Mondrian. 1919. Checkerboard, Dark Colors. Oil on canvas, 84 x 102 cm. Reproduced with the permission of Haags, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

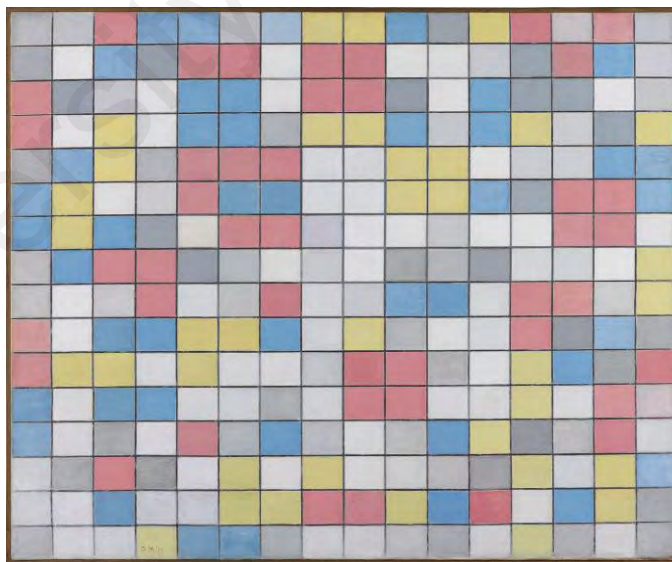


Figure 4.12: Piet Mondrian. 1919. Checkerboard, Light Colors. Oil on canvas. 86 x 106 cm. Reproduced with the permission of Haags, Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

4.3.3 Analysis of the key Neo-Plastic concepts in 1918-1919 compositions and 1919-1920 writings

4.3.3.1 Characteristics of the means of imaging or plastic means

Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays, similar to his 1917 one, defined his means of imaging as flat and rectangular planes of primary colors. He stressed on the role of straight lines in perpendicular opposition to delimit the color planes and express the colors as flat rectangular planes. We also contend that Mondrian painted his elements of painting as rectangular planes of color in his 1918-1919 paintings. However, as we will see, Mondrian yet had not used primary hues for his planes. Moreover, he added different shades of grey to his triad of colors in his 1918-1919 paintings in which he had not explained their role and characteristics in his 1917 essay. Overall, it is argued the characteristics of his elements of paintings in 1918-1919 paintings only to some extent agree with what Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays explained about the elements of his paintings.

Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays affirmed and expanded what he had stated about his means of imaging in his 1917 essay. In this period, similar to his 1917 essay, he defined his means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of colors (triad of primary colors). Indeed, in line with his experimentations on lines to delimit the color planes in his 1918-1919 compositions, in several instances in his 1919-1920 essays he also emphasized on the essential role of lines for a pure expression of colors. For instance, in *Dialogue on the New Plastic* character A (a singer) praised Mondrian's simplification of colors in his earlier cubist and post-cubist works, yet 'A' criticized Mondrian's choice of pure colors (triad of primary colors) and intensified forms (flat plane) in his abstract-real paintings. In fact, character 'A' aimed to convince Mondrian (character B) for the necessity of natural colors to express a subjective expression of beauty. At this point, character B (Mondrian) replied to A as follows: "color must be

clearly delimited if it is to represent anything plastically” (Mondrian, 1919, p. 76). In his 1917 essay, he envisaged three phases for the purification and interiorization of colors. The delimitation of colors by lines was the last and most important step as he had emphasized. He stated that primary colors as intensified version of forms could be best universally expressed in flat rectangular planes. Similarly, in *Dialogue on the New Plastic* he stated this matter: “[p]ainting has to be purely *plastic*, and in order to achieve this it must use plastic means that do not signify the individual. This also justifies the use of rectangular color planes” (Mondrian, 1919, p. 78).

In *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*, Mondrian (character Z) also discussed that planes of color should be depicted on a two-dimensional, flat surface. In this regard, in the second scene of the trialogue, character X showed his interest to one of Mondrian’s naturalistic paintings since the forms (in this case, trees) were abstracted into a flat plane. Furthermore, X criticized this painting for the lack of volume - that is to say light and shadow. Then Z (Mondrian) replied that even the representational painters could only create an illusion of the volume which is indeed a naturalistic manifestation of the plane. ‘Z’ further rationalized and related his tendency to depict form as flat planes of color to the experimentations of modern painters who all aimed to abolish, though in different ways, the representation of ‘volume’ and three dimensionalities in painting: “modern painting is becoming increasingly *conscious* that painting *demand*s the plane” (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 87). From this statement, we infer that in theory of Neo-Plasticism, the flat plane is one of the most essential means of expression. In his trialogue, Mondrian further explained his intensified elements of paintings. In this respect, he considered the flat planes as intensified, abstracted, forms: “all naturalistic color when intensified is *pure*, just as all line when intensified is *straight*, and all form when intensified is *plane*” (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 118). In this quote Mondrian

explicitly pointed out to three abstract equivalents of the elements of painting in his artistic vision.

Moving to the analysis of the 1918-1919 compositions, we see that in some of these paintings, the means of imaging are represented as rectangular planes of color and grey. However, contrary to what Mondrian expounded in his essays in this period about the purity of colors, the colors in these compositions are heavily tinted with white and grey (see figures 4.6 & 4.9). Additionally, Mondrian sometimes ceased to use colors (as in figures 4.7 & 4.8) to focus on finding his method to delimit the planes. In some of his 1918-1919 paintings, he used light or dark grey colors (see figures 4.6, 4.9, 4.10, and 4.12) along with the triad of colors. As we will see, in his post-1920 writings, he called grey, as well as white and black, as 'noncolors.' Nevertheless, Mondrian in 1919-1920 essays had not pointed to noncolors even though he used grey as a noncolor in some of his 1918-1919 paintings. This is the first instance where we see Mondrian uses a new element in his painting, which is not yet explained in the writings he wrote in almost a similar time period. That is to say, based on the widely endorsed fact about relation between Mondrian's paintings and writings, we infer that in this case Mondrian first experimented on color grey in his 1918-1919 paintings and only later - first in his 1921 essay - he introduced grey as part of the triad of noncolors, space.

In line with his emphasis on the rectangularity of planes in 1919-1920 essays, we see that in his 1918-1919 compositions he painted planes as enclosed and determined rectangular entities. The rectangularity of planes and their relationship is most palpable in the last diamond composition of this period (see figure 4.10) where, in absence of the grid lines, the upright rectangle planes were shown in their most degree of contrast against the lozenge composition. If we put aside the first two diamond compositions (figures 4.7 & 4.8), we contend that the characteristics of the means of imaging in his

1918-1919 painting is in line to what Mondrian described in his 1919-1920 essays. However, due to the light hue of lines (see figures 4.6), the regularity of lines, and thin thickness of lines, the planes do not express themselves in their most universal, interiorized, state. Overall, in comparison to 1917 compositions, we see a development in the use and characteristics of the means of imaging in 1918-1919 paintings. As such, Mondrian defined and depicted his means of imaging as delimited rectangular planes of color.

4.3.3.2 The equivalence between form and space

Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays shed more light on the concept of the equivalence of the elements of his painting. In this regard, he stated that equivalence is not similarity in size and color value of the planes. Instead, he defined such sameness as equality in oppositions or what he called an 'equivalent duality' in this period. We find that, in this period, Mondrian's artistic ideas in respect to his concept of equivalence becomes more crystalized compared to what he had postulated in his 1917 essay. However, we infer that only in a few of his 1918-1919 compositions, he depicted his means of imaging in such an 'equivalent duality.' As we will see, in majority of his 1918-1919 compositions the equivalence was expressed based on similarity in size of the planes.

As it was discussed, Mondrian in his 1917 essay explained the aesthetic conditions, regarding the balance of the means of imaging as well as the balance between form and space. Moreover, in his 1917 essay, Mondrian defined the balance between form and space as mutual interaction between two forces; 'expansion' and 'limitation.' From his writing in this period, we find that in theory of Neo-Plasticism the equality of the line, color, or plane is assessed and defined based on their exact dual opposition. In his 1919-1920 essays, he further explained equivalence. In his essay *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*, Mondrian (Z) stated that: "[e]quivalence does not mean uniformity or

sameness, any more than it means *quantitative equality*” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 97). In the previous statement, Mondrian explicitly stated that equivalence in means of imaging is not evaluated through quantitative scales such as similarity in size, appearance, or number of the plastic elements. Instead, such ‘equivalence’ is measured within a qualitative scale. Surprisingly, when we read the earlier publications on the analysis of Mondrian’s paintings, rarely we find any exhaustive examination of the concept of ‘equivalence’ and, more importantly, the development of this concept in Mondrian’s artistic thought in different periods of Neo-Plasticism. In the previous publications, much of the attention was on the explanation of philosophical roots of the concept of ‘unity in diversity’ and concept of unity which Mondrian mainly introduced in his 1917 essay.

In his 1919-1920 dialogue, he called such balance in his means of imaging ‘equivalent duality.’⁴⁵ From this term, ‘equivalent duality,’ it is inferred that in Neo-Plasticism unity between means of imaging and space is achieved through a balanced equality between dual oppositions. In this regard, in *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* we read: “[i]n the New Plastic we have equivalence of extreme opposites” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 97). Overall, we find maturation in Mondrian’s artistic vision during 1919-1920, in respect to his definition of the equality of his means of imaging. As we will see, this definition by Mondrian in regard to the equivalence of his means of imaging is a signal to his emerging aesthetic ideas, which he wrote in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism later in 1926.

Contrary to Mondrian’s description of about the aesthetic conditions required for balance and unity of his means of imaging in his 1919-1920 essays, we contend that in

⁴⁵ This concept will be explained in relation to the third principle in the following section.

some of the 1918-1919 paintings balance between planes is expressed through similarity and sameness. In some of the 1918-1919 paintings, we see that planes of color were represented as equal-sized tiny planes. Such equality in the dimension of the planes is most discernible in the first two diamond compositions (figures 4.7 & 4.8) and two checkerboards (figures 4.11 & 4.12). In the first two diamonds, the equality in size of planes is very palpable due to the division of the composition into similar units. We find the demonstration of what Mondrian called an 'equivalent duality' only in a few of 1918-1919 compositions such as *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (figures 4.6) and *Composition with grid 6: lozenge, composition with colours* (figure 4.10). In these paintings, balance between the planes is expressed through an exact and distinct opposition of planes. We see that the vertical and horizontal lines as well as the triad of primary colors and grey neutralize, or nullify, their duality through a continuous oppositional relationship. Nonetheless, even in these two instances (see figures 4.6 & 4.10) we can easily group the planes into three major shapes as perfect squares, elongated vertical rectangle, and elongated horizontal rectangles. Overall, in some of the 1918-1919 paintings the means of imaging are not represented in unity, or equivalence, through an exact duality or what Mondrian called an 'equivalent duality.'

Regarding the equivalence between form and space, we contend that the balance in the majority of 1918-1919 compositions is achieved through interaction between two forces: 'expansion' and 'limitation.' As we saw, Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays had not added something new about the attainment of equivalence between form and space. When we look at 1918-1919 paintings - especially the first two lozenge compositions (see figures 4.7 & 4.8) - we realize that the form and space are not in absolute unity. It is obvious that in these compositions, Mondrian is still wrestling to find a method to flatten form (planes of color) and space (white surface of the composition) into one layer. Mondrian's experimentations on the use of grid lines, which is demonstrated in

the first two diamond compositions of this period (see figures 4.7 & 4.8), more or less resulted in the destruction of the identity of planes and space. In fact, in the first two diamond paintings, Mondrian went far beyond to suppress contrast between figure and ground or what Bois called ‘superimposition,’ which was a major problem in 1917 compositions.⁴⁶ Moreover, the flickering spots in the intersections of the lines in these two lozenge paintings really hamper viewer’s perception of form and space on one flat surface.

In general, I found that, neither in his 1918-1919 paintings nor in his 1919-1920 writings, Mondrian provided us with a method or aesthetic condition or new theory in relation to the creation of balance between form and space. Nevertheless, he came to this idea that to Neo-Plastically express balance in his means of imaging, he should stop painting planes as similar units of color. We see in some cases, such as in figures 4.6 and 4.10, he started slicing his compositions in a way they created planes in different dimensions. It is in these compositions that we find more unity between figure and ground. Therefore, in this period (1918-1920), Mondrian came to this idea that equivalence is not a quantitative equality in size or color value of the planes. As we will see, only after 1920 he truly started expressing equivalence as an ‘equivalent duality’ - rather than sameness in size or color value of the planes.

4.3.3.3 Dialectic of oppositions and the concepts of ‘relationship’ and unity in diversity

Mondrian, similar to his 1917 essay, in many instances in his 1919-1920 essays explained his theory of oppositions. He stressed that duality of the means of imaging and composition is a prerequisite to establish what he called ‘relationships.’ According

⁴⁶ Main rationale for Mondrian’s unwillingness to portray space as white in the planar surface of the composition indeed goes back to the shortcomings he felt in his 1917 compositions. As it was studied, the space in 1917 compositions was shown as an illusionistic and atmospheric white background which hosts the planes of color in suspension.

to him, such relationships are essential to articulate equilibrium, rhythm, and beauty as universal. In this period, he also more explicitly talked about two kinds of relationships in his abstract-real art: immutable and mutable. In his 1919-1920 essays, Mondrian also explained his theory of oppositions under the light of Hegelian dialectic of oppositions and relations between parts and whole. In addition, the duality between lines and color planes in 1918-1919 paintings is represented more distinctly and dominantly compared to the 1917 compositions. However, as we will see, duality in some of the 1918-1919 paintings is not expressed as exactly and primarily as in other paintings. Overall, we find what Mondrian's 1918-1919 paintings and his description of his 1919-1920 essays about his theory of oppositions are the demonstration of his developed aesthetic ideas, compared to what he had indicated in his 1917 essay.

In his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in Painting*, Mondrian introduced - with a philosophical tone - his doctrine of the dialectics of oppositions. He stated that the outcome of the oppositions of the means of imaging is 'relationship,' which is essential to express equilibrium, rhythm, and beauty in his abstract-real art. In essays of this period - particularly in dialogue: *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* - he further expanded his discussion on his theory of dual oppositions in more details and in relation to his paintings.

In the first place, Mondrian in the essays of this period emphasized on the duality of his means of imaging. Additionally, he stressed that such dual opposition is necessary to establish 'relationship' - *verhouding* in Dutch. In the outset of *Dialogue on the New Plastic*, he pointed out to the significance of 'relationship,' which is the result of duality and opposition of the means of imaging (color and line). In this dialogue, when character 'A' (a singer) - one who appreciates the naturalistic and subjective beauty of melody in music as well as the naturalistic forms and colors in painting - asked

character B (a painter: Mondrian) about the goal of his abstract-real art, Mondrian replied: “[t]o express relationships plastically through oppositions of color and line” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 75). A few lines later when ‘A’ asked Mondrian (B) how the beauty and balance could be expressed through intensified forms and purified colors, Mondrian replied:

A. But how can color and line as such, without the form we perceive in nature, express anything determinately?

B. To express plastically color and line means to establish *opposition* through color and line; and this opposition expresses plastic *relationship*. *Relationship* is what I have always sought, and that is what all painting seeks to express. (Mondrian, 1919, p. 76)

According to the above-mentioned statement, unity and beauty are offspring of oppositions and relationships between means of imaging. Beside *Dialogue on the New Plastic*, in his long essay *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* in form of a triologue, Mondrian discussed his concept of duality as a fundamental condition to establish ‘relationship’ in the composition. In the beginning of the triologue, in the first scene the Layman (character Y) tried to convince Z (Mondrian) about their significance of the naturalistic colors for expressing a repose⁴⁷ - an absolute unity and balance - in painting. ‘Z’ in return tried to distinguish his understanding of harmony from the layman’s (Y) standpoint. In this respect, Z said that he sees the repose as the outcome of ‘harmony of relationships’ and not representation of color and tone. When ‘Y’ asked Mondrian (Z) to further explain the term ‘relationship,’ Mondrian replied as follows:

⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that Mondrian used the Dutch term ‘*rust*’ in the original text, which was translated as ‘rest’ and ‘repose’ by Holtzman and James in 1986. This term appeared in Mondrian’s early essays, including his two sketchbooks written in 1914 and his 1917-1918 essay *The New Plastic in painting*. However, Mondrian used the Dutch term ‘*rust*’ in abundance in his long essay - *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*. He continued to use this term until 1922 in his essays. According to Bois (1994), the term ‘repose’ means an absolute balance and unity, which is a static equilibrium. Similarly, Cheetham (1991) interpreted the term repose as ‘tranquility of the immutable absolute’ (p. 47) which is achieved through the resolution of the oppositions of dual contraries in respect to each other. As Cheetham revealed, Mondrian most probably borrowed the concept ‘repose’ - *rust* in Dutch - from Dutch Mathematician L. E. J. Brouwer and his book *Leven, kunst en mystiek* - Life, Art and Mysticism (Cheetham, 1991, p. 47).

“[w]e express ourselves plastically through oppositions of line and color, and this opposition is relationship” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 84). Thus, we deduce that the duality in Neo-Plastic theory is indeed a prerequisite to establish ‘relationship,’ and the ‘relationship’ by itself is a prerequisite to express equilibrium and rhythm. As Mondrian delineated: “[t]he determinate plastic expression of the universal is inconceivable without pure equilibrium, and equilibrium is inconceivable without duality. Duality expresses relationship” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 114).

In Mondrian’s 1919-1920 writings, we find the introduction of two kinds of ‘relationships’: immutable and mutable. In his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*, he did not use such term ‘immutable’ for relationships. Instead, he used this term in relation to the universality and pure essence of beauty and truth in his abstract-real art. As it was studied, in this essay he introduced the relationship between position of lines at right angle as exact, primary, and ‘equilibrated relationship’ in the composition.⁴⁸ However, in *Dialogue on the New Plastic and Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* he started using compound Dutch terms *onveranderlijke verhouding* and *veranderlijke verhouding* - respectively translated by Holtzman and James in 1986 as ‘immutable relationship’ and ‘changeable relationship’ - to distinguish two kinds of relationships. Mondrian considered the relationship between positions of lines at right angle as immutable. As he stated: “[t]he plastic expression of immutable relationship: the relationship of two straight lines perpendicular to each other”⁴⁹ (Mondrian, 1919, p. 79). The relationships of dimension - and so proportion - and color to noncolor are changeable ones for Mondrian because they are dependent on the immutable relationship of the position of lines. In the first scene of triologue, when character ‘Z’ -

⁴⁸ In the original text, the term ‘*verhouding van stand*’ was used by Mondrian, which was translated as ‘relationship of position’ by Holtzman and James in 1986.

⁴⁹ Based on the original Dutch manuscript of this essay, all words are originally in italics in translation of Holtzman and James (1986). This shows the importance which Mondrian gave to the definition of immutable relationship in his aesthetic vision.

Mondrian - tried to explain to 'X' (a naturalistic painter) about the concept of absolute harmony and balance in his abstract-real art, repose, Mondrian (Z) pointed out that the relationship between position of lines at right angle is primary compared to other relationships: "[b]oth the relationships of color and the relationships of dimension are sustained by the relationship of position" (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 85). From his two essays in this period, we find that the perpendicular angle stabilizes the changeable and relativity of relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. As such, the static equilibrium, or 'repose' or 'rest,' can only be attained through the 'stability' that the relationship of position of lines contributed to its composition. Mondrian (Z) further pointed to such stabilizing role of relationship between positions in response to 'Y' (a layman) as follows:

Y. But what stability is there in all these relationships?

Z. In this mutability of relationships there is one immutable relationship: plastically, it is manifested by the perpendicular position. Plastically, this gives us stability. (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 86)

It is noteworthy that to establish the mutable and immutable relationships between lines, colors, and planes, first an exact opposition between means of imaging - which Mondrian called a 'distinct duality' in his trialogue⁵⁰ - is required. In the third scene of trialogue, when Mondrian 'Z' tried to explain to the 'X' (a naturalistic painter) and 'Y' (a layman) about his new concept of 'harmony' in his abstract-real art, he (Z: Mondrian) delineated the significance of duality in means of imaging and relationships:

⁵⁰ In original Dutch version, Mondrian used the Dutch term *onderscheiden tweeheid* which is translated as 'distinct duality' by Holtzman and James in 1986. In a broader scope, this term can also refer to two distinguished entities.

A *distinct* duality is just as necessary for art as for the expression of life. [...] In the New Plastic we have equivalence of extreme opposites and therefore a distinct duality. [...] the changeable relationship of dimension is the one, and the immutable relationship of position is the other. (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 97)

Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays also explained his theory of oppositions in the light of relation between parts to the whole. He considered 'parts' as means of imaging and their immutable and changeable relationships whereas 'whole' for Mondrian is indeed a universal unity, equilibrium, and beauty. It is attained through a resolution of distinct dualities of his means of imaging to what he called 'equivalent duality' in his triologue. Concept equivalent duality is not limited to formal theory of Neo-Plasticism, Mondrian throughout his writings, in several instances, tried to propagate this idea that people should transcend their dualistic worldview in life (as in art) into a transcendent consciousness to see everything in pure unity or what he called a 'purified duality' (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 96). In his essays, as in the triologue, in many instances he talked about the purification and resolution of duality that is required to express pure unity and equilibrium in both domains of art and life. In this respect, he started considering everything in relation to its oppositions (as horizontal versus vertical, color versus noncolor and so on) in distinct duality. However, as he emphasized, such distinct duality is only an 'apparent duality,' which is essential to express what he called 'equivalent duality': "[p]ure unity is plastically expressed as *equivalent duality*. Therefore, if we want to express true unity, we must express it plastically through such an apparent *duality*" (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 95). Hence, analyzing Mondrian's standpoint, we deduce that the equivalent duality is the outcome of the antagonization of dual contraries (means of imaging) which duality is resolved into pure unity through constant oppositions.

Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essay related the relation between parts and whole to what ancient thinkers said about relation between ‘microcosm’ and ‘macrocosm’⁵¹: “[e]ach thing repeats the whole on a smaller scale: the structure of the microcosm resembles that of the macrocosm, according to the sages” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 86). He talked about the relation of parts and whole in the essays he wrote in this period. In the first scene in the trialogue, when ‘X’ (the naturalistic painter) criticized a red moon in Mondrian’s painting as a tragic and uncommon expression in painting, Mondrian (Z) said that all parts (That is to say moon, sky, sea, and other elements) should be read as a whole - in relation to other elements - and not separated from each other. At this point, Mondrian (Z) indicated that all elements of painting as straight lines and purified colors should be perceived as mutual relationships between parts and the whole:

All things are a part of the whole: each part obtains its visual value from the whole and the whole from its parts. Everything is expressed through relationship. Color can exist only through other colors, dimension through other dimensions, position through other positions that oppose them. That is why I regard relationship as the principal thing. (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 86)

It should be noted that the exact and pure ‘relationship’ between parts cannot be attained without the representation of parts (means of imaging) in ‘distinct duality,’ as Mondrian emphasized in his trialogue. As ‘Z’ (Mondrian) further explained, when we see the elements of line and color (means of imaging) in isolation from the whole painting, we cannot perceive the ‘relationship’ between those elements as a whole. As such, when in the first scene, ‘Y’ (a layman) appreciated the beauty of a moon in Mondrian’s painting, in isolation from other elements, Mondrian tried to convince ‘Y’ that such beauty is indeed an individualistic, subjective and so tragic, limited, expression of beauty in

⁵¹ Ancient philosophers considered the microcosm (part) as epitome or a small instance of the macrocosm (whole) which is the universe. In this respect, ancient thinkers envisioned that macrocosm as whole universe is constructed based on similar units of microcosm (man in general term). Thereby, all characteristics and components of universe (macrocosm) are also embedded in microcosm (man) in smaller scale. (Macrocosm and Microcosm, Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved July 19, 2018 from Encyclopedia.com)

painting. Instead, the viewer of art should practice to see everything in relation to the whole: “[w]hen we see something as a thing-in-itself, we separate it from the whole: opposition is lacking—we no longer see relationships but only color and form” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 86).

In his 1918-1919 compositions, particularly in the first two diamonds (see figures 4.7 & 4.8) and two checkerboards (see figures 4.11 & 4.12), Mondrian represented such relation of parts to the whole at its best. In these paintings, due to a very regular division of composition into tiny similar-sized planes, these tiny elements are in a relationship of proportion to the whole size of the composition. In fact, it is through the multiplicity or plurality of lines, and so planes, that viewer sees a very concrete relationship between parts and whole in these compositions. In the dialogue, Mondrian (Z) explained that mutual relation between parts and whole and vice versa is achieved through duality in means of imaging and it is required to establish the relationships:

Thus everything that is regarded as a thing in itself, as *one*, must be viewed as a *duality* or *multiplicity*—as a *complex*. Conversely, everything in a complex must be seen as *part* of that complex: as part of a *whole*. Then we will always see *relationships* and always know one thing through the other. (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 86)

Indeed, in 1918-1919 compositions, Mondrian aimed to turn the attention of the viewer from means of imaging as standalone elements to ‘relationships’ between those means of imaging. On this matter, many scholars, notably Bois and Blotkamp, discussed similar ideas about the relation of parts to the whole in Mondrian’s diamond 1918-1919 paintings. However, what was absent in their studies was a Neo-Plastic explanation of the infrastructure of such relationship as demonstrated in his paintings and expounded in his writings as a whole. When we look at the 1918-1919 paintings, particularly the first two diamond paintings (see figures 4.7 & 4.8), we realize that Mondrian tried to

represent the 'relationships' between planes of color rather to depict the lines and planes as solo entities or parts. Some scholars like Milner, Bois, and Carmean interpreted the white flickering spots in the intersection of the lines in these painting in relation to what Mondrian stated in his trialogue about one of his earlier naturalistic paintings. In the third scene of the trialogue, Mondrian analyzed one of his earlier paintings, depicting a clear night starry sky and a sandy beach. In this scene, the naturalistic painter (X) showed his interest to the starry sky. X tried to posit the idea that the formless nature of stars, represented in the multiplicity of relationships, expresses a more universal harmony and beauty. Similarly, Z (Mondrian) agreed with X's viewpoint. Z (Mondrian) further stated that stars, similar to the 'points,' are universal forms since they do not represent or indicate to any naturalistic form or subject matter. Indeed, Mondrian postulated this idea that the glittering light of the stars - similar to the optical flickering spots in the first two diamond compositions of this period - is the source to create 'relationship': "the stars have the advantage of appearing as points and not as form, like the moon. The multitude of stars produces a more complete expression of relationship" (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 90). As such, Mondrian said that the plurality of stars as points determines the plane of sky in the painting. Similarly, we see that Mondrian used the same tactic in his first two diamond paintings (figures 4.7 & 4.8) and two checkerboards (figures 4.11 & 4.12) to establish and represent the relationships.

Overall, Mondrian in essays of this period - *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* - expanded on his theory of dual oppositions more in relation to his paintings. He distinguished two kinds of relationships - immutable and mutable - which are the outcome of dual opposition of means of imaging in the composition. He further introduced the exact oppositions of lines at right angle as a 'repose,' or rest, which stabilizes the expression of equilibrium in the composition.

Moreover, in his 1918-1919 essays he explicated his doctrine of oppositions, or duality, in regards to the relation between parts and whole.

Looking at the 1918-1919 paintings, we realize that duality between means of imaging in these paintbrushes is manifested more concretely and distinctly compared to 1917 compositions. Thanks to use of straight lines to delimit the planes in these compositions, a distinct duality was shown between vertical and horizontal lines. Such duality between lines in perpendicular opposition was expressed at its best, somehow overemphasized, in the first two lozenge paintings (see figures 4.7 & 4.8). Nevertheless, we also argue that in this period the duality was not expressed as exact and equilibrated as Mondrian emphasized in his 1919-1920 essays. For instance, in the first two diamond paintings (figures 4.7 & 4.8), duality between lines was not represented as exact and distinct due to the intense flickering spots in the juncture of the lines. In addition, lines are not opposed in some cases such as in figures 4.6, 4.9, and 4.10. In these paintings the lines are not intersected (i.e. as a cross) and, thereby, they are not in exact duality and opposition. For example, in *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (figure 4.6), only in two cases a vertical line meets and passes through a horizontal line in the left side of the composition. Similarly, in the two checkerboards (figures 4.11 & 4.12), duality of the lines was not depicted as exact and dominant due to the thin width of the lines. In 1918-1919 paintings, the immutable relationship between the position of lines and mutable relationship between dimension and proportion of the planes were not shown as exact and equilibrated enough to make us feel repose and absolute equilibrium in these paintings.

We see that in 1918-1919 compositions, opposition and duality between colors is not shown as distinct. In these paintings, colors were heavily mixed with white and grey - as in figures 4.6, 4.9, 4.10, and 4.12 – and, thereby, they are not opposed in pure hue and

saturation in respect to each other. Although the mixture of colors with grey and white resulted in color harmony in the whole composition, the unsaturated hues of colors also led to lack of duality and opposition between triad of colors and grey colors. As the studies on his writing in this period show, Mondrian had not yet theorized a concrete set of oppositions for his triad of primary colors. Therefore, the colors are not in dual oppositions in these paintings. Interestingly, he used different shades of grey along with other triad of colors in his 1918-1919 paintings. However, he did not explain the role of color grey as a means of imaging in his 1919-1920 essays. This is one of the instances that we should solely depend on the paintings to interpret the use of color grey in his painting.⁵² One of the main rationale for using color grey, as Blotkamp also indicated in relation to the post-1920 paintings of Mondrian, is to moderate and suppress the intense contrast of the triad of colors with the white surface.

Indeed, the duality in 1918-1919 compositions - especially in the first two diamonds and two checkerboards - was expressed as the 'multiplicity' of lines. It is about similar dimensions of the color planes, and color variation is represented as an exact immutable relationship between position and changeable relationships among the dimensions of planes. In this respect, he benefited from 'multiplicity' in the element of line to further unite ground and figure through constant neutralization of oppositions (duality) of vertical and horizontal lines. In a nutshell, as a result of the more concrete manifestation of duality in means of imaging, compared to 1917 compositions, the oppositions and relationships among dimension, proportion, and color of planes were also articulated as more exact and equilibrated. Overall, we infer that there is almost close connection between 1918-1919 compositions and what Mondrian explained in relation to his theory

⁵² As it was studied in chapter 2, Mondrian as early as 1917, influenced by the mathematician and philosopher Schoenmaekers and ideas of De Stijl group, was aware of the oppositions of primary colors (red, blue, and yellow) as material and noncolors (white, grey, and black) as nonmaterial. However, he postponed using noncolors until late 1919, in order to, first, experiment on various possibilities and, then, find the best formula to compose lines and colors in unity in his 1917-1919 compositions.

of oppositions, especially pertaining to the concept of relation between parts and whole. Moreover, we see that Mondrian's artistic ideas in regards to his theory of oppositions developed, compared to what we saw in his 1917 Neo-Plastic oeuvre, both in his 1918-1919 paintings and his 1919-1920 writings.

4.3.3.4 Method and conditions to express the equilibrium

We saw that Mondrian in many instances in his 1917 essay had talked about the key concept of harmony (equilibrium) in Neo-Plasticism. In his 1919-1920 essays similarly he expounded his key concept of equilibrium. He postulated that the equilibrium is primarily the outcome of the relationship between the position of lines at right angle and mutable relationships among the dimensions of the planes. However, when we look at the 1918-1919 compositions we surmise that only in a few of those paintings equilibrium was achieved in the way Mondrian described in his 1919-1920 essays. In majority of 1918-1919 paintings, due to the modularity of the lines, thin width of the lines, and optical spots in the intersections of the lines, the equilibrium was not expressed as absolute and repose as Mondrian emphasized in his writings in this period. In my opinion, Mondrian in his 1919-1920 writings offered mature theories about his concept of equilibrium which had not yet been completely manifested in majority of his 1918-1919 paintings.

Similarly, Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* discussed his concept of equilibrium. In his 1917 essay, he stressed on the importance of primary relationships among the positions of lines and mutable relationships among the dimensions of planes to express the equilibrium. Similarly, in his 1919-1920 essays he pointed to this matter. For instance, in *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*, he pointed out that both relationships between the position of lines and dimension of planes are essential to express the equilibrium: “[t]he

relationship of position cannot express equilibrium without equilibrated relationships of dimension” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 85). Similarly, in the fifth scene of the trialogue, he said: “[e]quilibrium is expressed in a *purely* plastic way, through *pure means: through the relationship of position and dimension of the straight*” (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 105). As we will see in Chapter 5, the aesthetic conditions that Mondrian stated in his 1919-1920 essay are his emerging artistic ideas about the expression of the equilibrium that he later crystalized in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism in 1926.

As Mondrian frequently remarked in his trialogue, for ‘pure’ expression of equilibrium the relationships should be expressed as ‘exact’ and ‘equilibrated.’ That is to say, there are two main characteristics for expressing the harmony in Neo-Plasticism: exactness of the duality and a balanced relationship among the means of imaging. We deduced from his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting* that the ‘equilibrated relationship’ between his means of imaging is indeed a Neo-Plastic rendition of the traditional concept of harmony that he called ‘equilibrium.’ Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays emphasized on the essential role of lines at right angle in expressing an absolute equilibrium. In Neo-Plasticism, the right angle between vertical and horizontal line origins in ancient rules, related to the immutable laws of nature. In nature, such verticality is found in trees and buildings, whereas the horizontality is most discernible in the horizon line of sea and ocean. So, it is not surprising that Mondrian in his trialogue interchangeably called perpendicular angle (90 degree) as ‘primordial relationship.’⁵³ The ancient relationship between vertical and horizontal lines is an immutable expression of balance and unity that Mondrian, as it was discussed, called equilibrium or ‘repose’ in this period.

⁵³ In the original text the Dutch term *oerverhouding* was used by Mondrian which was translated as ‘primordial relationship’ by Holtzman and James in 1986. The prefix ‘*oer-*’ in Dutch refers to anything primitive, prehistoric, and ancient. Thereby, primordial relationship seems an appropriate English equivalent for Dutch term *oerverhouding*.

According to Mondrian, relationship between two perpendicular lines as a primitive ratio found in the nature is cloaked in the corporeality of natural forms. Indeed, from Mondrian's text we infer that, contrary to the common argument of many art critics in regard to Neo-Plasticism, Mondrian's pure style of Neo-Plasticism is not against the nature and forms found in it. Neo-Plastic painting is indeed a new rendition or translation of nature and natural forms restated through a geometric, esoteric, and pure abstract vocabulary. The things that distinguishes a Neo-Plastic form, color, or line from a naturalistic one are indeed the differences found in the nature of relationships among those elements of paintings. Contrary to naturalistic painting, the forms, colors, and lines in Neo-Plastic painting establish an exact, objective, and balanced representation of relationships. Similar to his earlier 1917 essay, Mondrian in his triologue also called such vague and indeterminate representation of relationships as 'tragic.' In this regard, tragic refers to the relationship between elements in representational painting that is not expressed as 'equilibrated' and exact:

While naturalistic painting does make us feel that harmony which transcends the tragic, it does not express it determinately because it does not express equilibrated relationships exclusively. Natural appearance, form, natural color, natural rhythm, and even in most cases natural relationships, all express the tragic. (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 88)

Mondrian in triologue also discussed how these relationships could be expressed as 'equilibrated' and universal in his abstract-real art through the opposition of purified, intensified, and elements of painting (means of imaging). According to him, the task of each artist is to interiorize, or abstract, the perpendicular relationship between lines in nature into a flat plane. That is to say, artist should interiorize and intensify the inexact relation between elements in upright angles in nature (such as in trees, buildings, relation of moon to the horizon, and so on) and elements in horizontal angle (such as sea, sky, horizon line) into exact straight lines at right angle.

Similar to his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*, Mondrian in several instances in dialogue acknowledged the importance of the principal opposition between lines in right angle to express the equilibrium. In the first scene, when a layman (Y) asked Mondrian (Z) about a definition for ‘relationship of position,’ Mondrian replied: “[t]he most perfect of these relationships is the perpendicular, which expresses the relationship of the two extremes” (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 85). As it was discussed in the previous section, the relationship among the positions of lines ‘stabilizes’ the relativity and changeability of other relationships of the dimensions, proportions, and colors of planes. So it is inferred that the repose, or absolute equilibrium which Mondrian talked about in his 1919-1920 essays, can only be attained through the stability and immutability of relationship among the positions of perpendicular lines. Mondrian explains this matter here: “the equilibrated relationship of position—the perpendicular opposition of lines and planes—is what gives the plastic expression of repose” (Mondrian, 1919-1920, p. 85).

Overall, we found that Mondrian in his two essays *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* had not added something new to what he had previously stated about his concept of equilibrium. He informed us that the equilibrium is the outcome of relationships between lines and planes. However, the relationship among the positions of lines is primary to achieve an absolute and stabilized expression of equilibrium as repose or rest. As it is inferred from his texts, the total resolution of immutable and mutable relationships among position, dimension, and proportion of lines and planes results in the expression of an absolute harmony which Mondrian called equilibrium or repose in his *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*.⁵⁴ As we will

⁵⁴ According to Tosaki’s scrutiny (2017), and in opposition to the common interpretation of this term, the concept of ‘repose’ by no means is a static harmony or equilibrium. Instead, ‘repose’ is a confined midpoint area, not an absolute point, between two sides of dual oppositions (means of imaging), which is in constant movement. I am more inclined to Tosaki’s argument than those earlier arguments of scholars who considered repose as a static harmony in Neo-Plasticism.

see in Chapter 5, what Mondrian explained as a method or condition to express equilibrium in his early texts (1917-1920), later in 1926 are culminated as his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

When we look at 1918-1919 compositions (see figures 4.7 to 4.12), we come to this idea that in some cases the equilibrium is achieved in the way Mondrian explained in his 1919-1920 writings. The equilibrium, compared to his 1917 compositions, is achieved through relationship among the position of lines at right angle. By applying the element of line in these compositions, relationships among dimension, proposition and color of planes were also expressed as more exact and dominant. However, in majority of his 1918-1919 paintings we see the equilibrium expressed as relative and to some extent tragic because the balance was mainly articulated through traditional laws of harmony: repetition and symmetry.⁵⁵ The impurity of colors, pale hue of lines, failure to paint the lines as intersected and crossed (most palpable in figures 4.6, 4.10), too much emphasis on structure of the grid lines, as well as similarity in the dimension of the planes (see figures 4.11 and 4.12) are main reasons why we feel lack of an absolute equilibrium and repose in these paintings. Indeed, the 'equilibrated relationship' between lines and planes in these paintings was not represented as concrete or determinate - *bepaalde* in Dutch - as possible.

Even, in the first two diamonds of this period (see figures 4.7 & 4.8) where lines are saturated black hue, the equilibrium was not expressed as 'repose' or 'rest.' Such conclusion is indeed opposed to the common interpretation of these 1918-1919 diamond paintings. Contrary to the earlier stance of scholars, when we analyze Mondrian's paintings and writings in this period we surmise that the equilibrium is not expressed as

⁵⁵ Mondrian's standpoint toward the use of symmetry and repetition was explained in the next section in relation to the concept of rhythm in more detail.

pure and stable in these paintings. We see that - as scholars like Milner, Carmean, and Bois also indicated - in these diamond paintings, particularly in *Composition with Grey Lines* (figure 4.7) and *Composition in Black and Gray* (figure 4.8), the high quantity of the intersections of lines resulted in the creation of a very intense oscillating spots on the intersecting points. As a result, viewer inevitably interprets the lines as broken and short pieces rather than seeing them in exact perpendicular opposition. Only in the *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (figure 4.6) and the last diamond painting of this period *Composition with grid 6: lozenge, composition with colours* (see figure 4.10) we are content that a repose, or pure equilibrium, between planes and the ground is expressed based on what Mondrian had postulated in his 1919-1920 essays.

Regarding the two checkerboards, we contend that the relationship between positions of lines is not represented determinate and exact enough due to the thin width of the lines as well as the very random groupings of similar-sized color planes. The very dynamic combination (in zigzag, 'L' or 'T' forms) of colored planes really hampers our perception to experience a sense of repose or rest in these paintings. In two checkerboards we perceive a relative unity, equilibrium that is articulated through a dynamic rhythm among similar-sized planes. In general, I surmise that the equilibrium is only achieved in a few of 1918-1919 paintings such as *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (figure 4.6) and the last diamond painting (figure 4.10), based on exact relationships between position of lines as well as the ones among the dimension of the planes.

Overall, we find that, similar to what it was discussed earlier in relation to Mondrian's 1917 paintings and writings, Mondrian in his 1919-1920 writings outlined his sophisticated theory in relation to the expression of equilibrium that is not fully demonstrated in all his 1918-1919 paintings. This again suggests that the acknowledged

idea that Mondrian's writings came after the creation of the paintings is not true in the cases of his early 1918-1919 paintings and 1919-1920 writings. I found that in some of his paintings in this period (see figures 4.6 and 4.10), the equilibrium is partially expressed through the Neo-Plastic aesthetic condition: interaction of immutable relationship between position of lines and mutable relationships among the dimension and proportion of the planes. Nevertheless, I believe that in other cases such as his first two diamond paintings and his two Checkerboards the equilibrium has been attained differently, less objectively and purely, through other methods such as multiplicity of lines and colors. I infer that Mondrian, during 1918-1919, had not yet come up with one finalized method to express equilibrium as universal in his paintings. Therefore, he experimented various tactics - such as multiplicity of lines, using a regular pattern of lines and colors - to see which one best suited a universal and exact articulation of equilibrium in his abstract-real paintings. It is noteworthy that, compared to his 1917 paintings, in his 1918-1919 paintings Mondrian's theoretical ideas in regard to the articulation of the equilibrium developed as is demonstrated in his 1918-1919 paintings.

4.3.3.5 The articulation of the 'rhythm' as well as symmetry and repetition

In his section we will see that during 1918-1920 Mondrian remained obsessed with the concept of rhythm. Similar to his 1917 essay, he defined rhythm as inward and abstract expression in the composition. In this period, he distinguished two kinds of rhythm from each other: natural rhythm and inward rhythm. He stated that the inward, interiorized, rhythm is not created through old rules of harmony such as symmetry and repetition. Instead, he delineated that such inward rhythm in his abstract-real painting is attained through 'equilibrated relationship' or what he called 'equilibrium.' He introduced rhythm as a relative, individual, subjective expression in the composition which 'relativizes' the absolute, universal, expression of the equilibrium. He also stated that the rhythm is the outcome of the multiplicity of relationships between lines and planes.

Similarly, we will see that in majority of 1918-1919 paintings, the rhythm is expressed through plurality in relationship among the position of lines at right angle and relationship between the dimensions of planes. Nevertheless, we surmise that the rhythm is not consistently expressed through one method in all 1918-1919 compositions. We see that sometimes the rhythm is expressed through Mondrian's emphasis on lines, and sometimes it is articulated through the multiplicity of the color planes. Overall, we find that when it comes to the expression of the rhythm, only in some cases there is a close agreement between Mondrian's 1918-1919 paintings and his 1919-1920 theoretical essays.

Mondrian in *Dialogue on the New Plastic and Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* (trialogue) did not discuss 'rhythm' as much he did in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*. His discussion in regard to the rhythm in his 1919-1920 essays is the reinforcement and expansion of what he had previously - in his 1917 essay - theorized about it. In the first place, and similar to his 1917 essay, he talked about the rhythm in relation to the expression of the harmony or equilibrium in the composition. In this regard, he distinguished the 'naturalistic harmony' in representational art from the new harmony used in his abstract-real art: "[i]n the naturalistic there is natural harmony, to be sure, but the equilibrated relationship of the abstract is another conception of harmony" (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 96). According to what was studied in his 1917 essay, the old (naturalistic) harmony is the outcome of the old rules of harmony such as symmetry and repetition whereas the new harmony, or equilibrium, is the result of 'equilibrated relationship' between means of imaging or plastic means. Up to this point, I surmise that in the early theory of Neo-Plasticism, the element of rhythm is the offspring of harmony (equilibrium). In his 1919-1920 essays, Mondrian also emphasized on two kinds of the expressions of harmony. For instance, in the 7th scene of the trialogue, Mondrian (Z) tried to inform the layman about the significance of the

‘equilibrated relationship’ that is essential to express a universal expression in abstract-real art. When X (naturalistic painter) asked Mondrian (Z) how harmony could be rendered as ‘equilibrated relationship’, Mondrian (Z) replied:

Naturalistic harmony, the old harmony, is not plastically expressed according to the concept of pure equilibrated relationship. It is expressed as relative equilibrium. It remains dominated by the "repetition" characteristic of nature: it expresses opposition but not the continuous annihilation of the one and the other. That is why the New Plastic is precisely against the old harmony. (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 114)

From the above-mentioned statement it is inferred that the old harmony, which is achieved based on the repetition of represented objects or subject matters, results in a ‘relative’ expression of the equilibrium. However, the ‘new harmony,’ as an absolute equilibrium, is achieved through the oppositions of the means of imaging and neutralization of their duality in the composition. In the statement he once again reminded us that the new harmony, or equilibrium, in abstract-real painting is not the result of the conventional rules of harmony such as symmetry and repetition.

In relation to the distinction of old harmony from new harmony, in his 1919-1920 essays, we find the explanation of two kinds of rhythm: natural rhythm and inward rhythm. What we interpret from Mondrian’s text in this period is that the natural rhythm is the outcome of the repetition of particular - naturalistic - forms whereas the inward rhythm, as universal and interiorized version of the natural rhythm, is attained based on multiplicity and plurality of intensified form - mainly the straight lines at right angle. Based on Mondrian’s definition of his inward rhythm, we infer that he allowed himself to *repeat* the intensified element of his paintings. In fact, he adopted repetition - within the vocabulary of ‘multiplicity’ - as his main tactic in this period to achieve the rhythm in his 1918-1919 paintings.

It should be noted that rhythm (whether natural or inward) is considered as a 'relative' factor in the composition. As Mondrian discussed in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in Painting*, in theory of Neo-Plasticism the relative, subjective element of rhythm opposes the exact and equilibrated relationship among the position of lines (absolute equilibrium, or repose). A relative rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting intervenes with the 'absolute' relationship among the position of lines in perpendicular angle. In this regard, in the third scene of the triologue Mondrian tried to convince the layman (Y) that the stars in the sky - the painting under analysis in the third scene - depict a more universal representation of the relationship between positions of lines. In contrast, he (Mondrian: Z) stated that the moon in the sky expresses a vague relationship to the plane of the sky. Mondrian (Z) further explained that the 'multitude' of stars as 'points' - and not as 'form' such as moon - represents a more universal expression of the relationship in the painting. In this respect, Mondrian in his triologue stated that the inward rhythm is achieved through the 'multiplicity' of lines at right angle (primordial relationship):

Through multiplicity, *rhythm* also arises. [...] The multiplicity of particularities creates *natural* rhythm, however, which *to some extent destroys the capriciousness of individual things*, while the multiplication of the primary relationship creates a more *inward* rhythm that in turn *destroys the absoluteness of this primary relationship*. (Mondrian 1919-1920, pp. 90-91)

From the above statement, we surmise that the repetition and multiplicity among the intensified elements of paintings in Neo-Plastic theory is indeed an effective method to create the rhythm. That is to say, Mondrian indicated that 'repetition' could be used to pluralize the relationships among the universal means of imaging. At this point, I agree with Tosaki's recent argument (2017) about the shift in Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in regard to the rhythm during 1919. In his 1917 essay, Mondrian mainly talked about rhythm as an individual and subjective expression of absolute whereas in his 1919-1920 essay *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* Mondrian postulated that rhythm is the

outcome of ‘multiplicity’ and equilibrium (harmony). Indeed, Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essay, considered an equal role for the rhythm and harmony (equilibrium). In this regard, in the quote stated above, he stated that the rhythm ‘destroys’ – better to say relativizes to some extent – the absolute relation between the position of his lines. Indeed, in his 1919-1920 essays, Mondrian furthered on his earlier method about the expression of rhythm. As it was studied, in some of his 1918-1919 paintings in this period he also used regular pattern of lines, which resulted in the creation of a vivid rhythm of lines against the white surface of the composition. At this point, I argue that, in contrast to the common standpoint of the scholars, most notably Tosaki’s recent argument (2017) which considered Mondrian’s early Neo-Plastic rhythm as ‘covert,’ ‘static,’ ‘non-repetitive,’ and ‘non-sequential’, the rhythm in the 1917-1919 compositions is depicted through the repetition and sequentiality of his means of imaging. Although we should not overlook the fact that Mondrian’s aesthetic vision toward rhythm after 1932, and particularly in his post-1934 writings, drastically changed from a partially static rhythm to a dynamic - or what Tosaki called an ‘ostensive’ and ‘kinetic’ – one, dynamic equilibrium, the rhythm in the early Neo-Plastic paintings by no means is a complete static experience. Such subtle dynamism in the rhythm is even expressed in some of the 1921-1932 paintings which were under study by Tosaki. As we will see in Chapter 5, the dynamism in these classic Neo-Plastic paintings is not only represented by the repetition of the lines, but also by the varying pulse of the thickness of the lines.

Indeed, Mondrian in the previous statement implicitly pointed to a method for creating the rhythm that he had theorized in his 1917 essay. As it was studied, Mondrian stated that rhythm was expressed through variant relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. From the above-mentioned statement we infer that the plurality of relationship among the position of lines at right angle subsequently results in the

multiplicity of relationship among the dimension of the planes. Thus, the rhythm in 1918-1919 compositions, similar to what Mondrian previously postulated, is primarily achieved through mutable relationships between dimensions of the planes that by themselves were created through the immutable relationship between positions of the lines at right angle. In the third scene of the dialogue, Mondrian (Z) explains this matter: “[i]n the New Plastic, rhythm, even though interiorized, continues to exist; it is, moreover, varied through the inequality of the relationships of dimension by which the relationship of position, the primordial relationship, is expressed” (Mondrian 1919-1920, p. 91).

Overall, I found that Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays mainly talked about his concept of rhythm in relation to what he had previously postulated in his 1917 essay. However, in his writing in this period he introduced two kinds of rhythm: natural rhythm and inward rhythm. Similar to his 1917 essay, in his writings in this period Mondrian introduced his inward rhythm as an interiorized, abstract, and relative expression in the composition, which contrasts the absolute expression of the equilibrium. Moreover, he talked about the conditions required to express the rhythm. Similar to his 1917 essay, he stated that the rhythm is achieved through the invariant relationship between position of lines and the one among the dimension of planes. However, in his 1919-1920 essays he also considered the ‘multiplicity’ of the means of imaging as an aesthetic condition to express a live and dynamic rhythm in his abstract-real paintings.

Moving to the visual analysis of the 1918-1919 paintings, we see that rhythm in these compositions, as Mondrian theorized, is expressed through the tactic of ‘multiplicity’ of the relationships among the position of lines at right angle. The good examples are his first two lozenge compositions (see figures 4.7 & 4.8). Although in these paintings the irregular grid of thicker width slightly suppressed the symmetrical and regular

arrangements of the lines, we find that the rhythm was chiefly articulated through the multiplicity of the relationships among lines. Similarly, we see that the rhythm in two checkerboards (figures 4.11 & 4.12) was expressed through the multiplicity of color planes. It is obvious that in the first two diamonds, Mondrian's emphasis was on the multiplicity of the lines, whereas in the two checkerboards he pluralized the color values of the planes. Indeed, in the two checkerboards the rhythm is mainly expressed through a color variation rather than mutable relationship between the dimensions of the planes.

Although, the rhythm in 1918-1919 compositions was articulated through the tactic of the multiplicity of relationship among the position of lines and dimension of the planes, we see that the expression of the rhythm is not chiefly dependent on the changeable relationship between the dimension and proportion of planes. This is because the relationships between the position of the lines and dimension of the planes were not expressed as exact and dominant in these paintings. In majority of 1918-1919 paintings the rhythm was not articulated through exact and equilibrated relationships between lines and planes because the lines are pale grey hue (figures 4.9 & 4.10) and in some cases (figures 4.11 & 4.12) the lines are very thin and, thereby, they are not represented as concrete in the composition. Moreover, due to the existence of regular grid lines - as in figures 4.7 and 4.8 - the planes are similar in size and so they could not establish exact equivalent opposition through variations in relationship among their dimensions. We infer that Mondrian during 1918-1919 was not yet committed to and had not finalized a theory to consistently use it to express the rhythm in his paintings. In contrast, in his 1919-1920 writings he explicitly indicated his method for the creation of the rhythm. Regardless of the fact that the rhythm was not expressed in all 1918-1919 compositions as Mondrian explained in his 1919-1920 essays, we see that Mondrian succeeded to express a more inward and dynamic rhythm in these paintings, compared to his 1917 paintings. That is to say, Mondrian in his 1918-1919 paintings depicted a

good demonstration of what he theorized about the conception of inward rhythm in his 1919-1920 essays.

4.3.4 Conclusion: 1918-1919 compositions and 1919-1920 writings

As it was studied, throughout the analysis of Mondrian's 1918-1919 essays and his 1919-1920 paintings we found slight developments in relation to his key Neo-Plastic concepts. In fact, majority of the formal concepts and theories that he discussed in this period were reinforcement and in some cases expansion of what he had stated in his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*. We also realized that in some cases what he postulated in his 1919-1920 essays, regarding his formal concepts and theories, had not yet been demonstrated in his canvases. In a nutshell, we found that contrary to the widely acknowledging argument that Mondrian's writings came after the creation of his paintings, in some cases his 1919-1920 writings are ahead of his 1918-1919 artistic experimentations. It is the point where looking at his paintings and various experimentations he did in such a short period of time (1918-1919) help us better understand his artistic development in relation to his key Neo-Plastic concepts. Although in his 1919-1920 essays, Mondrian shed light on the foundation of the formal theory of Neo-Plasticism, in those texts Mondrian had not talked about various experimentations he did during 1918-1919 to come up with the best method to express equilibrium and rhythm in his paintings. According to Michael White, one of the closest rationales for such a paradox is the lack of Mondrian's confidence to exhibit his paintings because of the unstable and cold art market during the War period (i.e. World War I). Indeed, Mondrian throughout 1917-1919 had more chances to publish his writings, particularly in the *De Stijl* magazine, rather than painting. Therefore, he primarily wrote his aesthetic ideas to heighten the aesthetic taste of the public for the reception of his pure abstract paintings. Based on historical evidences, Mondrian made very few paintings during 1915-1919 – only 3 paintings in 1917 and 16 paintings

throughout 1917-1919 – and he was more engaged with the circle of the friends, artists, and thinkers. As a result of the lack of artistic productivity and little dedication of his time to experiment his new aesthetic thoughts, as he wrote in his essays in the 1917-1920 period, it can be expected that he could not fully demonstrate in his paintings what he was theorizing at this time. However, what is important here is that such precedence of Mondrian's 1917-1919 writings to his 1917-1919 paintings needs more scrutiny of art historians to further illuminate such paradox. In general, I surmise that only in some cases there is a relation between what he had painted during 1918-1919 and what he had written in his 1919-1920 essays.

Regarding the characteristic of the means of imaging, Mondrian in *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and in triologue *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* stated that his means of imaging are flat rectangular planes of primary colors. However, we saw that he used very impure hue of colors in his 1918-1919 paintings and the colors were in many cases more inclined to his earlier Cubist earth tone palette. In respect to his concept of equivalence in means of imaging, Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays provided us with new information that was an extension to what he had earlier discussed in his 1917 essay. He stated that the equivalence means a distinct duality represented in the means of imaging. Furthermore, the equality of the line, color, or plane is not 'sameness' in size, color, or number of the elements of the painting. Nevertheless, in his 1918-1919 paintings we saw that the unity and equivalence between planes and lines was achieved based on similarity in size and color value of the planes rather than expression through an exact and 'equivalent duality' among the means of imaging.

Similar to his 1917 essay, Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays talked about his theory of dialectics of oppositions and its significance to establish the relationships. Similarly, we saw that lines in his 1918-1919 compositions were painted in a distinct duality.

However, the duality of lines in some of these paintings (particularly in the first two diamond paintings, see figure 4.7 & 4.8) was overemphasized. The regularity of crossing lines created a very glittering white spots in the intersection of the lines that disturbs our perception to see the lines in exact duality or opposition. As a result, the duality in these two cases was not shown as distinct and equilibrated as Mondrian stressed in his writings. Similarly, I found slight differences between what Mondrian explained in his 1919-1920 essays in respect to the expression of the equilibrium and what he painted in his 1918-1919 compositions. Due to the multiplicity of lines (as in figures 4.7 & 4.8), similar sizes of planes, as well as an intense optical effect in the intersection of the lines (see figures 4.11 & 4.12), I was convinced that equilibrium in these compositions was expressed to some degree as relative or what Mondrian called tragic. That is to say, in these paintings the equilibrium was not primarily attained through immutable relationship among lines. Due to similar reasons, the rhythm was also not articulated exactly based on what Mondrian had mentioned in his 1919-1920 essays. Instead, the rhythm was primarily created through Mondrian's tactic of 'multiplicity' in his 1918-1919 compositions. I saw that, in contrast to his negative viewpoint in regard to using repetition and symmetry to express harmony or equilibrium in his Neo-Plastic theory, he interestingly expressed the rhythm in some of his 1918-1919 paintings through the 'multiplicity' of his universal means of imaging. Overall, I inferred that only in some cases there is a relation between what Mondrian painted in his 1918-1919 compositions and what he theorized about his formal concepts and theories in his 1919-1920 essays.

4.4 Early Neo-Plastic compositions (1919-1923)

4.4.1 Selected essays to analyze Mondrian's artistic development during 1919-1925

To analyze Mondrian's artistic development toward his key Neo-Plastic concepts in the early years of Neo-Plasticism, his writings published between mid-1920 and 1925 were

analyzed. These essays, except *Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence*, are mainly short texts Mondrian wrote to discuss the relation of his Neo-Plastic theories to other arts such as literature, music, and architecture. Indeed, Mondrian after the rationalization and justification of his formal concepts and theories of Neo-Plasticism in his pre-mature Neo-Plastic period (1917-1920), was further motivated to write in a literary style to additionally demonstrate the implication and applicability of his aesthetic rules in other arts such as music and architecture as well as life.

The first essay which was used in this section is *Le Néo-Plasticisme: Principe general de reequivalence plastique - Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence* (1920). Mondrian wrote this essay in the first half of the 1920 and it is the first piece that appeared in French in Paris.⁵⁶ According to Veen (2011), in this essay Mondrian discussed the possibilities for implementing his universal principles of Neo-Plasticism in different arts such as architecture, sculpture, literature, music, theater, and dance (p. 124). This essay is among Mondrian's important writings because in this text he talked in abundance about concepts such as harmony, equilibrium, and importance of his doctrine of oppositions. More importantly in this essay Mondrian explained more in detail about his concept 'new harmony' or 'harmony of art' - l'harmonie de l'art - which he distinguished from the 'old harmony' or 'natural harmony' - l'harmonie naturelle - in representational art.

Mondrian's other two important essays in this period are *De 'Bruiters Futuristes Italiens' en 'het' nieuwe in de muziek - The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists' Bruiteurs* - and *Neo-Plasticisme. Sa realisation dans la*

⁵⁶ According to Veen's scrutiny (2011), Mondrian first wrote the essay *Le Néo-Plasticisme* in Dutch, and then it was translated into French by help of his friend Van Eck in Paris. As Veen further explained the original Dutch version of this essay was not found (p. 125).

musique et au theatre futur - Neo-Plasticism: Its realization in Music and in Future Theatre. In both essays, Mondrian discussed similarities between his Neo-Plastic principles and modern music of Futurist composer Luigi Russolo.

The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists' Bruiteurs was originally written in Dutch in July 1921 and published in two issues of *De Stijl* in August and September 1921 (Veen, 2017a, p. 199). According to Holtzman and James (1986), this essay is the first text Mondrian wrote between 1921 and 1927 that shows the relation between Neo-Plasticism and music (p. 148). Mondrian's main motivation of for writing this essay⁵⁷ was the concert of the Futurists' painter and music composer Luigi Russolo in June 1921 in Paris. In fact, in this essay Mondrian tried to show that his Neo-Plastic principles are universal aesthetic rules and they could be applied on contemporary art such as modern music, architecture, and literature.

The other essay *Neo-Plasticism: Its realization in Music and in Future Theatre*, is indeed a supplement⁵⁸ to the earlier 1921 essay - *The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists' Bruiteurs*. Similarly, in this essay Mondrian discussed relation of the Neo-Plastic principles to modern music, particularly to the Futurist music *Bruiteurs*. In this essay, he praised modern and new approaches toward the expression of the beauty and harmony in Russolo's modern music as an important step forward to express a 'new' consciousness and spirit in art. Overall, these two essays, although

⁵⁷ According to one of Mondrian's letter to *De Stijl* architect Oud in August 1921, Mondrian stated that he had seen Luigi Russolo's concert in Paris and was motivated to write this essay. In this concert, Russolo used 27 of his so-called music instrument '*Intonarumori*' - noise machines (Veen, 2011, p. 134). Indeed, Luigi Russolo was one of the Futurist artists who were initiated by their leader F. T. Marinetti in Italy. Russolo's Futurist music was mainly based on the 'noise' and not the common tonal music and melody called *Bruiteurs*. This is also indicated in the title of the essay Mondrian wrote in July 1921. According to Veen (2011), this essay was widely welcomed and criticized in Paris. It was translated into French by Mondrian's friend Van Eck. It was also published in *De Stijl* magazine in 1923 in German.

⁵⁸ This essay appeared around six months after writing *The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists' Bruiteurs*. In two letters sent to Theo van Doesburg in October and December 1921, it is clear that Mondrian wrote this essay continuing with his previous essay in relation to Neo-Plastic principles and their implication and manifestation in Futurist music.

written in relation to the music, are important texts since in these two essays Mondrian explained his Neo-Plastic principles.

Beside music, Mondrian in essays of this period discussed the universality of his Neo-Plastic principles in relation to the architecture in which he had found closest affinity to his Neo-Plastic art. Among these essays written in relation to the architecture is *De realiseering van het Neo-Plasticisme in verre toekomst en in de huidige Architectuur - The Realization of Neo-Plasticism in the Distant Future and in Architecture Today* (1922). According to Holtzman and James, Mondrian wrote this essay in relation to the article of J.J.P. Oud published in 1921.⁵⁹ Oud in parallel to the premises of De Stijl group tried to abolish all the ornamentation and use of handicrafts in architecture. Instead Oud - in parallel to what Mondrian postulated in his Neo-Plasticism - tried to propagate that architecture needs simplicity, and the main structure of building should be based on the factory-made materials like steel and glass in straight angle. Nevertheless, from the letters it is clear that Oud was not certain about the applicability of Neo-Plastic principles in practice in architecture design. Indeed, Oud insisted that architects need their own architectural rules to express form in space. On the other hand, Mondrian tried to convince Oud that architects should use the Neo-Plastic principles as used in his paintings. Although, this debate between Oud and Mondrian remained unresolved, such discrepancy between two figures motivated Mondrian to write *De realiseering van het Neo-Plasticisme in verre toekomst en in de huidige Architectuur* in defense of his position.

⁵⁹ According to Holtzman and James (1986), Oud in his article entitled '*Over de toekomstige bouwkunst en hare architectonische mogelijkheden*' reinforced his argument by illustrating the painting of Severini's, a Cubist landscape by Survage, and one of Mondrian's 1918 compositions. However, Oud in his article had not indicated Mondrian's standpoint about architecture - previously discussed in Mondrian's dialogue and his French pamphlet. This was the main motivation for Mondrian to write '*De realiseering van het Neo-Plasticisme in verre toekomst en in de huidige Architectuur*' - *The Realization of Neo-Plasticism in the Distant Future and in Architecture Today* - which was followed by two shorter essays about architecture in this period.

To analyze Mondrian's artistic theories and concepts in this period, other texts of Mondrian such as *Moet de schilderkunst minderwaardig zijn aan de bouwkunst? - Is Painting Inferior to Architecture?* (1923); and *L'architecture future neo-plasticienne - The Neo-Plastic Architecture of the Future* (1925) were used under analysis. In both texts, Mondrian discussed the relation between architecture and Neo-Plastic principles. The former was published in the late 1923 in *De Stijl* magazine. According to Veen (2011), the main inspirational source for writing this essay was the *De Stijl* architecture exhibition held in the *Galerie de l'Effort Moderne*⁶⁰ in Paris from mid-October to mid-November 1923. The latter essay was published in autumn 1925 in magazine *L'Architecture Vivante*, in reaction to group exhibition of *De Stijl* architectures held by management of Theo van Doesburg in 1923 and 1924 in Paris.

In addition, in this section other writings of Mondrian in which he discussed about his Neo-Plastic principles in painting were used under analysis. Amongst the most important essays he wrote between 1923 and 1925 in relation to his formal Neo-Plastic theories and concepts are *Het Neo-Plasticisme - Neo-Plasticism* (1923), *Geen axioma maar beeldend principe - No Axiom but the Plastic Principle* (1923), and *A bas l'harmonie traditionnelle - Down with Traditional Harmony* (1924). Mondrian originally wrote *Neo-Plasticism* (1923) in Dutch and it was published in October 1923 in magazine *Merz* (Germany, Hanover). He wrote this essay in support of the Dadaist ideas in which the *Kurt Chitters* - editor of *Merz* - aimed to propagate those ideas in his journal. As such Mondrian in *Neo-Plasticism* supported Dadaists break away from the conventional style of writing in literature (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 175). In *Neo-Plasticism* Mondrian discussed about the principles of Neo-Plasticism in relation to art and life.

⁶⁰ According to scrutiny of Veen (2011), Mondrian in a letter to *De Stijl* architect Oud in November 1923 declared that he had seen this exhibition and he (Mondrian) found the works of architects close to Neo-Plastic art (p. 161).

Mondrian wrote *No Axiom but the Plastic Principle* in 1923. This short essay was published in August 1924 in *De Stijl* magazine. This text is amongst the last contribution of Mondrian to *De Stijl* magazine before his separation from *De Stijl* group. In this short essay Mondrian stressed on two key concepts ‘immutable, and ‘mutable’ and the relativity in everything. In this short essay, Mondrian explained on his core Neo-Plastic theories and concepts particularly in relation to the concepts such as duality, immutable relationship between position of lines, relativity of the rhythm, and equilibrated relationship as harmony, equilibrium. The other essay, used in this section, is *Down with Traditional Harmony* (1924) that was originally written in French and planned to be published in a Futurist magazine *Noi*. However, this essay remained unpublished in Mondrian’s lifetime. In this essay, Mondrian supported the Futurist’s viewpoints on the expression of harmony in art as a new artistic vision which was also stressed in Neo-Plastic art. In a nutshell in this essay, Mondrian distinguished his conception of new harmony from the old harmony.

4.4.2 Mondrian’s return to Paris and the 1920-1923 Neo-Plastic compositions

After returning to Paris in June 1919, Mondrian faced monumental developments in abstract art. In Paris he found out that he should clearly define his position in the circle of artists who were working in different styles such as classicist realism, Dada, and Surrealism (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 127). Indeed, the active and dynamic atmosphere of the metropolitan city of Paris was very significant in changing Mondrian’s vision toward his paintings. According to Blotkamp, the “hectic traffic, tall buildings, facades covered with colourful posters, and electric signs against the night sky” (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 170) were all seminal factors which caused noticeable changes in the appearance of Mondrian’s paintings. Such impact of Paris’ environment on Mondrian is immediately felt when we compare the last works he painted in Netherlands (two checkerboards) and his paintings in Paris. In the first place, in his Parisian works the colors are brighter and

puer. Moreover, the colors have more contrast with each other. Another important factor which grew him and provided Mondrian with a new energy was his move to a new studio in Paris. In November 1919, he moved to a new studio located at 5 rue de Coulmiers. His new studio was lighter and more appealing to him since there was a source of light at top of the building. Overall, the new atmosphere of Paris, his new studio, as well as the circle of friends and artists in Paris were seminal factors in the development of Mondrian's aesthetic vision.

After returning to Paris and in the first few months, Mondrian painted very few paintings and he was mainly engaged with writing his artistic theories within an essay *Natural and Abstract Reality*. In the first few months, Mondrian visited his old friends such as Mexican painter Diego Rivera and sculptor Alexander Archipenko. He also attended exhibitions such as that of Picasso's recent works showed in the Leonce Rosenberg gallery. Surprisingly, Mondrian after returning to Paris realized that those avant-garde artists such as Picasso and Gino Severini whose works he had admired before war period (1912-1914), were practicing classicist-realist style. In short, he found that many artists in Paris were also inclined with traditional figurative painting. In such a situation, Mondrian in 1919 found himself isolated and alone in Paris with his pure abstract style. Indeed, it was van Doesburg, and not Mondrian, who succeeded to propagate the modern premises of De Stijl in Paris. Doesburg in his short visits of Paris during 1920 and 1921 succeeded to establish close contacts with art galleries and Dada, Futurists, and Cubist artists. As a result of Van Doesburg's endeavors, he held an exhibition of Cubist group La Section d'Or in Netherlands.

When in 1919 Mondrian returned to Paris he found difficulty in adapting himself to the new situation; he realized that his painting is far more abstract than those of Picasso and Braque. Only very few people could apprehend his avant-garde painting in Paris.

According to Seuphor, during 1920-1926, Mondrian struggled to financially support himself in Paris. Collectors in Paris were hardly interested in buying Neo-Plastic paintings. As a result, during 1922-1925 he had to paint, contrary to his own interest, flowers and give his flower paintings to his Dutch friends such as Van Domselaer and Salomon Slijper to sell them in Netherlands. Beside such financial problems, Mondrian in early years of his stay in Paris succeeded in exhibiting his works. In November 1923, Mondrian exhibited some of his works in an exhibition of De Stijl group arranged by Leonce Rosenberg in La Galerie L'Effort Moderne, Rue de la Baume.

According to Seuphor, many art critics in Paris, who could not understand Mondrian's radical art theories embodied in his Neo-Plastic paintings, talked about his "mental laziness," "stupid obstinacy," and "incapability to renew himself" (Seuphor, 1956, p. 151). Indeed, these art critics could not fathom Mondrian's avant-garde paintings which were ahead of the frontiers of abstract art. Even in 1920 Mondrian almost gave up. He planned to return back to Netherlands and start a job as a waiter in a cafe and quit his painting career for ever. Suddenly everything changed good for him when once again he received financial aids from his friends and Salmon Slijper (an art collector) found more buyers for Mondrian's flower paintings (Deicher, 1999). Although many art critics in Paris attacked Mondrian with negative words, Mondrian never quit his mission to propagate the art theories which he believed are universal principles for creating a new life.

After a short historical overview on Mondrian's position after 1919 in Paris, I move on to examine the characteristics of 1919-1923 paintings. The outcome of Mondrian's 1914-1919 experimentations was the proposal of the first Neo-Plastic composition in

1919-1920.⁶¹ During his post-cubist and abstract-real period Mondrian explored various possibilities to express the equilibrium and rhythm as pure as possible. In *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (figure 4.6) and two checkerboards (figures 4.11 & 4.12) he succeeded to determine, although not perfectly, the color planes through the use of lines in principal opposition (right angle). Using lines to delimit and determine the planes of color was a seminal step to further remove contrast between figure and ground and to express the equivalent relationship or equilibrium in the composition.

After moving to Paris in July 1919, Mondrian sought solutions to address shortcomings in his previous works that were created due to the existence of a regular grid.⁶² To this end, he stopped using repetition and symmetry in his compositions. In 1919-1923 compositions, we see that the canvas is divided asymmetrically by lines and, thereby, their intersection creates unequal-sized planes. In his post-1919 works, Mondrian also used purer hue for primary colors. Nevertheless, as Blotkamp (1994) also indicated, Mondrian in his 1919-1920 paintings did not use a saturated hue of primary colors and the colors are slightly tinted with white and grey⁶³. The lines, similar to two checkerboards (see figures 4.11 & 4.12), are thin in 1919 and early 1920 compositions. These characteristics found in the first Neo-Plastic compositions were started in the mid 1919 but were completed in 1920: *Composition with Red, Yellow, Blue and Black* (Figure 4.13) and *No. VI / Composition No.II* (figure 4.14). In fact, these two works

⁶¹ It should be emphasized that henceforth, in parallel to Mondrian, I refer to his works executed after 1919 as 'Neo-Plastic' rather than abstract-real. Although Mondrian continued to use the term abstract-real in his essays until 1922, he used this term more in retrospect that is linked to new term as Neo-Plastic or the Dutch term *nieuwe beelding*. Indeed, Mondrian used the term abstract-real in his early essays to distinguish his pure abstract art, as a new style, from representational painting.

⁶² According to Blotkamp (1994) and evidences found in Mondrian's letter, Mondrian was well aware of the shortcomings like repetition and symmetry in his previous compositions, which were also criticized by van Doesburg in 1919.

⁶³ According to Blotkamp, Mondrian never set a fixed hue for the triad of primary colors in his compositions. Therefore, the primary colors particularly in the 1919 to mid-1920 compositions varied from one painting to another. For example, red color was used within ranges from a bright orange to purple; blue is sometimes close to ultramarine and sometimes to light cobalt; and finally yellow was sometimes used as greenish yellow and sometimes as warm yellow. However, after mid-1920, Mondrian stopped tinting his colors with white and grey, but he continued to use the colors in slight variations of primary hues in his paintings (Blotkamp, 1994, pp. 173-174).

share common visual characteristics with previously studied 1918 paintings such as *Composition with Colour Planes and Grey Lines* (figure 4.6). However, in these 1919-1920 paintings the colors are saturated hues and lines are dark grey.

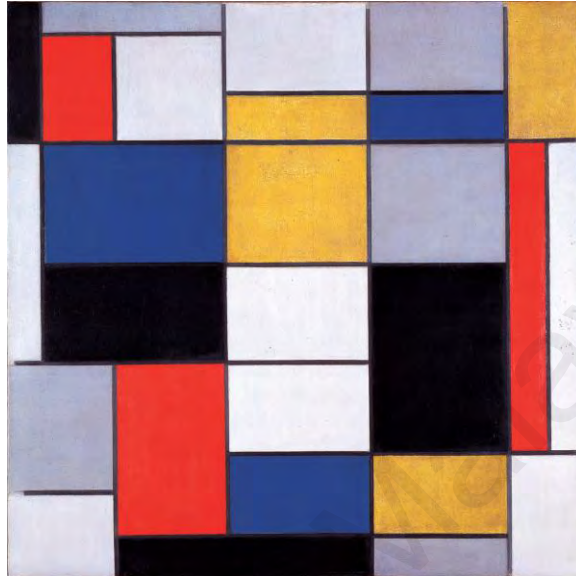


Figure 4.13: Piet Mondrian. 1919. *Composition with Red, Yellow, Blue and Black*. Oil on canvas. 90 x 91 cm. Reproduced with the permission of Rome, National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art. By permission of Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo.

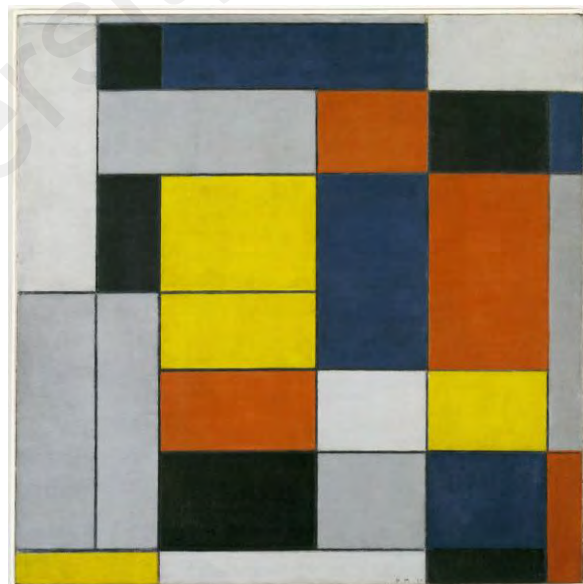


Figure 4.14: Piet Mondrian. 1920. *No. VI / Composition No. IIa*. 997 x 1003 mm. Reproduced with the permission of © Tate Gallery London. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)

In later 1920 paintings, *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (figure 4.15) and *Composition with Red Yellow, Blue and Black* (figure 4.16), lines are thicker and they are solid black. Moreover, in 1920 compositions, lines intersected more asymmetrically in a way they did not create a grid. Mondrian in these paintings also started using white, light grey, and black that he called ‘noncolors’ in his writings. We saw that Mondrian had used shades of grey in his previous 1918-1919 compositions. However, he had not used grey, black, and white as a triad of noncolors in those early paintings. Similar to his 1918-1919 paintings, in his 1919 compositions (see figures 4.13 & 4.14) the grey color is in different hues: in darker and lighter tones.⁶⁴ As a result, the colors in relation to these variations of grey are perceived relatively subjective and in different levels of depth in respect to each other. In his 1920 compositions, a lighter shade of grey was consistently used (see figures 4.15, 4.16, & 4.17). As a result, we find the colors in more harmony in these paintings. According to Blotkamp (1994), the use of light grey helped Mondrian to further minimize contrast between the white surface of the canvas and saturated hue of color planes. Bois (1994) asserted that noncolors helped Mondrian abolish the atmospheric space which was very ostensive in 1917 compositions. I agree with the interpretations of Bois and Blotkamp. However, I assert that by using noncolors Mondrian primarily aimed to further reinforce the representation of relationship between colors. In absence of the triad of noncolors in 1917-1919 compositions, we saw that colors were, more or less, translated in isolation from the ground. However, in these compositions, we see that colors and noncolors established, more integratedly, a relationship between their values in the ground.

⁶⁴ According to Blotkamp (1994), the noncolors in these early compositions (see figures 4.13 & 4.14) were related to one of the primary colors. As such, the black links to the blue, the medium grey is visually related to the red, and the light grey relates to the yellow (p. 174).

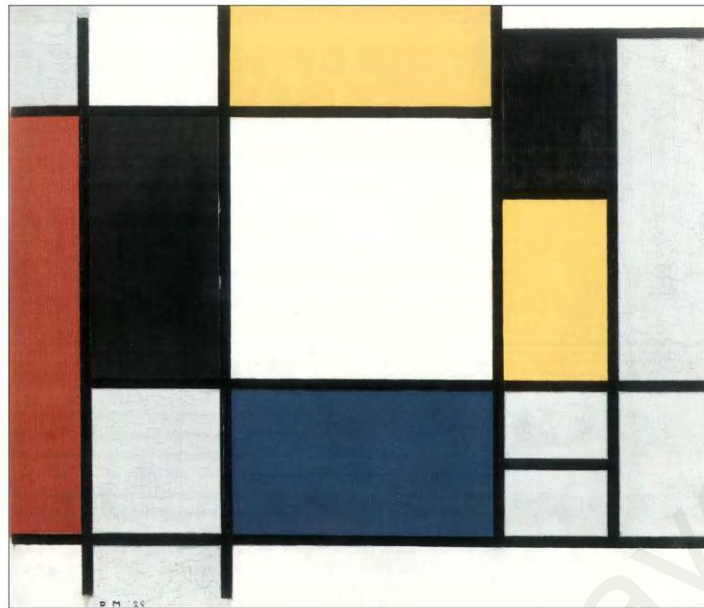


Figure 4.15: Piet Mondrian. 1920. Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue. Oil on canvas, 51.5 x 61 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

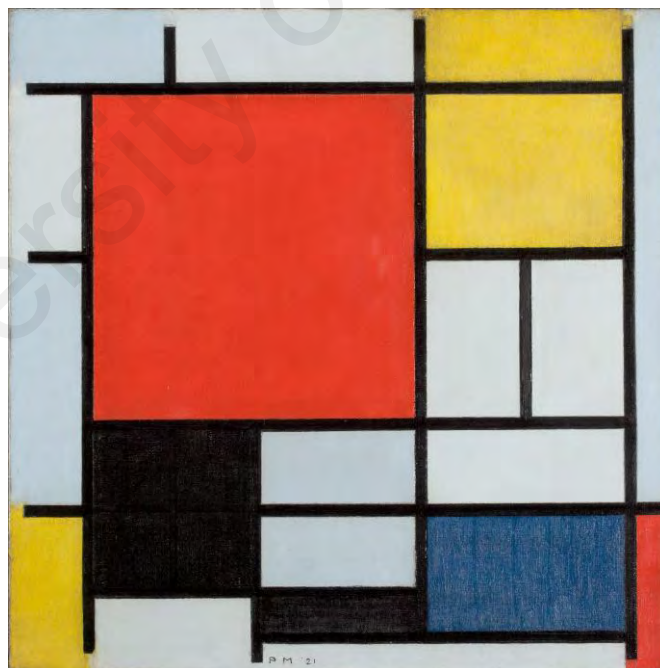


Figure 4.16: Piet Mondrian. 1920. Composition with Red Yellow, Blue and Black. Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 59.5 cm. Reproduced with the permission of Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

In the next series of compositions painted in 1921, we see that the number of lines is reduced and they are shifted to the periphery of the composition. In other words, as Bois (1994) stated, the scale of plane's size is enlarged in respect to the proportion of the canvas. Furthermore, each primary color only appears once and they are separated from each other by noncolors. The colors are also purer in these compositions. These characteristics are related to 1921 paintings such as *Composition with Large Blue Plane, Red, Black, Yellow, and Gray* (figure 4.17), *Composition with red, yellow, black, blue and grey* (figure 4.18), and *Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray* (figure 4.19).

One of the common characteristics of the 1920-1922 paintings is that the lines are not completely extended to the edges of the canvas. There is variety of arguments about Mondrian's inclination to paint incomplete lines to the edges of his compositions in this period. Some scholars such as Welsh and Elder believe that it goes back to De Stijl principles. In this respect, the De Stijl artists stated that the incomplete extension of lines to the edges of the canvas is necessary to create illusion of growth or expansion of colors beyond the boundary of line (Elder, 2006, p. 13). Similarly, Welsh stated that: "the practice originated from a fear that the abstract composition would lose its organic compactness if all lines were carried through to the edge of the composition, bisecting it completely" (as cited in Carmean, 1979, p. 31). However, Bois (1994) argued that Mondrian's reluctance to extend the lines to the edges of his canvases is related to his intention not to depict the lines as grid (p. 324). Regardless of scholars' diverse viewpoints in regards to rationalization of Mondrian's choice for leaving the lines incomplete to the edges of his composition in this period, what is important is Mondrian's consistency in this tactic in almost all the Neo-Plastic paintings, executed from 1920 to 1922.

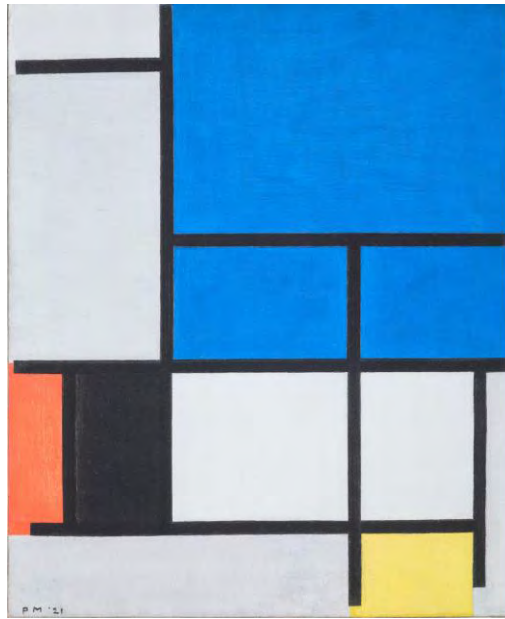


Figure 4.17: Piet Mondrian. 1921. Composition with Large Blue Plane, Red, Black, Yellow, and Gray. Oil on canvas. 23 3/4 × 19 5/8 in. (60.33 × 49.85 cm). Reproduced with the permission of Dallas Museum of Art, Foundation for the Arts Collection, gift of Mrs. James H. Clark 1984.200. FA

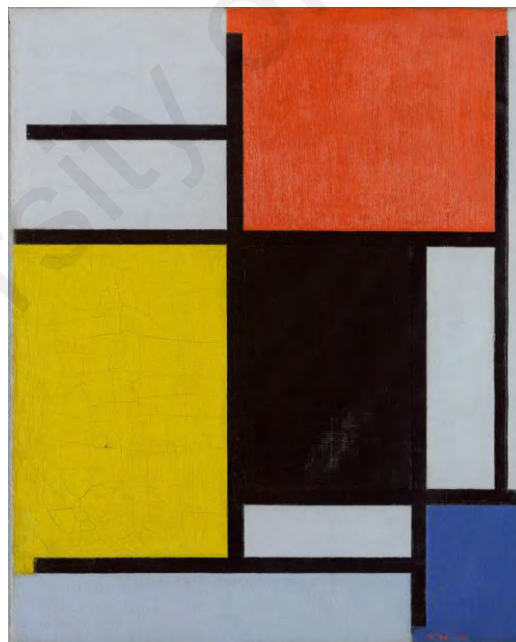


Figure 4.18: Piet Mondrian. 1921. Composition with red, yellow, black, blue and grey. Reproduced with the permission of Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.



Figure 4.19: Piet Mondrian. 1921. Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray. Oil on canvas. 23 5/8 x 23 5/8 in. (60 x 60 cm). Reproduced with the permission of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, U.S.A. Gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., 1957.307.

During 1922-1923, the number of lines and color planes were further reduced, compared to those 1919-1921 compositions. More importantly, we see that all the colored planes shifted to the periphery of the composition. The congregation of planes in the sides of the composition is one of the common characteristics of the 1922 and 1923 paintings. In this respect, Blotkamp categorized these compositions as 'peripheral' types. Such instances of peripheral type of compositions are characterized as series of small sized canvases such as: *Composition with Blue, Yellow, Red, and Black* (1922) - figure 4.20, *Composition with Blue, Yellow, Red, Black, and Grey* (1922) - figure 4.21, and *Tableau, with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red and Grey* (1923) - figure 4.22.

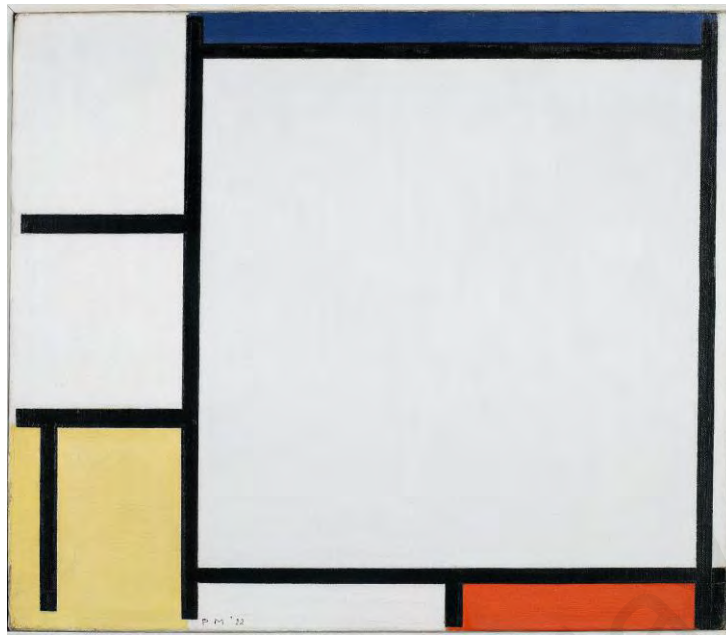


Figure 4.20: Piet Mondrian. 1922. Composition with Blue, Yellow, Red, and Black. Oil on canvas, 42 x 49 cm. The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of Bruce B. Dayton.

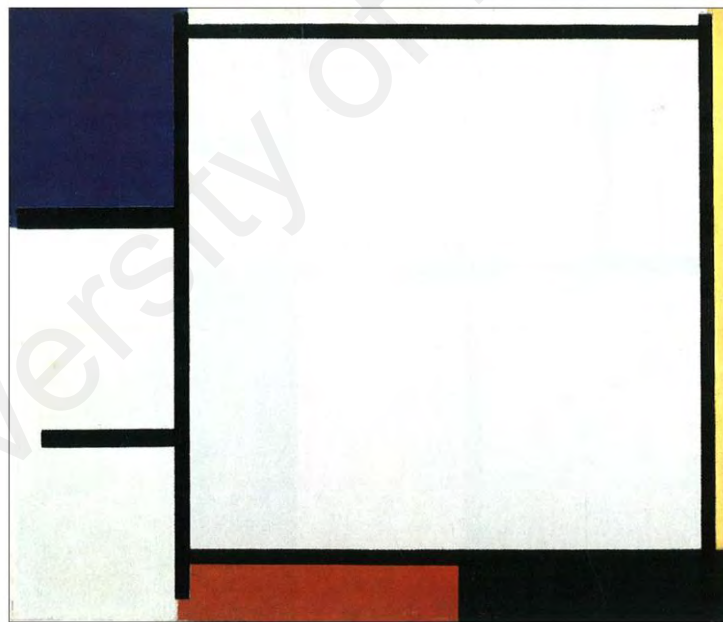


Figure 4.21: Piet Mondrian. 1922. Composition with Blue, Yellow, Red, Black, and Grey. Oil on canvas, 42 x 49 cm. The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

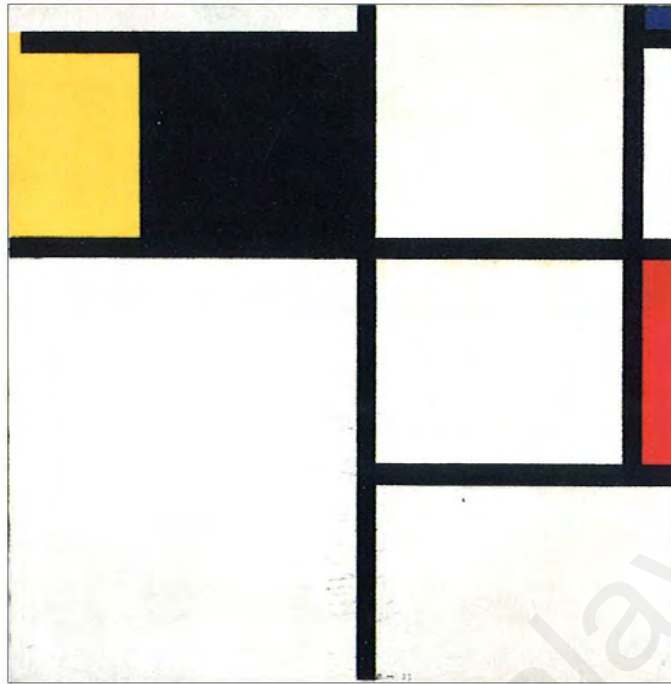


Figure 4.22: Piet Mondrian. 1923. Tableau, with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red and Grey. Oil on canvas. 54 x 53.5 cm. (from Bax, 2001, p. 225).

4.4.3 Analysis of the key aesthetic concepts in 1919-1923 compositions and 1920-1925 writings

4.4.3.1 Characteristics of the means of imaging or plastic means

Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings emphasized on what he had postulated about the means of imaging in his 1917-1920 essays. In this period, for the first time he introduced the triad of ‘noncolors’ - white, grey, and black - as opposite pair for the triad of primary colors. He defined his means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of color and noncolor. We find that elements of paintings in his 1919-1923 paintings are similar to what he described in his 1920-1925 essays. However, when we look at these paintings we infer that the planes in the periphery of these compositions are not completely delimited by the lines. Therefore, the planes in the peripheral sides of these paintings are not in complete agreement to the Mondrian’s definition of his purified colors and forms. Overall, we find almost a similar development and relation between Mondrian’s paintings in his 1919-1923 and his description of the means of imaging in

his 1920-1925 essays. Moreover, we realize that during 1920-1925 Mondrian's artistic ideas in respect to his means of imaging further developed, compared to the earlier 1917-1919 period.

From the earlier 1917-1920 essays, we found that means of imaging (plastic means) are rectangular planes of color that are delimited by the lines. Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings for the first time introduced triad of 'noncolors'⁶⁵ (white, grey, and black) as opposite pair for primary colors. As we saw, one of the main problems in the earlier compositions was lack of the series of colors to oppose to the triad of red, blue, and yellow. Although in some of the 1918-1919 compositions (see figures 4.9, 4.10, and 4.12) some shades of grey were used, these grey colors were not exact oppositions for the impure hue of red, blue, and yellow. However, in 1919-1923 compositions, the triad of grey, white, and black is used dominantly which opposes the triad of primary colors. In line with the use of these noncolors in his 1919-1923 compositions, Mondrian in his essay in *The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists' Bruiteurs* as early as 1921 said: "[o]bjects and beings are thus reduced to a universal plastic means that 'expresses' them but does not presume to represent them. This new reality in painting is a composition of color and noncolor" (Mondrian, 1921, p. 150). Similarly, in his 1922 essay *Neo-Plasticism: Its Realization in Music and in Future Theater* Mondrian stated that: "[i]n Neo-Plastic painting the plastic means is determined color, the duality of color and noncolor" (Mondrian, 1922a, p. 161). From these statements, we perceive that in theory of Neo-Plasticism colors and noncolors are universal means of imaging, which are distilled and transformed version of particular forms in nature.

⁶⁵ It is noteworthy that Mondrian in none of his earlier essays such as *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality* talked about 'noncolors.' It can be inferred that Mondrian in this period (1919-1920) did not envisage noncolors as essential means of imaging. Similarly, noncolors were not used as equal as primary colors in the studied 1918-1919 compositions. Only in the last diamond painting (figure 4.10) and in *Checkerboard, Light Colors* (figure 4.12) grey is used amongst other colors.

Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings - similar to his 1917-1919 essays - stressed that colors and noncolors should be painted as flat rectangular planes. He defined his means of imaging, plastic means, as planes of color and noncolor that are determined through opposing vertical and horizontal lines. From his writings in this period we understand that flat planes of color and noncolor⁶⁶ are transformed, interiorized, version of naturalistic forms which are necessary to establish the 'relationship.' In his French pamphlet *Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence* he stated as follows:

In the New Plastic, painting no longer expresses itself through the *corporeality* of appearance that gives it a naturalistic expression. To the contrary, painting is expressed plastically by *plane within plane*. By reducing three dimensional corporeality to a single plane, *it expresses pure relationship*. (Mondrian, 1920, p. 138)

In the above-mentioned statement, Mondrian indeed emphasized on two dimensionality of the surface of his Neo-Plastic compositions as one of the important aesthetic conditions in theory of Neo-Plasticism. Nevertheless, in addition to other scholars' common arguments, I acknowledge that Mondrian rarely achieved an absolute two-dimensional painting throughout his experimentations. Firstly, the primary hues of colors create a sense of depth and emboss in our perception. Secondly, the variety in thickness of lines, particularly used in the post-1924 compositions, creates an illusion of depth of field and perspective of the lines in respect to the white surface of the composition.

⁶⁶ It is interesting that Mondrian in essays of this period tried to theorize the idea that the primary colors, as purified version of natural colors, should also be used as substantial element and integral to the architecture. Similarly, he considered for the 'sound' in music a similar role as colors in painting. Furthermore, he considered for the nonsound (noise) a similar role as noncolors in his Neo-Plastic painting. In short, in essays of this period, he wished to show the possibility of having the universal means of expression and, therefore, equivalence and pure relationship in other arts, particularly in music and architecture. Moreover, he discussed that this end could be attained through equilibrium and pure unity between life's opposition in man's consciousness and through the use of intuition.

In his 1921 essay *The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists' Bruiteurs*, Mondrian further discussed the process of the transformation of natural forms into a pure abstract or what he called interiorized, intensified, purified form. He stated that the abstraction does not mean a one-way act of the destruction of 'outward' appearance - corporeality - of form. Yet the universal means of imaging are the result of a twofold action of the interiorization of the corporeality of objects and exteriorization or what he called 'crystallization' of the inwardness of the object. The inwardness for Mondrian is the pure state of the spiritual which is from a complete metaphysical essence whereas the 'outward' is a physical or naturalistic appearance of objects and entities. As Mondrian stated, such equivalence between inwardness and outwardness of objects can only be attained through the composition of rectangular planes of color and noncolor:

Neo-Plasticism found the new reality in painting by *abstracting what is most outward and by determining (or crystallizing) what is most inward*. It established this new reality through the composition of *rectangular planes in color and non color*, which replaced limited form. (Mondrian, 1921, p. 150)

As such, we realize that as much as pure abstract art of Neo-Plasticism is based on the destruction of naturalistic forms and subjectivity in painting, it is also equally based on the reconstruction of a new Neo-Plastic form. Such argument is indeed a complimentary idea to common interpretation of scholars, notably Bois and Blotkamp, who mostly emphasized only on the destructive aspect of Neo-Plastic painting. Nevertheless, by reading Mondrian's text we realize that Mondrian, as early as 1921, was aware of a twofold process of destruction-construction as his method for abstracting naturalistic forms. As we will see in Chapter 6, in the post-1932 compositions, and when Mondrian started destroying the pictoriality and thingness of his means of imaging, as intensified

elements of his painting, through his tactic of plurality, there was also a counter-act of reconstruction as a dynamic equilibrium (rhythm) between distilled form and space.

Mondrian in his 1920-1925 essays also explained his rationale for the depiction of planes as flat rectangles. Similar to his 1917-1919 essays, he stated that colors could only be depicted as universal and purified on a flat plane. In his 1922 essay *Neo-Plasticism: Its Realization in Music and in Future Theater* he stated that: “[f]or color to become determined it must be (1) *plane*, (2) *pure* (primary), and (3) *exactly defined without being limited*. That is why color is employed in *rectangular planes*” (Mondrian, 1922a, p. 161).⁶⁷ Mondrian in his 1917 essay also pointed to these three phases of the purification of colors. As he previously had discussed, the third condition is the most important phase to purify or interiorize colors. According to Mondrian, the lines never ‘limit’ the colors or noncolors. Instead the lines merely determine or *define* the relationship between proportion and dimension of color and noncolor planes. In his 1923 essay *Neo-Plasticism*, not only Mondrian pointed to the importance of lines to purify and interiorize colors, but also he pointed out to triad of noncolors as his universal means of imaging that are opposite pair to the triad of colors. As we will see in Chapter 5, what Mondrian stated in the above-mentioned quote, he later, in 1926, restated in the first principle of Neo-Plasticism.

This plastic expression of planes is determined by the straight and is realized in pure primary colors (yellow, blue, and red) opposed to noncolor (white, black, and gray). [...] Neo-Plasticism expresses itself as a multiplicity of rectangular planes or rectangular prisms in color and noncolor. (Mondrian, 1923b, p. 176)

Another important topic in 1920-1925 writings in relation to the means of imaging is Mondrian’s discussion of two traditions of painting: new art (Neo-Plastic art) and old art (representational painting). He called the latter a ‘morphoplastic’ expression in art

⁶⁷ Italics are originally in the text.

whereas the former is a Neo-Plastic expression in art.⁶⁸ In his 1922 essay he separated his Neo-Plastic painting from morphoplastic as follows: “Neo-Plasticism is not for artists who are ‘content’ with morphoplastic expression” (Mondrian, 1922a, p. 157). The key gap between these two expressions in art is the matter of exactness, purity, and universal expression of relationships. In theory of Neo-Plasticism, as long as the morphoplastic expression - i.e. corporeality of form - is dominant in painting, the ‘relationship’ among elements of painting could not be established pure, exact, and so equivalent. Similar to his early essays, Mondrian called subjective or morphoplastic expression a ‘tragic’ expression in his new art.

Overall, we found that Mondrian in his 1920-1925 essays for the first time informed us about some concepts and theories which he had not discussed in his previous writings. Firstly, he introduced ‘noncolors’ as a new element of his painting. Moreover, he expanded his discussion about the characteristics of his means of imaging in relation to what he had previously postulated in his 1917-1919 essays. He defined his means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of color and noncolor. Lastly in this period, he further distinguished a Neo-Plastic as a universal expression in painting from what he called a ‘morphoplastic’ as a tragic, subjective expression in painting.

Moving from a theoretical analysis of Mondrian’s writings in this period to visual analysis of 1919-1923 paintings, we see that the characteristics of the means of imaging in the 1919-1923 compositions is similar to what Mondrian described in his 1920-1925 writings. In the first place, and in contrast to earlier 1917-1919 compositions, the colors

⁶⁸ Mondrian explained his term of ‘plastic’ as whatsoever which constructs the image (*beelding* in Dutch). As such, the ‘morphoplastic’ is in direct contrast with ‘Neo-Plastic’ or in Dutch terminology *Nieuwe Beelding* in a way the former depends on the particularity of form. Mondrian in his 1921 essay, *The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists’ Bruiteurs*, defined the term plastic as follows: “[t]he conception of the word ‘plastic’ has also been limited by individual interpretations. It has been narrowed to mean ‘morphoplastic’; but in a deeper and broader sense, ‘plastic’ means ‘what produces an image’ and only that” (Mondrian, 1921, p. 151). As such, the morphoplastic is the corporeality of objects in nature whereas the ‘plastic’ is the pure abstract manifestation of such corporeality or morphoplastic in Neo-Plastic painting.

are purer. Although, colors are still tinted with grey and white in the first two compositions of 1919 (see figures 4.13 and 4.14), in post-1920 compositions the triad of primary colors are almost pure in hue. Nonetheless, there are still noticeable changes in hues of blue, red, and yellow in 1919-1923 compositions. For example, the blue varies from a dark indigo to ultramarine, and even to light cobalt from one work to the other (compare figures 4.17, 4.19, and 4.21). But colors in each composition are in their full saturated state and they are no longer tinted with white or grey.

In addition, in 1919-1923 paintings we find that triad of 'noncolors' - white, grey, and black - was used as primary as the triad of colors. In majority of these paintings, there is at least one black or grey plane. In 1919-1920 compositions (see figures 4.13 & 4.14) Mondrian variably used two to five black planes which are distributed among other planes of color. After 1920, he used only one black plane which was mainly positioned in the sides of the composition. Indeed, in contrast to the 1917-1919 compositions, the noncolors in the 1919-1923 compositions are equally assigned a similar role as colors and they are opposed to colors to neutralize their duality.

Another important point emphasized in 1920-1925 essays was the 'rectangularity' of the planes of color and noncolor. According to Mondrian, the color and noncolor planes should be 'defined' or determined through intersecting lines at right angle. Nonetheless, we see that in a majority of 1919-1923 paintings, the planes in the periphery are not completely delimited and defined by the lines. Such inconsistency is more palpable in the post-1920 compositions. In these paintings we see that the thick and black lines are not extended to the edges of the canvas.⁶⁹ For instance, in 1920 painting *Composition with Red Yellow, Blue and Black* (figure 4.16), the planes in the bottom, left, and top

⁶⁹ Mondrian's such reluctance for leaving the lines unextended to the edges of his canvases, as it was discussed, mainly goes back to the tradition of De Stijl painters.

sides are not fully delimited compared to the central planes. This problem is also palpable in other compositions of this period as in figures 4.17, 4.18, and 4.21. In *Composition with red, yellow, black, blue and grey* (figure 4.18), the light grey and red planes in the top part of the composition are almost inactive planes. In fact, the incomplete extension of the lines to the edges of the majority of 1919-1923 compositions resulted in the separation of the planes of color and noncolor from the lines. In these paintings the lines seem to be on top of the colors and noncolors. Therefore, contrary to Mondrian's aim to compose the planes and lines on a flat, two dimensional surfaces, in these paintings the planes and lines are perceived in different layers.

Overall, we find that what Mondrian wrote in his 1920-1925 writings in relation to his means of imaging was mostly an expansion of what he had stated in his 1917-1920 essays. He also provided us with new updates about his means of imaging in relation to new triad of noncolors which he also used in his 1919-1923 paintings. Generally, we found a close relation between the characteristics of the means of imaging (plastic means) in 1919-1923 paintings and what Mondrian described in his 1920-1925 essays about his means of imaging. Lastly, we see that Mondrian expanded his artistic vision in regards to his means of imaging, noticeably in both his 1919-1923 paintings and 1920-1925 writings.

4.4.3.2 The equivalence between form and space

In this section we will see that Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings, similar to his 1917-1919 essays, talked about his Neo-Plastic concept of the 'equivalence' of his means of imaging. We will see that in this period, for the first time, he wrote about an aesthetic condition required to achieve balance between form and space. In this respect, he theorized that such balance is attained through the opposition between large planes of

noncolor and small planes of color. After analyzing 1919-1923 paintings we contend that in these paintings the lines and planes of color and noncolor are in equivalence through their exact opposition rather than similarity in size of the planes. Moreover, we find that in majority of 1922-1923 compositions, the equivalence between form and space was expressed through the opposition of large planes of white or light grey (as noncolors) and small planes of color. Overall, we find a close relation between Mondrian's 1922-1923 paintings and what he explained in his 1920-1925 writings about the equivalence between form and space.

In his 1917-1919 essays, Mondrian talked about 'equivalence' in his means of imaging. He defined the equivalence of his means of imaging as an 'equivalent duality' - i.e. vertical versus horizontal, color versus noncolor, and so on. In his earlier text, Mondrian stated that the equivalence is not a sameness or similarity in size or color value of the planes or lines. In his 1920-1925 essays, however, he did not discuss about this idea in relation to painting. Nonetheless, there are a few instances in his writings in this period where he implicitly pointed to this matter. For example, in his 1920 essay *Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence*, he explained the characteristics of 'new harmony' in painting and music. In this respect, he said that to express a new harmony as universal, the natural colors - the colors as in the nature - in painting as well as the seven tones in musical scale, should be interiorized to their most purified state. As he further explained, such new harmony is attained through various relationships among interiorized means in different size, color, tone, or strengths:

Because the New Plastic wants to abolish the natural, it is logical that it places the three colors in painting, and the corresponding tones in music, in quite *different relationships of dimension, strength, color, or tonality* while still preserving aesthetic equilibrium. (Mondrian, 1920, p. 145)

Mondrian in his 1920-1925 essays, compared to his earlier essays, more explicitly expounded on his idea of equivalence between form and space.⁷⁰ In his earlier text, we saw that he talked about form and space in relation to two terms of 'expansion' and 'limitation.' Although he introduced these concepts, he had not offered any method or any aesthetic condition required to create balance between form and space. Only in his 1922-1925 writings he started explaining the conditions required to attain balance between form and space. The first instance is found at the end of his 1922 essay *Neo-Plasticism: Its Realization in Music and in Future Theater*. In this essay Mondrian tried to theorize the idea that the equilibrated relationship as a universal and new harmony could also be expressed in music. In this respect, he connected the primary colors to abstracted, interiorized sound and noncolors with 'nonsound' (noise) in music. He further stated that these universal means of expression in music should be composed by the composer in variety of volumes (loudness). Indeed, here he interestingly pointed to a new theory in regard to the condition, to attain equilibrium between form and space. In this respect, he argued that equilibrium and harmony in music is the outcome of the confrontation of a 'very loud sound' (plastically color in painting) with a 'relatively slight' noise (noncolor in painting):

If the composition is to express equivalence and to neutralize its two elements, then its "plane" sounds (in the language of painting) should not have the same intensity or be similar in character. A very loud sound can be opposed by a relatively slight but *altogether different* noise. (Mondrian, 1922a, p. 162)

From the above-mentioned statement it is inferred that in theory of Neo-Plasticism equivalence between form and space is the outcome of opposition, between a large area of noncolor (as nonsound) and a smaller area of color (as sound). Interestingly, in 1925,

⁷⁰ In contrast to earlier essays (1917-1919), Mondrian did not refer to two contrasting terms 'expansion' (space) and 'limitation' (intensified form) in his 1920-1925 essays. Only in his 1920 French pamphlet *Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence*, he used these words twice when he was describing the concepts of intensified form and space in architecture and sculpture.

in his short essay *The Neo-Plastic Architecture of the Future*, Mondrian stated this matter more explicitly. In this essay, he emphasized on the point that architects should mutually work with Neo-Plastic painters to be able to express their architectural outcome in pure equilibrium and beauty. To this end, Mondrian stressed that triad of primary colors is an essential universal means of expression in architecture which should be used in opposition to noncolors (that is to say three dimensional space in architecture). At this point, Mondrian indicated that a small area (planes) of color is sufficient to express balance between form and space in both architecture and painting: “[a]s [Neo-Plastic] painting has already demonstrated, a minimal color area often suffices to produce equilibrated relationship with noncolor”⁷¹ (Mondrian, 1925, p. 197). As Mondrian earlier indicated, the triad of primary colors on a flat plane is indeed intensified version of natural forms whereas the noncolors are considered as space. As such, in the former statement Mondrian said that the equilibrated relationship (equilibrium, harmony) between form and space is achieved through the opposition of a large area of white (or light grey) with small areas of colors. As we will see in Chapter 5, this aesthetic condition for the expression of equilibrium between form and space was later restated in 1926 as the second principle of Neo-Plasticism. Hence, we infer that during 1922-1925 Mondrian’s artistic ideas in relation to the equivalence between form and space shifted to a mature and evolved state compared to what he had written and demonstrated in his paintings prior to 1921.

Moving to his 1919-1923 paintings, we find that equivalence between lines and planes of color and noncolors in these paintings is represented based on equality in the opposition, or duality, of those means of imaging. Indeed, Mondrian, during his experimentations in this period, succeeded to find the best method to express the planes

⁷¹ The term ‘Neo-Plastic’ was added to the original quote as a reminder that Mondrian meant his Neo-Plastic painting in particular.

in various sizes and color values in balance. However, we find that in the 1919-1920 compositions (figures 4.13 & 4.14) his approach to express balance between his planes is more or less inclined to what he had practiced in his 1918-1919 paintings. In these paintings, the thin width of the lines and, more or less, grid-like lines - similar to the Checkerboards - divided the composition into almost similar slices. When we look at these early 1919-1920 paintings, we infer that equivalence between the means of imaging is expressed based on similarity of the dimension of the planes. In both early Neo-Plastic compositions, we can easily group the planes into three main groups: perfect squares, rectangles, and vertical elongated rectangles. In 1920 compositions (see figures 4.15 & 4.16), planes are created through a more asymmetrical positioning of the lines. As a result, a more exact and dynamic relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes is established. We find a good demonstration of what Mondrian defined in his 1920-1925 writings in regard to his concept of equivalence in his 1921 compositions. Thanks to the reduction in the quantity of the lines and the enlargement of the scale of composition, in these paintings we see a unique size and dimension for each plane. As such, in 1921 compositions (see figures 4.17 & 4.18), viewer hardly finds two planes of color and noncolor with a similar dimension. In 1922 and 1923 compositions, difference in the dimension of the planes boosted due to the shift of all color planes to the borders of the canvas, which resulted in the creation of a large plane of noncolor in the center. In the 1922 compositions, Mondrian stopped intersecting the lines as cross (plus sign). Moreover, he divided the narrow elongated rectangles in the periphery of the canvas into smaller planes of color and noncolor. However, we see that planes in these paintings in different size are in repose or absolute equilibrium in respect to each other.

Similarly, we find correspondence between his 1919-1923 compositions and what Mondrian introduced in his 1920-1925 essays, particularly in his 1925 one, *The Neo-*

Plastic Architecture of the Future, as his new aesthetic condition for the attainment of equilibrium between form and space. In majority of the post-1921 compositions, balance between form and space was attained through the opposition of large planes of noncolor and smaller planes of color. The best instances are found in 1922 compositions (see figures 4.20 and 4.21) where lines are intersected closer to the sides of the composition and, thereby, they create a large area of empty space (noncolor) in the center which is opposed to the tiny narrow rectangles in the sides of the composition. In contrast, in 1919-1921 compositions, the color planes covered almost as much space of the composition as the noncolors. Hence, the spatial balance between form and space in 1919-1921 compositions was not expressed based on this condition. As it was studied, it was not until 1922 when Mondrian indicated that equivalence between form and space is the outcome of the antagonization of a large area of noncolor and small areas of color. Similarly, we see that balance between planes of color and noncolor in majority of the 1921-1923 compositions were obtained through the opposition of a large areas of white or light grey as noncolors and small planes of red, blue, and yellow as colors. Overall, it is inferred that this tactic was formed and developed in Mondrian's theory during 1921-1923. We also find close relation between what Mondrian theorized in his 1922-1925 essays about the condition of the attainment of balance between form and space and his 1921-1923 compositions. Lastly, we find a noticeable artistic evolution of Mondrian toward his concept of equivalence and expression of balance between form and space, in both his 1921-1923 paintings and 1920-1925 writings.

4.4.3.3 Dialectic of oppositions, and concept 'relationship'

Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings, similar to his earlier writings, talked about his doctrine of oppositions. He stated that dual opposition is essential in the means of expression and composition to establish the equivalent relationships or equilibrium in Neo-Plastic painting. In this period, he extensively talked about immutable and mutable

relationships under the light of the concepts ‘relative’ and ‘absolute.’ At the end of this section, I assert that the duality in the means of imaging in 1919-1923 compositions represented more exact and equilibrated compared to pre-1919 paintings. Overall, we find a good demonstration of what Mondrian explained in his 1920-1925 writings about his theory of oppositions in the 1919-1923 paintings.

Mondrian in his 1917-1919 essays, in many instances, explained his doctrine of oppositions. He stressed that duality in the means of imaging is essential to represent pure relationships among position, dimension, and proportion of his means of imaging. Furthermore, he informed us that these exact and equivalent relationships are prerequisite to express equilibrium, rhythm, and beauty as universal. In the first place, Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings reminded us that duality and opposition in the means of imaging is fundamental in order to express the equivalent relationship in composition. For instance, in his 1920 French pamphlet, he emphasized on his theory of dual oppositions. Similar to what he had mentioned, he said that duality and opposition exist in two levels of the means of imaging and compositions. He also stated that everything is perceived in relation to its opposition which he, as we understood, borrowed from Hegelian teachings of Bolland.

Any given thing will become better understood through its multiple aspects and its different relationships; [...] The essential is that the principle of opposites rules the work as a whole as much in its composition as in the equilibrated relationship of its plastic means. (Mondrian, 1920, p. 141)

In the above-mentioned statement, Mondrian indicated to his doctrine of oppositions in his means of imaging and composition which, as we will see in Chapter 5, later in 1926 he wrote as his third principle of Neo-Plasticism. In fact, his theory of oppositions is one of the most immutable principles of Neo-Plasticism that was applied on all Neo-Plastic compositions to express a universal equilibrium, rhythm, and beauty. In his 1921

essay, *The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists' Bruiteurs*, Mondrian indicated that duality and constant opposition of his means of imaging are essential to attain equivalence and unity in the composition. In this essay, Mondrian talked about his theory of oppositions in relation to music. As he explained, the universal expression in music, or new spirit, is not completely achieved even in modern and innovative experimentations of composers such as Russolo and Schonberg. He continued that a plastic and universal expression of beauty could not be fully attained in works of these modern composers since they use repetition of particular element of expression (sound in music) and their individuality to express harmony and beauty.⁷² At this point he exemplified his Neo-Plastic painting. He stated that his opposing means of imaging (that is to say vertical versus horizontal, color versus noncolor) are the best prototype of pure expressive means in art. Mondrian in this essay also indicated that the dual oppositions are not similar in appearance, which is an affirmation of what he had stated about the equivalence of his means of imaging: “[t]he existence of continuous mutual opposition has as its principal condition the construction of a duality whose components are equivalent but not homogeneous, and that neutralize each other” (Mondrian, 1921, p. 154).

When we read Mondrian’s 1920-1925 texts, we find that he re-explained the two kinds of relationships that he had introduced in his 1917-1920 essays: immutable relationship between position of lines at right angle and changeable relationships among dimension and proportion of the planes of color and noncolor. As Mondrian stated in his earlier essays, the relationships among dimension and proportion of color and noncolor planes rely on immutable relationships among the positions of lines. In this respect, in the

⁷² At this point, Mondrian supported modern music composers’ innovative use of machines and mechanical devices for the production of sound and noise. He believed that for universal expression of new spirit and consciousness, these non-human devices could express beauty and harmony less as individual and more as universal.

beginning of his 1921 essay, he pointed to two kinds of relationships in his Neo-Plastic art:

Neo-Plasticism expresses these laws, these ‘invariants,’ through the *constant relationship of position: the perpendicular relationship*. To achieve this it uses the ‘variable,’ that is, *relationships of dimensions (measure), relationships of colors, and relationships of color (sound) to noncolor (noise)*. (Mondrian, 1921, p. 150)

In his 1923 essay, *No Axiom but the Plastic Principle*, Mondrian also discussed the two concepts of immutable and mutable in relation to concept of ‘relativity.’ Indeed, he explained immutable as an ‘absolute’ expression in art that is against the mutable which is a relative expression. He delineated that in a relative vision everything is perceived in duality as two extremes (good-evil, individual-universal) in life and art. He stated that those who look at an artwork through such relative (dualistic) vision could only perceive a subjective and ‘tragic’ expression of unity and harmony in art. Nevertheless, according to him, ‘relativity’ led us to seek for the absolute: “[t]he relativity, the mutability of things creates in us a desire for the absolute, the immutable” (Mondrian, 1923c, p. 178). When we read his writing in this period, we deduce that a Neo-Plastic painter should shift from a relative expression to an absolute, universal expression of harmony and beauty in art and life. Such ‘absolute’ in his Neo-Plastic painting is an immutable content that is expressed through the exact relationship among the positions of lines in principal opposition.

Mondrian’s aim to transcend from relative (mutable) to absolute (immutable) expression in his Neo-Plastic doctrine is because of the idea that relativity in life and art results in ‘tragic’ (individual/naturalistic) expression of equilibrium and beauty. In Neo-Plastic theory, tragic expression is descriptive (lyrical) and it is based on the subjective and individualistic emotions and ego of artist. As long as the tragic expression in art

dominated - especially in painting - equilibrium and harmony could not be expressed as pure and universal. In his 1923 essay, *No Axiom but the Plastic Principle*, Mondrian pointed out that tragic expression is indeed a dualistic vision in art and life: “[t]he *desire for extremes* causes the tragic in life (in art, expressed through the lyrical)” (Mondrian, 1923c, p. 178). Therefore, I contend that Mondrian considered dualistic vision in art and life as a source for a tragic, subjective expression of equilibrium and beauty. Throughout his writings, he tried to propagate the idea that in order to perceive a universal unity as beauty we should look at everything through lens of a ‘purified duality’ or ‘equivalent duality.’ He stressed that, to conceive the universal expression of harmony and beauty in art, we should transcend our relative and dualistic vision to see everything as a purified or equivalent duality. It is noteworthy that what Mondrian called a purified duality is indeed a resolved state of the dual oppositions. Therefore, we come to the point that the prerequisite to perceive everything in equivalent or purified duality is to acceptance the dialectic of oppositions and, particularly, the theory that everything exists in relation to its opposite and vice versa.

Moving to the visual analysis of the early Neo-Plastic paintings (see figures 4.13 to 4.22), we see that compared to his pre-1919 paintings, in the 1919-1923 paintings the duality between means of imaging is represented as more concrete and dominant. In these paintings, triad of colors for the first time is opposed to triad of noncolors. The duality between colors and noncolors is expressed as most distinct and equilibrated in his post-1920 compositions where Mondrian starts consistent using of a shade of light grey and white. In these paintings each color is used only once or twice. Due to the light tone of the grey, the colors could establish a very dynamic dialectic between each other and white planes. Conversely, in the first two 1919 compositions (see figures 4.13 & 4.14), the duality between color and noncolor was mainly represented through

‘multiplicity,’ which is evocative to what Mondrian had experimented in his 1918-1919 compositions.

The perpendicular opposition (duality) between lines is more dominantly represented in these 1919-1923 compositions. In fact, changes in the thickness and hues of lines in these early Neo-Plastic paintings, particularly in the post-1920 compositions, reinforced the duality or opposition of lines. However, we contend that in 1922-1923 paintings, and due to the shift of lines to the periphery of composition, the duality between lines is not as assertive and dominant as in earlier 1920-1921 compositions. In 1922-1923 paintings, lines mainly met each other in form of letter ‘T’ and not as a cross. Therefore, the duality in post-1922 compositions is more vividly articulated between color values of planes rather than the lines.

A good example where Mondrian succeeded to show a distinct dual opposition in lines and in colors is his 1921 lozenge painting *Lozenge Composition with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red, and Gray* (see figure 4.19). In this painting, as it is also indicated by Champa, the lines at right angle in respect to the diagonal angle of lozenge canvas are depicted in a very exact and dominant opposition or duality.

Similarly, we see that the duality in the composition of 1919-1923 paintings - relationships among position, dimension, and proportion of lines and planes - is expressed as more dominant compared to the earlier paintings. In these paintings, due to the thick breadth and solid black color of lines, the immutable relationship between position of lines and changeable (mutable) relationships between size and proportion of planes are shown as more exact and equivalent. As we understood, in majority of 1917-1919 compositions, the duality and relationships between lines and planes could not be manifested exact and equilibrated enough because the lines were commonly thin and grey. Overall, we found that Mondrian, compared to his 1917-1919 abstract-real

paintings - succeeded in depicting a more dominant representation of an exact duality or opposition in his 1919-1923 compositions.

4.4.3.4 Method and conditions to express the equilibrium

Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings talked about his concept of equilibrium in retrospect to what he had written in his earlier 1917-1919 essays. In this regard, he emphasized that equilibrium is primarily attained through invariant relationship between positions of the lines in principal opposition. He defined the immutable relationship between position of lines at right angle as the most exact, and 'self-neutralizing' oppositions in Neo-Plastic painting. We also find that equilibrium in majority of 1919-1923 compositions expressed through immutable relationship among the position of lines at right angle. Nevertheless, we argue that in these paintings the equilibrated relationships, equilibrium, could not be established as absolute due to the incomplete extension of the lines to the edges of these compositions. Overall, we found that equilibrium in the 1919-1923 compositions is achieved through the aesthetic conditions that Mondrian theorized in his 1920-1925 writings.

Mondrian in his 1917-1919 essays, in many instances, discussed his ideas about equilibrium and its expression in his abstract-real paintings. He stated that relationship among the position of lines at right angle is essential to express an exact and pure equilibrium. He used 'equilibrium' as a new term for 'harmony' in his new art. From his earlier writings we found that relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes are also necessary to articulate a pure equilibrium. In his 1920-1925 essays, he further explained the implications and relation of what he had posited in his 1917-1919 essays about equilibrium in other arts (such as music, literature, and architecture) as well as the domain of life.

In relation to what we deciphered from Mondrian's 1917-1919 essays, Mondrian in a few instances in his 1920-1925 writings indicated that equilibrium is primarily the outcome of relationship between positions of lines in perpendicular opposition. Mondrian in this period further discussed about his concept of equilibrium as the outcome of a balance between 'relative' (mutable) and 'absolute' (immutable). As Mondrian explicated, equilibrium between relative and absolute is only possible through the representation of lines at right angle: "Neo-Plasticism expresses this unity. It expresses the equivalence of nature and nonnature⁷³—interiorized outwardness and exteriorized inwardness through the plastic expression of *the straight line in vertical and horizontal position*" (Mondrian, 1923b, p. 176). Similarly, in his 1922 essay *Neo-Plasticism: Its Realization in Music and in Future Theater* we read: "[t]he rectangular position, the expression of the immutable, is the core of the Neo-Plastic plastic means. From this the power and equilibrium of the image derive" (Mondrian, 1922a, p. 161). From these statements, we infer that in theory of Neo-Plasticism, relationship among lines at right angle is the main prerequisite to attain and express an absolute equilibrium or harmony.

Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings, further expounded the process in which equilibrium or harmony is attained in Neo-Plastic theory. In this regard, he stated that equilibrium is the outcome of the neutralization and annihilation of the duality of the means of imaging - especially the lines at right angle. For him straight lines at straight angle are the most exact, distinct, oppositions and, thereby, whenever they are opposed (i.e. intersected) they completely resolves their duality into a universal unity or equilibrium. In his 1920 essay *Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic*

⁷³ By 'nature' Mondrian here means the corporeality of form or physical appearance of everything as an object. Whereas, the 'nonnature' in contrast is the spiritual and pure metaphysical in this context. Simply, the nature refers to material (or matter) and nonnature denotes spiritual (spirit) as two primary oppositions in art and life.

Equivalence, he called his means of imaging in exact opposition as ‘self-neutralizing’ elements. This means when lines are opposed in perpendicular opposition they start neutralizing their duality into unity. Mondrian in his 1923 essay *Is Painting Inferior to Architecture?* further stated that lines at right angle are ‘self-annihilating’: “[t]he absolute is expressed in the straight. Painting and architecture in the new aesthetic are consequent realizations of *composition of the straight in self-annihilating opposition, thus a multiple duality of the constant rectangular relationship*” (Mondrian, 1923a, pp. 173-174). In this essay Mondrian tried to convince architects that a universal expression of balance and beauty could only be attained by utilizing the most intensified, abstracted, forms as well as a constant relationship between lines in perpendicular opposition. As such, it is inferred that equilibrium in Neo-Plastic paintings are achieved through the ‘naturalization’ or ‘annihilation’ of dual opposition of lines and planes of color and noncolor. Furthermore, as Mondrian emphasized, constant relationship between lines is established through the plurality of duality of lines in perpendicular opposition.

Overall, we found out that what Mondrian explained about his concept of equilibrium throughout his 1920-1925 texts was in retrospect to what he previously had tried to propagate in his 1917-1919 essays. Firstly, he emphasized on the primary role of relationship between lines in perpendicular, rectangular opposition for a Neo-Plastic expression of equilibrium or harmony. Secondly, he postulated that the equilibrium is the outcome of the ‘neutralization’ and ‘annihilation’ of the duality of the means of imaging and their relationships in the composition. Thirdly, he informed us that equilibrium is achieved through the multiplicity of immutable relationship, opposition between position of lines and mutable relationship among the dimensions of planes.

Moving from Mondrian's writings, in the 1919-1923 compositions (see figures 4.13 to 4.22) we see that equilibrium is achieved through constant perpendicular oppositions of lines as well as relationship among the dimensions of planes. However, it is possible to show that equilibrium in some of these paintings is not fully attained as an absolute unity. For example, we see that equilibrium in post-1920 compositions was expressed as more exact and universal compared to 1919-1920 compositions (figures 4.13 & 4.14). In the 1919-1920 paintings lines are thin and grey and, thereby, relationships among the positions of the lines could not be established exact and distinct as Mondrian emphasized in his writings. In contrast, in 1920-1923 compositions equilibrium was expressed more as a 'repose' or absolute equilibrium. This is because in the post-1920 compositions the lines are thicker and more saturated black and, thereby, they established more exact relationship compared to those early 1919-1920 paintings.

It should be noted that not all the lines in 1920-1923 compositions meet the condition to express an absolute, universal equilibrium. Based on what Mondrian explained in essays of this period, equilibrium is attained through the constant and pluralized relationship between positions of the lines. Nonetheless, we realize that in majority of these paintings the lines were not extended to the edges of the canvas. This matter is most palpable in 1921-1922 compositions (see figures 4.17, 4.18, 4.20, and 4.21). In these paintings relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes in the periphery of the composition is not expressed as concrete as the enclosed planes in the center. This is because the planes in the sides of these paintings could not participate in an equal and exact dialectic of relationships with the enclosed planes. Neo-Plastically speaking, the 'equivalent duality' is not depicted in the 1919-1923 compositions as pure and absolute as Mondrian stated in his writings in this period. At this point, by analyzing Mondrian's early Neo-Plastic paintings and writings, we can come up with a more theoretical, rather philosophical, explanation of the key concept of 'equilibrium'.

In the earlier publications, the discussions of scholars, notably Blotkamp, Bois, Milner, mainly focused on the notion of 'unity' and the destruction of contrast between ground and figure. Moreover, in the previous formal analysis of the concept of equilibrium, scholars talked about Mondrian's artistic development in relation to the successive stages of pictorial changes found in the paintings. However, in this section we could further compliment the previous interpretations of scholars of the concept of equilibrium through a coinciding theoretical and visual lens of scrutiny. In this section we further understood about the aesthetic conditions and the way equilibrium is achieved in a Neo-Plastic painting. Overall, we contend that equilibrium in 1919-1923 paintings - particularly in 1920-1923 paintings - was represented and expressed in the way Mondrian theorized in his writings as early as 1917-1919 as well as the ones in 1920-1925.

4.4.3.5 The articulation of the 'rhythm' as well as symmetry and repetition

In this section, we will see that Mondrian, similar to what he had stated in his 1919-1920 essays, in his 1920-1925 writings indicated two kinds of rhythm: natural and inward. He defined inward rhythm as a relative expression in the composition which is attained through variable relationships between the dimension and proportion of planes. My argument was that rhythm in majority of 1919-1923 compositions was also expressed through mutable relationships between dimensions of the planes. However, we will see that due to the incomplete extension of the lines to the edges of these canvases, the rhythm could not be established evenly between peripheral and central planes. Generally, we infer that there is a close relation between the way rhythm is expressed in 1919-1923 paintings and what Mondrian explained in his 1920-1925 essays about the expression of rhythm. Moreover, we realize that Mondrian in his 1919-1923 compositions demonstrated what he theorized about rhythm in his writings.

As it was studied in the beginning of this chapter, Mondrian in his 1917-1920 essays discussed his concept of rhythm. Firstly, he said that rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting should be expressed as inward and interiorized. In this respect, he introduced two kinds of rhythm in painting: 'natural rhythm' and 'inward rhythm'. As Mondrian explained, natural rhythm is the offspring of the old and traditional rules of harmony - symmetry and repetition - in the representational painting whereas the inward and abstract rhythm is achieved through the 'equivalent relationship' that is the outcome of the neutralization of duality of universal means of imaging. Mondrian in earlier essays defined rhythm as a relative expression that is opposed to the immutable and absolute equilibrium in the composition. Lastly, Mondrian in his earlier essays stated that rhythm is expressed through the mutable relationship among the dimensions of planes. In his 1920-1925 writings, Mondrian affirmed what he had stated about rhythm in his 1917-1919 essays. He also explained the possibilities to consider his universal, inward, rhythm in other arts, particularly music.

In the first place, Mondrian in his 1920-1925 essays - similar to his earlier essays - defined and distinguished rhythm in his Neo-Plastic paintings differently from the old and natural rhythm in representational painting. In this respect, he re-emphasized that in Neo-Plastic painting rhythm is not attained through old and traditional laws of harmony such as symmetry and repetition. Instead, rhythm is achieved through the 'equilibrated relationship' between universal means of imaging that he called a 'new harmony.' Moreover, he stated that rhythm is achieved through mutable relationship between dimension and proportion of color and noncolor planes. In his 1920 essay, *Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence*, he distinguished the old harmony from his new harmony or what he called equilibrium:

This *harmony of art* is so totally different from natural harmony that (in the new plastic) we prefer to use the term *equivalent relationship* rather than "harmony." However, the word "equivalent" must not be taken to mean symmetrical. Equivalent relationship is plastically expressed by *contraries*, by *neutralizing oppositions*, which are not harmonious in the old sense. (Mondrian, 1920, p. 145)

In the previous statement, Mondrian also reminded us that equality in relationships should not be wrongly interpreted as symmetry that is an old rule used in the representational painting. In this regard, in his 1921 essay, *The Manifestation of Neo-Plasticism in Music and the Italian Futurists' Bruiteurs*, he explained that, as long as 'repetition' is used in music as well as in other arts, to create rhythm and harmony, beauty and balance are expressed as individual, subjective, or in his terminology 'tragic.' He exemplified the universal expression of harmony or equilibrium in Neo-Plastic painting - attained through constant resolution of the duality of the means of imaging - as the best prototype of a universal expression of harmony in art: "[i]t is through *composition* that the 'universal plastic means' must be expressed in continuously self-neutralizing plurality (and not by repetition 'in the manner of nature'). Without seeking symmetry 'in the manner of nature,' equilibrium must nevertheless predominate" (Mondrian, 1921, p. 154). From the previous statement we deduce that multiplicity in relationships among the opposing universal means of imaging for Mondrian is a new substitute for traditional law of harmony (symmetry and repetition) in art. In his 1924 essay *Down with Traditional Harmony!* Mondrian pointed to this matter: "[w]hen it [Neo-Plasticism] speaks of equilibrated relationship, Neo-Plasticism does not mean symmetry but constant contrast"⁷⁴ (Mondrian, 1924, p. 191). Therefore, it is inferred that only an inward, interiorized, rhythm that is depicted as continuous dual

⁷⁴ The term 'Neo-Plasticism' was added.

opposition of universal means of imaging results in the expression of a new harmony or equilibrium in Neo-Plasticism.

When we read Mondrian's 1920-1925 texts in this period, we find about the aesthetic conditions in which rhythm could be expressed in Neo-Plasticism. In the first place, we understand that rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is a relative component of the composition that is expressed through the variant relationship between dimension and proportion of color and noncolor planes. As Mondrian previously had stated in his 1917-1920 essays, the rhythm - although interiorized and inward - relativizes the absolute expression of equilibrium and beauty in the composition. In his 1921 essay, Mondrian re-emphasized on this matter: "[i]n composition, the invariant (the spiritual) is expressed by straight line and planes of noncolor (white, black, and gray), while the variable (the natural) is expressed by color planes and by rhythm"⁷⁵ (Mondrian, 1921, p. 150). According to Mondrian, the creation of balance between immutable (invariant) and mutable (variant) expressions in composition is one of the most challenging tasks of the Neo-Plastic artist. Because rhythm always intervenes with the absolute expression of the equilibrium.

From his 1920-1925 writings we also deduce that relativity, or mutability in the expression of rhythm could be reduced through the exact, absolute relationship among lines in perpendicular angle. As such, in the theory of Neo-Plasticism a universal expression of harmony or equilibrium is the outcome of mutual interaction between the absolute expression of perpendicular opposition of lines as absolute (repose) and variant expression of rhythm as relative component of the composition. Therefore, we

⁷⁵ Interestingly, Mondrian in this 1921 essay envisaged relationship between position of the lines at right angle and noncolors as immutable expression in his Neo-Plastic composition whereas he considered the colors and expression of rhythm as a relative, mutable expression in the composition. Indeed, as it is understood from Mondrian's writings, he always related his purified triad of colors to material, and relative. Yet, for him noncolors (as space in his Neo-Plastic painting) are manifestations of absolute and spiritual.

understand that the lines at right angle are the fundamental elements to establish two kinds of expressions - i.e. relative and absolute - in the composition. Indeed, the exact opposition between vertical and horizontal lines is the manifestation of absolute expression in the composition. Yet lines at right angle also establish, in the second place, the variant (mutable) relationships between dimensions and proportions of the planes. It is the expression of rhythm in the composition. Mondrian in 1923 indicated this matter as follows:

Neo-Plasticism constructed its *universal plastic means, the rectangular color plane*. Through the duality of position of the straight it expresses equilibrium (equivalence) of relative and absolute. It opposes the color plane to the noncolor plane (white, gray, and black), so that through this duality the opposites can annihilate one another in the multiplicity of the composition. The perpendicular position expresses the constant; the rhythm of the composition expresses the relative. (Mondrian, 1923c, p. 179)

Overall, we realized that what Mondrian discussed in his 1920-1925 essays about rhythm was the reinforcement of what he had posited in his 1917-1920 essays. Firstly, he talked about the element of rhythm in relation to the expression of a new harmony, equilibrated relationship. In this respect, he stated that rhythm is expressed as inward and interiorized through constant neutralization of the duality of the means of imaging. Furthermore, he informed us that such inward rhythm is the result of a constant, pluralized, relationships between the position of lines and the dimension of planes and it cannot be achieved through old rules of harmony, including symmetry and repetition.

When we look at 1919-1923 compositions, we deduce that what Mondrian described in his 1920-1925 writings in relation to his concept of rhythm is the result of his experimentations of those paintings. In the first place, we see that in these paintings rhythm is expressed through the mutable relationship between the dimensions of the planes. Thanks to the asymmetric division of the planes in 1919-1923 compositions,

each plane is given a unique identity in terms of dimension and proportion to other planes. Nevertheless, we also argue that relationship between size and proportion of color planes is not depicted as distinct in the first two 1919 compositions (see figures 4.13 & 4.14). Due to the thin width and greyish hue of lines, relationship between the dimension and proportion of planes is not represented as concrete as those post-1920 compositions. Thanks to the increase in breadth and color hue of the lines, we are convinced that the rhythm in the 1920 and 1921 compositions (see figures 4.15 to 4.19) is primarily achieved through relationship between the dimension and proportion of planes.

In 1922-1923 paintings (see figures 4.20, 4.21, and 4.22), rhythm was expressed as more absolute compared to the previous works. Due to the move of color planes to the periphery of the composition and reduction in the quantity of the colors, relativity and variety in the dimension and proportion of the planes is minimized. Subsequently, we argue that in 1922-1923 compositions the mutable character of rhythm and colors also diminished. Indeed, in these compositions rhythm is the outcome of an immutable relationship among the lines at right angle - equilibrium - which Mondrian in his previous essays called 'repose.' Such expression of repose, equilibrium, in the 1922-1923 paintings was expressed through opposition between a very large noncolor plane (light grey or white) in the center and tiny planes of color and noncolor in the periphery of these compositions. Hence, I argue that rhythm in 1922-1923 compositions is primarily expressed through immutable relationship among lines rather than mutable relationships between the proportion of color and noncolor planes.

Despite the similarities found between what Mondrian practiced in his 1919-1923 compositions and what he stated in his writings in this period in relation to his concept of rhythm, there are slight inconsistencies as well. In majority of the 1920-1922

compositions (see figures 4.16, 4.17, 4.18, 4.20, and 4.21), lines are not completely extended to the edges of these compositions. As a result, and as it was discussed in relation to the concept of equilibrium, relationship between the dimension and proportion of peripheral planes could not be established as determinate, or exact, as the enclosed planes in the center. This means that the mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes, that are the condition to express rhythm, are not represented evenly between the peripheral planes and central ones. This problem is noticeably resolved in the 1921 diamond composition of this period (see figure 4.19) as well as 1923 composition⁷⁶ (see figure 4.22) when Mondrian started extending lines to the edges of the canvas. At this point, we understand that contrary to the common viewpoint of scholars, notably Blotkamp, Champa, Bois, Seuphor and particularly Tosaki, who considered 1919-1922 compositions as mature Neo-Plastic compositions, these paintings still have inconsistencies to be evaluated as mature Neo-Plastic paintings. Only after 1922 and in the post-1923 compositions, when Mondrian started extending his lines to the very edges of his compositions, we see that equilibrium and rhythm are fully achieved by the way he described in his writings. That is to say, we should consider the majority of the 1919-1922 compositions as partly immature Neo-Plastic paintings when Mondrian had not yet found his best method to represent the most exact and equilibrated relationship among the lines of his paintings.

In 1919-1923 compositions, we see that he also stopped using symmetry and repetition for expressing rhythm and equilibrium. As it was studied, Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writing also insisted on the idea that symmetry and repetition are old laws of harmony and they should be avoided in Neo-Plastic painting. In contrast to his 1917-1919 paintings, in his 1919-1923 compositions he stopped using symmetry and repetition to

⁷⁶ In 1923 composition, there is still one line in the upper left side of the composition, which is not extended to the edges of the canvas. However, this line is stretched very close to the fringe of the composition and, thereby, it can be overlooked.

express rhythm. The asymmetric distribution of lines is very palpable in post-1920 compositions. In these paintings, lines usually are not intersected - except in a few instances - as cross sign. Instead, they are intersected similar to the letter 'T' (see figures 4.17 & 4.18). As a result, the lines are not repeated in the way they were in the 1918-1919 compositions. Moreover, in his post-1920 paintings, Mondrian ceased to repeat the triad of primary colors. In majority of his 1921-1923 compositions, each color only appears once. As a result, rhythm in these paintings is not expressed based on the traditional laws of harmony (symmetry and repetition), as Mondrian also stressed in his 1920-1925 essays.

In a nutshell, we found a noticeable development in the way rhythm was expressed in 1919-1923 paintings compared to what we saw in 1917-1919 compositions. We understood that Mondrian defined his concept of rhythm - as he depicted in his 1919-1923 compositions - as early as 1917. However, it was not until 1920 that we find a true manifestation of a Neo-Plastic rhythm, as he defined in his 1917-1920 writings, in his paintings. This suggests that, only after 1920, Mondrian succeeded to find the best method to express rhythm through mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. Overall, we found that by examining Mondrian's early Neo-Plastic writings, we will learn a great deal about the concept of rhythm. In line with Tosaki's recent exhaustive philosophical scrutiny (2017) of the concept of rhythm, we found that Mondrian's writings helped us further decode and interpret the very abstracted version of rhythm in Neo-Plastic paintings. Tosaki in the outset of his book argued that the 'static' rhythm in the early Neo-Plastic paintings is not clearly represented, compared to the vivid rhythm in his late Neo-Plastic oeuvre. Tosaki further asserted that rhythm in the early Neo-Plastic paintings is 'covert,' hidden, and it is not represented as concrete and ostensive entity on the surface of these compositions. In this respect, we saw that by a thorough analysis of Mondrian's writings and paintings we

can clearly interpret, theoretically and based on a Neo-Plastic vocabulary, the way such covert, hidden rhythm is emerged and expressed in the early Neo-Plastic compositions.

4.4.4 Conclusion: 1919-1923 compositions and 1920-1925 writings

Overall, we realized that Mondrian in his 1920-1925 essays, mainly discussed his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories in retrospect to what he had previously explained in his 1917-1920 essays. In his 1920-1925 writings he talked about his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories as universal aesthetic rules that can be applied on other arts especially music and architecture.

Moving on based on the order of the concepts presented in this chapter, I surmise that, during 1919-1925, Mondrian's aesthetic vision toward his elements of paintings (means of imaging) noticeably developed compared to his earlier 1917-1919 period. In his 1919-1923 paintings and his 1920-1925 writings, for the first time he used and introduced a new triad of colors as white, grey, and black that he called 'noncolors.' He considered these noncolors as opposite pairs to the triad of primary colors. Moreover, in his painting in this period he used pure hues for primary colors, which was in line with his definition of the means of imaging. Mondrian defined his means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of color and noncolor that are delimited by the lines at right angle. However, we saw that in most cases in his 1919-1923 paintings the planes in the periphery had not yet the characteristics of such Neo-Plastic definition since the lines were not extended to the edges of the canvas.

In his 1920-1925 writings, Mondrian also discussed his concept of 'equivalence' in his means of imaging. He said that the equivalence of lines and planes of color and noncolor is an 'equivalent duality' or 'distinct duality' of these means in the composition. Similar to his 1917-1920 essays, Mondrian in his writing in this period said that equivalence is not equality in size or appearances of planes. Similarly, we saw

that, in contrast to majority of 1917-1919 paintings, the balance between planes in 1919-1923 composition was expressed through the opposition of dissimilar-sized planes that were arranged asymmetrically in these compositions. Moreover, in his 1920-1925 essays, particularly in his 1925 essay, Mondrian informed us about a new condition to attain equilibrium between form and space. He said that the balance between form and space is achieved through opposition between large area of noncolor and small areas of color. Similarly, I found that in majority of his 1919-1923 compositions - especially in his post-1922 - form and space are in balance through interaction between large planes of noncolor (mostly white or light grey in the center of composition) and small areas of color (mostly positioned in the periphery of the composition).

Regarding his key Neo-Plastic theory of dialectics of oppositions, Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings repeated what he had delineated in his 1917-1919 essays. He stressed that dual opposition is essential among means of imaging and in the composition. He discussed his theory of oppositions in the domain of life and in relation to balance between two concepts, relative and absolute. I also found out that in his 1919-1923 paintings the planes of color and noncolors are represented in an exact, distinct duality in respect to each other. Indeed, in the 1919-1923 paintings the exact duality between lines was reinforced due to the more thickness of the lines compared to 1917-1919 paintings as well as using noncolors in opposition to the triad of colors.

I saw that Mondrian in his 1920-1925 writings also discussed his concept of equilibrium. What he wrote in this period was indeed expansion of what he had mentioned earlier in his 1917-1919 essays. We understood that the equilibrium is achieved through immutable relationship among lines in perpendicular opposition. In essays of this period, he also expounded about the process of attainment of the equilibrium. In this regard, we deciphered that equilibrium is attained through the

'neutralization' of the duality of immutable relationship between lines at right angle and multiple relationships between position and dimension of the planes. Similarly, we found that in 1919-1923 compositions, the expression of equilibrium is primarily dependent to the immutable relationship between positions of the lines. However, as it was discussed, equilibrium in majority of these paintings was not expressed as pure and absolute as he had stated in his writings. Because the planes in the periphery of these paintings were not completely delimited by lines, we found lack of an exact relationship between the enclosed planes in the center of these paintings and the peripheral ones.

Mondrian in his 1920-1925 essays also discussed rhythm, its characteristics, and its condition to be expressed in Neo-Plastic compositions. What he discussed about rhythm in his writing of this period was in relation to what he had discussed in his 1917-1919 essays. As such, he introduced rhythm as a relative expression of composition that is attained through changeable relationship among the dimensions of color planes in respect to noncolor planes. Moreover, he stated that in Neo-Plastic painting artist should avoid using symmetry and repetition to express rhythm and harmony. In a similar way, I argued that rhythm in 1919-1923 paintings is articulated through mutual interaction between the invariant relationship between position of lines and the variant relationship between the size and proportion of the planes. Lastly, I contend that in line with his emphasis on his 1920-1925 essays and the forbiddance for using symmetry and repetition to express rhythm and harmony, he also ceased to use symmetry and repetition in his 1919-1923 compositions. Overall, I found a similar artistic evolution in Mondrian's 1919-1923 paintings and his 1920-1925 writings toward his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories.

CHAPTER 5: SECOND NEO-PLASTIC PERIOD:

POST DE STIJL YEARS (1924-1931)

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, Mondrian's experimentations with his early Neo-Plastic paintings and writings during the De Stijl period were examined. We saw that during 1917-1925 Mondrian was interested in some concepts and theories such as his means of imaging, equivalence between form and space, theory of opposition, equilibrium and rhythm. In this chapter, Mondrian's artistic development in his formal concepts and theories of Neo-Plasticism will be analyzed. This will be through looking at his 1924-1931 paintings and his 1926-1932 writings. All 1924-1931 paintings are put in one group in this chapter because they share common visual characteristics. As we will see, Mondrian remained interested in the concepts and theories that he had demonstrated in his 1917-1923 paintings and had written in his 1917-1925 writings. In 1926, he wrote his art theories as six principles of Neo-Plasticism that were mainly result of his early experimentations with his 1917-1923 compositions. Overall, we find that what Mondrian experimented with and wrote during 1924-1932 is the reinforcement and affirmation of what he stated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism as culmination of his art theories. Nevertheless, in his post-1929 paintings and writings we find slight artistic refinements of his concepts and theories, particularly in relation to his means of imaging (plastic means). At the end of this chapter I surmise that Mondrian, during 1924-1932, remained consistent with what he theorized as the theory of Neo-Plasticism in his paintings and writings.

5.2 Neo-Plastic compositions (1924-1931)

5.2.1 Selected essays to analyze Mondrian's artistic development during 1924-1932

To analyze Mondrian's artistic vision during 1924-1931 toward his formal concepts and theories of Neo-Plasticism, his 1926-1932 writings are used. Unlike to the previous period (1917-1925), Mondrian considerably wrote little during this period, especially between 1927 and 1929. The majority of the essays and articles he wrote are short texts that are either written as a response to the criticism he received for his pure abstract style or they were written upon a request of an editor of a journal to introduce his Neo-Plastic painting to the public. Among these essays only *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships* is an exception and it is written as a theoretical long essay, without any external stimulation.

After 1924,⁷⁷ when Mondrian moved away from De Stijl group, he ceased to write for De Stijl magazine. This is one of the reasons, as Veen also indicated, that many of Mondrian's writings after 1926 were remained unpublished during his lifetime. After separating De Stijl group, Mondrian faced more hardship to find editors and magazines to publish his essays and articles. However, after 1924 Mondrian found other editors in France, who helped him edit his texts and publish his writings. For example, in 1926 Mondrian met interior designer Felix Del Marle (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 187) who was the editor of the French magazine *Vouloir* in which Mondrian published his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Mondrian also became member of the avant-garde groups such as the *Cercle et Carré* in 1930 and later a member of the *Abstraction-Creation* group. Involvement with these modern art circles helped Mondrian to find more editors such as Michel Seuphor, Arthur Muller-Lehning, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Christian Zervos. Knowing these new editors and art circles, Mondrian succeeded to publish his

⁷⁷ For more information about the influence of De Stijl art movement on Mondrian and Mondrian's separation from De Stijl group please refer to chapter 2 section 2.3.4.

essays and articles in magazines such as *Vouloir, i 10: Internationale revue, Cahiers d'Art, Bulletin de L'Effort moderne, Manometre, and Noi, or transition* after 1926 (Holtzman & James, 1986, pp. 187-188).

In his 1926-1932 essays and articles, Mondrian tried to brand his Neo-Plastic art as a universal and original art to the public. Generally, Mondrian in essays of this period discussed theories of his Neo-Plasticism in relation to society and life. In this respect, more than before, he considered his Neo-Plastic principles as universal rules for living a new life based on equivalent relationship or a universal unity among life oppositions (good-bad, matter-spirit, and so on). In fact, he envisaged his Neo-Plastic painting and its principles as universal rules for living a new life based on moral values such as brotherhood, peace, and justice.

For Mondrian this period (1926-1931) was a critical period. On the one hand, he gradually became more and more well-known as a pure abstract painter in art circles of Paris due to the essays and articles he was writing and publishing in French magazines, and exhibitions he held in Paris. On the other hand, Mondrian was motivated to write in reaction to the criticism he received for his pure style from the School of Paris, a representational art school that was becoming popular after 1925 (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 187). The widespread flooding of various modern art styles in the capital of art (Paris) at the time resulted in more controversial criticism on Mondrian's Neo-Plastic style. Therefore, Mondrian found words as the best weapon to rationalize his universal art theories in art and life.

Now, I start to introduce the essays and articles that I will analyze and use in this chapter. To analyze Mondrian's artistic stance on his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories during 1924-1932, Mondrian's 1926 essay, *Purely Abstract Art - L'art purement abstrait*, is the first text used in this chapter. This essay appeared in March 1926 in the

magazine *Vouloir*. Mondrian's main motivation to write this essay was Del Marle's - editor of magazine *Vouloir* - request, who had visited Mondrian in his studio in February 1926, to write an essay in relation to the Neo-Plastic principles and environment (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 198; Veen, 2011, pp. 183-184). Mondrian in this essay discussed his new definition for the term harmony in Neo-Plastic painting.

Beside the *Purely Abstract Art*, Mondrian's other 1926 essay, *The New Plastic Expression in Painting - Die Malerei und ihre praktische 'Realisierung,'* is examined in this chapter. Mondrian wrote this essay as a reply to Zervos' review on the very monumental art exhibition, *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, held in December 1925 in Paris.⁷⁸ In *The New Plastic Expression in Painting*, Mondrian interestingly elaborated on the historical origins and the development of Neo-Plastic painting in the 20th century. In this essay, Mondrian also discussed the aesthetic theories of Neo-Plasticism.

Home-Street-City - 'Neo-Plasticisme. De Woning- De Straat- De Stad' - is another essay that Mondrian wrote from May to December 1926 and published it in January 1927 in *Vouloir* (Veen, 2017a, p. 276). Similar to earlier 1926 essay *Purely Abstract Art*, this essay (*Home-Street-City*) was written by Mondrian to show the possibility of the implication of Neo-Plastic principles in the society. In this essay Mondrian delineated his concepts of unity in diversity - relation of parts to the whole - through a philosophical and social lens. Furthermore, in *Home-Street-City* Mondrian for the first time introduced his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Noteworthy, Mondrian had already wrote these six principles in another 1926 essay *Principes généraux du Neo-*

⁷⁸ According to Holtzman and James (1986), *Art d'Aujourd'hui* was one of the largest art exhibitions - arranged by Victor-Yanaga Poznanski - that was held in Paris featuring more than 250 abstract paintings (p. 202).

Plasticisme. However, this essay was not published sooner than 1949 in French magazine *Art d'Aujourd'hui*.

According to Holtzman and James (1986), Mondrian was motivated to write his principles in reply to a questionnaire. It was distributed by Del Marle - the editor of French magazine *Vouloir* - to the De Stijl artists (including Mondrian) in 1926 to explain the aesthetic rules of Neo-Plasticism (p. 213). In his 1926 essay *General Principles of Neo-Plasticism - Principes généraux du Néo-plasticisme* Mondrian crystallized a culmination of what he had theorized throughout his pre-1926 experimentations with Neo-Plastic compositions within six principles of Neo-Plasticism.⁷⁹ Since this essay was not published during Mondrian's life, he restated these six principles in his other 1926 essay *Home-Street-City*, which was published in *Vouloir*.

From Mondrian's 1927-1929 writings, two important essays are selected: *Jazz and Neo-Plastic - De Jazz en de Neo-plastiek* - and *Pure Abstract Art - De Zuiver Abstracte Kunst*. The former essay, *Jazz and Neo-Plastic*, was published in December 1927 in *Internationale revue i10*. Unlike its name, in this essay, Mondrian did not talk much about the relation between Neo-Plastic and Jazz music.⁸⁰ Instead, Mondrian, similar to his previous 1926 essays, wrote *Jazz and Neo-Plastic* to show the implication of the Neo-Plastic principles in society and life. In this essay, he also discussed about rhythm and further indicated to the similarities he found between rhythm in Jazz music and a Neo-Plastic, universal, expression of rhythm.

⁷⁹ For more information about this essay and these six principles, please refer to chapter 1. In this chapter, these six principles - together with other instances in 1926-1932 writings, where Mondrian talked about his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories, will be analyzed.

⁸⁰ According to the scrutiny of Holtzman and James, Mondrian's inclination toward discussing his Neo-Plastic principles in the context of society is clear in a letter he wrote in 27th August 1927 to Oud: "I [Mondrian] am busy with an article on Neo-Plastic chromoplastic in architecture. [...] I only take jazz as the starting-point; it does not deal with music" (as cited in Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 217).

The other essay, *Pure Abstract Art - De Zuiver Abstracte Kunst* - was published in Switzerland's daily newspaper *Neue Ziircher Zeitung* in 26 October 1929. It was based on a German translation from an original Dutch text. This essay was requested by the organizers of the exhibition *Abstract and Surrealist Painting and Sculpture* that took place in Zurich Kunsthau from 6 October to 3 November 1929. In this exhibition, Mondrian also contributed five of his Neo-Plastic paintings (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 223; Veen, 2011, p. 214). In this essay, Mondrian discussed his theory of oppositions. In it, he discussed the importance of the establishment of an 'equilibrated relationship' among oppositions to realize a pure equilibrium and unity in art and life.

Beside the earlier essays, for the analysis of Mondrian's artistic development of his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories, two 1930 essays were chosen: *Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic) - L'Art Réaliste et l'Art Superréaliste (La Morphoplastique et la Néoplastique)*⁸¹ - and *Cubism and Neo-Plastic - Le cubisme et la néoplastique*. The previous essay is a revised and shortened version of what Mondrian was writing from December 1929 to March 1930 and planned to publish it as a book or pamphlet (Veen, 2017a, p. 319). When Michel Seuphor, Mondrian's friend and editor of the magazine *Cercle et Carre*, asked him to publish an essay in his magazine, Mondrian shortened this long piece of writing. *Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)* was published in *Cercle et Carre* in 15 April 1930 (Veen, 2011, p. 234). In this essay, Mondrian emphasized on the concept of rhythm and its limited expression in other modern styles such as Cubism and Purism. In this regard he showed how the element of rhythm had been expressed in relation to the form in other modern styles such as Cubism and Purism. At the end of his essay, Mondrian led

⁸¹ According to Veen (2011), there are five versions of *Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)* available in different archives. For this thesis, the version that was published in *Cercle et Carre* - translated by Holtzman and James in 1986 - was used.

his discussion to the concept of beauty and how a universal beauty could be realized by the abolition of the entire subjectivity - or what he described as ‘pathetic lyricism - and individuality’ in art.

The other 1930 essay used in this chapter is *Cubism and Neo-Plastic - Le cubisme et la néoplastique*, dated 25 March 1930. Mondrian wrote this essay for the daily *L'Intransigeant* newspaper. This piece of writing, with this title, was never published in its original language, French (Veen, 2017a, p. 325), in *L'Intransigeant* or any other journal. However, this essay is considered as one of the most important and controversial writings of Mondrian in defense of his Neo-Plastic painting (pure abstract art in a broader scope) and its principles. This text was written as a response to two weeks continuous criticism of abstract art, especially in regard to the article of *Tériade*, which was published in 11 March 1930 in daily newspaper *L'Intransigeant*. In defense to such criticisms to the very aesthetic principles of abstract art, editors of the magazine *Cahiers d'art* asked the pioneers of abstract movement to send their reply to those criticisms. Mondrian's response was published in January 1931⁸² as a slightly revised version of *Cubism and Neo-Plastic - Le cubisme et la néoplastique* in *Cahiers d'art* with the new title⁸³ *Réponse de Mondrian à l'enquête sur l'art abstrait - Mondrian's response regarding to abstract art* (Holtzman & James, 1986, pp. 236-237; Veen, 2011, p. 238). Overall, in this essay Mondrian explained rhythm as a universal component of the composition. In this respect, he delineated that rhythm should be expressed, as much as possible, ‘free’ and independent from the means of imaging, plastic means.

⁸² According to Holtzman and James (1986), beside Mondrian other pioneers of abstract art such as Fernand Leger, Willi Baumeister, Wassily Kandinsky, and Hans Arp sent their responses to the criticism of *Tériade* of abstract art to journal *Cahiers d'art* for publication.

⁸³ According to Veen (2011), the two texts *Le cubisme et la néoplastique* and *Réponse de Mondrian à l'enquête sur l'art abstrait* are very similar and they overlap in content (p. 238). For this thesis, the translation of Holtzman and James from 1930 essay *Le cubisme et la néoplastique - Cubism and Neo-Plastic* is used.

Beside the previous writings, Mondrian's long and important 1931-1932⁸⁴ essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships - L'art nouveau - la vie nouvelle (La culture des rapports purs)* is considered. This essay is one of Mondrian's the most significant theoretical texts. In it we find a culmination of his matured, refined artistic standpoint on his Neo-Plastic principles. In this essay, Mondrian expounded the relation of Neo-Plastic painting and its theories to life and culture. Besides, in this essay Mondrian in many instances talked about the two components of his Neo-Plastic painting: means of imaging (plastic means) and relationships.

5.2.2 Mondrian's flourishing period in Paris and his 1924-1931 Neo-Plastic compositions

By the 1925 Mondrian was recognized as one of the pioneers of abstract art in Paris. The exhibitions he participated in and, more importantly, the theoretical writings he published throughout 1919-1925 in *De Stijl* magazine and French journals were very influential to propagate his avant-garde theories and to heighten his artistic position in the circle of the artists in this city. Mondrian's theoretical writings were not only published and read in Paris, but also in other countries such as Germany. In 1925 a selection of his articles (translated to Germany) was published in the Bauhaus book under the title *Die Neue Gestaltung* - the German for Neo-Plasticism. Therefore, Mondrian's Neo-Plastic idea was further recognized in Germany and particularly among the Bauhaus circle.

Moreover, Mondrian's contribution to the big exhibition *'l'Art d'aujourd'hui'* held in 1925 was another seminal step which helped him gain a higher level of recognition in Paris. As a result of more recognition in international art market, Mondrian was no

⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that while the main body of *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships* was written in 1931, Mondrian later supplemented an 'Introduction' for this long essay in 1932 as well. For this thesis both texts are analyzed.

longer dependent on the circle of De Stijl artists. After 1925, he became an independent artist who was well-known not only in the circle of artists in Netherlands and Paris, but also in other countries in Europe. As a result, more art dealers and collectors were interested in buying his Neo-Plastic artworks. For example, in 1924 Mondrian succeeded to sell one of his 1923 paintings to Alexander Dornier that he brought it to Landesmuseum in Hanover. In short, in this period, mid 1920's onwards, many art dealers, such as Ida Bienert and her son Friedrich, Miss Katherine Dreier, and Mr. Gallatin started to buy more artworks from Mondrian (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 185; Seuphor, 1956). In 1926 Katherine Dreier also bought one of Mondrian's lozenge-shaped canvases. That painting was exhibited in the same year in International Exhibition of the Society Anonyme in Brooklyn. In Paris, Mondrian was also surrounded by warm families such as Stieltjes and Hoyack, Vantongerloos, Dr. d'Eck, and Seuphor (Seuphor, 1956, p. 164).

Mondrian also influenced many artists in Paris. Interestingly, we see that after 1925, many of the former members of De Stijl group and other artists, such as Vantongerloo, Cesar Domela, as well as Jean Gorin, started to paint in the manner of Neo-Plastic style. Indeed, Mondrian had a direct impact on the previously mentioned artists. Besides, according to Blotkamp, Mondrian's influence is palpable on artists such as Joaquin Torres-Garcia, Leger, Alexander Calder and, although less palpable, Picasso's late-1920's paintings. According to Blotkamp, by the 1930, Mondrian was as well-known as Kandinsky as one of the pioneers of abstract art (Blotkamp, 1994, pp. 199-201).

It is noteworthy to mention that though after 1925 Mondrian succeeded in gaining an acceptable recognition in Paris, the atmosphere of Paris in this time was not really ready to accept his pure abstract art and his fellow artists. Good and well-known galleries in Paris usually preferred to exhibit works of branded artists such as Picasso and Matisse.

At this time, the circle of Russians, Czechs, Hungarians, Swiss, Dutch and Scandinavians abstract artists centered around Leger. However, they had less opportunity to exhibit their work compared to Picasso or Matisse (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 201). Such a tough situation had become worse by the proposal of Surrealism which soon gained high popularity in Paris during this time. Nevertheless, after late 1920's the abstract artists could regain their previous popularity in the circle of artists in Paris. It was through the endeavors of the avant-garde, abstract artists such as Andre Breton that the abstract artists could stand against those group of semi-abstract and figurative painters in the city. Another important incident which steadily reinforced the popularity of the abstract artists was the formation of *Cercle et Cane* group in 1930 by Uruguayan painter Torres-Garcia and Michel Seuphor. The seminal members of the group were three well-known abstract painters: Kandinsky, Leger, and Mondrian. Other painters and architects such as Jean Arp, Le Corbusier, Kurt Schwitters, and Vantongerloo soon joined the Cercle et Cane. Although Cercle et Cane could not survive more than a few months, such short-lived group of painters formed a more organized and enriched group called *Abstraction-Creation* which lasted from 1931 to 1936.

Moving from an overview of Mondrian's artistic position in Paris after 1925 within a historical context, it is necessary to look at the characteristic of his paintings. As it was discussed in Chapter 2, during 1923-1924, Mondrian found that Doesburg was gradually deviating from the principles of De Stijl. In this regard, Doesburg⁸⁵ in his lozenge paintings - so-called contra-compositions - used diagonal lines. This was against Mondrian's theory of Neo-Plasticism. Regardless of this gap, Doesburg's lozenge compositions motivated Mondrian to further experiment with his Neo-Plastic theories on a series of lozenge compositions. Lozenge shape compositions are among

⁸⁵ According to Blotkamp, van Doesburg who was searching for a new accommodation even had to stay in Mondrian's studio in Paris for a few weeks at the end of 1923. As a result, two fellow painters worked enthusiastically close together in this period.

the most important oeuvre of Neo-Plasticism. Carmean (1979) believes that Mondrian's lozenge compositions beautifully depict his artistic theory of Neo-Plasticism: "[t]he diamond was in fact a form both instrumental in and receptive to his evolving ideas, and it is in Mondrian's diamond paintings where we find his art at its most fulfilled and assured" (p. 18). Therefore, entire of Mondrian's lozenge paintings in this period are analyzed in this chapter.

During 1924-1925 Mondrian painted two diamond paintings *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (1924) - figure 5.1, and *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (1925) – figure 5.2. Compared to the earlier 1918-1919 as well as 1921 lozenge compositions, in these paintings lines⁸⁶ are completely extended to the edges of the canvas and furthermore, they are thicker. According to Mondrian's explanation in his earlier writings, we see that lines in these paintings perfectly delimit and determine the color and noncolor planes. In these paintings, the lines at right angle - the primary and immutable relationship among the positions of lines - is represented as very concrete and dominant, in contrast to the diagonal angle of the canvas. What is common in majority of these new series of compositions is variety in the thickness of lines. Such variety is very discernible in the short vertical line in the left side in figure 5.1, and two thicker lines in the right and top sides in figure 5.2. As a result, lines seem to be in a kind of aerial perspective and depth of field in respect to the space. Therefore, we realize that rhythm in these paintings is expressed not only through relationship between the dimension of the color and noncolor planes but also through the interaction of lines in different layers.

⁸⁶ In 1921 lozenge compositions, lines were not yet completely extended to the very diagonal edge of the composition. Hence, there is a tiny white triangle in the intersection of lines with the borders of the canvas.



Figure 5.1: Piet Mondrian. 1924. Tableau No. IV; Lozenge Composition with Red, Gray, Blue, Yellow, and Black. Oil on canvas. Overall (diamond): 142.8 x 142.3 cm (56 1/4 x 56 in.). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of Herbert and Nannette Rothschild, 1971.51.1 (© 2018 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust - info@mondriantrust.com).

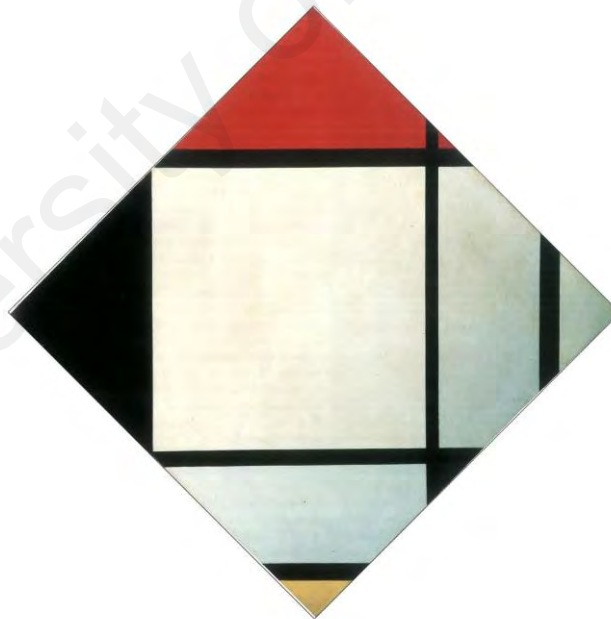


Figure 5.2: Piet Mondrian. 1925. Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue. Oil on canvas. Diagonal 109. Private Collection (© 2018 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust - info@mondriantrust.com).

In next series of compositions created during 1925-1926, all color planes are shifted to the periphery of the canvas.⁸⁷ By shifting the color planes to the sides of the composition, the depth of the field of colors was also abolished to a noticeable degree. That is to say, the planes of color and noncolor are represented in more unity in one layer. Moreover, in these paintings the quantity of lines was reduced. As a result, the central planes are no longer enclosed entities and they are perceived as a large empty space in the composition.⁸⁸ Similar to his former 1921 lozenge composition, in these diamond paintings the open-ended planes appeared as irregular polygon shapes that are connected to the outer space of the composition. These characteristics are discernible in *Composition with Blue and Yellow* (1925) – figure 5.3, *Composition with Grey and Black* (1925) - figure 5.4, *Composition with Black and Blue* (1926) – figure 5.5, *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* - figure 5.6. In the entire of these three works, planes are not enclosed by four lines and there is, at least, one open side to the outer space of the composition.

⁸⁷ Mondrian previously used and discovered this tactic in his 1922 compositions as it was studied. Hence, after 1924 he reused this technique to further express unity in the surface of the composition.

⁸⁸ The move of the planes of colors to the sides of the composition is also implemented in his upright paintings in this period. He persistently continued this tactic in majority of his 1925-1931 compositions.



Figure 5.3: Piet Mondrian. 1925. Composition with Blue and Yellow. Oil on canvas. Diagonal 112 cm. Kunsthaus, Zurich. Vereinigung Zürcher Kunstfreunde, 1956 © ProLitteris.

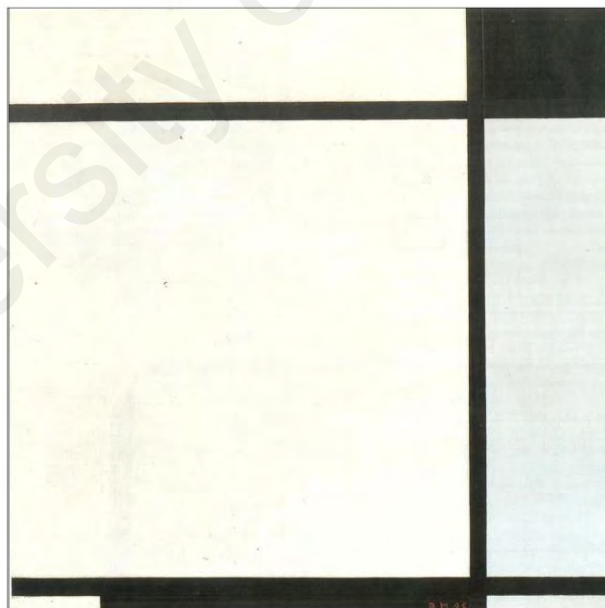


Figure 5.4: Piet Mondrian. 1925. Composition with Grey and Black. Oil on canvas. 50 x 50 cm. Kunstmuseum, Bern.

In the next two 1926 lozenge compositions, the quantity of the lines is further reduced: *Composition with Black and Blue* (figure 5.5) and *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* (figure 5.6). In the previous painting (see figure 5.5), only two lines are used, which are positioned very asymmetrically against the vertical and horizontal axis of the lozenge composition. Scholars such as Blotkamp resembled the two intersecting lines in figure 5.4 to the two blades of an open scissors which tend to be closed - in a swirl movement - and so overlap each other in parallel with the diagonal axis of the canvas (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 198). Although I agree with Blotkamp for the presence of such swirl movement of the planes, I think any resemblance of these two lines to an open scissor is in opposition to what Mondrian really intended to express by these two lines.

In *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* (figure 5.6), the element of color is removed. Four intersected lines are painted, each in different thickness, in the white surface of the composition. In the absence of the colors, lines in variety of thicknesses seem stacked over each other more than before. This means that the space, in contrast to what Mondrian intended, was represented as a three dimensional space. It should be noted that, thanks to the use of lines in his post 1924 compositions to delimit the planes of color and noncolor and using colors in minimal, three dimensionality of space was not an obstacle for Mondrian. Indeed, we see that due to the portrayal of planes and lines in different layers, the rhythm and balance between the planes are expressed more dynamically in these compositions. As we will see, Mondrian in this period, and particularly after 1927, became interested in the syncopated rhythm of Jazz music. Similarly, in his paintings and writings he showed more interest to express rhythm as vivid and universal.



Figure 5.5: Piet Mondrian. 1926. Composition with Black and Blue. Oil on canvas. 24 1/16 x 24 1/16 inches (61.1 x 61.1 cm) . Reproduced with the permission of © Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin Collection, 1952-61-87.

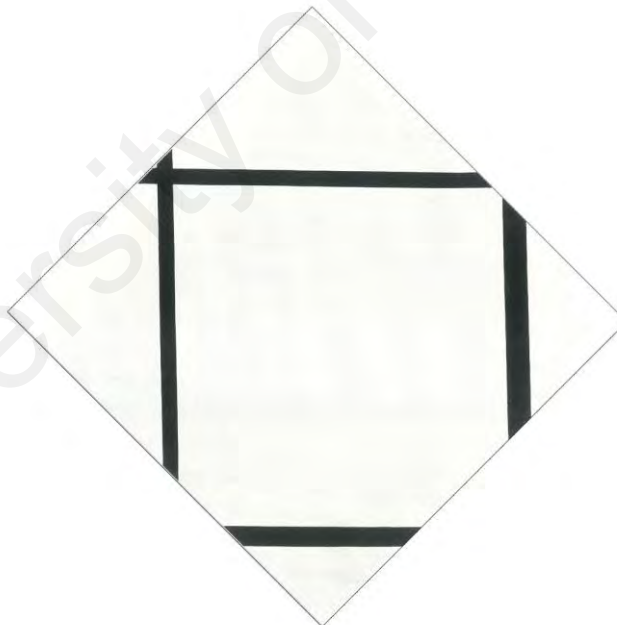


Figure 5.6: Piet Mondrian. 1926. Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray. Oil on canvas. 46 1/8 x 45 1/2" (117.2 x 115.6 cm). Reproduced with the permission of © Museum of Modern Art, New York. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest, 179.1953.

After 1926, Mondrian temporarily stopped painting in diamond format, and focused his experimentation on upright compositions. In works executed between 1927 and 1931, similar to the previous diamonds, lines are in periphery of the composition, in a way their intersections do not create a central white space. Hence, in these paintings we see that the harsh contrast between the large white planes - see figures 5.1 to 5.4 - and other planes of color is minimized.

When we look at the 1927-1931 compositions, we find two major groups of works. In the first group two primary lines, similar to 1925-1926 lozenge paintings, intersect close to the peripheral side of the composition. Consequently, one very large plane which is commonly white (noncolor) is opposed to tiny planes of colors in the sides of the composition. This type of compositions is shown in *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (1927) – figure 5.7, *Composition with Black, Red and Grey* (1927) - figure 5.8, *Composition with Yellow, Blue, Black and Light Blue* (1929) – figure 5.10, *Composition No. I, with Red and Black* (1929) - figure 5.11, and *Composition with Yellow* (1930) - figure 5.13. In all these paintings, there are two main vertical and horizontal lines which are stretched through the whole width and length of the composition. The shorter lines are used in the sides of the painting bisecting the elongated rectangles in the periphery into smaller units. Moreover, each color appears only once and they are pure hue of primary colors.

In the second group of paintings the two lines intersect close to the central axis of the composition. The good examples of this group of paintings are *Composition with Red, Yellow and blue* (1928) - figure 5.9, *Composition with Blue and Yellow* (1930) - figure 5.12, *Composition with Yellow* (1930) - Figure 5.14, and *Composition in Colours / Composition No. I with Red and Blue* (1931) - figure 5.15. The vertical and horizontal lines in these compositions are positioned asymmetrical to the central axis of the

composition. As a result, we see that the lines tend to move forward and backward in respect to the central axis of the composition. Subsequently, as Milner and Blotkamp also indicated, in these 1927-1931 compositions we see a pulsing rhythm that is the outcome of such fluctuation of the lines.

In both types of the 1927-1930 compositions - similar to previous lozenge composition of this period - the tiny rectangular plane, created as a result of the intersection of two vertical and horizontal lines, is filled with color. I argue that by filling these tiny planes, Mondrian succeeded to turn the attention of the viewer from tracing the continuity of lines to the relationship between the large planes of noncolor and small planes of color.

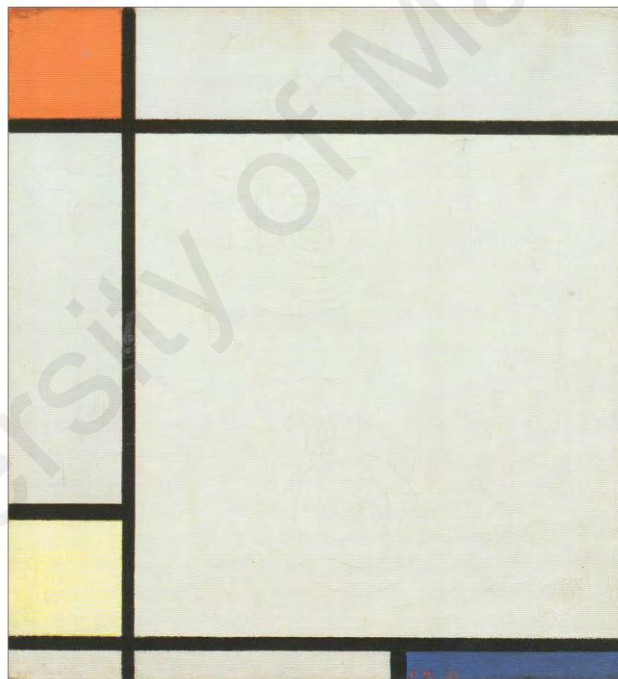


Figure 5.7: Piet Mondrian. 1927. Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.



Figure 5.8: Piet Mondrian. 1927. Composition with Black, Red and Grey. Oil on canvas. 56 x 56 cm.

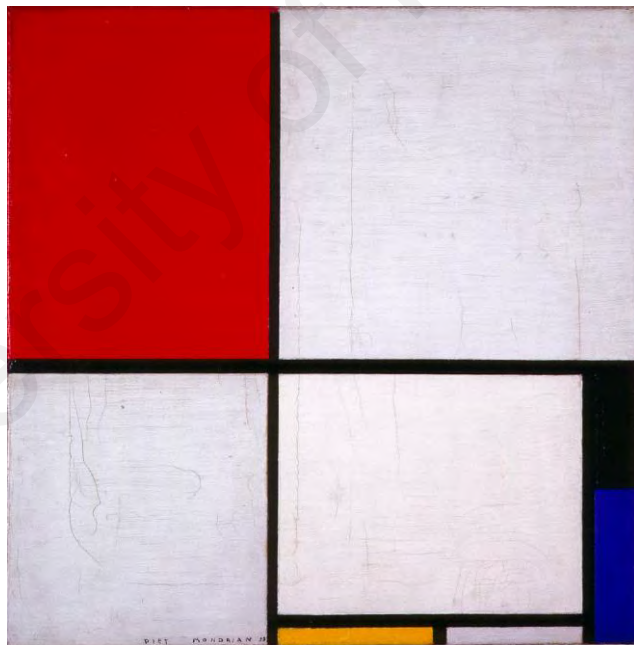


Figure 5.9: Piet Mondrian. 1928. Composition with Red, Yellow and blue (Komposition mit Rot, Gelb und Blau). Oil on canvas. 45.2 x 45 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen.

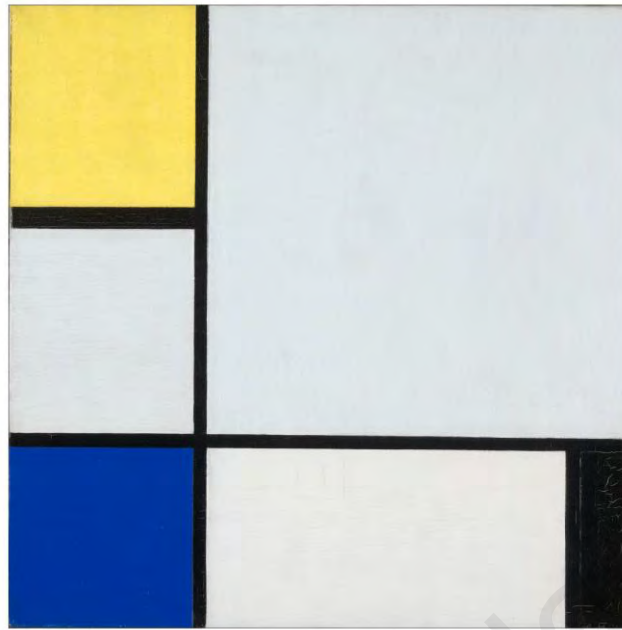


Figure 5.10: Piet Mondrian. 1929. Composition with Yellow, Blue, Black and Light Blue . Oil on canvas. 50.6 x 50.3 cm (19 15/16 x 19 13/16 in.). Reproduced with the permission of © Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Collection Société Anonyme.



Figure 5.11: Piet Mondrian. 1929. Composition No. I, with Red and Black. Oil on canvas. 52.3 x 52.2 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Kunstmuseum Basel, Schenkung Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach 1968, Inv. G 1968.88

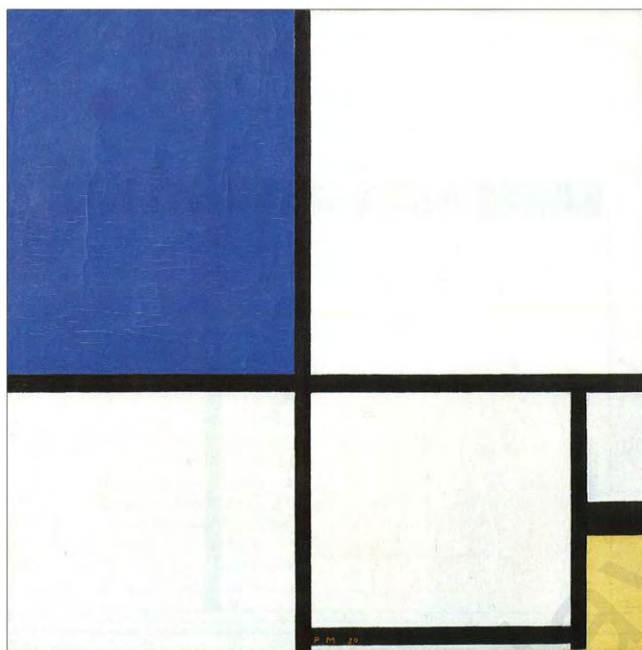


Figure 5.12: Piet Mondrian. 1930. Composition No. II, Composition with Blue and Yellow. Oil on canvas. 50.5 x 50.5 cm. Private Collection.

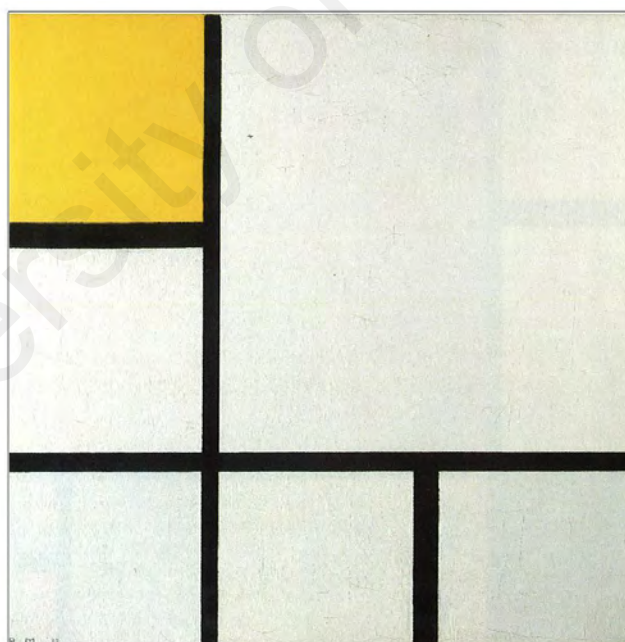


Figure 5.13: Piet Mondrian. 1930. Composition with Yellow. Oil on canvas. 19 7/8'' x 19 7/8'', Kunstmuseum.

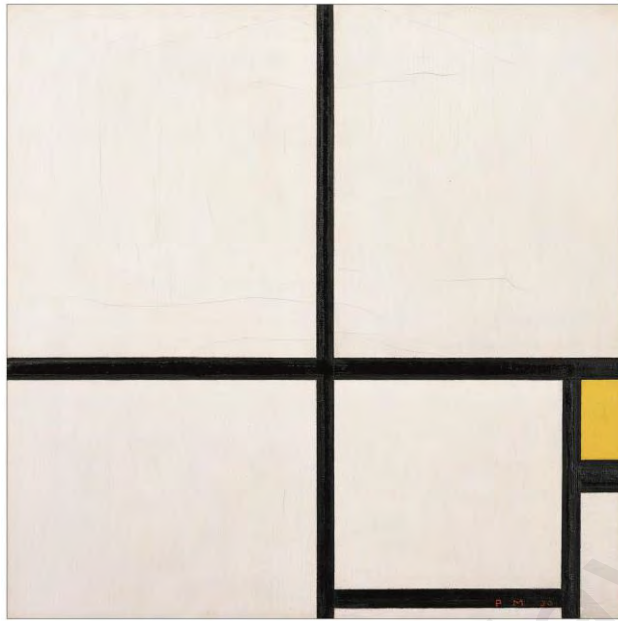


Figure 5.14: Piet Mondrian. 1930. Composition with Yellow (Komposition mit Gelb). Oil on canvas. 46 x 46.5 cm. © Mondrian/Holtzman Trust, c/o Beeldrecht, Amsterdam, Holland / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Foto: Walter Klein, Düsseldorf.

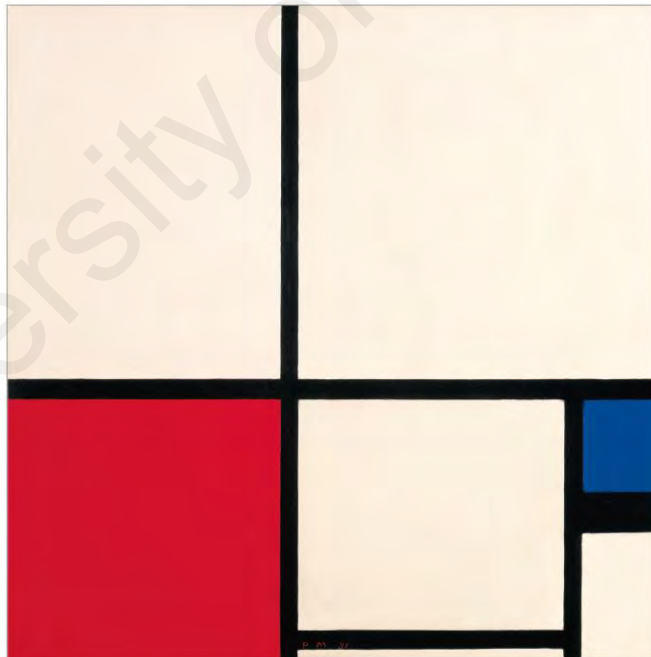


Figure 5.15: Piet Mondrian. 1931. Composition in Colours / Composition No. I with Red and Blue. 50 x 50 cm. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Inv. no. 677 (1977.51). © Mondrian/Holtzman Trust.

Besides the previous paintings, there are some paintings which demonstrate a more radical break away from former ones. These compositions, created between 1929 and 1931, are painted at upright angle and they share similar characteristics to previous works. In these works, Mondrian represented a more dynamic rhythm through the use of a wider range of thicknesses and lengths for the lines. Such abrupt changes in the thickness and length of lines are discernible in *Composition No. III / Fox Trot B with Black, Red, Blue and Yellow* (1929) - figure 5.16, *Composition with Black Lines* (1930) - figure 5.17, and *Composition No. I with Red* (1931) - figure 5.18. As the majority of scholars indicated, Mondrian's tendency to animate the rhythm of lines, especially in his late 1920's compositions, goes back to his interest in the live rhythm of Jazz music. As we will see, Mondrian in his 1926-1932 essays and articles introduces rhythm as a vivid and dynamic expression in the composition in relation to syncopated rhythm of Jazz music.

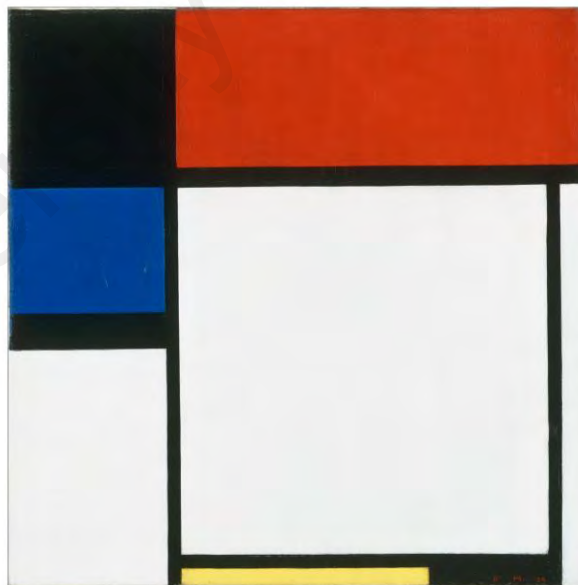


Figure 5.16: Piet Mondrian. 1929. *Composition No. III / Fox Trot B with Black, Red, Blue and Yellow*. Oil on canvas. 45.4 x 45.4 cm (17 7/8 x 17 7/8 in). Reproduced with the permission of © Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Collection Société Anonyme.

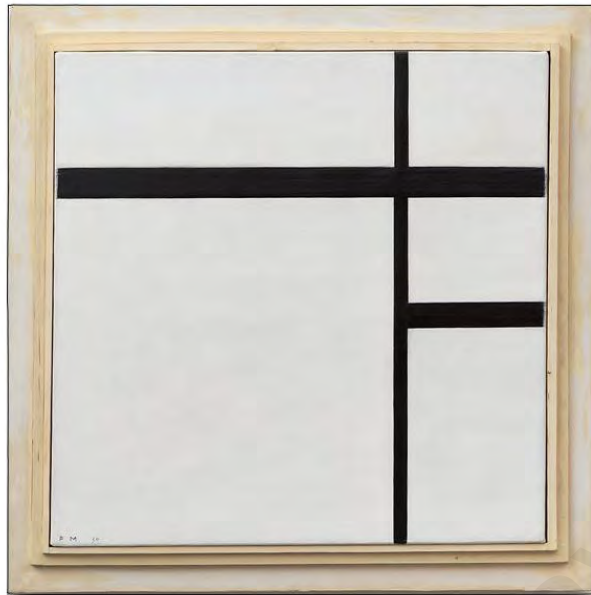


Figure 5.17: Piet Mondrian. 1930. Composition with Black Lines (Composition en blanc et noir II). Oil on canvas. 50.5 x 50.5 cm. Stedelijk van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven. Acquired in 1950, Inventory number 343.

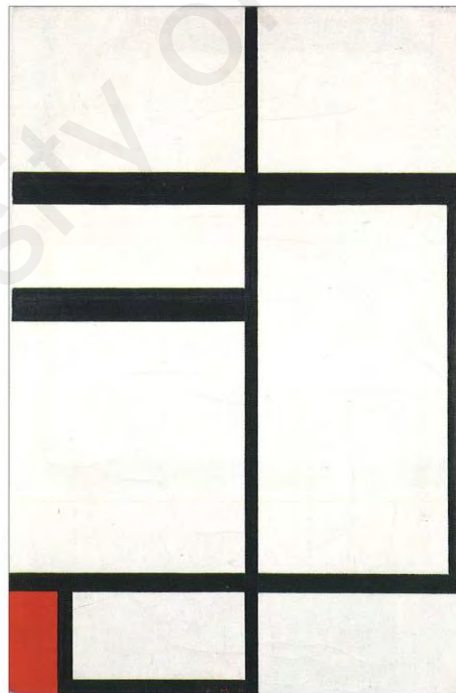


Figure 5.18: Piet Mondrian. 1931. Composition No. I with Red. 1931. Oil on canvas. 82.5 x 57.4 cm.

During 1930-1931, Mondrian, in contrast to his previous works, painted series of very stark lozenge compositions. These diamond paintings are indeed replica of previous 1925-1926 lozenge paintings except that the element of color is totally abolished in these compositions. In these paintings, he only used a minimal number of lines to express equilibrium and rhythm. These 1930-1931 lozenge paintings are: *Foxtrot A* (1930) - figure 5.19, *Composition No. I, Lozenge Composition with Four Black Lines* (1930) - figure 5.20, and *Composition with Two Lines* (1931) - figure 5.21. In fact, Mondrian in these stark paintings demonstrated the well-known statement 'less is more' as he also indicated in 1932: "as pure plastic ends, it [new art] achieves the maximum of expression with the minimum of means" (Mondrian, 1932, p. 279). We notice that he only used two straight lines in *Composition with Two Lines* (figure 5.21) to express the equilibrated relationship, or equilibrium, as well as rhythm.



Figure 5.19: Piet Mondrian. 1930. Fox Trot A. Oil on canvas. 78.2 x 78.3 cm (30 13/16 x 30 13/16 in.). vertical axis: 110 cm (43 5/16 in.). Reproduced with the permission of © Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Collection Société Anonyme.

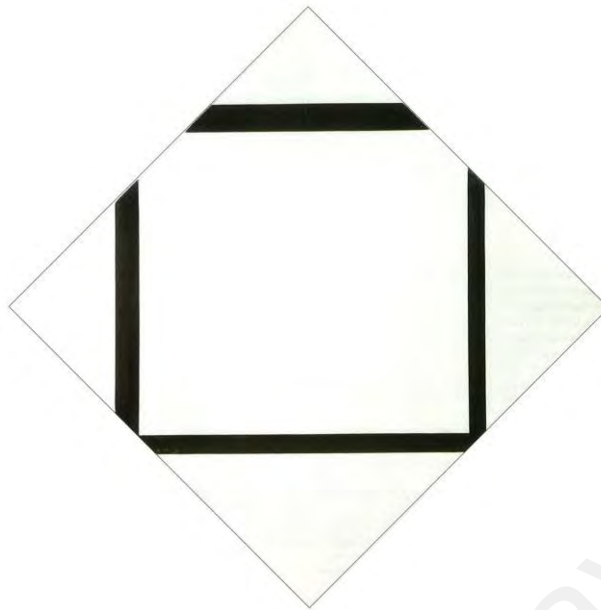


Figure 5.20: Piet Mondrian. 1930. Composition No. I, Lozenge Composition with Four Black Lines. Oil on canvas. 75.2 x 75.2 cm, vertical axis: 105 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Hilla Rebay Collection, 1971.



Figure 5.21: Piet Mondrian. 1931. Composition with Two Lines. Oil on canvas. diagonal 114 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Overall, what is common in all post-1924 compositions is the complete extension of the lines to the edges of the canvas. Indeed, lines after 1924 were painted as more concrete and dominant to express purer expression of balance and rhythm in these paintings. I assert the complete extension of lines, resulted in a more dynamic interaction of inner and outer space of these paintings. In this regard, we see that lines pull away with themselves the planes located in the periphery to the outer space of the canvas.

5.2.3 Analysis of the key Neo-Plastic concepts in 1924-1931 compositions and 1926-1932 writings

5.2.3.1 Characteristics of the means of imaging or plastic means

In this section we will see that Mondrian depicted his means of imaging in his 1924-1931 compositions and 1926-1932 writings as flat rectangular planes of color and noncolor. Indeed, we infer that Mondrian's expressions in his writing and paintings of this period are the affirmation of what he had delineated about his means of imaging in his 1917-1925 essays. In 1926, he also crystalized what he had postulated in his previous 1917-1925 essays about his means of imaging in the first principle of Neo-Plasticism. When we read his 1926-1932 writings, we understand that in his writings he also added some supplementary information to what he stated in the first principle of Neo-Plasticism. However, we see that Mondrian in his paintings in this period did not fully demonstrate what he stated about the new role of lines and colors in his writings. Overall, we find close relation between the characteristics of the means of imaging in Mondrian's 1924-1931 paintings and his explanation of the means of imaging in his 1926-1932 writings.

As it was studied in Chapter 4, Mondrian in his 1917-1925 essays in many instances talked about the elements of his painting which he called *beeldingsmiddelen* in Dutch,

translated as ‘plastic means’ or ‘means of imaging.’ As he stated in his 1917-1925 writings - best demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings - his means of imaging are flat rectangular planes of primary colors (red, yellow, blue) and noncolors (white, grey, black). As early as 1917, he postulated that flattened rectangular planes of color and noncolor are the most purified, intensified version of naturalistic forms, space, and colors in Neo-Plastic painting.

Mondrian in his 1926-1932 writings reinforced and slightly expanded what he had previously theorized in relation to the definition of his means of imaging. Most importantly, in the late 1926 he wrote a culmination of what he acquired throughout his 1917-1925 experimentations in respect to his means of imaging in the first principle of Neo-Plasticism as follows: “[t]he means of imaging must be the rectangular plane or prism in primary color (red, blue, and yellow) and in non-color (white, black, and gray). In architecture, empty space is considered as non-color. Material may count as color” (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6).⁸⁹ In the second statement of this principle, Mondrian connected colors to the ‘material’ or any tangible entity in the architecture. He also indicated that noncolors in architecture are counted as ‘empty space’ that is a three dimensional space. It is interesting that Mondrian even in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism once again emphasized on the universality of his artistic theories and their application in other arts, particularly architecture. Knowing about Mondrian’s refined definition of his means of imaging, mentioned in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism, now we move to his 1924-1931 compositions to examine the characteristics and role of his means of imaging in these paintings.

⁸⁹ The original French version of the first principle of Neo-Plasticism is:

Le moyen plastique doit être le plan ou le prisme rectangulaire en couleur primaire (rouge, bleu et jaune) et en non-couleur (blanc, noir et gris) Dans l'architecture l'espace vide compte pour la non-couleur. La matière peut compter pour la couleur. Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017a, pp. 282-283)

When we look at 1924-1931 compositions, we see that, compared to the earlier 1917-1923 compositions, the primary colors were used in almost pure hue. However, we realize that colors in majority of these paintings (especially in lozenge compositions and post 1930 compositions: see figures 5.5, 5.6, 5.14, 5.17, 5.19, 5.20, and 5.21) are either used in minimal or they are completely removed. This means that the triad of primary colors, as means of imaging, is not an essential element in Neo-Plastic composition. Overall, we see that Mondrian used the colors as secondary means of expression in his 1924-1931 compositions. Instead, he emphasized on the elements of line and noncolors as essential means of imaging. I argue that one of the reasons Mondrian in his 1924-1931 paintings kept the colors to a minimum is for the subjective and individual characters of primary colors. Although for Mondrian primary colors are purified version of naturalistic colors, he was well-aware that these colors, based on Goethe's theory of colors, appear in different levels. Therefore, in the 1924-1931 compositions, we see that the triad of primary colors was used very cautiously, usually one or two colors used, to minimize as much as possible the depth of field in the colors.

There are two factors that really distinguish the use and role of the means of imaging (particularly the element of line) in 1924-1931 compositions from earlier studied paintings in Chapter 4. Firstly, the lines are completely extended to the edge of the composition. Secondly, the lines intersect in ways that do not create, except in few instances, enclosed rectangular planes. Although we still perceive the surface of these compositions as number of geometric divisions representing rectangles, we rarely find the planes bounded by four lines. Mondrian intersected the lines in a way that the planes seem to be freed from the limitation of the lines. As a result, we see that the planes tend to establish dialectic of relationships with the outer space of the composition.

It is clear that Mondrian in these compositions started to redefine some other roles for the lines beside their previous role of the delimitation of color and noncolor areas in the composition. In majority of the 1924-1931 compositions, almost all planes have one or two sides open to the outside area of the canvas. As such, in these paintings there is barely more than one plane which is enclosed with four lines. In such cases, like in figures 5.9, 5.12, 5.14 and 5.15, the enclosed plane is part of the white surface of the composition. Therefore, the enclosed planes are not represented as a dominant enclosed rectangle in the composition. This means that Mondrian in his 1924-1931 paintings, as much as possible, tried not to depict the planes as enclosed rectangular shapes. Overall, slight changes in the role of the lines are common in the majority of the 1924-1931 compositions. In these paintings, the lines were used as independent and free elements in relation to the white space of the composition rather than being merely used to enclose the planes. Therefore, we infer that in contrast to Mondrian's emphasizing on the role of lines in his earlier writings and paintings for delimiting and purifying the colors, in his 1924-1931 paintings - particularly in his post-1926 paintings - he demonstrated a relatively new role for the lines. Now, we move on to see what Mondrian stated, besides what he wrote in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism, about the means of imaging in his 1926-1932 writings. This helps us get a better understanding of Mondrian's artistic vision in relation to his means of imaging that are the outcome of his experimentations in his 1924-1931 paintings.

In his 1926-1932 writings, Mondrian reinforced what he had stated about his means of imaging in his earlier 1917-1925 essays. As it was discussed, Mondrian in 1926 wrote his first principle of Neo-Plasticism that was his refined idea in regard to what he had found throughout his 1917-1925 experimentations with his means of imaging on canvases. Although in his first principle Mondrian defined the characteristics of his means of imaging, in other essays and articles he wrote in this period (1926-1932), he

further indicated some new ideas that help us better understand his matured artistic vision toward his elements of painting. For instance, in his long 1931 essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*, he defined the means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of color which are created through intersection of perpendicular lines:

The fine arts reveal that their essential plastic means are only *line, plane surface, and color*. Although in composition these means inevitably produce forms, these forms are far from being the essential plastic means of art. For art, forms exist only as secondary or auxiliary plastic means and not in order to achieve particular form. (Mondrian, 1931, p. 245)

In the above statement Mondrian pointed to a new idea about the role of his means of imaging (particularly lines) which implication we also found in the majority of his 1924-1931 paintings. From this quote it is inferred that the forms (rectangular shapes) that are created through the intersection of the lines are not primary elements of painting in Neo-Plasticism. As we saw, Mondrian in his 1917-1925 essays as well as his first principle of Neo-Plasticism always stressed that his universal means of imaging are 'rectangular' planes of color and noncolor. However, in his 1931 essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships* he indicated that any enclosed forms whether as rectangular or whatsoever⁹⁰ in the composition is secondary and, thereby, not an essential pictorial element to express the beauty and equilibrium. This means that Mondrian in this period considered a similar rank for each of his means of imaging: line, color, and plane. In his 1924-1931 paintings, we saw that the lines are not used, at least in a majority of cases - in order to delimit and confine the borders of the planes. This means that the superiority of lines to the colors was diminished in 1924-1931 paintings. That is to say, planes of color and noncolor no longer depend on the lines to

⁹⁰ In his lozenge compositions, we see that the intersection of the lines created irregular polygon shapes.

be expressed in the composition. In this regard, Mondrian in his 1931 essay called his means of imaging ‘neutral’ elements. For Mondrian the intensified form, color, and line as ‘neutral’⁹¹ elements are essential means in his refined theory of Neo-Plasticism.

Indeed, what Mondrian wrote in his 1931 essay are signals to his matured and transformed artistic ideas, compared to what he had written about his means of imaging in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism. As we saw, in 1924-1931 paintings, particularly those 1927-1931 compositions, the planes are no longer represented as enclosed rectangle shapes. It is inferred that such transformation in Mondrian’s artistic vision toward his means of imaging is the result of his visual experimentations with element of line in his 1924-1931 paintings. That is to say, he characterized the universal means of imaging as flat rectangular planes (surface of the composition) as ‘neutral’ elements that are merely employed to establish *relationships* in the composition.

When we read Mondrian’s 1926-1932 writings, we also find another transformation of Mondrian’s artistic ideas toward using his lines that was absent in his early Neo-Plastic writings. In this regard, he emphasized that the intersection of lines should not be interpreted as a ‘cross sign’ or any other enclosed form or symbol. In this respect, we find that in Neo-Plasticism the distinct duality between means of imaging abolishes every possibility for the interpretation of the lines at right angle as a ‘cross’ sign.’ In his 1926 essay *Home—Street—City*, Mondrian stated this matter: “[w]hen united in the ‘appearance’ of a cross, these lines express a form—although abstractly; but in Neo-Plastic composition they are really opposed, thus annihilating all form” (Mondrian, 1926c, p. 210). From this statement, it is also inferred that lines in Neo-Plastic painting are not used to create rectangular shape or any appearances, even abstract, such as a

⁹¹ Mondrian in original French manuscript of this essay used French term ‘*forme neutre*’ which Holtzman and James in 1986 translated as ‘neural form.’

cross sign. Instead, as Mondrian stressed, lines are opposed in a way that they abolish all their particularity (cross sign, rectangles, and any abstract or geometric shape). Mondrian further explained that such subjective interpretation of lines as cross sign or any enclosed forms (such as rectangles) should be annihilated through the ‘multiplicity’ of oppositions. In this regard, in the outset of his 1929 essay *Pure Abstract Art*, he said that to cancel any interpretation of the lines at right angle (dual opposition) as any enclosed form, the lines should resolve their duality through perpetual oppositions in the composition:

The basic elements of form are not attained through mere stylization. Clear plastic expression arises from the process of abstraction, through disassociation, that is, through the annihilation of closed form—the duality of straight line in perpendicular relationship. But this duality again becomes form or symbol whenever it is not plastically expressed as a multiplicity of mutually annihilating oppositions. (Mondrian, 1929, p. 223)

As Mondrian stated in the above statement, as long as the means of imaging are in constant opposition, they are not interpreted as enclosed forms or any other symbols such as cross sign. Moreover, we come to this point that in the refined aesthetic theory of Neo-Plasticism (late 1920’s), the intensified, abstracted elements of paintings are not sufficient, contrary to early 1917-1925 Neo-Plastic theory, to express a universal harmony or rhythm in the composition. Besides being abstract and purified, these elements should also be composed in a way that destruct their geometric shapes, even though abstract, through multiplicity, constant dual oppositions, and relationships. This means that Mondrian in his late 1920’s started another phase of distillation, or purification, of the elements of his paintings in order to attain the utmost possible universal, pure, expression of beauty as equilibrium in his paintings; an expression which is almost independent from the pictoriality and thingness of the element of painting. At this point, we come up with a new argument in respect to Mondrian’s

transformation of his aesthetic ideas. Contrary to scholars' common interpretations, notably Blotkamp and Bois who marked Mondrian's major aesthetic change (mainly his destructive approach toward his elements of paintings) in his late Neo-Plastic period during 1934-1944, I argue that such transformation of Mondrian's aesthetic vision had already been established during 1929-1932. There are two reasons: Firstly we saw a noticeable change in the use and role of lines in the post-1927 paintings. Secondly, we find that Mondrian started to mention his new ideas in regard to the role of his lines in his post-1929 writings. Overall, we understand that in his 1924-1931 paintings and writings Mondrian no longer considered a constructive role for the lines, at least as a primary role, in creating rectangular planes of color and noncolor. Whereas, in this period, and particularly after 1930, he redefined the universal means of imaging as neutral and auxiliary elements which are only used to represent the relationships in the composition. In his 1930 essay *Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)*, where he tried to distinguish his Neo-Plastic from geometric and decorative art, he delineated his new artistic vision toward the means of imaging (plastic means) as follows:

Although the rectangular plane is also a geometric form, it does not appear as such in Neo-Plastic: composition annihilates its morphoplastic character. [...] Neo-Plastic is as destructive as it is constructive. It is quite wrong to call it "Constructivism." It is a great mistake to think that Neo-Plastic constructs rectangular planes set side by side—like paving stones. The rectangular plane should be seen rather as the result of a plurality of straight lines in rectangular opposition. (Mondrian, 1930a, p. 231)

As Mondrian explained above, the 'morphoplastic character' of means of imaging - for example any subjective interpretation of lines as enclosed geometric shapes or a cross sign - should be abolished in the composition through constant relationships, or opposition, among the means of imaging. Indeed, Mondrian in essays of this period

assigned a more substantial role for lines to express 'relationships' rather than depicting themselves as rectangular planes of color and noncolors.

When we further examine Mondrian's writings in this period, we get a fuller knowledge about his refined aesthetic ideas in respect to his idea of the role of lines. In this regard, Mondrian emphasized that line and color should exist as 'free' and self-reliant elements. As we saw, in 1919-1923 paintings and writings the lines were given an important task to delimit the colors and noncolors. Nevertheless, in majority of 1924-1931 paintings, the colors are partially freed from the limitation of the lines. Similarly, in his essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships* he indicated that line and color should exist as free and independent elements in Neo-Plasticism: "[t]he mutual separation of particular forms is the beginning of the independent existence of line and color, because thus freed, they lead to the creation of neutral forms (and consequently of free lines) that are above limiting particularities" (Mondrian, 1931, p. 259). According Mondrian's previous statement, the neutrality of the all elements of paintings in their utmost abstract state is a new aesthetic condition for a Neo-Plastic form. That is to say, a 'neutral form' - coined by Mondrian in the previous quote - is defined as free lines, colors, and noncolors which have lost their early Neo-Plastic roles, notably the primary value of lines, to delimit and define the colors and noncolors. In such a transformed Neo-Plastic theory, colors and lines are independent elements. Indeed, as Mondrian mentioned in the previous statement, the lines should be used as 'free lines' rather than constructing elements of geometric forms such as rectangular planes.

In essays of this period, Mondrian also delineated the process of the abstraction of the elements of painting. In this regard, he delineated the various stages of the abstraction of

particular form in morphoplastic⁹² expression- representational painting - in art into universal means of imaging in Neo-Plastic painting. As he explained, what he called a 'neutral' and 'universal' means of imaging in his Neo-Plastic painting is the product of steady reduction of the particularity of forms in various modern movements such as Cubism and Purism. In essays of this period, Mondrian called such abstraction and simplification of corporeality in painting 'denaturalization.'⁹³ In his 1926 essay *Home—Street—City*, he defined the term 'denaturalization' as a synonym for 'abstraction' as follows: "[t]o denaturalize is to abstract. By abstracting one achieves pure abstract plastic expression. To denaturalize is to deepen"⁹⁴ (Mondrian, 1926c, p. 211). For understanding the term *denaturalization*, we should interpret what Mondrian had previously discussed as the twofold task of the construction and destruction of form. As Mondrian clarifies in his 1917-1925 essays, the abstraction does not mean a one-way task of the destruction of the particularity of form. The first task is the destruction and interiorization of particularity and corporeity of naturalistic forms. The other task in reverse is the representation or exteriorization of the hidden and equivalent 'relationships' that is cloaked in the naturalistic forms due to the particularity of form. In his 1927 essay *Jazz and Neo-Plastic*, Mondrian pointed to such twofold process of abstraction:

Jazz and Neo-Plasticism are revolutionary phenomena in the extreme: they are destructive-constructive. They do not destroy the actual content of form: they only deepen form and annihilate it in favor of a new order. Breaking the limitations of "form as particularity," they make universal unity possible. (Mondrian, 1927, p. 219)

⁹² In his 1929 essay *Pure Abstract Art*, Mondrian distinguished the morphoplastic from Neo-Plastic as follows: "[a]rt that is naturalistic, abstracted, or geometric in form can be called 'morphoplastic art' and art that is concerned with the basic elements of form can be called 'pure abstract art'" (Mondrian, 1929, p. 223).

⁹³ In the original French manuscript of *Home—Street—City*, Mondrian used the French terms '*denaturaliser*' and '*denaturalisation*' which are translated as 'denaturalize' and 'denaturalization' in English by Holtzman and James in 1986.

⁹⁴ Mondrian used the French term '*approfondir*' in this statement which is translated as 'deepen' by Holtzman and James.

In fact, such twofold actions of destruction and construction of form in Neo-Plasticism, as Mondrian stated in the above statement, can be described as the abolition of the particularity of form, color, and line in one hand and construction or establishment of pure, equilibrated relationships among purified form, color, and line on the other hand. From Mondrian's writings we infer that the destruction of the particularity of form is a prerequisite to attain and express pure and universal relationships in Neo-Plastic painting.

Overall, we found that Mondrian in his 1926-1931 writings affirmed what he had theorized about the means of imaging in his earlier 1917-1925 essays as well as what he had written in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism in 1926. As such, means of imaging was defined as rectangular planes of color and noncolor in the composition. However, as we realized, in essays of this period and particularly in his post-1930 essays, he started to propagate this new idea that his means of imaging should be used as free and neutral as possible in the composition. That is to say, the lines and colors should exist independently. In this respect, he emphasized that a Neo-Plastic artist should use the lines in constant opposition in a way the intersection of the lines are not perceived as any enclosed geometric form or cross sign. Similarly, we saw that Mondrian in his 1924-1931 paintings depicted his means of imaging in the way he described in his 1926-1932 writings. Generally, I surmise that Mondrian in his paintings and writings in this period reinforced what he had stated about the means of imaging in his earlier essays as well as first principle of Neo-Plasticism. In his 1926-1932 writings, he also introduced a new role and identity for his means of imaging. This was a new supplement to his first principle of Neo-Plasticism and his previous theorization of the means of imaging. Generally, I found a close relation between Mondrian's paintings in his 1924-1931 compositions and his explanation of the means of imaging in his 1926-1932 writings,

particularly his first principle of Neo-Plasticism he wrote in 1926. I also found that, compared to his 1917-1925 period, during 1929-1932 Mondrian's artistic vision toward the role of his means of imaging developed both in his paintings and writings.

5.2.3.2 The equivalence between form and space

My argument in this section is that there is no change in Mondrian's aesthetic ideas during 1924-1932 and in regard to his Neo-Plastic concept 'equivalence.' When we look at 1924-1931 compositions, we contend that the equivalence - similar to his earlier 1919-1923 compositions - is expressed as a distinct duality of the means of imaging rather than similarity in the dimension or quantity of lines or planes. Moreover, I assert that Mondrian in majority of his 1924-1931 compositions used a similar method - opposition between large planes of noncolor and small planes of color - to express balance between form and space. Accordingly, I infer that though in his 1926-1932 writings Mondrian did not discuss the aforementioned concepts considerably, in his 1924-1931 compositions he continued to use a similar theory which he had theorized in his pre-1926 experimentations. It was to express equilibrium between form and space.

As it was studied in chapter 4, throughout his experimentations with his 1917-1923 compositions, Mondrian surmised that the equivalence of the means of imaging is not a similarity in size or color value of the planes or lines. Instead, he came to this point that such equivalence was an exact manifestation of distinct duality, opposition, or what he called 'equivalent duality' of his means of imaging. Furthermore, in his 1925 essay *The Neo-Plastic Architecture of the Future*, he introduced a condition for the creation of balance between form and space. He stated that the balance is attained through opposition between large planes of noncolor and small planes of color. In 1926, Mondrian crystalized his Neo-Plastic definition for the concept of equivalence and balance between form and space in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism as follows:

“[t]he equivalence of the means of imaging is necessary. Size and colors may differ, but they must be of equal value. In general, equilibrium results from large surfaces of non-color or empty space, and rather small surfaces of color or material”⁹⁵ (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). Indeed, what Mondrian indicated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism is a summarized theoretical statement of what he had found throughout 1917-1923 experimentations for expressing the most universal expression of balance in his means of imaging. In this principle he mentioned the new term of ‘equal value.’ In his previous 1917-1925 essays, he delineated such ‘equal value’ through other terms such as ‘equivalent duality,’ or ‘distinct duality.’ Therefore, we can restate the first statement in the second principle in this way: the ‘equivalence’ means ‘equal value’ of lines and planes of color and noncolor. Moreover, such equal value is a distinct, exact, representation of duality, or opposition, among means of imaging rather than a similarity in size or quantity of the means of imaging. After becoming familiar with the second principle of Neo-Plasticism, we move on to see how the equivalence of the means of imaging as well as the equivalence between form and space is expressed in 1924-1931 compositions.

In the 1924-1931 compositions, we see that regardless of the differences in thickness and length of lines as well as the dimensions of the planes, the whole composition is in unity. We saw that in the earlier 1917-1919 compositions equivalence was represented through color variation and, in some cases, through lines. In contrast, in 1924-1931 paintings, equivalence was achieved as more concrete and dynamic through the oppositions of primary relationship between position of lines at right angle that are

⁹⁵ The original French version of the second principle of Neo-Plasticism is:

L'équivalence des moyens plastique est nécessaire. Différents de dimension et de couleurs, ils seront néanmoins de même valeur. L'équilibre indique en général une surface grande de noncouleur ou d'espace vide et une surface plutôt petite de couleur ou de matière. Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017a, pp. 282-283).

painted in various length and thickness. This shift of focus from the element of color to line is very palpable in post-1925 compositions, particularly in the stark lozenge compositions of this period (see figures 5.3, 5.5, 5.6, 5.19, 5.20, and 5.21). In these paintings, either colors are kept to a minimum or the element of color is totally removed. In other upright compositions of this period - particularly those 1929-1931 compositions - we see that lines in variety of thickness and length - mostly in absence of colors - are represented in unity and balance. For instance, there is at least one very thick line which is opposed with other lines in figures 5.12 to 5.16. Overall, it is very clear that in the 1924-1931 compositions the equivalence is attained, in line with what Mondrian stated in his second principle, through an 'equal value,' distinct duality, opposition of lines, and planes of color and noncolor.

In relation to the balance between form and space, we see that in majority of 1924-1931 compositions the balance between form (planes of color) and space (planes of noncolor) is attained through the opposition of a considerably large surface of white or light grey (as noncolor) with smaller areas of color. Indeed, we see that in both types of compositions⁹⁶ studied in previous section, the balance between form and space is attained as Mondrian stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. Interestingly, we see that in some of the lozenge and upright compositions of this period the element of color is totally absent (see figures 5.17, 5.19, 5.20, and 5.21). Yet the balance between the lines and noncolors is retained. Therefore, we deduce that in theory of Neo-Plasticism the equivalence between form and space can be achieved in the absence of the element of color (as intensified form).⁹⁷ Within a Neo-Plastic vocabulary in these

⁹⁶ Those paintings with two all-over lines crossed close to the sides of the composition (see figures 5.4, 5.7, 5.8, 5.10, 5.11, and 5.13) and those paintings where lines are positioned asymmetrically somewhere close to the central axis of the composition (see figures 5.9, 5.12, 5.14, and 5.15).

⁹⁷ Although Mondrian, at the end of his life in May 1943, in a letter to Sweeney called his compositions without color (as in case of figures 5.17, 5.19, 5.20, and 5.21) drawings with oil color rather paintings (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 356), these paintbrushes are counted as important part of Neo-Plastic oeuvre in the standpoint of Mondrian's scholars.

paintings, equilibrium is expressed through immutable relationship between position of lines and empty space of the composition. If we count black lines as noncolor we infer that in Neo-Plasticism lines and noncolors (particularly white) are bottom line means to express the balance between form and space. It should be noted that Mondrian in the second principle stated that the opposition between large areas of noncolor to small areas of color is a 'general' rule to attain equivalence in the composition. That is to say, the presence of small planes of color in the composition is not mandatory to achieve the balance between form and space in the composition. In fact, in case of the removal of colors, Mondrian was not really deviated from his second principle. Indeed, in some of his 1926-1932 paintings - such as in figures 5.17, 5.19, 5.20, and 5.21 - he slightly altered his method to achieve the unity and balance between form and space. To understand Mondrian's standpoint about his concepts of equivalence and balance between planes of color (form) and noncolor (space), it is required to examine Mondrian's 1926-1932 writings.

Mondrian in his 1926-1932 writings talked very little either as confirmation or as updates to what he had stated in his 1917-1925 essays about his concept of equivalence in the means of imaging and the balance between form and space. Only in his 1926 essay, *Principes généraux du Néo-Plasticisme - General Principles of Neo-Plasticism*, we find the best recap of his artistic standpoint about these concepts. He had written them as his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. I restated this second principle based on translation of Holtzman and James (1986). It is slightly different from Veen's translation that was mentioned in the beginning of this section:

Equivalence in the dimension and color of the plastic means is necessary. Although varying in dimension and color, the plastic means will nevertheless have an equal value. Generally, equilibrium implies a large area of noncolor or empty space opposed to a comparatively small area of color or material. (Mondrian 1926c, p. 209)

According to Mondrian the equivalence of his means of imaging is an ‘equal value’⁹⁸ or what in his earlier essays he called ‘equivalent duality.’ Mondrian in his 1917-1925 writings defined such ‘equal value’ as an exact opposition or what he called ‘equivalent duality’ or ‘distinct’ duality’ - ‘*onderscheiden tweeheid dus*’ in Dutch - of the means of imaging. He discussed that such equivalent duality could be best articulated through the representation of relationship between positions of lines at right angle. As it was studied in Chapter 4, Mondrian in his earlier 1919-1923 paintings and his 1919-1925 writings, had already demonstrated and written the theories he stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. Therefore, we realize that what he wrote in 1926 as his second principle of Neo-Plasticism is a gist of what he had deduced through his 1919-1923 experimentations with his paintings.

During his 1926-1932 writings, only in one case in his 1930 essay *Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)* Mondrian affirmed what he stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism, regarding his concept of the equivalence of the means of imaging: “[t]he two oppositions (horizontal and vertical) are in equivalence, that is, they have the same value: a primordial fact for this equilibrium” (Mondrian, 1930a, p. 232). In this quote he once again emphasized that lines in perpendicular position express the purest, absolute equivalence. Thus we infer that Mondrian in 1930, similar to his previous De Stijl essays as well as his second principle, defined equality in means of imaging as an exact, distinct duality rather than a quantitative balance in size or number. Similar to his previous statement, in the same essay *Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)*, Mondrian argued that the

⁹⁸ Mondrian first used the Dutch term *gelijke waarde* - translated as ‘equal value’ into English - in his 1926 essay *Neo-Plasticisme. De Woning- De Straat- De Stad*, *Home-Street-City*. He further used French term *même valeur*, as equal value in English, in the second principle in his other 1926 essay *Principes généraux du Neo-Plasticisme, General Principles of Neo-Plasticism*.

equivalence should not be interpreted as similarity in the size or appearance of the means of imaging:

This equilibrium is clearly not that of an old gentleman in an armchair or of two equal sacks of potatoes on the scales. On the contrary, equilibrium through equivalence excludes similarity and symmetry, just as it excludes repose in the sense of immobility. (Mondrian, 1930a, p. 229)

As such, in theory of Neo-Plasticism equivalence in Neo-Plastic painting is not similarity or equality - as Mondrian likened it to two sacks of potato in balance on the scale - in quantity, size, or appearance of the elements of painting. Instead, equivalence as a dynamic balance between dissimilar means of imaging is an 'equivalent duality' or exact opposition. Indeed, in the above-mentioned quote we find out about Mondrian's artistic development toward his concept of equilibrium in this period. In his 1917-1923 paintings and writings, equilibrium⁹⁹ is expressed as 'repose' or 'rest.' However, in 1930 he defined equilibrium as a dynamic expression.

It is noteworthy that, except to his second principle of Neo-Plasticism, Mondrian in no other instance in his 1926-1932 essays and articles talked about the condition required to attain balance between form and space. Although Mondrian did not point to this aesthetic rule, we saw that in majority of his 1924-1931 compositions balance between form and space is achieved through what he stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. Generally, we infer that Mondrian in his 1924-1931 experimentations remained committed to what he had written in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. In the early Neo-Plastic paintings, mostly 1921-1923 compositions, equivalence between planes of color and noncolor was attained through the opposition of large planes of noncolor and small planes of color. I argue that Mondrian in his 1924-1932

⁹⁹ Mondrian's artistic development in regard to his concept of 'equilibrium' is analyzed in a separate section in this chapter.

paintings used a similar method to create balance between form and space. Overall, I surmise that Mondrian's artistic vision toward the concept of equivalence between form and space is not transformed in comparison to his pre-1924 Neo-Plastic period. What he stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism in 1926 is indeed an upshot of what he had explained in his 1919-1925 essays about the concepts of equivalence and balance between form and space.

5.2.3.3 Dialectic of oppositions and concept of 'relationship'

In this section, Mondrian's artistic ideas about his theory of oppositions will be explored through the analysis of his 1924-1931 paintings and 1926-1932 writings. We will see that means of imaging - particularly lines - in 1924-1931 paintings are depicted in a very distinct and exact opposition, or duality. Similarly, in his 1926-1932 writings, similar to his statements in his 1917-1925 essays, he stressed that duality among the means of imaging and in the composition is required to establish the 'relationships' and to attain a universal expression of equilibrium and beauty. In 1926, he crystalized what he had written during 1917-1925 about duality in his theory of the dialectic of oppositions as his third principle of Neo-Plasticism. I assert that, compared to his earlier compositions, throughout his 1924-1931 experimentations Mondrian succeeded to represent a more exact duality or opposition among lines in his paintings. Generally, we contend that in his 1924-1931 experimentations he remained fully committed to what he stated in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism.

I found that in 1917-1925 writings Mondrian in many instances discussed his theory of opposites. He stated that everything exists in relation to his opposite. In this regard he defined his elements of painting as opposite pairs such as vertical line versus horizontal lines and colors versus noncolors. He considered two levels of oppositions. In the first place, he postulated that duality should exist between means of imaging. Secondly, he

stated that the duality is also essential in the composition. I further realized that in theory of Neo-Plasticism, whenever means of imaging oppose each other, the 'relationship' is established. In his 1917-1925 essays, Mondrian in many instances talked about two kinds of relationships: immutable relationship among the position of lines at right angle and mutable relationship between dimension and proportion of the planes.¹⁰⁰ In Neo-Plastic painting relationship between positions of lines is a primary relationship because the other relationships are reliant on the relationship of lines.

Mondrian in his 1926-1932 writing also explained his theory of oppositions. In 1926, he wrote his third principle of Neo-Plasticism in which he discussed what he had overly indicated in his earlier writings: "[t]he opposing duality is required within the means of imaging and also within the composition" (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6).¹⁰¹ Indeed, what he succinctly wrote in his third principle is just a recap of what he had frequently posited in his earlier writings as along with what he had consistently demonstrated in all his 1918-1923 compositions. We notice that Mondrian in the third principle did not point to other Neo-Plastic concepts such as relationships which is fundamental to his theory of oppositions. Now we move on to examine his 1924-1931 paintings to see how he used his theory of oppositions to express the relationships in this period.

We see that in the 1924-1931 compositions duality among lines is represented as very exact and distinct. In the first place, due to the increase in the thickness of lines in these 1924-1931 paintings the opposition or relationship between the positions of lines is established as very exact compared to those early 1919-1923 compositions. Thanks to the complete extension of lines to the edges of the 1924-1931 compositions, the lines

¹⁰⁰ In some instances, in his 1917-1925 essays, Mondrian also defined a mutable relationship between the value of the colors and noncolors.

¹⁰¹ The original French version of the third principle of Neo-Plasticism is: "[l]a dualité d'opposition dans le moyen plastique est exigée de même dans la composition" Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017a, pp. 282-283).

are opposed perfectly with their full length. Moreover, because colors are kept to a minimum, the black lines are represented more dominantly in contrast to the white surface of the composition. The opposition among the lines is best depicted in lozenge compositions of this period, especially those with small areas of color, such as figures 5.3, 5.5, 5.19, and 5.21. As scholars like Carmean and Champa also indicated, the diagonal angle of lozenge edges and their contrast with the perpendicular angle of lines boosted the representation of the immutable relationship among the position of lines in these compositions.

The lines in upright compositions of this period are also represented as very exact and distinct. However, I argue that in upright 1926-1929 compositions, the duality of lines is not shown as distinct as in the 1930-1931 compositions. This is because in 1926-1929 upright compositions (see figures 5.7, 5.8, 5.9) the small plane which is created as a result of intersection of two primary all-over lines is filled with color. As a result, the intersecting point and, thereby, the perpendicularity of lines is slightly cloaked and diminished with the materiality and hue of the colors. In contrast, in the 1930-1931 compositions (see figures 5.13, 5.14, 5.17, and 5.18), Mondrian did not fill those small planes with color. Subsequently, the duality between vertical and horizontal lines in these post-1930 compositions is represented as more distinct and exact compared to the 1926-1929 paintings.

One of the new experimentations of Mondrian in his 1924-1931 compositions is the opposition of lines in variety of thicknesses and lengths. As such, in these paintings the duality among the lines is not only represented via a perpendicular angle, but also it is depicted through variations in the width and length of the lines. The variation in breadth of lines is most palpable in post-1929 compositions (see figures 5.16, 5.17, and 5.18). However, the best instances of such diversity in the opposition of line are discernible in

figures 5.17 and 5.18. Due to the different oppositions of positions, thicknesses, and lengths among the lines in these paintings, we, as viewers of these paintings, see a more dynamic representation of the duality of lines, compared to the earlier 1919-1923 paintings.

As a result of the depiction a more distinct and exact duality between means of imaging in 1924-1931 compositions, the immutable relationship between position of lines and mutable relationship between dimension and proportion of planes are also expressed as more distinct. Thanks to the reduction of the quantity of lines in these paintings, we no longer see the optical white spots in the intersection of the lines.¹⁰² As a result, the relationships among the positions of lines in straight angle and, so, the relationships of size and proportion of planes are expressed as more exact in 1924-1931 compositions. Overall, we realized that in the 1924-1931 paintings opposition among the lines is represented as more dynamic in comparison to the 1919-1923 compositions. To further understand Mondrian's artistic idea about his theory of opposition in this period, it is necessary to examine Mondrian's 1926-1932 writings.

In his 1926-1932 essays, Mondrian explained his theory of opposition. He emphasized that duality should be represented both in means of imaging and in the composition. As it was discussed in the beginning of this section, Mondrian in 1926 stated his idea about duality in his means of imaging and composition in the third principle of Neo-Plasticism. His explanations about the doctrine of oppositions in his 1926-1932 writings indeed confirm what he expounded in his 1917-1925 essays.

¹⁰² As discussed in Chapter 4, due to the frequent intersection of the lines in some of the 1918-1919 compositions, we saw glittering spots in the intersection of the lines. Although Mondrian tried to address this problem in his 1919-1923 compositions, we still found such light spots in some of his 1919-1921 compositions.

In the first place, Mondrian in his 1926-1932 writings once again stated that duality in the means of imaging is essential to establish relationships in the compositions. As we learned from his earlier writings, the relationships among the means of imaging are a prerequisite to express the equilibrium and rhythm in the composition. Mondrian in his pre-1926 essays distinguished Neo-Plastic painting from representational painting or morphoplastic expression in art. This was not only because of the abstract and intensified elements, but also for the existence of exact and equilibrated *relationships* among those distilled elements. Similarly, Mondrian in his 1931 essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*, pointed to this matter. In this respect, he emphasized that the purified, abstract elements of painting (universal means of imaging) and their exact, equivalent, relationships are two key characteristics of Neo-Plastic (new art in a general term) painting:

But the new art differs from the art of the past also from the viewpoint of relationships. If purely plastic expression is created by "the relationships" of line, plane surface, and color in their purely plastic values, then these means *exist only through their relationships*. Therefore, relationships are just as important as the plastic means. (Mondrian, 1931, p. 246)

Therefore, in theory of Neo-Plasticism the equivalent means of imaging are only a vehicle to express the *relationships*. From Mondrian's writing in this period we further understand that the Neo-Plastic painter's success for in expressing a universal beauty and equilibrium depends on his skill to represent the relationships as much exact and equilibrated as possible through using distilled elements of painting (line, color, and plane). As we saw, Mondrian in his paintings in this period also emphasized on representing a distinct opposition or relationships among lines in various thickness and lengths rather than painting the lines as a pictorial entity in the composition. In this regard, Mondrian in his 1926 essay, *Purely Abstract Art*, stressed that in Neo-Plastic

painting the *relationships* among the means of imaging result in the expression of a universal beauty:

All representation, even using abstract forms, is fatal to pure art; that is why purely abstract *art* is expressed *exclusively through relationships*. The plastic means is only a "means." This was also the intention of the old art, but in it the "means" assumed a dominant role. Through its pure relationships, purely abstract art can approach the expression of the universal, of expansion, of grandeur, of energy as beauty, and thus fulfill art's true function. (Mondrian, 1926a, p. 200)

It is noteworthy that to attain an equilibrated relationship, means of imaging should be composed in an exact opposition. According to Mondrian, in the representational painting, the focus of the artist is on the *means* of expression, or elements of painting, rather than the expression of equilibrated relationships. Indeed, the relationships in the representational paintings are established as inexact and based on individual, subjective emotions of the artist. Contrary to the representational painting, in Neo-Plastic painting the relationships are established as exact and equilibrated. In this regard, in his 1929 essay *Pure Abstract Art*, Mondrian once again differentiated the representational painting from Neo-Plastic painting. He delineated that the relationships among naturalistic lines, color, and forms in representational painting are expressed as disequilibrated, inexact, emotive, or what he called *tragic*. Whereas, in Neo-Plastic painting the relationships are established equilibrated, exact, and thereby universal:

All art based on form creates relationships through the nonequivalent, whereas pure abstract art creates relationships through equivalent opposition. For only the universal plastic means of pure abstract art can be composed in pure equivalence. The equivalence apparent in the composition of morphoplastic art achieved harmony but not pure equilibrium. (Mondrian, 1929, p. 223)

Therefore, we understand that Mondrian considered a very delicate borderline between Neo-Plastic painting - as a pure abstract art - and representational painting. In the latter,

the relationships were expressed through ‘nonequivalent’ opposing elements of painting (i.e. naturalistic forms, lines, and colors). But, in the former the relationships were articulated through ‘equivalent’ opposing means of imaging (straight lines, purified colors, and flat plane). What is inferred from Mondrian’s writing is that the ‘equivalent’ and ‘exact’ relationships cannot be established in the composition without representing the means of imaging in a distinct and exact ‘duality.’ According to what Mondrian delineated earlier in his essays, such duality can be represented as most exact and equilibrated between vertical and horizontal lines.

In his 1926-1932 writings, Mondrian, similar to his early 1917-1925 essays, distinguished two kinds of relationships in the composition: immutable and mutable. As he previously stated, the immutable relationships among the positions of lines at right angle are primary relationships. As such, the mutable relationships between dimension and proportion of color and noncolor planes are the offspring of the immutable relationship between lines. Similarly, in his 1926 essay *The New Plastic Expression in Painting*, he stated that relationship among the lines is the source for establishing the relationship among the dimensions of the planes: “[l]ine is straight and is always placed in its two principal opposite positions, which form the right angle, the plastic expression of the constant. And the relationships of dimension are always based upon this principal relationship of position” (Mondrian, 1926b, p. 204). Similarly, in his 1931 essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*, he stated: “[d]espite its diverse relationships of dimension, Neo-Plastic is based on *the rectangular relationship of position*, which is constant” (Mondrian, 1931, p. 269). When we compare Mondrian’s earlier statements in his 1917-1925 essays with these later statements, we find a continuity of his aesthetic ideas in regard to the primary role of the relationships among the position of lines in Neo-Plasticism. Indeed, Mondrian always considered a very important role for relationship among the lines at right angle. In this respect, similar to

what he had stated in his 1917-1925 essays, in his writings in this period he also stated that the relationships among the positions of lines result in a universal expression in the composition. But, he said that the mutable relationships among the dimensions of the planes lead to an individual expression in the composition. Mondrian believed that equilibrium or unity is attained through the resolution between these two opposite expressions in the composition. In this regard, in his 1930 essay, *Realist and Surrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)*, we read:

Through rectangular opposition, the constant relationship, art established universal-individual duality: unity. In Neo-Plastic composition, this constant relationship expresses immutability. It is universal expression in opposition to the *relationship of dimension*, which is variable and constitutes the individual expression in Neo-Plastic work. (Mondrian, 1930a, p. 232)

In this section I proposed a new approach to the analysis of Mondrian's theory of oppositions. Contrary to scholars' former contextual approaches, notably those of Cooper, Threlfall, Tosaki, and Bois who examined Mondrian's theory of opposition within a philosophical lens, mainly in relation to Hegel, in this section I further elaborated on the components of his theory of oppositions in relation to his theory of Neo-Plasticism and paintings. As such, by solely examining Mondrian's writings and paintings, we come up with new theoretical knowledge in relation to his theory of oppositions, which further help us better interpret his classic Neo-Plastic paintings (ca. 1924-1931).

Overall, after examining Mondrian's 1924-1931 compositions, I found that he continued to represent an exact dual opposition among his means of imaging, as he had done in his 1919-1923 experimentations. However, I realized that Mondrian in his 1924-1931 compositions succeeded to represent more exact and equivalent oppositions among the lines compared to his 1919-1923 paintings. In his 1926-1932 writings, he also

reemphasized on what he had delineated in his 1917-1925 essays about his theory of opposition. I inferred that what he stated in his writing about his theory of opposition - particularly his third principle of Neo-Plasticism - was indeed a reiteration of what he had already said in his 1917-1925 essays. Generally, I surmised that during 1924-1932 Mondrian's theoretical standpoint toward his theory of the dialectics of oppositions, compared to his early Neo-Plastic period, remained constant. Moreover, in 1926 he crystalized his idea of duality or oppositions in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism. Lastly, I found a close relation between Mondrian's 1924-1931 experimentations and his emphasizing on the primary role of relationships among the positions of lines in his 1926-1932 writings.

5.2.3.4 Method and conditions to express the equilibrium

In this section we will see that during 1924-1932 Mondrian's artistic standpoint in regard to his concept of equilibrium remained constant to what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings and what he had written in his 1917-1925 writings. However, we contend that in this period, Mondrian succeeded to express the equilibrium more as dynamic and concrete compared to his earlier paintings. In his 1926-1932 writings, Mondrian also reinforced what he previously theorized in his 1917-1925 essays about equilibrium and its expression in the composition. In 1926, he crystalized the outcome of his pre-1926 experimentations on his canvases to express a pure equilibrium in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. Overall, during 1924-1932 we find no change or development in Mondrian's ideas in regard to his concept of equilibrium.

Mondrian in his 1917-1925 essays in many instances talked about his concept of equilibrium. He introduced 'equilibrium' as a new term for 'harmony.' He argued that the equilibrium is achieved through immutable relationship among the positions of lines at right angle and mutable relationships between dimension and proportion of the

planes. Mondrian in 1926 wrote in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism what he had demonstrated in his pre-1926 paintings and writings about the concept of equilibrium. In his fourth principle he stated: “[t]he constant equilibrium is achieved by the relationship of position, and is expressed by the straight line (limit of the means of imaging) in its principal opposition (rectangular)” (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6).¹⁰³ In the fifth principle he continued as follows: “[t]he equilibrium, that neutralizes and annihilates the means of imaging, is possible by the relationships of proportion in which they are placed and which create the living rhythm” (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). In the fourth principle he emphasized on the primary role of relationships among lines at right angle as an essential condition to express the equilibrium. Furthermore, in this principle Mondrian once again emphasized on the role of lines in Neo-Plastic painting. It should be noted that by means of imaging here¹⁰⁴ Mondrian means color and noncolor planes. In the fifth principle he stated that equilibrium is also the outcome of relationships among the proportion of the planes.¹⁰⁵ In the fifth principle, he also talked about the neutralization of the duality of the means of imaging that is required to express equilibrium. Indeed, what Mondrian wrote in these two principles is a recapitulation of his 1917-1923 experimentations - as well as what he wrote in his 1917-1925 essays about equilibrium - to express a pure equilibrium in his paintings. Having a crystalized definition of Mondrian for his key concept of equilibrium in mind, in the following section Mondrian’s 1924-1931 compositions are examined to see how he expressed the equilibrium in his paintbrushes in this period.

¹⁰³ The original French version of these principles are as follows. Fourth principle: “[l]’équilibre constant est atteint par le rapport de position, et exprimé par la ligne droite (limité du moyen plastique) dans son opposition principale (rectangulaire)” - Fifth principle: “[l]’équilibre qui neutralise et annihile les moyens plastiques se fait par les rapports de proportion dans lesquels ils sont placés et qui causent le rythme vivant” Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017a, pp. 282-283).

¹⁰⁴ *Moyen plastique* in French.

¹⁰⁵ In the fifth principle Mondrian also indicated the way the rhythm is achieved in the composition. That is why the fifth principle is also examined in the next section in relation to the concept of rhythm.

When we look at the 1924-1931 compositions, we maintain that in majority of these paintings equilibrium is expressed based on what Mondrian stated in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. In the first place, we see that equilibrium in these compositions is achieved through relationships among the positions of lines. Moreover, equilibrium is expressed through the lines in straight angle (perpendicular opposition). Compared to his earlier 1919-1923 compositions, in 1924-1931 paintings we see that the opposition of lines is represented as more dominant and, thereby, we perceive a more absolute unity and balance among the means of imaging. The opposition among the lines is most palpable in those stark lozenge compositions (see figures 5.3, 5.5, 5.19, and 5.21) where the lines are in sharp contrast to the white surface of the composition. The perpendicular opposition of lines in these paintings is also more assertive because in these compositions lines are extended to the very edges of the canvas and the colors are kept to a minimum. In majority of the 1924-1931 compositions there are at least two main lines - the lines which are assimilated to two blades of scissors by Blotkamp - which they passed through the whole width and length of the composition. These two lines represented exact and equilibrated relationships and, thereby, they have a key role for expressing equilibrium.

Although we argue that equilibrium in majority of 1924-1931 compositions is achieved through relationship among the positions of lines at right angle, in some cases we see that the equilibrium is not the outcome of the perpendicular relation among the lines as well as the relationship among the proportions of the planes. For example, in some of the lozenge compositions, the lines are positioned in a way they are not intersected in the composition area and they met somewhere in the outer surface of the composition. Some scholars such as Blotkamp, Milner, and Bois stated that equilibrium in these paintings - such as figures 5.6 & 5.20 - is mainly achieved through constant interaction between the inner and outer space of the composition. It seems Mondrian felt more

freedom and flexibility to slightly deviate from his own principles of Neo-Plasticism (particularly the fourth principle) in his lozenge compositions to express equilibrium. Overall, we argue that some of the 1924-1931 paintings are not in exact agreement to the aesthetic conditions of the fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

When we compare the 1924-1931 compositions with those early Neo-Plastic paintings (1919-1923), we assert that in many of these later paintings the immutable relationships among the positions of lines is further animated and dynamized. Such dynamic representation of relationships among lines in these paintings is mainly due to the variations of the thickness and length of the lines that is best discernible in figures 5.16, 5.17, and 5.18. In order to attain a pure equilibrium among these lines, the thick lines are shorter than the thinner ones. As such, the continuous opposition of relationship among the position of lines in different thickness and length results in a more dynamic expression of equilibrium. We infer that the term 'constant equilibrium' in the fourth principle denotes such a dynamized expression of equilibrium in his 1924-1931 paintings. At this point, my argument for considering a dynamic expression of equilibrium in the post-1924 paintings is similar to that of Tosaki's account. Tosaki (2017) marked a transformation in the expression of rhythm in Mondrian's post-1927 paintings and writings. As we discussed, the rationale for such dynamic expression in post-1924 paintings is mainly due to the change in the nature of the relationships among the lines which are used in different thickness and length. Overall, we find that what Mondrian wrote in his fourth and fifth principles are fully demonstrated - except in a few exceptions as it was discussed - in his 1924-1931 compositions. At this point, we move on to see what Mondrian wrote in his 1926-1932 writings about equilibrium.

As it was stated, in 1926 Mondrian crystalized his ideas about equilibrium in the fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. In his other essays and articles of this period,

Mondrian chiefly restated what he had previously theorized in his 1917-1925 essays in respect to his concept of equilibrium. In the first place, and in relation to what he also stated in his fourth principle, he emphasized that the relationship among the positions of the lines is an essential condition to express equilibrium. He stated that to establish immutable relationships among the lines, they should be opposed in perpendicular angle. In his 1926 essay *Home—Street—City*, he pointed to this matter:

It should be noted, however, that in Neo-Plastic art the essential question is not of vertical or horizontal, but of the perpendicular position—and the relationship thus obtained. For it is this relationship that express the immutable in contrast to the mutable in nature. (Mondrian, 1926c, p. 210)

Mondrian in his 1926-1932 essays also pointed out to the aesthetic conditions required to express equilibrium. In his 1926 essay in *Home—Street—City* he stated that the invariant relationship among the lines at right angle is essential to articulate equilibrium or repose in the composition: “the vertical and horizontal in the rectangular relationship produce a plastic expression of inner strength and repose” (Mondrian, 1926c, p. 210).¹⁰⁶ Similarly, in his 1927 essay *Jazz and Neo-Plastic* he said: “[i]n form there is no equivalence of opposites. Form must be reduced to the duality of position of the straight line in order to realize equilibrium” (Mondrian, 1927, p. 220). Hence, we see that Mondrian in other instances, besides his fourth principle of Neo-Plasticism, mentioned a similar condition for the expression of equilibrium.

In his 1926-1932 essays, Mondrian also talked about the ‘neutralization’ of the duality of the means of imaging - mentioned in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism as well - that is required to attain equilibrium. For instance, in his 1926 essay *The New Plastic*

¹⁰⁶ It is interesting that Mondrian in his post-1926 writings, rarely used the term ‘repose’ and instead he used his Neo-Plastic terminology of ‘equilibrium’ for harmony. In contrast in his early Neo-Plastic writings - particularly 1917-1919 writings - he frequently used the term ‘repose’ which denotes a static and absolute harmony.

Expression in Painting, he said: “[t]he two contrary and mutually annihilating (neutralizing) oppositions were established in *equivalence*” (Mondrian 1926b, p. 203). From this quote we infer that in theory of Neo-Plasticism equilibrium is the end result of the neutralization and resolution of the duality of the means of imaging. In this regard, in his 1926 essay *Home—Street—City*, Mondrian indicated that the equilibrium which is as equal as pure beauty in Neo-Plasticism is achieved through the neutralization of the means of imaging:

There are endless ways to express beauty, but pure beauty, the expression of pure equilibrium, can be manifested only *through pure plastic means*. [...] But pure means alone do not suffice to produce Neo-Plastic expression. *They must be composed in such a way that they lose their individuality and through neutralizing and annihilating opposition form an inseparable unity*. (Mondrian, 1926c, p. 209)

According to the above-mentioned statement, the particularity of the means of imaging could be abolished through the neutralization of their duality. As it was discussed earlier in relation to his means of imaging, Mondrian stated that the particularity of the lines in perpendicular angle as geometric forms such as cross signs or rectangular planes should be cancelled and annihilated through opposition and neutralization of the duality of the means of imaging. That is why Mondrian in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism also emphasized on the neutralization of the means of imaging.

Another important point in Mondrian’s 1926-1932 essays in relation to the concept of ‘equilibrium’ is the very concept of ‘equilibrium.’ Mondrian in his previous 1917-1925 essays had distinguished ‘equilibrium’ as a ‘new harmony’ from ‘old harmony’ in painting. We understood that the harmony in representational painting is attained through vague, disequilibrated, and subjective relationships among naturalistic forms. In contrast, the ‘equilibrium’ as a ‘new harmony’ in Neo-Plastic painting is expressed through exact, pure, and equilibrated relationships among the means of imaging. In his

1931 essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*, he once again distinguished the old harmony in figurative painting from equilibrium (new harmony) in Neo-Plastic painting as follows:

The new art reveals that its plastic expression of harmony is entirely different from the harmony of the past; that is, it manifests the same content altogether differently. That is why the new aesthetic speaks of "equilibrium" instead of harmony. Moreover, while the "harmony" of the past expresses a veiled state, the equilibrium of the new art denotes an exact state. (Mondrian, 1931, p. 252)

In his 1926-1932 essays, Mondrian called the old harmony an 'individual equilibrium' whereas he called the new harmony a 'universal equilibrium.' In the introduction to his essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*, he distinguished between these two kinds of equilibrium: "[t]he fact must be emphasized that for art and for life it is a matter of *universal* equilibrium and not of individual equilibrium" (Mondrian, 1932, p. 278). We infer that, by 'individual equilibrium' Mondrian means the subjective expression of equilibrium which differs from an objective and universal expression of the equilibrium in Neo-Plastic painting. Such universal equilibrium is the outcome of reciprocal acts of dual oppositions, means of imaging, in the composition.

Overall, we found that Mondrian followed a similar method used in his 1919-1923 compositions to express equilibrium in his 1924-1931 compositions. Equilibrium in these post-1924 paintings is expressed through the immutable relationships among the positions of the lines and mutable relationships among the proportion of the lines. Although in some cases we argued that the expression of equilibrium is not merely dependent on the relationship among the lines at right angle. We also saw that in his 1926-1932 writings, Mondrian reiterated what he had previously written about his concept of equilibrium. We also found in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism a recapitulation of what he had stated in his 1917-1925 writings about his

concept of equilibrium. We realized that when it comes to equilibrium, there is a close relation between 1924-1931 paintings and his 1926-1932 writings. Lastly, during 1924-1932 we find only subtle transformation in Mondrian's artistic thought in regard to his concept of equilibrium.

At the end of this section, I come up with a new argument that is in contrast with earlier interpretations of scholars in relation to the expression of equilibrium in pre-1932 paintings. Contrary to the majority of scholars' viewpoint, who interpreted the expression of equilibrium in pre-1932 paintings of Mondrian more or less as a repose and static expression, I assert that equilibrium in a majority of 1924-1932 paintings is by no means a static expression. In this regard, Mondrian both in his 1927-1932 paintings and late 1920's writings showed his interest to express a dynamic expression of equilibrium and rhythm by representing a dynamic relationship among the lines in different length and thickness.

5.2.3.5 The articulation of the 'rhythm' as well as symmetry and repetition

In this section, I will examine Mondrian's artistic development in regard to the concept of rhythm in his 1924-1931 paintings and 1926-1932 writings. I contend that Mondrian in his paintings and writings in this period manifested rhythm slightly different from what he had demonstrated in his earlier 1919-1923 paintings as well as what he wrote about rhythm during De Stijl period. Although in 1926 he recapitulated in his fifth principle what he said earlier in his 1917-1925 essays about rhythm, we assert that rhythm in his 1924-1931 is not really articulated in the way he stated in the fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism. We argue that in the post-1924 compositions, rhythm is articulated mostly through the opposition of free and self-reliant means of imaging. Similarly, we find that Mondrian, in some instances, in his 1926-1932 writings provided us with his transformed artistic ideas in regard to the expression of the rhythm that help

us better explain the way rhythm is articulated in his post-1924 paintings. Overall, we assert that when it comes to the expression of rhythm there is a close relation between his 1924-1931 paintings and 1926-1932 writings.

In Chapter 4, we realized that Mondrian in his 1917-1925 writings was interested in the concept of rhythm. We found that in his 1919-1923 painting he had fully demonstrated what he had expounded in his 1917-1919 essays about rhythm. In his 1917-1925 writings, Mondrian introduced rhythm as a relative expression - in contrast to absolute expression of equilibrium. We found that rhythm in a Neo-Plastic painting is achieved through the mutable relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. He distinguished his 'inward rhythm' in Neo-Plastic paintings from a 'natural rhythm' in representational painting. He postulated that the former is achieved through variant relationships among the dimension of the planes while natural rhythm is expressed in representational painting through conventional rules of harmony such as symmetry and repetition. In his 1926-1932 writings, Mondrian indeed reiterated what he had written in his 1917-1925 writings about rhythm. In 1926, in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism he wrote about rhythm, which is a recap of what he had acquired throughout his pre-1926 experimentations on his canvases. In the fifth principle he stated: "[t]he equilibrium, that neutralizes and annihilates the means of imaging, is possible by the relationships of proportion in which they are placed and which create the living rhythm" Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). Here he called rhythm as 'living' since, as we will see in this period, he introduced and manifested rhythm in his paintings as a dynamic and live expression in the composition. In his sixth principle Mondrian indicated that symmetry and repetition should not be used in Neo-Plastic painting: "[a]ll symmetry shall be excluded"¹⁰⁷ Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). It is

¹⁰⁷ The original French version of the sixth principle is as follows: "[t]oute symétrie sera exclue" Mondrian (as cited in Veen, 2017a, pp. 282-283).

noteworthy that in the translation of Holtzman and James (1986), the term ‘naturalistic repetition’ was also added in translation as follows: “[n]aturalistic repetition, symmetry, must be excluded” (Mondrian, 1926d, p. 214). As it was studied in Chapter 4, Mondrian in his 1917-1925 essays in some instances stated that inward rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is not created by using symmetry and repetition. Therefore, what he stated in his sixth principle is indeed a succinct recapitulation of what he had expounded in his 1917-1925 essays about the use of symmetry and repetition in Neo-Plastic painting. Having crystallized idea of Mondrian in respect to ‘rhythm’ and the use of symmetry and repetition in Neo-Plastic art, we move on to see the analysis of 1924-1931 compositions.

In the 1924-1931 compositions we see that rhythm in some cases is expressed through the mutable relationship between the dimension (and so proportion) of color and noncolor planes. Thanks to the extension of lines to the edges of these paintings, the relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes are represented as more concrete compared to the 1917-1923 compositions. However, we also contend that in some of the 1924-1931 paintings the rhythm is not primarily expressed through mutable relationship among the dimensions of the planes. For instance, in all lozenge compositions of this period (especially in the post 1925 paintings: see figures 5.3, 5.5, 5.6, 5.19, 5.20, 5.21) rarely do we see any recognizable rectangular plane with a concrete dimension. Though, Mondrian in his 1918-1921 lozenge compositions intersected the lines in a way we could see a palpable relationship among the dimensions of the planes. Due to the reduction in the quantity of lines and colors in lozenge composition of this period, no enclosed planes are created. As a result, the relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes in these diamond paintings could not be established as dominant as the early Neo-Plastic compositions. I assert that in majority of 1924-1931 compositions - particularly the lozenge

compositions - rhythm is mainly expressed through variety in thickness and lengths of the line rather than mutable relationship among the dimensions of the planes.

What is common in majority of the 1924-1931 paintings is that rhythm is expressed, as much detached as possible, in accordance to variations in the dimension of the rectangular planes. In contrast, we saw that in 1919-1923 paintings, rhythm was articulated through diversity of the proportion and dimension of the planes. Instead, I assert that rhythm in 1924-1931 paintings is mainly created through a constant interaction of lines in various thicknesses and lengths. When we look at these paintings (either lozenge or upright works), we first see the lines which divided the whole composition area into unequal slices of space and material (commonly small areas of color). In fact, Mondrian kept the lines to a minimum in his 1924-1931 paintings, and each line is assigned a particular mission. When we compare a 1919-1920 composition (see figures 4.13 & 4.15) with a composition of this period (see figures 5.6, 5.7, 5.11, 5.20 for instance), we distinguish a noticeable difference not only in the quantity of the lines between these two periods, but also the role of the lines to express the rhythm. In the majority of 1919-1923 compositions, lines intersected to create enclosed planes and rhythm depended on the mutable relationships among the dimensions of those enclosed planes. Nevertheless, in 1924-1931 compositions, rhythm is partly expressed through the variant relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. This is because in these compositions planes are no longer enclosed by four lines. Although in majority of these compositions one small plane - commonly in the periphery - was completely enclosed, these small planes could not establish a dominant relationship of dimension or proportion with the rest of open-ended planes.

In the 1924-1931 compositions, majority of the planes are open to the outer space of the composition and, thereby, they established a spatial relationship with the outer space.

Indeed, in these compositions rhythm was expressed through constant interrelationship between what Mondrian previously explained as two forces of 'expansion' and 'limitation.' That is to say, rhythm emerged as a result of a spatial interaction between what Mondrian called 'filled space' (mainly lines in various thicknesses and lengths and small areas of material or color) and empty space (large open ended white planes in these compositions). On the one hand, lines delimited (to some extent) and retained planes within the composition area. On the other hand, planes tend to expand and interact with the outer space of the composition. Such opposition between expansion and limitation forces results in a creation of a beating rhythm between lines (limitation force) and space (expansion force). Some scholars such as Blotkamp, Bois, and Milner also indicated that rhythm in these compositions is expressed through a pulsing interaction between inner and outer space of the composition. In this regard, I agree with Blotkamp who stated that rhythm in these paintings (particularly the lozenge compositions) is expressed as a swirl movement of the planes in relation to the central axis of these compositions. The origin of such whirl movement is the presence of two all-over stretched vertical and horizontal lines in which they are mostly positioned on the left side in majority of 1927-1930 compositions. Overall, we content that rhythm in some of the 1924-1931 paintings is not merely created through mutable relationships among the dimensions or proportions of the planes as Mondrian indicated in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism.

When we look at 1924-1931 compositions, we also realize that Mondrian completely ceased to use symmetry in these paintings. We see that the lines - especially in compositions such as figures 5.9, 5.12, 5.14, 5.15, and 5.18 - are painted asymmetrical to the central axis of the canvas. In these paintings, the vertical and horizontal lines are neither in the periphery nor in the center of the composition. As a result of such asymmetric positioning of the lines in respect to the central axis of these paintings, the

vertical line simultaneously tends to be pulled either to the center or to the sides of the canvas. Such pulsing movement of all-over lines is discernible in 1930 composition (see figure 5.14) where the vertical line is positioned in a very special position to the central axis of the composition. At first glance, the line is seen in the center of the composition, but soon we realize that the line is slightly closer to the right side of the composition. As a result, we perceive that the line constantly moves to the central axis or away from it. This is because we want to stabilize such unstable position of the vertical line to a fixed central axis of the composition. The lines were also painted asymmetrically in diamond compositions of this period (see figures 5.3, 5.5, 5.19, and 5.21). In these paintings, Mondrian intersected the lines in the periphery of the composition to avoid creating any enclosed plane in the center of the composition. As it was discussed, Mondrian in his 1924-1931 paintings put more emphasis on the representation of the relationships rather to create rectangular planes. Overall, it is clear in the 1924-1931 paintings that Mondrian in his experimentations in this period tried to express rhythm as much as possible independent from the planes, as rectangular entities, and from the variations of their dimension. Moreover, as he also indicated in his six principle of Neo-Plasticism, in his 1924-1931 paintings he ceased to express rhythm through symmetry and repetition.

Mondrian in his 1924-1931 compositions also stopped using his previous tactic of multiplicity or repetition of lines or colors to express rhythm. We saw that he used repetition in majority of his 1917-1919 compositions to express rhythm. However, as he also emphasized in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism, in his 1924-1931 paintings he ceased to repeat lines (like grid or network of lines) and colors. Although some of similar-sized planes in the periphery of some of these compositions (see figures 5.10 and 5.13) are repeated, in majority of 1924-1931 paintings we rarely see any repetition of the lines for the sake of creating a network of rectangular planes of color and noncolor. Instead, whenever the lines are repeated in a few instances, such as figure

5.18, they are used as free lines to animate rhythm in the composition. To further excavate Mondrian's standpoint about rhythm in this period, his 1926-1932 writings are examined in the following section.

In addition to his fifth principle, Mondrian in other instances in his 1926-1932 writings talked about rhythm. Similar to what he had written during his De Stijl period, in his 1926-1932 essays and articles he distinguished the natural rhythm which is expressed as morphoplastic in representational painting from inward and interiorized rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting. For instance, in his 1930 essay *Cubism and Neo-Plastic*, he differentiated morphoplastic expression from Neo-Plastic expression as follows: “[t]he difference between morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic is that the latter represents rhythm itself, therefore in an exact way and not, as in morphoplastic, clothed in limited form” (Mondrian, 1930b, p. 238). From this statement we deduce that rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is expressed purely without any dependence on the elements of painting and form. We also saw that rhythm in the 1924-1931 compositions is articulated independent to the means of imaging and variation of the dimension of the rectangular planes. Similarly, in his writings in the same period Mondrian stated that rhythm is expressed as ‘free’ and ‘universal’ in the composition. This is one of the instances where we find an analogous evolution in Mondrian's paintings and writings. As it was analyzed, Mondrian in his 1924-1931 experimentations expressed rhythm through the creation of balance among large areas of space (white surface of the composition) as expansion force - and a few lines in different thicknesses and lengths - limitation force. To put it differently, rhythm in these paintings (1924-1931) was not a direct outcome of the variant relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. Similarly, in his 1926-1932 writing, he also emphasized that rhythm should be expressed free from the particularity of the planes - i.e. geometric forms of planes. At the end of his 1930 essay *Cubism and Neo-Plastic*, Mondrian pointed to this matter:

It is sufficient to say here that this is not possible when the Neo-Plastic work is carried to its extreme, that is, when "all" is expressed in and by line and color and when all the relationships in the composition are equilibrated. Then the rectangular planes (formed by the plurality of straight lines in rectangular opposition, which are necessary in order to determine color) are dissolved by their homogeneity and rhythm alone emerges, leaving the planes as "nothing." (Mondrian, 1930b, p. 240)

In the above-mentioned statement, we see Mondrian's transformed aesthetic ideas in regard to the expression of rhythm. This differs from what he had mentioned in his early Neo-Plastic writings. In this regard, the inward and universal expression of the rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is not achieved through interaction between planes as rectangular entities. He stated that the constant neutralization of the duality of the lines results in expressing a rhythm *alone* rather representing the planes. From content of his writings, we infer that the particularity of planes (their rectangular shape) should be annihilated through constant opposition of the lines. Subsequently, it is through such perpetual interaction between free lines - as opposing means of imaging - which a 'live' or 'vital' rhythm, as Mondrian stated in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism, emerges in his compositions. Similarly, in his 1924-1931 compositions we saw that rhythm was expressed free from the element of plane as a rectangular entity in the composition and it was mainly articulated through the pulse of the lines in variety of breadth and length.

At this point, we argue that Mondrian in his De Stijl essays had defined rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting under the shadow of his emphasize on the concept equilibrium. In this respect, in his 1919-1923 compositions and 1917-1925 essays, he had envisioned the expression of the rhythm as an aftermath consequence of the invariant relationship among the positions of lines (equilibrium). In those earlier paintings, the rhythm was mainly created through the variations in size of the planes. In contrast, when we look at his 1924-1931, especially his post-1928, paintings we realize that rhythm is emerged as dynamic interaction between freed lines in different thickness and length. In this regard,

in his 1931 essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*, he introduced rhythm as a prominent element of his new art (particularly his Neo-Plastic painting) that is attained through the relationship between ‘neutral’ and universal means of imaging:

Through its neutral or universal forms and pure relationships, the new art established rhythm free from the oppression of form. Because rhythm dominates in all new art, and not neutral or universal forms, its plastic expression through the strength of its pure means (line and color) is stronger than the art of the past—for the new mentality. (Mondrian, 1931, p. 252)

From this quote we understand that rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is expressed apart from the particularity of form. Furthermore, rhythm in Neo-Plasticism is articulated through relationship between ‘neutral’ and ‘universal’ means of imaging. As it was discussed in relation to means of imaging,¹⁰⁸ Mondrian in his writings in this period - particularly his post-1929 essays - introduced his lines and planes as free and neutral elements. He postulated the new idea that the lines should not be used to construct rectangular planes but they should merely be used to represent the equilibrated relationships in the composition. In his 1927 essay *Jazz and Neo-Plastic*, he defined the rhythm that is expressed independent from the particularity of the means of imaging - rectangular planes - as a universal rhythm: “Neo-Plasticism actually shows rhythm free of form: as *universal rhythm*” (Mondrian, 1927, p. 218).

In his 1926-1932 writings, Mondrian also reinforced what he had stated in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism about the way rhythm is expressed in Neo-Plastic painting. In this respect, when we read his 1926 essay *Home—Street—City*, we find that rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is expressed through mutable relationship among the dimensions of the planes: “[i]n this composition they express the movement of life, matured by a

¹⁰⁸ Please see section 5.2.3.1

deeper rhythm arising from relationships of dimension” (Mondrian, 1926c, p. 210). It should be noted that the rhythm which is attained through different relationships among the dimensions or proportions of the planes basically depends on the immutable relationship among the positions of lines. Mondrian in his writings always considered relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes as offspring of the relationship among lines. In his other 1930 essay *Cubism and Neo-Plastic*, he stated that rhythm is attained through mutable relationships among the proportion of the planes as well as the relationship among the positions of the lines at right angle: “the different proportions in the opposed duality of the straight line produce a rhythm always varied by the relationships of dimension yet at the same time constant through its constant relationships” (Mondrian, 1930b, p. 232). Therefore, we see that what Mondrian stated in his 1926-1932 writings about the expression of rhythm in Neo-Plasticism is indeed a reinforcement of what he had stated in his previous 1917-1925 essays and had crystalized in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. Indeed, we deduce that for understanding the process of the emergence of rhythm in Neo-Plastic paintings, we should holistically interpret the fourth and fifth principles. This means that both expressions of rhythm and equilibrium essentially depend on the invariant relationships among the positions of the lines at right angle.

Interestingly, Mondrian in his 1926-1932 writings in some instances introduced some supplementary information to what he stated in his fifth principle in regard to the way rhythm was expressed in Neo-Plastic painting. He postulated that rhythm, similar to equilibrium, could be expressed through immutable relationships among the lines at right angle. For example, in 1930 essay *Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)* he said: “[i]n painting the straight line is certainly the most precise and appropriate means to express free rhythm” (Mondrian, 1930a, p. 231). Similarly, in his 1931 essay *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships* he

considered immutable relationships among the positions of the lines in perpendicular angle as the main condition to express rhythm: “[new art] seek to express the principal opposition of rhythm; the two opposed aspects found, for example, in the two directions (height and width) of a work” (Mondrian, 1931, p. 252). In these two previous quotes, we find Mondrian’s matured, refined, aesthetic ideas about the method of the expression of rhythm that is also demonstrated in his late 1920’s Neo-Plastic paintings. Therefore, we infer that rhythm, similar to equilibrium, is essentially expressed through the immutable relationship among the positions of the lines. This means that, rhythm is not necessarily expressed through mutable relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. Similarly, Tosaki (2017)¹⁰⁹ in his recent scrutiny of Neo-Plastic rhythm pointed to the shift of Mondrian’s attention from the dimension of his planes to lines to represent a more forceful and moving rhythm in his 1927-1932 compositions (p. 64). In this regard, I agree with Tosaki’s account, who argued that Mondrian’s conception of rhythm further changes after 1927. We see that in his post-1927 paintings (particularly those 1929-1932 paintings) rhythm emerges as more vivid through various thicknesses and lengths of the lines. In his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism, Mondrian also introduced the expression of rhythm as ‘living’ and dynamic whereas rhythm in early Neo-Plastic paintings more or less depended on the primary expression of harmony (equilibrium) and, so, it was more static compared to his post-1927 paintings. We also realized that rhythm in majority of the 1924-1931 compositions was mainly expressed through the invariant relationship among lines with different thicknesses and lengths rather than emerging through variation in the dimension of the planes. In a nutshell, rhythm in these paintings was mainly expressed through lines rather than planes.

¹⁰⁹ Tosaki further argued that Mondrian’s aesthetic vision toward rhythm changed according to what he stated in his 1931 essay *The New Art – The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*. In this regard, Mondrian defined rhythm as a force and tension of the relationships among the means of imaging in the composition.

Mondrian in his 1926-1932 writings, similar to what he had stated earlier, talked about rhythm as a relative and individual expression in Neo-Plasticism. In contrast, he defined the expression of equilibrium as absolute or what he called 'repose.' He stated that rhythm to some extent relativizes the absolute expression of equilibrium. At this point, it is necessary to elucidate a paradox which we may find between what Mondrian called rhythm as an individual expression in the composition and what he called rhythm as universal in his 1926-1932 writings. Indeed, the individual expression of rhythm is not in contradiction to what Mondrian called rhythm as universal. Mondrian used the term 'universal rhythm' to distinguish the traditional, natural, rhythm in representational (old) art from new rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting. At the same time, this universal rhythm is an individual, relative, expression compared to the immutable and universal expression of the equilibrium. This is because equilibrium is chiefly the outcome of the *immutable* relationship among the positions of the lines at right angle whereas rhythm is mainly the outcome of the *mutable* relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes. In this regard, in his 1926 essay *Purely Abstract Art* he stated as follows:

Besides the simplicity of the plastic means, there is also *rhythm*, which animates the composition and opposes the constructive elements of the plastic means. For rhythm is the individual element in the duality, opposing the plastic means, which is the universal element; just as, within the plastic means, color opposes noncolor (black-white-gray). (Mondrian, 1926a, p. 201)

Mondrian in the above statement emphasized that rhythm is an 'individual' element in the composition. By this statement we surmise that 'individual rhythm' for Mondrian does not mean a morphoplastic expression. Indeed, individual expression of the rhythm is akin to the fact that rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is expressed through mutable, relative, relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes.

Another important point that Mondrian explained in his 1926-1932 writings is the dynamic expression of rhythm. Similar to what he had stated in his 1917-1925 essays, in his 1924-1932 writings he stressed that rhythm animates and mobilizes the stability of immutable relationship among lines. As it was studied, rhythm in 1919-1923 compositions was not really expressed as dynamic. The rhythm in those early Neo-Plastic paintings was mainly expressed as a repose or rest. However, we see that equilibrium in 1924-1931 compositions was no longer expressed as a 'repose,' absolute equilibrium.

As majority of scholars such as Blotkamp and Threlfall stated, the interest of Mondrian for expressing a free and dynamic rhythm goes back to his acquaintance with syncopated rhythm of Jazz music after 1927.¹¹⁰ Indeed, as Blotkamp also stated, Mondrian envisaged a close relation between Jazz music and Neo-Plastic painting. We argue that the syncopated rhythm of Jazz music further inspired Mondrian to express the rhythm as a dynamic and pulsing beat of the lines in variety of lengths and breadths in his 1924-1931 compositions. It is noteworthy that Mondrian always stressed that a universal expression of rhythm could only be articulated in Neo-Plastic painting and not in Jazz music.¹¹¹ He believed that the particularity and subjectivity of the means of expression (sounds) is not completely abolished in Jazz music. Nevertheless, he always exemplified the syncopated rhythm in Jazz music as a good sample of what he

¹¹⁰ Mondrian initially acquainted with Jazz music through contact with modern music composers such as Jakob van Domselaer in 1912. His interest in Jazz music was enhanced after becoming familiar with figures such as Frits van Hengelaar and Paul Sanders in 1916 (Blotkamp, 1994, p. 159).

¹¹¹ In his 1930 essay, Mondrian stated the inconsistencies in modern and Jazz music to express a free and universal rhythm as follows:

Modern music, like modern painting, has already tried to free itself from this naturalistic form. But because sound waves, like words, are so closely interconnected, and, therefore, difficult to control, it has not yet been possible to achieve free rhythm in music. Nevertheless, modern concert music and, above all, jazz reveal splendid efforts toward this realization—which painting has already attained. (Mondrian, 1930a, p. 231)

succeeded to truly express as free and universal rhythm in his Neo-Plastic paintings. For example, in his 1927 essay *Jazz and Neo-Plastic* he stated:

Jazz—being free of musical conventions—now realizes an almost pure rhythm, thanks to its greater intensity of sound and to its oppositions. Its rhythm already gives the illusion of being "open," unhampered by form. But on the other hand Neo-Plasticism actually shows rhythm free of form: as universal rhythm. (Mondrian, 1927, p. 218)

We should note that such free and dynamic rhythm - as manifested in Jazz music - in Neo-Plastic painting is not expressed through the traditional rules of harmony such as symmetry and repetition. We saw that Mondrian in late 1926, in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism, succinctly indicated that symmetry and repetition should be excluded in Neo-Plastic painting. In other essays also he banned the use of symmetry. For example, in his 1926 essay *Purely Abstract Art*, and a few months before writing the principles of Neo-Plasticism, we read: “[p]urely abstract art excludes, for instance, the symmetry that abounds in nature—further evidence that external and traditional laws can no longer satisfy the new spirit” (Mondrian, 1926a, p. 200). Similarly, in his other 1926 essay *The New Plastic Expression in Painting* Mondrian considered the ‘repetition’ as an outdated rules of harmony which should be excluded in new art: “in the new art the repetition we see in natural appearance is destroyed” (Mondrian, 1926b, p. 204). As we understood, in Neo-Plasticism in the multiplicity in duality, opposition between among the universal means of imaging is a new substitute for such traditional rules of harmony.

After analyzing Mondrian’s 1924-1931 paintings and his 1926-1932 writings, we found some developments in his artistic ideas in regard to the expression of rhythm. We surmise that in majority of 1924-1931 compositions rhythm, in contrast to the earlier 1919-1923 compositions, was not really expressed through the method he had stated in his fifth principle: mutable relationship between the dimension and proportion of the

planes. I argue that rhythm in these compositions was mainly expressed through the immutable relationship among the lines which are painted in variety of lengths and thicknesses. Similarly, in his 1926-1932 essays and in chronology with the creation of these paintings, Mondrian pointed to his refined, developed, aesthetic ideas in regards to the conditions to express the rhythm. He stated that rhythm could be expressed through the opposition of the lines alone. At this point, we come up with a similar conclusion of Tosaki (2017) about the changes occurred in the characteristic of the rhythm in the 1927-1932 paintings. Tosaki indicated that rhythm in the 1927-1932 compositions becomes more 'assertive' and emerged in the compositions more related to the expression of equilibrium. Overall, during 1927-1932 we find noticeable, although not monumental, change in Mondrian's artistic ideas in relation to his conception of rhythm. As such, we see that the rhythm of the means of imaging in 1927-1932 paintings¹¹² is more dynamic, assertive, and independent to the pictoriality of the means of imaging (particularly to the dimensions of the planes). On the other hand, contrary to the common belief of the scholars who interpreted rhythm in the 1920-1932 paintings as static expression and in relation to what Mondrian called a 'repose,' I found that the expression of rhythm in 1924-1932, especially those 1927-1932 compositions, steadily transforms from static to a dynamic expression. Overall, I believe that in the 1924-1931 paintings rhythm is expressed as much independent as possible from the means of imaging. Similarly, in his writing Mondrian stated that rhythm should be expressed as a free and universal expression, self-reliant to the particularity of the panes and lines. Lastly, and in relation to what he stated in his sixth principle, he also excluded using symmetry and repetition in his paintings in this period to express rhythm as universal.

¹¹² Similar to Tosaki, Yve-Alain Bois also indicated the change in the characteristics of the rhythm in Mondrian's post-1927 paintings of. Nevertheless, Bois, contrary to Tosaki who studies various factors, mainly rationalized such change for the influence of Jazz music on Mondrian after 1927.

5.2.4 Conclusion

Overall, I found that, compared to his 1917-1923 paintings and 1917-1925 writings, during 1924-1932 Mondrian's artistic vision toward his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories slightly developed. In 1926 Mondrian also wrote his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism within six principles which was a culmination of what he had found during his 1917-1925 experimentations. I surmise that what Mondrian painted in his 1924-1931 paintings and what he wrote during 1926-1932 was a demonstration and reiteration of what he stated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. That is to say, Mondrian in his experimentations in this period remained committed to the premises of his six principles. Nevertheless, in some cases we saw that his experimentations in his 1924-1931 paintings was not completely in accordance to what he had theorized in his six principles as well as what he had mentioned in his earlier 1917-1925 writings. We found that Mondrian also in his 1926-1932 writings indicated his refined, transformed, artistic ideas, regarding his key concepts and theories which were demonstrated in his paintings in this period. In general, I found a close relation between what Mondrian tried in his 1924-1931 paintings and what he wrote in relation to his theory of Neo-Plasticism in his 1926-1932 writings as well as the six principles of Neo-Plasticism in 1926.

Regarding his means of imaging, or plastic means, I found that Mondrian in some of his 1924-1931 paintings used and depicted his means of imaging exactly as he had defined them in his 1920-1925 essays and first principle of Neo-Plasticism. As such, in some of his paintings the means of imaging are rectangular planes of colors (red, blue, yellow) and noncolors (white, grey, black). Nevertheless, we realized that colors and noncolors in these paintings - particularly those 1927-1931 paintings - were not completely enclosed, or delimited, by four lines as they were in 1919-1923 compositions. As a result, the planes were not shown as concrete and enclosed rectangular entities as it is

defined in the first principle. Moreover, in some of his 1924-1931 compositions, Mondrian totally removed the triad of primary colors. Therefore, I deduced that in some of his 1924-1931 paintings he slightly deviated from what he crystalized in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism. That is to say, he demonstrated that the means of imaging could be further confined to the lines in perpendicular opposition and noncolors. Mondrian in his writings in this period, particularly in his 1929-1931 essays, pointed to the new role and identity of his lines. He defined his means of imaging as 'neutral' and 'free' elements which mission is not to construct the rectangular planes. Instead he postulated that the intersection, or opposition, of the lines should only express pure and equivalent relationships. Indeed, in his writings, as well as in the paintings of this period, he redefined a new role and personality for his means of imaging, especially for his lines. As it was studied in his 1924-1931 paintings, he painted the lines in different thicknesses and lengths as free and liberal means to animate the expression of the equilibrium and the rhythm in the composition rather to construct enclosed planes. Overall, we found a close relationship among the characteristics of the means of imaging in the 1924-1931 paintings and what Mondrian wrote during this time in relation to new role of the means of imaging.

In respect to the concept of 'equivalence' and balance between form and space, I inferred that the means of imaging in the 1924-1931 paintings were equivalent to the way Mondrian had mentioned in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. In these paintings, equivalence among the means of imaging was attained through a diversity and distinct duality of lines and planes rather than similarity in their size or color values. Secondly, in line with what he stated in the second principle, I saw that in majority of his 1924-1931 paintings form (filled space) and space (empty space) are in balance through the opposition of a large area of noncolor (especially white) and small areas of color. Overall, I deduced that during 1924-1932, Mondrian remained committed to what

he had stated in his second principle about equivalence and balance between form and space. That is to say, during 1924-1932, we found no alteration or development in Mondrian's artistic ideas toward his concept of 'equivalence' and the condition he theorized for the attainment of balance between form and space.

Regarding his theory of oppositions, I found that what he stated in 1926 in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism and other 1926-1932 writings is indeed a reiteration of what he had postulated in his 1917-1925 writings. In the third principle, he emphasized that duality should exist both in the means of imaging and in the composition. I contend that the dual opposition among the lines was represented as more concrete and exact in 1924-1931 compositions, compared to the pre-1924 compositions. In the 1924-1931 paintings, the duality among the lines was represented not only through the position (right angle) but also through the opposition of thicknesses and lengths of the lines. Indeed, we deduced that the duality between the lines in 1924-1932 paintings was represented as more concrete and exact compared to the early Neo-Plastic paintings. Overall, throughout 1924-1931 we found no change in Mondrian's aesthetic vision toward his theory of opposition.

In respect to the key Neo-Plastic concept of equilibrium, I surmised that equilibrium, similar to the 1919-1923 paintings, in the 1924-1931 paintings was mainly expressed through immutable relationships among the positions of the lines as well as the mutable relationships among the dimensions of the planes. In 1926, Mondrian crystalized in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism what he had previously indicated and demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings in relation to the expression of equilibrium. We realized that Mondrian in his 1926-1932 writings also affirmed what he had stated in his fourth and fifth principles about the expression of equilibrium. Interestingly, we found that in some of the lozenge compositions of this period, equilibrium was not

expressed through the immutable relationships among the positions of the lines. Nevertheless, I assert that Mondrian throughout his 1924-1931 experimentations remained committed to what he had stated about equilibrium in his fourth and fifth principles. Therefore, during 1924-1932 I found no major change in Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in regard to the expression of equilibrium.

In respect to the concept of rhythm, I deduce that rhythm in 1924-1931 compositions was expressed slightly different from his 1919-1923 paintings. I understood that what Mondrian in 1926 stated as his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism was indeed a recapitulation of what he had stated in his 1917-1925 essays. Nonetheless, we inferred that rhythm - in contrast to what he stated in his fifth principle - in majority of 1924-1931 paintings was mainly articulated through immutable relationship between position of the lines in different thicknesses and lengths rather than to be expressed through the mutable relationships among the proportion or dimension of the planes. Interestingly, Mondrian in some instances in his 1926-1932 essays put forward some new information in respect to the expression of the rhythm which helped us to better understand the way rhythm was created in his 1924-1931 painting. He stated that rhythm should be expressed as much self-reliant as possible to the particularity of the means of imaging (i.e. rectangular planes). Moreover, he stated that rhythm could be articulated through invariant relationships among the positions of the lines. Similarly, we contend that in 1924-1931 paintings, rhythm was partly articulated through the mutable relationship among the proportions of the planes and it was primarily expressed through the variations in relationships among the lines. Overall, during 1927-1932 I found a noticeable transformation in Mondrian's artistic standpoint toward his concept of rhythm.

In respect to the symmetry and repetition, we understood that Mondrian, similar to what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 experimentations, in his 1924-1931 compositions also ceased to use symmetry and repetition to create rhythm and express harmony or equilibrium. In 1926, in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism he also indicated that symmetry and repetition should be excluded in Neo-Plastic painting. Besides, in the sixth principle, Mondrian in his 1926-1932 articles and essays delineated that the symmetry and repetition are old rules of harmony and, thereby, whenever they are applied on the elements of the painting they result in an individual, subjective, expression of rhythm and equilibrium. Indeed, I found that what Mondrian stated in his sixth principle as well as other essays in this period was indeed a reiteration of what he had said in his 1917-1925 essays. Therefore, I realized that during his 1924-1931 experimentations, Mondrian adhered to what he theorized in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism. He emphasized that in Neo-Plastic theory the plurality of duality, or opposition, of the universal means of imaging is a substitute for the old rules of harmony: symmetry and repetition. Overall, I surmised that Mondrian's artistic standpoint toward the concepts of symmetry and repetition did not change between 1924 and 1931, in both his paintings and writings.

CHAPTER 6: THIRD NEO-PLASTIC PERIOD: 1932-1944

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, we realized that during 1924-1931 Mondrian's artistic stance in regard to his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories was not transformed. This is in comparison to what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings as well as his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. In this chapter, Mondrian's artistic development in regard to his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories will be explained through the examination of his 1932-1944 compositions as well as 1932-1944 writings. The goal is to understand the artistic standpoint of Mondrian toward his art in this period, compared to what he had experimented in his pre-1932 paintings and written, in 1926, as his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Indeed, in this chapter I will explain Mondrian's deviations and transformations, during 1932-1944, from what he had stated in 1926 - manifested in his 1924-1931 paintings - in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism.

In fact, Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings¹¹³ started to use his means of imaging - particularly his lines - totally different from what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1931 paintings. During 1932-1935, he steadily increased the plurality, or multiplicity, of the lines. After 1935, and particularly during 1938-1944 after his movement from Paris to London and then to New York, quantity of lines increased to the extent that the lines turned into a lattice. As a result of these pictorial changes, we contend that in majority of his 1932-1944 paintings equilibrium and rhythm are not expressed in the way he had manifested in his pre-1932 paintings as well as his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. I also deduce that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings reiterated what he

¹¹³ Bois considered the pre-1932 compositions as classic Neo-Plastic works (1994, p. 316). Therefore, in order to distinguish between pre-1932 and post-1932 compositions, in this chapter I called 1932-1944 paintings post-classic Neo-Plastic.

had previously - throughout his 1917-1932 experimentations - expressed as his theory of Neo-Plasticism. Interestingly, in some cases, particularly in his 1938-1944 essays, articles, and notes he further pointed to his new ideas in regard to his means of imaging, balance between form and space, as well as the expression of equilibrium and rhythm. These are indeed signals to his late experimentations on his 1932-1944 compositions. Nevertheless, I find that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings had not explained about some of his very radical experimentations, particularly those he did in his 1940-1944 compositions, painted in New York. Overall, what Mondrian wrote in his 1932-1944 writings in regard to his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories are demonstrated in his 1932-1944 paintings as well. At the end of this chapter, I argue that Mondrian in majority of his 1932-1944 compositions no longer followed what he had theorized in his pre-1932 writings and written in his six principles. On the whole, we will see that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 experimentations considerably deviated from his pre-1932 theory of Neo-Plasticism, especially from what he had crystalized in principles 1, 2, 4, and 5.

6.2 Neo-Plastic compositions (1932-1944)

6.2.1 Selected essays to analyze Mondrian's artistic development during 1932-1944

Mondrian during 1932-1944 wrote important essays, articles, and short notes in English. In his writing in this period, he extensively discussed a dynamic expression of rhythm and equilibrium in Neo-Plastic painting. He stated that dynamic rhythm in his paintings is indeed a true representation of reality found in modern life of men who live in metropolitan cities such as Paris and especially New York. He also, more than before, talked about the implications of his principles of Neo-Plasticism in domain of life and culture, especially in relation to the concepts such as time, reality, and morality. He tried to propagate this idea that his Neo-Plastic principles are universal rules for living a utopian life in peace, brotherhood, and justice. He believed that his principles of

painting could be used to cease suffering, violence, war, and individual egoism in the world.

Amongst the writings used under analysis in this chapter are three short texts - *Three Statements for Abstraction-Creation* - which were published in three issues of *Abstraction-Creation* yearbook from 1932 to 1934. In these three texts, Mondrian talked about his new ideas in relation to the characteristics of his means of imaging that are indeed signals to his developed artistic vision in regard to his first principle of Neo-Plasticism. The other essay used in this chapter, written in French in the second half of the 1934, is *La vraie valeur des oppositions - The True Value of Oppositions in Life and Art*. Although Mondrian intended to publish this essay in the journal *Axis* in England in December 1934,¹¹⁴ this essay was not published sooner than December 1939 in Dutch in the magazine *Kroniek van hedendaagse kunst en cultuur* (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 283; Veen, 2011, p. 272). In this essay, we find Mondrian's developed artistic ideas toward his principles of Neo-Plasticism, especially in relation to the expression of equilibrium and his theory of oppositions.

The other piece of writing examined in this chapter is *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art (Figurative Art and Non-figurative Art)*. Mondrian wrote this article throughout a year from late 1935 to November 1936 and it was published in July 1937 in an English journal *Circle: An International Survey of Constructive Art*. (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 288; Veen, 2017a, p. 390). He wrote this text in regard to the constructivist ideas of a group of artists in *circle*.¹¹⁵ This text is significant since in it Mondrian tried to

¹¹⁴ According to Veen (2011), *Axis* was the first journal founded by Myfanwy Piper Evans in Britain with the intention to publish articles about non-representational art. This journal could only last less than three years from January 1935 to winter 1937. Mondrian most probably wrote *The True Value of Oppositions in Life and Art* upon the request of Myfanwy Piper Evans (pp. 272-273).

¹¹⁵ According to Holtzman and James (1986) Ben Nicholson, Naum Gabo, and the architect Leslie Martin were the editors of the journal *Circle: An International Survey of Constructive Art*. Besides Mondrian other prominent abstract artists such as Walter Gropius, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer, Lewis Mumford, Herbert Read, Richard Neutra, and Sigfried Giedion contributed to this issue of *Circle*.

distinguish the goals and principles of his Neo-Plastic art from other modern tendencies. In this article, Mondrian expounded the way a dynamic equilibrium and rhythm is achieved in the composition. Moreover, in this text he discussed the concepts and theories that are found in his first, third, fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

Other texts which were written during 1937-1938 and before moving to London are three short texts: *Tandis qu'en général - Three Notes*, *Kunst zonder onderwerp - Art without Subject Matter*, and *Neo-Plastic. Three Notes* is a very concise text which was published in the July issue of journal *transition* in 1937 (Veen, 2011, p. 286). In this short essay, Mondrian explained some new roles and the characteristics of the means of imaging that are indeed the outcome of his experimentations on his 1932-1944 paintings. The other important text in this period is *Art without Subject Matter* which Mondrian originally wrote in Dutch as an article but it was published in March 1938 in a catalogue regarding an exhibition took place in April 1938 in *Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam*.¹¹⁶ In this article, Mondrian explained the transformation of figurative art to non-figurative art. More importantly, in this essay he talked about the new role and identity of his means of imaging and his theory of oppositions that is also discernible in his post-1932 paintings.

Other text which is examined in this chapter is *Neo-Plastic* which was originally written in French during March 1938. It was published - translated in German - in August issue of magazine *Werk*. Mondrian wrote this essay in response to the negative criticism of Peter Meyer,¹¹⁷ the editor of the journal *Werk*, who had considered the non-

¹¹⁶ According to Holtzman and James, this exhibition - curated by W. J. H. Sandberg - was held in *Stedelijk Museum* in Amsterdam with the theme of the role and essence of abstract art. In this exhibition, Mondrian participated with four of his paintings. Other contributors to this exhibition catalogue were prominent abstract artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Jean Gorin, Georg Schmidt, H. Buys, and Sigfried Giedion (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 302; Veen, 2011, p. 290).

¹¹⁷ Other artists such as Pevsner, Kandinsky, Vantongerloo, Gabo, and Max Bill also wrote and contributed their articles to *Werk* in response to Meyer's negative criticism regarding nonrepresentational art (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 305).

representational art against the very goal of art making (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 305). In this short essay, we find Mondrian's developed, transformed, artistic vision in regard to his concepts of the means of imaging (plastic means), relationships, dynamic equilibrium, and rhythm.

Other essay that is examined in this chapter is *The Necessity for a New Teaching in Art, Architecture, and Industry* that was written and published during 1938-1939.¹¹⁸ In this text, Mondrian talked about his matured ideas in regard to the characteristics of his plastic means (means of imaging) as well as balance between form and space. As we will see later in this chapter, these new aesthetic ideas are his transformed ideas which he had stated in his first and second principles of Neo-Plasticism. *Liberation from Oppression in Art and Life* is another essay that is examined in this chapter. Mondrian wrote this essay between 1939 and 1940.¹¹⁹ This essay which was written in relation to the politics regarding the evil of Nazi and Soviet forces in the World War II, could not be published during Mondrian's lifetime. This essay was first published in 1945. In this essay, Mondrian mainly tried to propagate this idea that the principles of his Neo-Plasticism could be used in life to cease people's suffering from evil consequences of those dictator regimes. He postulated this idea that the expression of a dynamic equilibrium and free rhythm of lines and colors in his Neo-Plastic compositions is indeed a true manifestation of reality in life. Mondrian in this essay also reinforced what he had stated in his previous writings about the new characteristics and role of his means of imaging to express a universal equilibrium. More importantly, in this text we

¹¹⁸ It is noteworthy that Mondrian wrote part of this essay in Dutch most probably before his move from Paris to London. He also wrote this essay with an introduction in English after he moved to London. According to Holtzman and James (1986) and Veen (2011), Mondrian wrote this essay to define his new art course - based on Neo-Plastic principles - as a new approach toward teaching art to the students. Based on Mondrian's letter to László Moholy-Nagy - founder of Bauhaus school in Chicago in 1937 - in June 1939, it is clear that Mondrian mainly wrote this essay to persuade Moholy-Nagy to give him a teaching position at Bauhaus School (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 310; Veen, 2011, p. 299).

¹¹⁹ According to Veen (2011), there are various manuscripts for this essay. Moreover, there are a lot of short notes and essays which Mondrian wrote about 'oppressions' in art and life which were published by Veen. However, for case of this thesis, the version of Holtzman and James (1986) for this essay was used.

find Mondrian's refined artistic standpoint regarding the concept of rhythm that he defined as a 'dynamic equilibrium'. Last but not least, in this essay he also talked about what he had stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism in relation to the concept of 'equal value' of the means of imaging.

Among Mondrian's writings in 1941, *Toward the True Vision of Reality* is one of the important texts he wrote in relation to his principles of Neo-Plasticism. This autobiographical essay was written during April-July 1941 and it was published in January 1942 as an exhibition catalogue for his first exhibition in New York in Valentine Gallery (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 338; Veen, 2017a, p. 490). In this piece of writing, we find his new perspective toward his key Neo-Plastic concepts and theories, especially in relation to what he had stated in his first, second, and third principles of Neo-Plasticism. Additionally, in this essay he discussed the transition of his figurative style to pure abstract art during 1910s.

Another piece of writing used under analysis in this chapter is *A New Realism*. This essay,¹²⁰ according to Holtzman and James (1986), is Mondrian's last completed essay which was first read on his behalf by Balcomb Greene on the occasion of an exhibition in the Nierendorf Gallery, New York (p. 345). In this essay, Mondrian talked about his means of imaging, equivalence between form and space, and his concept of 'dynamic equilibrium.' He also explained his new concept of 'space-determination' which signals his developed ideas about creating balance between form and space in his 1932-1944 paintings. He also talked about his concept of space-determination in his other texts¹²¹

¹²⁰ According to Veen (2011), Mondrian sent *A New Realism* upon the request of Charmion von Wiegand to be published in a yearbook in *American Abstract Artists* (AAA). However, this essay was not published in AAA's yearbook until 1946 (p. 375).

¹²¹ Mondrian in last years of his artistic career somewhere between 1938 and 1944 (mainly in London and New York) wrote more than one hundred notes. Most of these notes are short and just jotted down within a paragraph or two. Some of his longer notes are separated and published by scholars such as Holtzman and Veen as sketches written for an article or essay.

such as *Plastic Art: Reflex of Reality*¹²² (ca. 1942) and *Space-Determination in Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* (1942-1944). In both essays, we find Mondrian's evolved ideas in respect to balance between form and space which are analyzed in this chapter in relation to his 1932-1944 painting.

The other text used under analysis is an interview of Mondrian with James Johnson Sweeney in 1943 (Holtzman & James, 1986, p. 356).¹²³ In this interview Mondrian explicated his key concepts of 'dynamic equilibrium' and rhythm. In it we interestingly - unlike the majority of his writings - find his explanation of his paintings in different period of Neo-Plasticism. For instance, he explained why in his early 1919-1920 Neo-Plastic paintings a dynamic equilibrium and rhythm could not be expressed. Most importantly, in this interview he pointed to his last two paintings *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* and *Victory Boogie-Woogie*. He exemplified those paintings as good instances where the dynamic rhythm of life and reality could be represented as a dynamic equilibrium in painting.

In addition to the texts written between 1932 and 1944 as essays, articles, and exhibition catalogues, series of Mondrian's 1938-1944 short notes and autobiographical texts are also examined. Holtzman and James (1986) compiled and thematically arranged Mondrian's important notes under title *A Folder of Notes* (1938-1944) that are used in this chapter. Although, majority of these notes are usually undated and short - sometimes as short as one paragraph or a less than a page - in these short texts we find Mondrian's transformed aesthetic ideas toward his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories.

¹²² According to Veen (2011), the title of this essay was first *Reality and Plastic Art* and then changed to *Plastic Art: Reflex of Reality* by Mondrian (p. 389).

¹²³ According to Veen (2011), Sweeney conducted this interview with Mondrian on May 24, 1943 in order to write an article about the development of Mondrian's art later.

Indeed, these scattered short notes help us better understand the development of his ideas toward Neo-Plastic concepts and theories during his 1932-1944 experimentations.

6.2.2 Late Paris period, London, and New York: monumental changes in 1932-1944 Neo-Plastic compositions

In 1934 Mondrian met two important figures in Paris: the English painter Ben Nicholson and American painter Harry Holtzman who had a long-lasting impact on Mondrian's last decade of his life. Paris during 1936-1938 was in unstable political situation. The evil consequences of dictatorial regimes such as Fascists in Italy, Hitler in Germany, and Franco in Spain had rendered Paris insecure for artists like Mondrian. The main danger was from Germans and the possibility of their air force attack to Paris. Therefore, Mondrian wrote to Nicholson that he was coming to London¹²⁴. He left Paris in September 21, 1938 by help of the painter Winifred Nicholson. In London, Painters such as Winifred Nicholson, Ben Nicholson, and Barbara Hepworth helped Mondrian settle in London and provided him with necessary materials. The Nicholsons and Naum Gabo helped him find a studio at 60 Park Hill Road in Hampstead. In London, Mondrian was surrounded with warm atmosphere and circle of friends such as Naum Gabo, Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, and architect J. L. Martin and his wife. It is noteworthy that artists in London were well familiar with his Neo-Plastic paintings and his aesthetic ideas due to his earlier membership in group *Abstraction-Creation*, his participation in some exhibitions in London, and his contribution to British yearbook *Circle*. Nonetheless, Mondrian could not stay long in London. In autumn 1940 a bomb was exploded close to his house and he had to leave London to New York. He moved from London to New York by help of his friend Harry Holtzman.

¹²⁴ Indeed, Mondrian's dream city was New York and upon his arrival in London, he said "I'm on my way to America" (Seuphor, 1956, p. 171).

Mondrian arrived in New York in October 1940. As Blotkamp indicated, Mondrian in New York had very prolific years. He started a very active social life in New York. He got acquainted with the American Abstract Artists (AAA) group in New York. In New York, many artists such as Burgoyne Diller, Fritz Glarner, Charmion van Wiegand, and Leon Polk Smith were absorbed by Mondrian's Neo-Plastic art and became his followers (Blotkamp, 1994; Diller et al., 1975). Mondrian in New York also became familiar with many artists and art critics such as Peggy Guggenheim, Max Ernst, André Breton and Marcel Duchamp. In New York he had the opportunity to regularly visit Peggy Guggenheim's gallery of *Art of This Century* (Milner, 1992, p. 203). In this period, Mondrian could sell his artworks with higher price compared to Paris. His art dealer Valentin Dudensing could sell each of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings around \$200. Dudensing also arranged two exhibitions for Mondrian in New York in 1942 and 1943. He also gave a reading of his essay *A New Realism* at Nierendorf Gallery (Seuphor, 1956, p. 188). In 1943, Mondrian became the jury of the 'Art of This Century.' As a result, Mondrian's popularity in New York increased to the point that at the end of 1943, many journalists came to interview with him.

New York for Mondrian was a warm and adorable city with generous and passionate young spirit. Seuphor called New York as the "capital of the new world" compared to Paris which for Mondrian was the "intellectual capital of the old." Mondrian found horizontal-vertical streets of Manhattan similar to Amsterdam horizontal canals. For him, New York was a "new Amsterdam" which was separated from Amsterdam by Atlantic (Seuphor, 1956, pp. 177-178). In New York, Mondrian first settled in First Avenue and 56th Street where he lived until October 1943. His first apartment was close to many art galleries which were between Fifth and Park Avenues, near to the 57th street. In October 1943, he moved to a larger studio at 15 East 59th Street.

After a historical survey on Mondrian's art and life during 1932-1944, now I move on to the description of the characteristics of the 1932-1944 Neo-Plastic paintings. When we look at Mondrian's post-1932 paintings, one notices monumental changes in appearances of these artworks. After 1932, Mondrian innovatively started to use double lines which soon changed to a dense network of lines. According to the scrutiny of Blotkamp, the idea of the doubling of the lines was borrowed from British painter Marlow Moss who had used double lines in her paintings as early as 1930. Subsequently, Mondrian after 1932 started to use double lines in his paintings.¹²⁵ On 22 December 1932, Mondrian in a letter to architect Oud indicated his innovative experimentations with double lines. He told to Oud that the double lines give him more clarity in his work: "I am doing some new research: canvases with double lines, which enables me to achieve a greater clarity" Mondrian (as cited in Blotkamp, 1994, p. 215). Although Mondrian was a follower of Moss in doubling the lines, the method of Moss' painting was different from Mondrian. Contrary to Mondrian, who used the intuitive faculties of his mind to paint, Marlow Moss used mathematical principles to determine the best place for the position of his lines. In this case, Blotkamp stated that Moss' calculative and mathematical method was closer to Vantongerloo rather than Mondrian's intuitive approach. More importantly, Mondrian soon, mainly after 1935, expanded his experimentations with double lines into pluralization of the lines which distinct him from Moss' artistic style.

Indeed, Mondrian after 1932 and especially in his 1935-1944 paintings used a completely different method to express a universal rhythm and equilibrium in his compositions independent from the particularity of his means of imaging. In this regard, he started to destroy the previous thingness of his planes, colors, lines, and even surface

¹²⁵ It is noteworthy that, following Mondrian, his fellow artist Jean Gorin also used double lines in his paintings.

of the composition through the pluralization of the lines. Indeed, as scholars such as Blotkamp and Bois also explained, Mondrian after 1932 used the element of line as a destructive agent to completely abolish the rectangularity of the planes. That is to say, the lines which were previously - in his pre-1932 paintings - used to delimit the colors and construct the rectangular planes, after 1932 were assigned a new role to destruct the geometric and subjective identity of the planes. Bois interestingly argued that by using double lines, Mondrian went against his own principles of Neo-Plasticism. Furthermore, Bois believed that the introduction of double lines as a new pictorial element in Neo-Plasticism caused monumental changes in the very core theory of Neo-Plastic painting:

The doubling of the line, an apparently simple gesture, created an immediate crisis in Mondrian's art: on the one hand, lines became increasingly active and prominent through their rhythmic repetition; on the other, the double line (especially as it widened) tended also to be read as a single plane, thus blurring the distinction between two essential elements of Mondrian's vocabulary. These interrelated changes were accompanied by a decisive shift in Mondrian's theory: he sought from this point on to "destroy" all static elements and to create a "*dynamic equilibrium*." In almost every sense, the art of his last decade was directed against the principles that had characterized the previous one. Bois (as cited in Tosaki, 2017, p. 68).

Although Bois interestingly asserted that monumental changes in the use of lines in post-1932 paintings was against the very core principles of Neo-Plasticism, he did not demonstrate and explain such deviation of Mondrian from his own principles of Neo-Plasticism in this late Neo-Plastic period. According to Tosaki's recent scrutiny (2017), the introduction of double line had two main consequences in the theory of Neo-Plasticism. Firstly, in relation to Bois' account, by using double lines Mondrian had to accept the 'repetition' of his means of imaging which he had banned in his sixth principles of Neo-Plasticism and his all pre-1932 paintings and writings. In return, by using double lines, Mondrian could depict a very dynamic or what Tosaki called an 'ostensive' or 'overt' rhythm in his compositions. Indeed, the rhythm in post-1932 paintings is no longer a subjective and covert, expression and it represented concretely

on the surface of these late Neo-Plastic compositions. Secondly, according to Tosaki, the introduction of double lines changed Mondrian's method of his painting from a theoretical into an empirical approach. That is to say, Mondrian's expression of rhythm and harmony becomes more expressive in this late Neo-Plastic period.

Mondrian's experimentations on the pluralization of his lines started after 1932 when he used double lines in his paintings. The first double line compositions were painted during 1932-1933. Some of them are *Composition with Yellow and Grey* (figure 6.1), *Composition with Double Line and Yellow* (figure 6.2), and *Composition with Double Line and Yellow and Blue* (figure 6.3). In these works, which can be considered as early post-classic Neo-Plastic compositions, lines have not yet been pluralized. These paintings share common characteristics with the earlier 1924-1931 compositions where lines were asymmetrically positioned to the central axis of the canvas. Similar to those earlier compositions, the open-ended planes in these paintings are still detectable and they establish a dialectics with the outer space of the composition. Nevertheless, due to the close spacing between the parallel lines, the two lines and spacing between them grab our attention in the first glance. As a result, when we look at these 1932-1933 compositions, we first see double lines and their spacing rather than rectangular planes. In latter two compositions (figures 6.2 & 6.3), double lines are thicker. Moreover, spacing between the two lines is increased. We see that in these paintings the dominance of double lines and the glittering white space between the lines to some extent distracted our perception to read the intersection of the lines as rectangular planes.

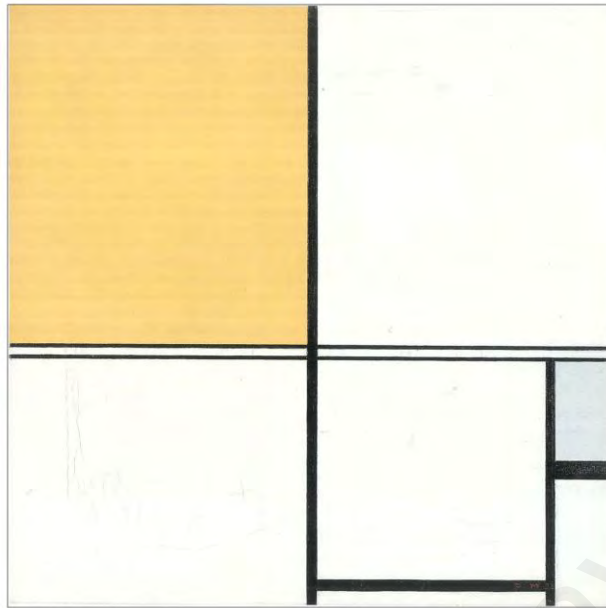


Figure 6.1: Piet Mondrian. 1932. Composition with Yellow and Grey. Oil on canvas. 50 x 50 cm, Private Collection (© 2018 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust - info@mondriantrust.com).

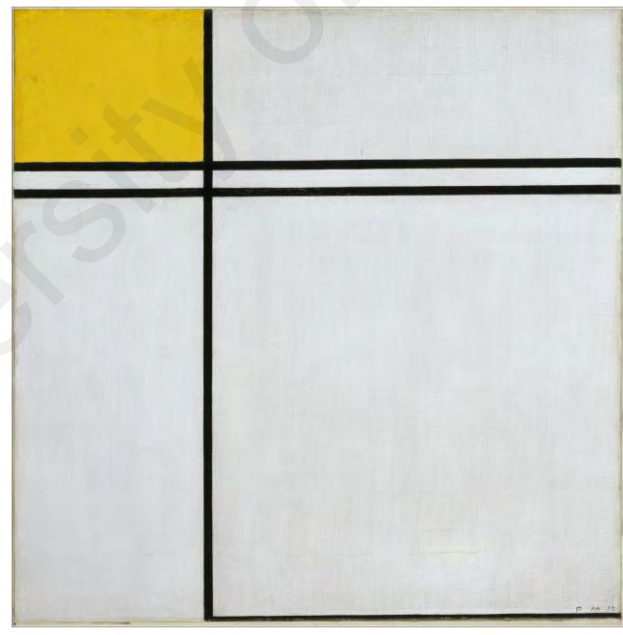


Figure 6.2: Piet Mondrian. 1932. Composition with Double Line and Yellow. Oil on canvas. 45.30 x 45.30 cm. Reproduced with the permission of © Scottish National Gallery Of Modern Art. Accession number: GMA 2502

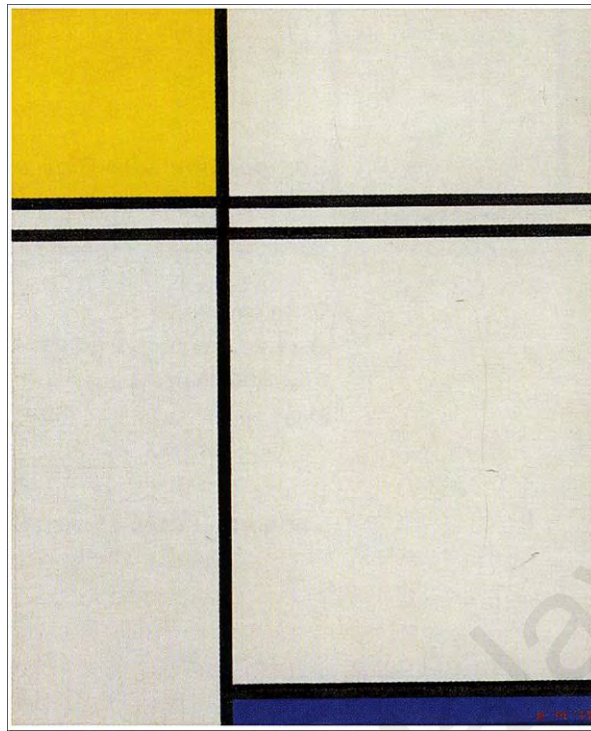


Figure 6.3: Piet Mondrian. 1933. *Composition with Double Line and Yellow and Blue*. Oil on canvas. 41 x 33.5 cm. Private collection (© 2018 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust - info@mondriantrust.com). Retrieved from <https://www.pubhist.com/w24325>

In 1934-1935 compositions such as *Composition in Black and White, with Double Lines* (figure 6.4), *Composition (No. 1) Gray-Red* (figure 6.5), and *Composition with Blue and Yellow* (figure 6.6), both horizontal and vertical lines are doubled. The double lines are repeated and they appeared as quadrupled lines. Moreover, the spacing between the lines increased. These paintings are similar to those group of 1927-1931 compositions where the vertical and horizontal lines are crossed close to the central axis of the composition. As a result of such asymmetrical positioning of the lines, it seems the lines constantly move backward and forward to the central axis of the composition. In these paintings, we see two comparatively contrasting open and enclosed space areas. The space between the double lines is imprisoned and confined whereas the space outside of the boundary of the double lines is open to the outer space of the canvas. In all three paintings, there is one dominant enclosed square in the lower right side of the

composition. However, these enclosed square planes are not dominant in these compositions since they are usually not filled with the color and, thereby, they are translated as part of the surface of the composition (space).

A common characteristic of 1934-1935 compositions - palpable in 1932-1933 compositions as well - is a very narrow plane at the bottom of the composition that is commonly filled with color. Such narrow area of surface is also represented as spacing between double lines. In this respect, I agree with scholars such as Milner and Bois who stated that in these post-classic Neo-Plastic compositions (particularly 1935-1937 compositions) sometimes the lines can be counted as planes and vice versa. Similarly, Blotkamp (1994) argued that the narrow spacing between the lines in 1935 compositions could be translated either as white lines or narrow white planes: “[t]here is, in effect, no strict distinction possible between white-as-line and white-as-plane; rather Mondrian succeeded in creating a smooth transition between the two” (p. 218). Nevertheless, among the interpretations of the scholars I endorse Welsh’s interpretation of the lines in these paintings as ‘space dividers’: “[v]irtually all lines, whether or not part of a pair, now must be read as functioning simultaneously as space dividers, and as boundary edges of various rectangular planar units, both white and coloured” Welsh (as cited in Carmean, 1979, p. 54). Indeed, in these 1934-1935 paintings we see that the multiplicity of double lines created restricted areas of space which are antagonized with the other open areas. As a result of such contrast between the imprisoned areas of space and open space, we no longer see the planes as rectangular entities with a concrete dimension and proportion. Instead, in these paintings we mostly see the lines and their intervals.

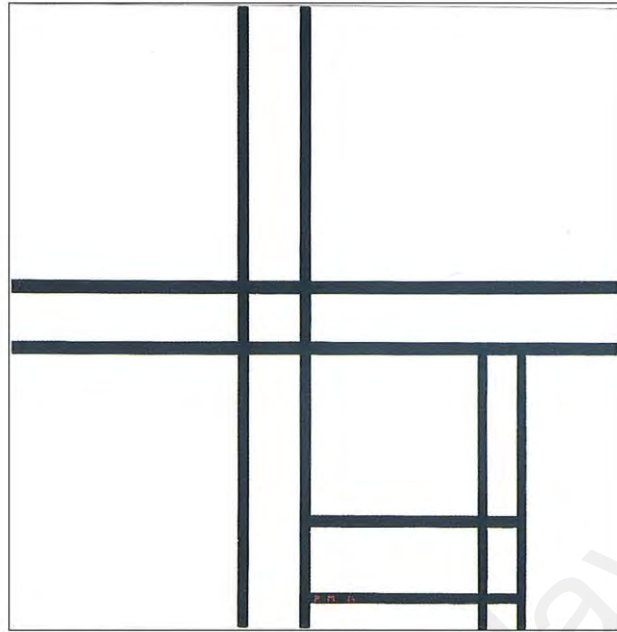


Figure 6.4: Piet Mondrian. 1934. Composition in Black and White, with Double Lines. Oil on canvas. 59.4 x 60.3 cm. Dallas, Museum of Art. Anonymous loan (Retrieved from Bax, 2001, p. 242).

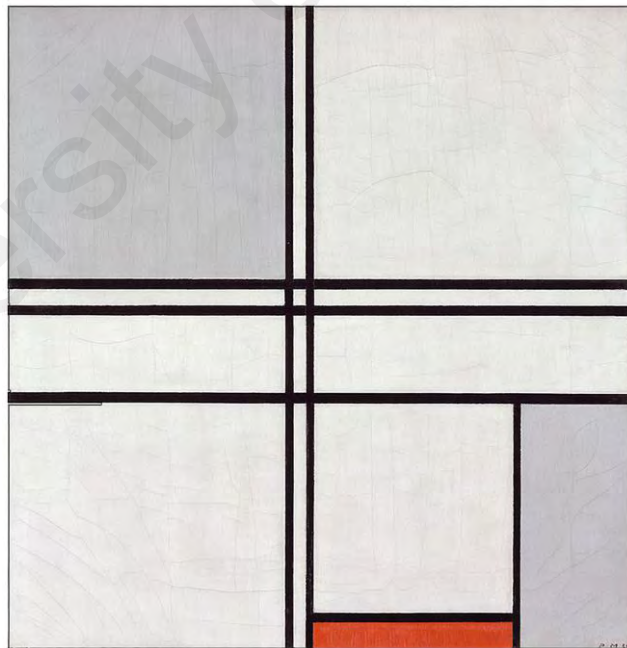


Figure 6.5: Piet Mondrian. 1935. Composition (No. 1) Gray-Red. Oil on canvas. 22 5/8 x 21 7/8 in. (57.5 x 55.6 cm). Reproduced with the permission of © The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, U.S.A. Gift of Mrs. Gilbert W. Chapman, 1949.518.

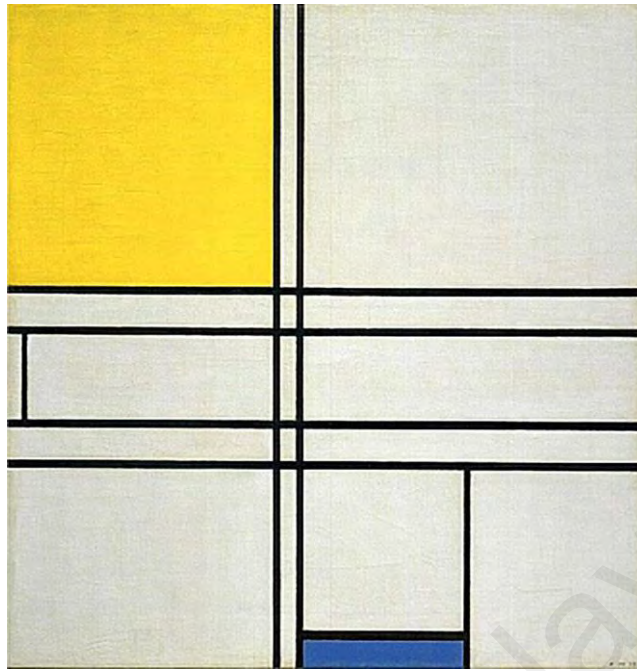


Figure 6.6: Piet Mondrian. 1935. *Composition with Blue and Yellow (Composition Bleu-Jaune)*. Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 27 1/4 in. (73 x 69.6 cm). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1972. Accession Number: 72.205.

In 1936-1938 compositions, majority of them created in Paris and before the move to London, lines changed to a dense network of horizontal and vertical ones. The good examples of works in this period are: *Composition with White and Red* (figure 6.7), *Composition* (1936) - figure 6.8, *Opposition of Lines, Red and Yellow* (figure 6.9), *Composition in Line and Colour III (Composition with Blue)* - figure 6.10, *Composition with Blue, Red and Yellow* (figure 6.11), and *Lozenge Composition with eight Lines and Red* (figure 6.12). In majority of 1936-1938 compositions, all lines are stretched throughout the whole width and length of the canvas. Similar to the earlier 1924-1931 compositions, in these paintings lines are also in varieties of thicknesses. We also find that the lines sometimes varied in length such as in the *Composition in Line and Colour III* (figure 6.10) and the 1938 diamond painting *Lozenge Composition with eight Lines and Red* (figure 6.12).

It is clear that the increase in the quantity of all-over lines inevitably resulted in the creation of many smaller enclosed areas as planes. However, the frequency of the bold black lines created an illusion of white glittering spots - similar to what we saw in 1918-1919 paintings - in the intersection of the lines (see figures 6.7 & 6.11). Consequently, in these paintings we see that lines seem constantly fragmented into shorter pieces and this by itself hampers our perception to identify any rectangular plane in these paintings. Overall, in these compositions (figures 6.7 to 6.12) we found that rhythm and harmony (equilibrium) are expressed independent from the element of plane. Such change in the expression of the balance and rhythm in these paintings is mainly related to the alteration in the role of lines. In fact, these changes in the role of the means of imaging in these paintings distinguish classic Neo-Plastic oeuvre (1920-1931) from post-classic period (1932-1944). In this regard, Krauss et al. (2004) outlined this turning point in the Mondrian's Neo-Plastic painting and theory:

He [Mondrian] multiplied the lines delimiting and linking the planes together so that "rhythm alone emerges, leaving the planes [themselves] as 'nothing'." Lines, which had been a secondary element in "classical" Neoplasticism, thus became the most active element, the main destructive agent, and their sheer multiplication ensured not only that planes lost their "individuality" (as one cannot securely grasp a plane with multiple contours), but also that the same "depersonalization" would happen to the lines themselves. (pp. 309-310)

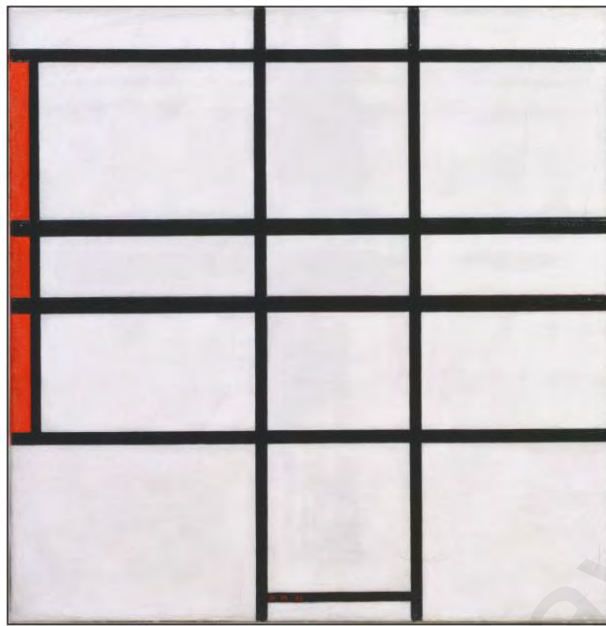


Figure 6.7: Piet Mondrian. 1936. Composition with White and Red. Oil on canvas. 19 7/8 x 20 1/4 inches (50.5 x 51.4 cm). Reproduced with the permission of © Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin Collection, 1952-61-89.

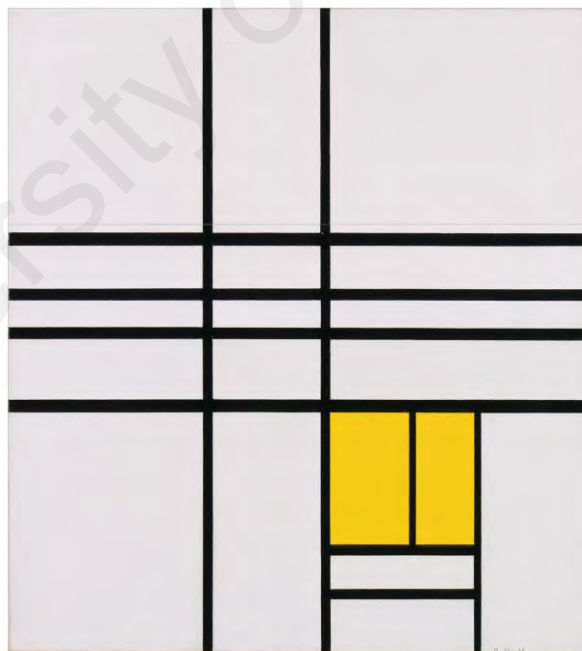


Figure 6.8: Piet Mondrian. 1936. Composition. Oil on canvas. 28 3/4 x 26 1/16 inches (73 x 66.2 cm). Reproduced with the permission of © Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950-134-152.

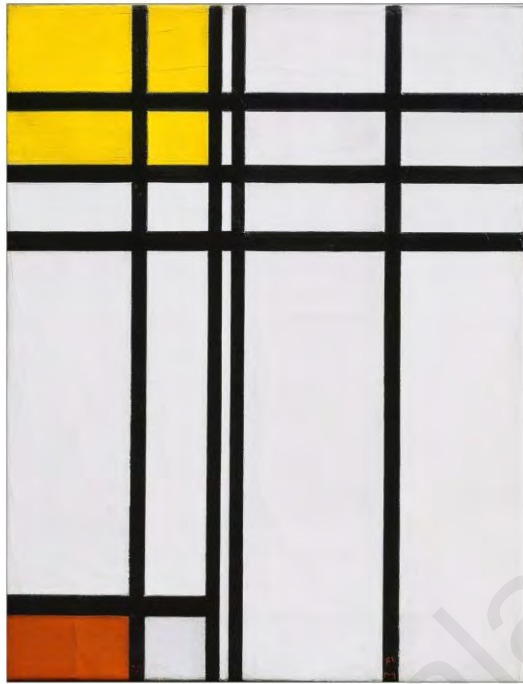


Figure 6.9: Piet Mondrian. 1937. Opposition of Lines, Red and Yellow. Oil on canvas. 17 1/8 x 13 1/4 inches (43.5 x 33.7 cm). Reproduced with the permission of © Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin Collection, 1952-61-90.

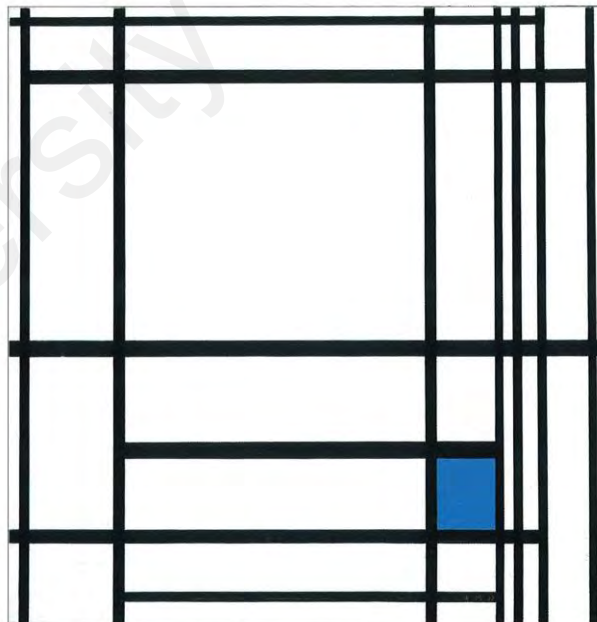


Figure 6.10: Piet Mondrian. 1937. Composition in Line and Colour III (Composition with Blue). Oil on canvas, 80 x 77 cm. Reproduced with the permission of Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

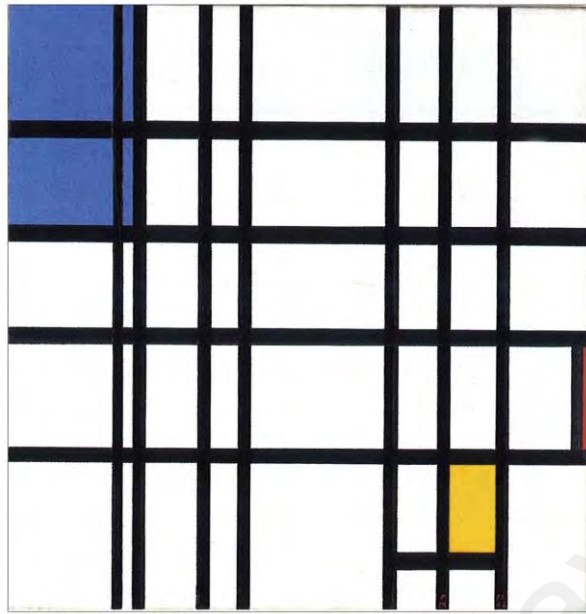


Figure 6.11: Piet Mondrian. 1937. Composition with Blue, Red and Yellow. Oil on canvas, 72.2 x 69.5 cm. Reproduced with the permission of Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

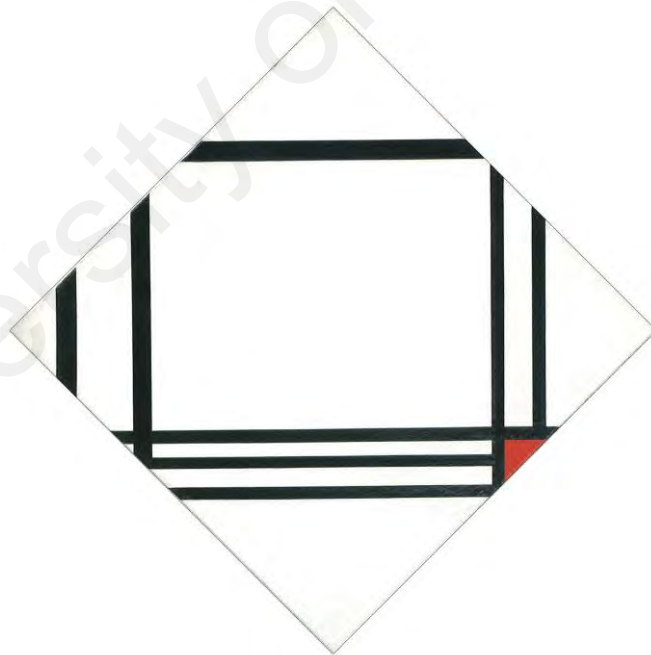


Figure 6.12: Piet Mondrian. 1938. Lozenge Composition with eight Lines and Red / Rautenkomposition mit acht Linien und Rot (Picture No. III). Oil on canvas. 100.5 x 100.5 cm; 103.0 x 103.0 cm. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, Sammlung Beyeler CH frei, © Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International Warrenton, VA USA.

Beside the previous paintings, there are some paintings which Mondrian painted between 1936 and 1940 in Paris or London but they were later repainted - during 1940-1943 - in New York.¹²⁶ These paintings commonly referred to as retouched, repainted compositions are grouped here since they share similar characteristics.¹²⁷ The good examples of these paintings are: *Composition No. 12 with Blue* (1936-1942) - figure 6.13, *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red* (1937-1942) - figure 6.14, *Composition of Red and White* (1938-1942) - figure 6.15, *Place de la Concorde* (1938-1943) - figure 6.16, *Composition No. 8* (1939-1942) - figure 6.17, *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (1939-1942) - figure 6.18, *Trafalgar Square* (1939-1943) - figure 6.19, and *Composition No. 11, 1940-42--LONDON, with Blue, Red and Yellow* (1940-1942) - figure 6.20.

It is possible to assort these repainted compositions into two groups. In the first group of paintings (see figures 6.13 & 6.14), the bold all-over lines are painted in more quantity and density. Moreover, in these paintings there is almost similar spacing between lines. Similar to the earlier 1932-1938 compositions, the lower right side was further bisected with a few shorter lines which slightly alleviated the quasi symmetrical and regular pattern of the lines. In majority of these paintings we see a fluctuating movement, or what Bois interpreted as an 'undulation' effect, between lines. The high density of lines¹²⁸ creates a white optical effect in the intersection of the lines. As a result, we hardly detect any rectangular plane in these compositions. Only those tiny cells which

¹²⁶ After Mondrian's arrival in New York in 1940, he started to revise his previous works brought by himself from Paris. Noticeable amount of his time in New York was spent for reapplying his new artistic vision on his previous Parisian works.

¹²⁷ Interestingly, Champa in 1985 first, and later Blotkamp in 1994, called these repainted compositions of Mondrian as 'trans-Atlantic paintings' since Mondrian had brought these paintings across the Atlantic Ocean to New York and he added last touches on these paintings in New York (Champa, 1985, p. 128). According to Cooper and Spronk (2001), the transatlantic paintings of Mondrian are 17 paintings that are initiated during 1935-1938 as well as those paintings started in London during 1938-1940 and, then, were finished during Mondrian's 1940-1944 stay in New York (pp. 24-25).

¹²⁸ Fauchereau (1994) interestingly linked the high density of lines in these late 1930s compositions to prison bars. This is a visual manifestation of the turmoil and pain of people in World War II. In this regard, lines are painted over the colors. That is to say, one can symbolically say that colors in these paintings were imprisoned by the lines.

are filled with color (such as the small blue cell in the lower right in figure 6.13) could be identified as a concrete rectangular entity in the composition.

The second group of retouched paintings (see figures 6.15 to 6.20) share almost similar characteristics with the previously studied 1936-1938 compositions (see figures 6.7 to 6.12). However, in these repainted compositions we find more tension and variety in the lines, especially in the horizontal lines.¹²⁹ As a result of reduction in the density of lines, those areas which are filled with color represent themselves as rectangular planes. These planes are more palpable in figures 6.15, 6.17, 6.19, and 6.20. Nonetheless, due to the existence of the optical white spots in the intersection of lines, these planes of color could not establish stable relationships with other white cells in the composition.

Beside the slight variations between those two groups of retouched paintings, there are a few common characteristics which distinguish these paintings from the earlier studied 1936-1938 paintings. In majority of these retouched paintings (except in figure 6.13), there are short bands, or dashes, of color that are usually positioned in the periphery of the composition. According to the majority of scholars, these new elements were most probably added in New York in the second phase of painting. Indeed, Mondrian in these repainted works proposed these dashes of color as new supplementary elements to his means of imaging to further heighten dynamism in rhythm and equilibrium of his compositions. It is interesting that for the first time after 1917, Mondrian painted colors without any obligation to enclose or determine them by element of line. Therefore, we observe Mondrian's tendency in these repainted compositions to further free colors from the element of lines.

¹²⁹ Some scholars such as Milner and Blotkamp resembled the horizontal lines that are confined between two vertical lines in some of these paintings (see figures 6.15, 6.18, and 6.19), to a ladder. In this thesis, I have not called these compositions a 'ladder type' in order to avoid any subjective perception of these paintings.

In the retouched paintings (see figures 6.14 to 6.20), the dashes, or bands, of colors are painted in different ways. In some paintings such as in figures 6.15, 6.17, and 6.20, these dashes of color are in the periphery of the composition. One side of these dashes of color is attached to the line and the other side is cut off by the edge of the composition. As a result, these dashes linked the enclosed space and the structure of the lines to the infinite outer space of the composition. In the second kind, the dashes appeared as short stripes of color (see figures 6.14, 6.16, and 6.18) which are freely painted over the lines, on the spacing of lines, and in the periphery of the composition. Mondrian used these unbounded dashes of color differently in these retouched paintings. For instance, in *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red* (figure 6.14) a blue stripe connected the spacing between close three vertical lines whereas lines seem painted over the blue stripes and, thereby, they are perceived as three continuous lines. Conversely, in *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (figure 6.18) the red stripe passed over the lines. As a result, it interrupted the continuity of three horizontal lines. At the same time, the red stripe in figure 6.18 unified the three lines as one bundle of lines. We also find innovative use of the colored stripes in *Place de la Concorde* (figure 6.16) where these dashes were used in more quantity, length, and color value in the periphery of the composition. In these works, those dashes of color can be either counted as 'line' or boundless 'planes.' Indeed, we see that in these paintings the borders between line and plane was abolished to some extent.

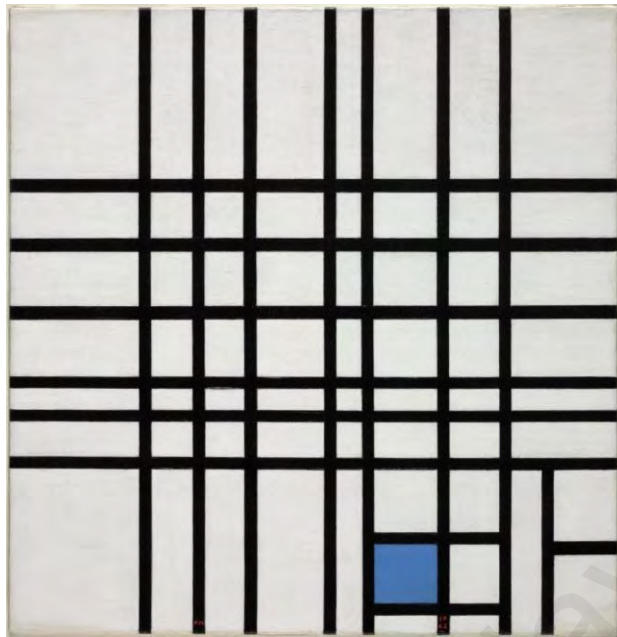


Figure 6.13: Piet Mondrian. 1936-1942. Composition No. 12 with Blue. Oil on canvas. 62 x 60.3 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Purchased 1970. Accession number 15911.

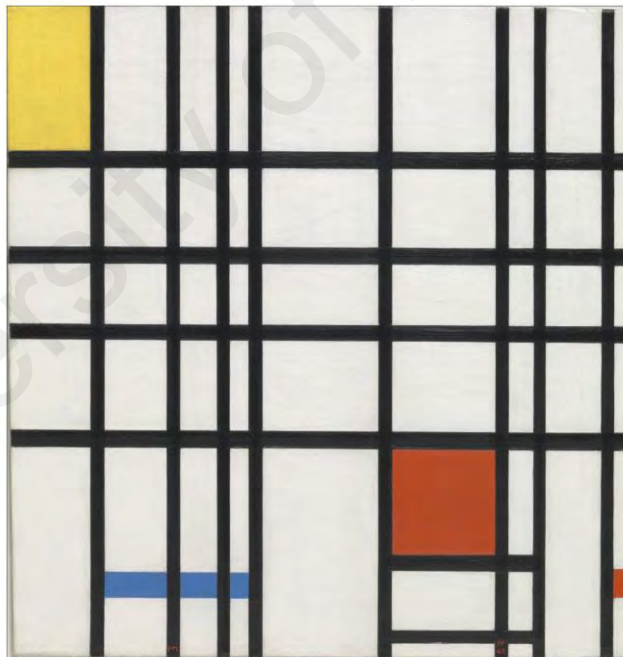


Figure 6.14: Piet Mondrian. 1937-1942. Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red. Oil on canvas. 72.5 x 69 cm. Reproduced with the permission of ©Tate Gallery, London. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported).

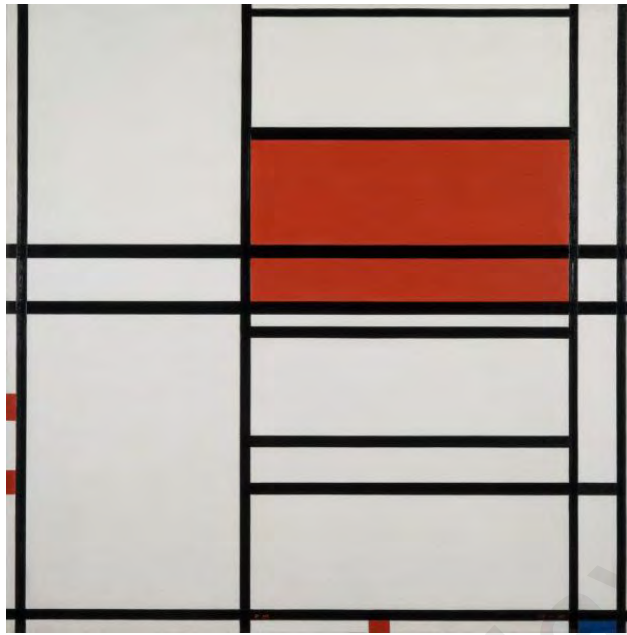


Figure 6.15: Piet Mondrian. 1938-1942. Composition of Red and White: No. 4 with red and blue. Oil on canvas. 39 1/2 x 39 in. (100.3 x 99.1 cm). © Mondrian / Holtzman Trust / HCR International, Warrenton, VA Object in public domain as of 2014. Saint Louis Art Museum. Friends Fund. Object Number: 242:1972.

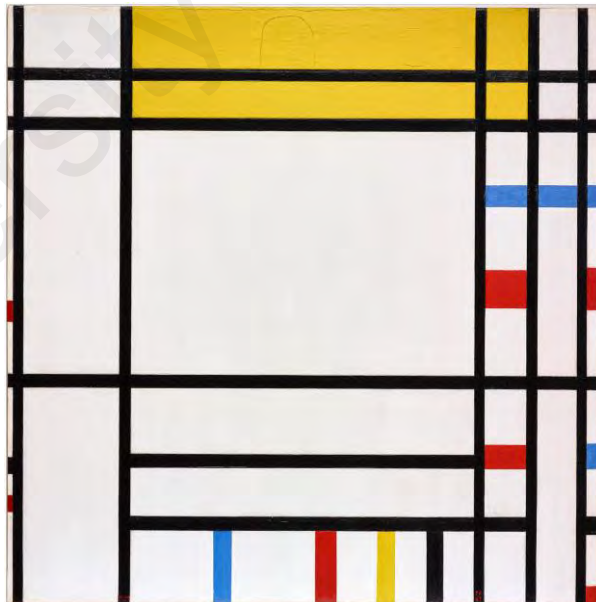


Figure 6.16: Piet Mondrian. 1938-1943. Place de la Concorde. Oil on canvas. 37 x 37 3/16 in. (93.98 x 94.46 cm). Reproduced with the permission of Dallas Museum of Art, Foundation for the Arts Collection, gift of the James H. and Lillian Clark Foundation 1982.22.FA.

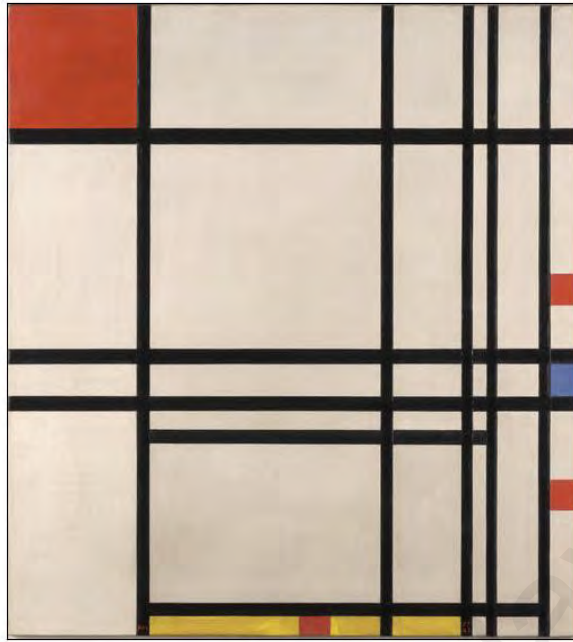


Figure 6.17: Piet Mondrian. 1939-1942. Composition No. 8. Oil on canvas. 29 1/2 x 26 3/4 in. (74.9 x 67.9 cm). Purchased by Kimbell Art Foundation, Fort Worth, 1994.

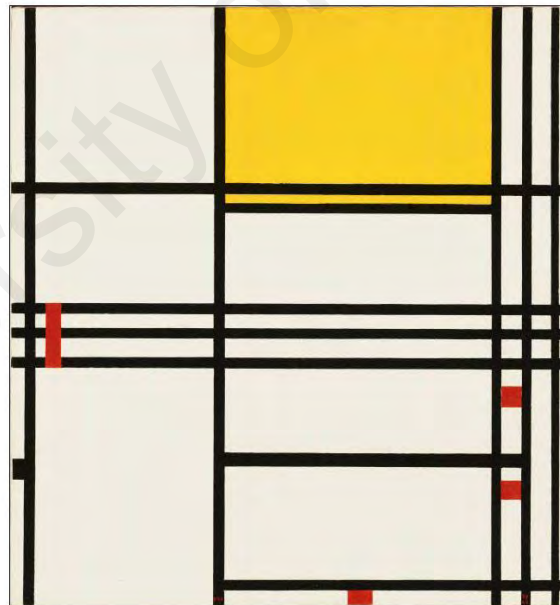


Figure 6.18: Piet Mondrian. 1939-1942. Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue (Composition No. 9). Oil on canvas. 31 3/8 x 29 1/4 in.; 79.6925 x 74.295 cm. Phillips Collection, Washington, DC. Gift from the estate of Katherine S. Dreier, 1953.

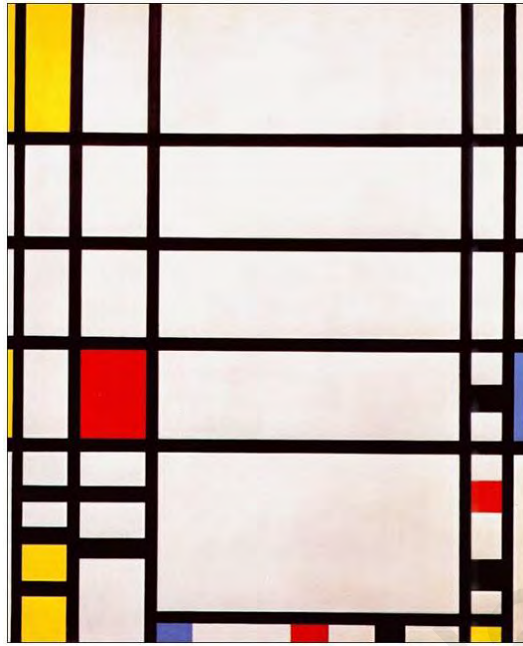


Figure 6.19: Piet Mondrian. 1939-1943. Trafalgar Square. Oil on canvas. 57 1/4 x 47 1/4" (145.2 x 120 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr and Mrs William A M Burden. Object number 510.1964. Retrieved from <https://www.piet-mondrian.org/trafalgar-square.jsp#prettyPhoto>

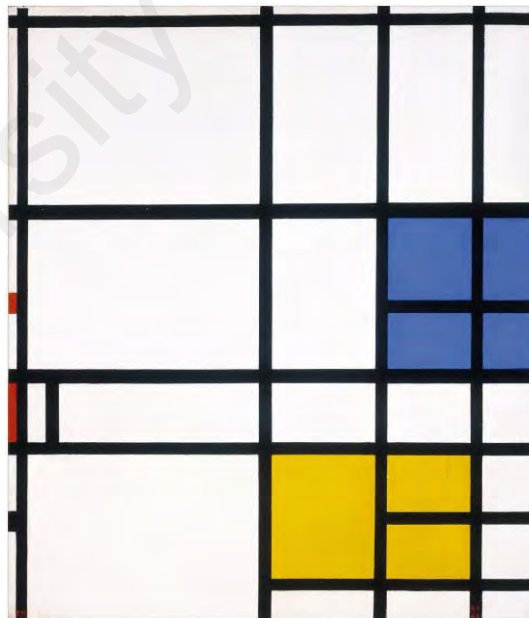


Figure 6.20: Piet Mondrian (Dutch, 1872-1944). *Composition No. 11, 1940-42--LONDON, with Blue, Red and Yellow, 1940-1942*. Oil on canvas, support: 32 1/2 x 28 inches (82.55 x 71.12 cm). Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Room of Contemporary Art Fund, 1944 (RCA1944:10). © Mondrian / Holtzman Trust.

Continuing his experimentations for expressing a freer and universal equilibrium and rhythm, Mondrian in New York further started to annihilate and depersonalize the element of 'line'. We saw that the blackness of lines in repainted compositions was in a very harsh contrast to the white surface of the composition. Moreover, those areas of color were inevitably represented in different layers in respect to the white background of the composition. As it was discussed in Chapter 4, based on Goethe's theory of colors, the blue recede and yellow tend to move forward to our eyes. As a result, in repainted compositions we see a foreground which is set against a background. Therefore, in series of paintings executed in New York between 1940 and 1944,¹³⁰ we see that Mondrian stopped using colors inside the planes. Instead he started to paint the lines in triad of primary colors and noncolors.¹³¹ Thanks to the removal of black for lines, the oscillating white spots in the intersection of lines were also cancelled. These characteristics are discernible in *New York*¹³² (1941-1942) - figure 6.21, *New York City, 3* (1941) - figure 6.22, *New York City I* (1942) - figure 6.23, *New York City II* (1941) - figure 6.24, and *New York City III* (1942) - figure 6.25.

In the first work in this collection, *New York* (figure 6.21), only red lines is added to black grid lines. This work is similar to *Place de la Concorde* (figure 6.16) in structure. The stripes of color are still congregated in the periphery of the composition. In the *New York City, 3* (figure 6.22) and *New York City III* (figure 6.25), black lines are kept to a minimum. In these paintings, white lines also are innovatively used along with other

¹³⁰ According to Blotkamp, the three years and four months of Mondrian's life in New York is among the most productive and prominent periods in his artistic career. In New York, he repainted over many canvases he brought from Paris and London. However, he succeeded only to complete three new works in New York - *New York*, *New York City I*, and *Broadway Boogie Woogie* - while the rest of the works remained unfinished.

¹³¹ Interestingly, Blotkamp mentioned that Mondrian's change of his lines from black to colors was not something new in that time. As early as 1916, van der Leek used colored lines. Later van Doesburg, Domela, Gorin, Jean Helion, and Marlow Moss also used colored lines.

¹³² In New York, Mondrian started to give his painting more familiar names based on the location in USA, especially New York. As Blotkamp also emphasized, Mondrian wanted to show that a modern painter (similar to a traditional painter) is receptive to his surroundings. Hence, one should not perceive these paintings subjectively based on their name.

colored lines which are opposed to the light grey surface of the composition. In both paintings we see a denser network of lines compared to the previous works. Interestingly in *New York City, 3* (figure 6.22), there is one yellow plane and one small blue plane. However, these planes have nothing in common with planes in earlier paintings, particularly those pre-1935 compositions. Due to the multiplicity of colored lines these colored planes enhanced the dominance of the network of the lines rather than asserting themselves as an active plane.

The density of colored lines increased in *New York City I* (figure 6.23) and *New York City II* (figure 6.24). In these works, we cannot separate any network of lines from the rest. All colored lines are knitted and meshed in a way we perceive them as one unified lattice of lines interlocked into each other. It is noteworthy that in spite of Mondrian's aim to unite the foreground and background, we see that in New York paintings each group of colored lines seems stacked over or beneath of other lines. As it was discussed, based on the theory of Goethe, blue tends to go backward in the space while yellow tends to move forward to our eyes (Bois, 1994, p. 320). Interestingly, Mondrian, who was well aware of the theory of colors, in his New York compositions not only benefited from this color theory but also intentionally intensified such color graduation as well. In these paintings, the lines in blue are always placed in the lowest layer. Whereas the yellow - sometimes red - lines are placed on toppest layer. In this regard, we see that the yellow lines in *New York City I* (figure 6.23) are painted over the blue lines. Similarly, the blue lines are completely buried by yellow and red lines in *New York City, 3* (figure 6.22), *New York City II* (figure 6.24), and *New York City III* (figure 6.25).

It is noteworthy that in some cases in New York compositions such rule, regarding the priority of the blue, yellow, and red lines, is ignored. For instance, in three cases in *New*

York City I (figure 6.23), the red line is allowed to pass over the yellow lines. Or in one case, the blue line passed over the yellow line. As a result, the tension in color gradation of lines increased and, thereby, lines seem to be completely detached from the surface of the composition. Indeed, in these New York compositions, we see the lines in an infinite and void space. Interestingly, Bois and Reiter-McIntosh (1988) interpreted such detachment of the lines from surface of these paintings through the phraseology of ‘antigravitation.’ According to Blotkamp, Mondrian’s outcome of his experimentations in his New York compositions was the destruction of the identity of the surface of the composition. We see that the colored lines in New York compositions are no longer assessed based on a background.

One of the unique characteristics of New York compositions is the use of colored tape instead of oil color. These colored tapes are used in *New York City, 3* (figure 6.22), *New York City II* (figure 6.24), and *New York City III* (figure 6.25). According to Milner (1992), Mondrian used these adhesive tapes by the suggestion of painter Carl Holty. These tapes, as Champa stated, facilitated Mondrian to test the exact position of the lines more precisely and impulsively. Indeed, these tapes gave Mondrian more control for alterations he might decide for the positioning of his lines throughout the execution of his paintings. According to Bois, these tapes for Mondrian were also the best tools to depict the colored lines detached from the surface of his compositions. Moreover, the actual thickness of these adhesive tapes helped Mondrian better depict the ‘texture’ in these paintings.

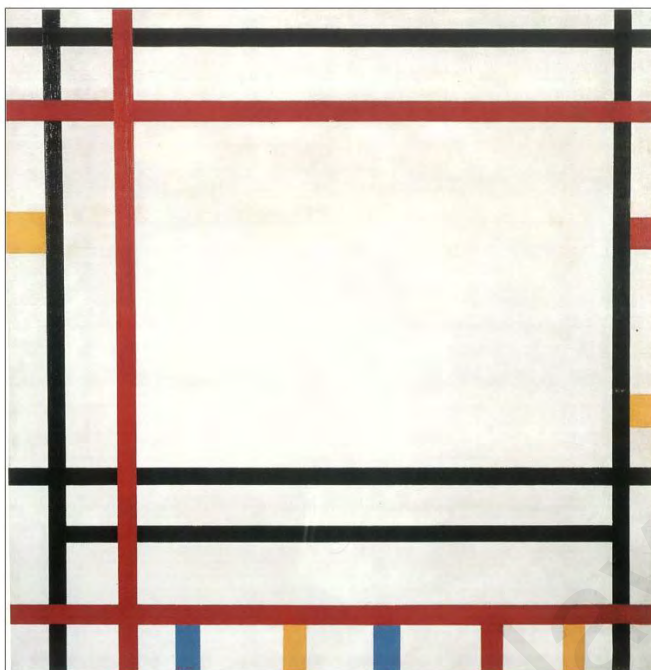


Figure 6.21: Piet Mondrian. 1941-1942. New York. Oil on canvas. 95.5 x 92 cm. Private collection (from Blotkamp, 1994, p. 234).

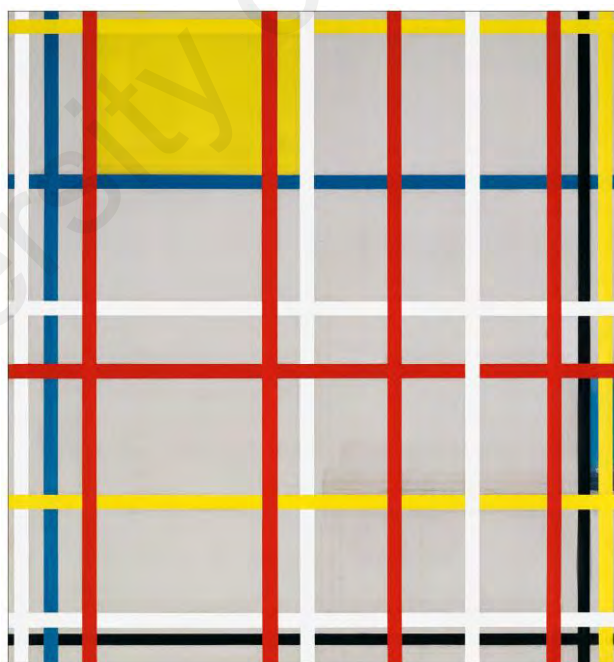


Figure 6.22: Piet Mondrian. 1941. New York City, 3 (unfinished). Oil, pencil, chalk and coloured tape on canvas. 117 x 110 cm. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Inv. no. 679 (1983.17). © Mondrian/Holtzman Trust.

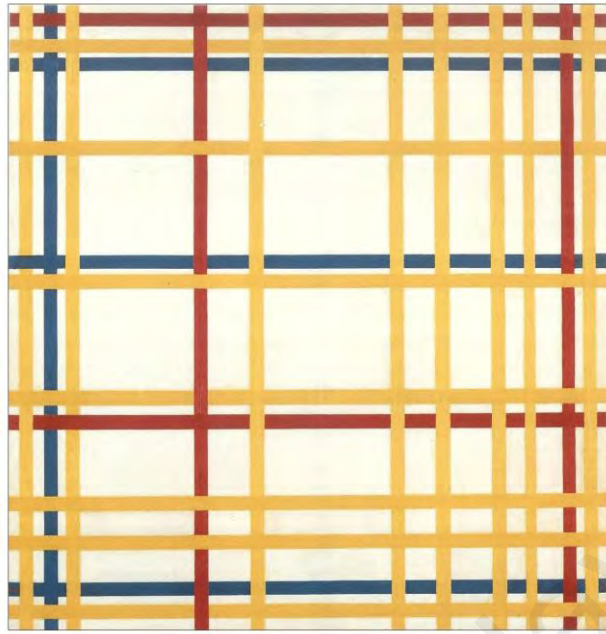


Figure 6.23: Piet Mondrian. 1942. New York City I. Oil on canvas. 119.5 x 114 cm. Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Paris (from Blotkamp, 1994, p. 235).

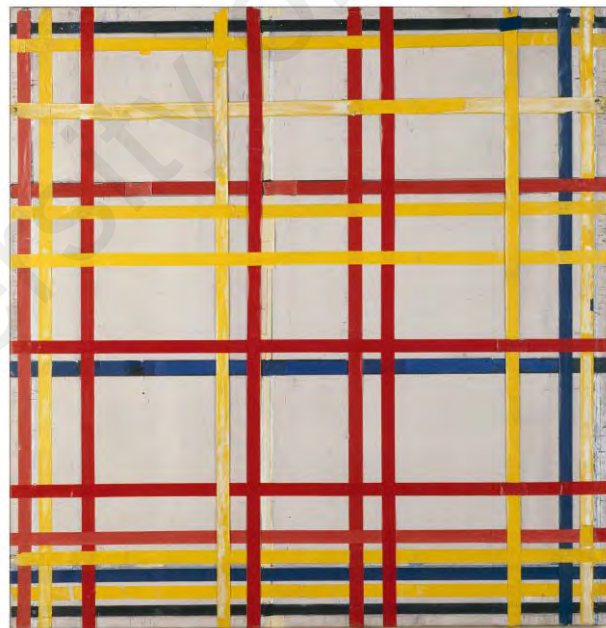


Figure 6.24: Piet Mondrian. 1941. New York City II. Oil on canvas with coloured tape (Öl und Papier auf Leinwand). 120 x 115,2 x 2,7 cm. © Mondrian/Holtzman Trust, c/o Beeldrecht, Amsterdam, Holland. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Foto: Walter Klein, Düsseldorf



Figure 6.25: Piet Mondrian. 1942. *New York City III*. Oil and tape on canvas. 113.5 x 97.5 cm. Sidney Janis Gallery, New York (from Milner, 1992, p. 218).

In the following New York paintings, we see that form (colors) and space (noncolors) are dismantled into tiny elements. Moreover such small pieces are represented within a dynamic and syncopated rhythm.¹³³ In these paintings the identity of lines completely abolishes Mondrian's destructive approach toward his means of imaging, particularly his lines. This is obvious in a letter he wrote to Sweeney dated May 24, 1943: "[n]ow the only problem is to destroy these lines also through mutual opposition. [...] I think that the destructive element is too much neglected in art" Mondrian (as cited in Blotkamp, 1994, p. 240).

I contend that the destruction of lines is completely achieved in his last two paintings: *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-1943) - figure 6.26 and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (1942-

¹³³ Influence of Boogie-Woogie jazz and modern atmosphere of New York on Mondrian to represent a dynamic and pulsing rhythm in his painting was discussed by the majority of scholars such as Blotkamp and Bois. Hence, for the sake of brevity, these factors are not discussed in this thesis.

1944) - figure 6.27. In both paintings the lines are constantly paused with rhythmic sequence of tiny blocks of red, blue, and white. In addition, there are a number of larger boundless blocks of color which connected the vertical and horizontal syncopated lines.¹³⁴ We see that in these two paintings the form and space interact upon each other, detached from the geometric surface of the composition. According to the majority of scholars, particularly Bois, in these last two paintings rhythm is thereafter expressed as free and liberated from the element of color. In fact, breaking up the colored lines into dotted pattern, inevitably dismantled the white space into smaller inconceivable pieces as well. We see that in these last two paintings the random pieces of space, colors, and noncolors are all integrated in a dynamic and pulsing movement. In such a meshed system, there is no difference whether the small squares are dashes of color, short broken lines, or part of infinite empty space. What is important is free dance of colored, non-colored, and white pieces in unity in the composition. This irregular pattern of dotted colors and non-colors made no rest for the eye to be stagnant in one particular position on the canvas. As Milner also indicated, the white planes in these works, particularly in *Victory Boogie Woogie*, are the only areas which give rest to the spectator's eyes. As such, there is a constant interaction between the tranquility of white areas and vivid rhythm of tiny blocks of color which Milner (1992) interpreted as “calm amid movement” (p. 222).

¹³⁴ Milner (1992) interpreted the role of these larger blocks of color in *Broadway Boogie Woogie* as a bridge which connected horizontal and vertical lines (p. 221).

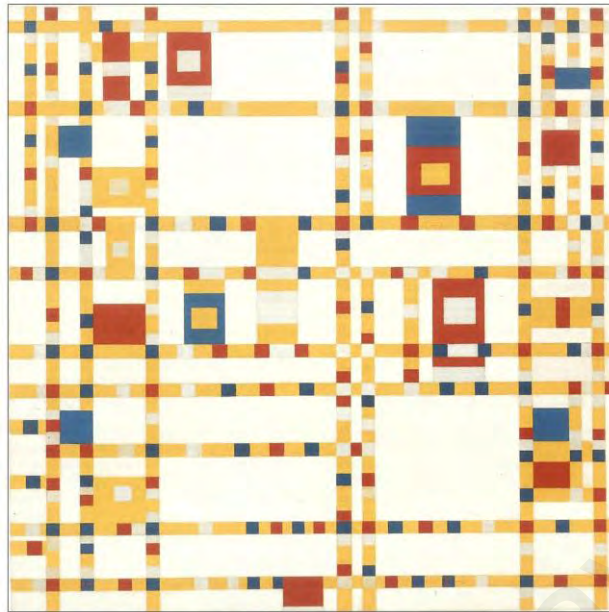


Figure 6.26: Piet Mondrian. 1942-1943. Broadway Boogie Woogie. Oil on canvas. 50 x 50" (127 x 127 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously. Object number 73.1943 (from Blotkamp, 1994, p. 239).



Figure 6.27: Piet Mondrian. 1942-1944. Victory Boogie Woogie. Oil, tape, paper, charcoal and pencil on canvas. Height 178.4 cm, width 178.4 cm. Reproduced with the permission of Gemeentemuseum, The Hague. Object number: 0810747.

6.2.3 Analysis of the key Neo-Plastic concepts in 1932-1944 compositions and 1932-1944 writings

6.2.3.1 Characteristics of the means of imaging or plastic means

In this section, I will examine Mondrian's artistic developments in relation to his elements of painting - plastic means, means of imaging - through analyzing his 1932-1944 paintings and writings.

After analyzing 1932-1944 paintings, I found a noticeable change in Mondrian's artistic stance toward the role of his lines and colors, compared to what he had practiced in his 1924-1931 paintings. I assert that the characteristics of his elements of painting are no longer in accordance to his pre-1932 paintings and writings, particularly to what he had crystallized in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism. In this section, I will identify and explain those alterations in use and role of the means of imaging in Mondrian's late Neo-Plastic paintings. Similarly, I saw that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings also explained his transformed ideas in regard to his means of imaging that elaborate the development of his ideas based on the elements of painting in this period. Generally, I found a parallel transformation of Mondrian's ideas regarding his means of imaging in his 1932-1944 paintings and writings.

As it was studied in Chapter 5, Mondrian in 1926 wrote what he had found throughout his 1917-1925 experimentations. This was in regard to his elements of painting in the first principle of Neo-Plasticism as followed: "[t]he means of imaging must be the rectangular plane or prism in primary color (red, blue, and yellow) and in non-color (white, black, and gray). In architecture, empty space is considered as non-color. Material may count as color" (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). I realized that during 1924-1931 the characteristics of the means of imaging were similar to what Mondrian had defined in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism. Nevertheless, I deduced that, in contrast

to what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 composition, in majority of 1924-1931 compositions, the lines were not merely intersected to construct rectangular entities as planes. I saw that in those paintings, particularly in his 1929-1931 compositions, he started to use his lines as free means - in different lengths and thicknesses - to create a dynamic rhythm rather than using lines to delimit colors. Having this overview of Mondrian's 1924-1931 experimentations in mind, I start to look at his 1932-1944 compositions and writings to see how he used and expressed his means of imaging in these paintings.

In majority of cases in the 1932-1944 compositions, the characteristics of the means of imaging are not similar to the pre-1932 compositions. Although in the post-1932 paintings, the triad of colors and noncolors are present, planes are no longer perceived as rectangular entities. Chronologically examining the 1932-1944 compositions, we see that in 1932-1935 (see figures 6.1 to 6.6) painting of the intersection of double, tripled, and quadrupled lines is not really translated as rectangular planes. Indeed, the glittering effect in the spacing between the lines disturbs our perception to detect any rectangular entity in these compositions. Overall, I contend that the characteristics of the means of imaging in 1932-1935 paintings is not in complete agreement to the first principle - as rectangular planes of color and noncolor - and what he had practiced in his pre-1932 paintings.

We also see that the rectangularity of the planes is less detectable in the 1936-1938 compositions (see figures 6.7 to 6.12). There is one main reason for such removal of the rectangular identity of planes in these paintings. The increase in the quantity of lines creates very intense white optical spots in the intersection of lines. As a result, we only decipher a concrete and stable form of a rectangle in those rare instances where the imprisoned areas between grid lines are filled with a color such as in figures 6.8, 6.10,

and 6.11. Nevertheless, in the majority of these paintings, the plurality of the lines at right angle really prevents us from reading the intersection of the lines as rectangular planes.

The rectangularity of the planes is further cancelled in repainted compositions (1936-1943) - see figures 6.13 to 6.20 - due to the increase in the multiplicity of the lines and, more importantly, the dashes and stripes of color as new elements in these paintings. The frequent intersection of lines, the variety of interval of lines as well as the variations in the thickness and length of the lines create an intense optical effect in the intersections of lines, which prevent us from recognizing any rectangular entity in these compositions. Meanwhile, as it was discussed earlier, the bands, or stripes, of color in these retouched painting, especially in *Place de la Concorde* (figure 6.16), can be counted either as boundless planes or lines. Indeed, we realized that in these repainted compositions both lines and colors were used as free and independent means. Therefore, we understand that Mondrian throughout his post-1935 experimentations defined a new role and identity for his means of imaging. This is no longer in agreement to what he had stated in his previous writings about his means of imaging, and particularly, to what he had stated in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism.

In New York compositions (see figures 6.21 to 6.27), we find more deviation of Mondrian from the premise of his first principle. In these paintings, we are unable to identify any rectangular plane within the meshed and dense lattice. We assert that the rectangularity of the planes is almost abolished in New York compositions. In the first place, we see that the colored lines, particularly yellow and red lines, compared to the black lines, are in little contrast to the white surface of the composition. Therefore, the tiny enclosed empty areas, created through the intersection of the colored lines, are almost resolved in the white surface of the composition. Secondly, in majority of New

York compositions such as in *New York City, 3* (figure 6.22), *New York City I* (figure 6.23), *New York City II* (figure 6.24), and *New York City III* (figure 6.25), the tiny cells are created through the intersection of the lines in different colors. As a result, each side of these enclosed areas, based on theory of Goethe, advance or recede to our eyes. That is to say, we see each side of these enclosed areas in different levels. In fact, in these New York works, we see a dense knitted scheme of lines which are interlocked into each other rather than any rectangular flat plane of color or noncolor. In this regard, I agree with Tosaki's recent interpretation, who asserted that the aim of Mondrian's pluralization of the means of imaging was indeed to annihilate the representational character of his rectangular planes as form of square. Indeed, Mondrian in his late Neo-Plastic paintings tried to change the previous representative character of his squares into an 'expressive form.'

We see that the rectangularity of the planes is completely annihilated in the last two compositions *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.26) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.27). In these two paintings, it is almost impossible to consider the empty spaces between the dotted lines as a rectangular plane. Overall, it is evident that Mondrian during his 1932-1944 experimentations gradually deviated from what he had demonstrated and delineated in his pre-1932 paintings and writings in regard to his means of imaging. At this point, I move on to examine Mondrian's 1932-1944 writings to find out more about his artistic development in relation to his means of imaging in this period.

When we read 1932-1944 writings, we find Mondrian's two different perspectives toward his means of imaging. In some cases, he talked about his elements of painting in retrospect to what he had stated in his first principle as well as what he had painted before 1932. In this regard, he defined his means of imaging as rectangular planes of

color and noncolor. For example, in his short text *Three Statements for Abstraction-Creation* (1932-1934) he defined his universal elements of painting as ‘rectangular planes’: “[b]ecause forms are more or less neutral in the measure that they approach the universal state, Neo-Plastic uses only a unique neutral form: the rectangular plane in varied dimensions” (Mondrian, 1932-1934, p. 282). Similarly, in his 1936 essay *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art (Figurative Art and Non-figurative Art)* he stated: “[t]hrough the clarity and simplicity of neutral forms, nonfigurative art has made the rectangular relation more and more determinate, until, finally, it has established it through free lines which intersect and appear to form rectangles” (Mondrian, 1936, p. 294). Indeed, Mondrian in these statements argued that the intersection of lines results in the creation of the rectangular planes. However, in the latter statement in 1936 he said that the intersection of the ‘free’ lines ‘appears’ to form rectangles. Indeed, in this quote we find Mondrian’s transformed aesthetic idea in regard to his means of imaging that it is also demonstrated in majority of the post-1932 paintings in this period. Mondrian even in his late essays affirmed what he had stated in the first principle. For instance, in his 1938 essay *The Necessity for a New Teaching in Art, Architecture, and Industry* he said: “[a] plane is exactly determined only when the lines forming planes end in the circumference” (Mondrian, 1938c, p. 317). It is interesting that in majority of 1932-1944 paintings Mondrian depicted his means of imaging differently to what he had defined in his first principle as well as to what he had demonstrated in his pre-1932 paintings and writings. Nevertheless, in some instances in his 1932-1944 writings he had endorsed his premises of the first principle that I found no longer valid in his 1932-1944 experimentations. My explanation for such argument is that Mondrian during 1932-1944 held his new experimentations on his elements of painting, particularly lines. This was not in opposition to what he had theorized in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism. Nonetheless, we found that in many cases the characteristics of his means of

imaging were not in agreement to what he had stated in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism.

Although Mondrian in some cases during 1932-1944 wrote about his means of imaging in relation to his first principle of Neo-Plasticism, there are several instances where he informed us with his renewed and developed artistic ideas in relation to his means of imaging. In the first place, in his writing in this period, he referred to his means of imaging as 'neutral' and 'free' elements. As we saw in Chapter 5, Mondrian in his earlier 1931 essay, *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*, had started to propagate the idea that lines and colors should be used as free and independent entities in the composition to express a free and dynamic rhythm. That is to say colors could be depicted in the composition without any reliance to lines to determine or delimit them. We found that colors in the pre-1932 compositions were, to some extent, freed from lines to express a free and universal equilibrium and rhythm. However, it was only during 1932-1944, particularly after 1938, that I contend lines, colors, and noncolors are freed from reliance on each other. Similarly, in his 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian referred to his means of imaging as 'neutral' and 'free' elements. In his 1936 essay *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art (Figurative Art and Non-figurative Art)*, where he distinguished his Neo-Plastic painting from representational art, he also described the new characteristics of his means of imaging:

Gradually art is purifying its plastic means and thus bringing out the relationships between them. Thus, in our day two main tendencies appear: the one maintains the figuration, the other eliminates it. While the former employs more or less complicated and particular forms, the latter uses simple and neutral forms, or, ultimately, the free line and the pure colour. (Mondrian, 1936, pp. 289-290)

In the above-mentioned statement, Mondrian defined the most distilled elements of a pure abstract painting as 'simple and neutral.' He further considered 'free' lines and

'pure' colors as the best elements to be used in painting. Overall, we see that compared to his pre-1932 writings, in this period Mondrian more than before emphasized on the free identity of lines. Similarly, I deduce that lines in majority of 1932-1944 compositions were used as primary and free elements to merely express a dynamic rhythm rather than to be used as a secondary element to determine the colors or to construct rectangular planes. In his 1932-1944 experimentations he steadily increased the plurality of such free lines to the extent that we could not identify any rectangular planes in these paintings. That is to say, in these late Neo-Plastic paintings the subjective characteristics of the planes (rectangular shape of the planes) was totally abolished through multiplicity of the relationships of the positions of lines. Interestingly, Mondrian in one of the rare instances in his writings, the 1941 autobiographical essay *Toward the True Vision of Reality*, delineated what he experimented in his post-1932 compositions to abolish the rectangularity of his planes:

In order to abolish the manifestation of planes as rectangles, I reduced my color and accentuated the limiting lines, crossing them one over the other. Thus the planes were not only cut and abolished, but their relationships became more active. The result was a far more dynamic expression. (Mondrian, 1941, p. 338)

Indeed, what Mondrian indicated in the above-mentioned statement is an upshot of his new tactic he used in his 1932-1944 paintings to express a more dynamic rhythm and equilibrium through the pluralization of his 'free' lines. As we saw, the colors in 1932-1944 paintings were no longer dependent on the lines to delimit or determine them. Such separation of lines from colors was one of the most important outcomes of Mondrian's experimentations in his post-1932 paintings. In addition, in his writing in this period Mondrian indicated that the means of imaging, particularly lines and colors, should be used as free and independent elements. For instance, in the outset of his 1937 short notes he said: "[t]he new art gives an independent existence to line and color"

(Mondrian, 1937, p. 301). Similarly, in his 1938 essay *The Necessity for a New Teaching in Art, Architecture, and Industry*, he considered the purest means of imaging (plastic) as self-reliant lines and colors: “[s]eparated lines or colors independent of one another are thus the most purely plastic” (Mondrian, 1938c, p. 313).

Indeed, it is obvious that, as scholars such as Blotkamp and Bois also stated, throughout 1932-1944 experimentations Mondrian steadily destructed the pictorial characteristics of lines as lines, planes as planes, colors as colors, and even space as space through the pluralization of lines. In return, through the constant neutralization of the duality of opposing lines at right angle, a very intense relationship and, thereby, a dynamic rhythm independent from his means of imaging is reconstructed. In this regard, in his 1932-1944 writings he stressed that the means of imaging should not assert themselves as dominant pictorial entities, or thingness, in the composition. For example, in his 1938 essay *Art Without Subject Matter* Mondrian stated: “[r]egardless of the plastic mode, the plastic means must never dominate in art. It is logical that the less the means assert themselves, the less they dominate” (Mondrian, 1938a, p. 303). Instead, he emphasized on the point that the means of imaging should completely resolve their particularity - that is to say their pictorial identity - through the multiplicity of their relationships. In his 1934 essay *The True Value of Oppositions in Life and Art* Mondrian pointed to this matter as follows: “[p]articuliar forms prevent full enjoyment of the unity that only neutral form, pure line and color can establish clearly when these ‘means’ lose themselves in composition” (Mondrian, 1934, p. 285). At this point, we surmise that the main intention of Mondrian to steadily increase the quantity of his all-over lines in his 1932-1944 compositions was to completely abolish the pictorial existence of his lines, planes, and colors.

To sum up, I found a noticeable change in use and role of the means of imaging in the 1932-1944 compositions compared to the 1924-1931 compositions. We inferred that in many cases the characteristics of the means of imaging in the 1932-1944 compositions was no longer in agreement with what he had stated in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism as well as what he had painted prior to 1932. I understood that the means of imaging in majority of his 1932-1944 paintings were no longer rectangular planes of color and noncolor. In the post-1932 compositions, Mondrian used both lines and colors as free and primary elements. In short, he abolished the reliance of the colors to the lines in his compositions. This end was achieved through the plurality of the relationship of lines at right angle that resulted in the destruction of the pictorial entity of lines, colors, and planes. As a result, no rectangular shape was detectable in these paintings. I found that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings revealed his developed artistic vision in respect to his means of imaging. He redefined the lines, planes, and colors as neutral, free, elements which should exist independent from each other. He also pointed to the tactic that he used throughout his 1932-1944 experimentations to destruct the particularity of his lines, planes, and colors through the multiplicity of lines. Overall, I discerned a noticeable development in Mondrian's vision in regard to his means of imaging during 1932-1944. This is reflected in both his 1932 paintings and writings.

6.2.3.2 The equivalence between form and space

In this section I will investigate Mondrian's standpoint in regard to his concepts of equivalence and balance between form and space during his late Neo-Plastic period. This will be done through the explorations of his 1932-1944 paintings and writings. After analyzing Mondrian's paintings in this period, we will see that the means of imaging are in equivalence through the equal manifestation of their duality - in line with the second principle - rather than the similarity of their size; though in some cases also I

contend that the equivalence was expressed through the similarity in the appearances of the lines and planes.

Overall, during 1932-1944 we find little deviation or alteration of Mondrian in respect to his concept of equivalence. I believe that in many cases, particularly in his post-1936 compositions, the balance between form and space is no longer attained through what Mondrian had practiced in his pre-1932 paintings and had stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. We find that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings has explained his developed ideas in regard to the balance between form and space, which are the outcome of his 1932-1944 experimentations. Accordingly, I surmise that during 1932-1944 the unity between form and space was expressed totally different the pre-1932 paintings as well as what Mondrian had theorized in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism.

As it was discussed in Chapter 5, in 1926 Mondrian, in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism, wrote a culmination of his ideas about equality and balance between form and space. In the second principle, he stated: “[t]he equivalence of the means of imaging is necessary. Size and colors may differ, but they must be of equal value. In general, equilibrium results from large surfaces of non-color or empty space, and rather small surfaces of color or material” (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). In the first part of the second principle, Mondrian defined ‘equivalence’ as an ‘equal value’ of the means of imaging rather than sameness in the quantity or appearance of his element of painting.

I discerned that Mondrian in his pre-1932 writings argued that equivalence in Neo-Plasticism means an equivalent duality. It is equal manifestation of duality or opposition of the means of imaging. In majority of his 1924-1931 paintings, he had followed what he had stated in his second principle. As such, equivalence between his lines and planes of color and noncolor was not represented based on similarity in the dimension or color

value of the planes or lines. Moreover, we deduced that in the majority of 1924-1931 paintings, balance between form and space was the result of opposition between larger areas of noncolor (space) with smaller areas of color (form). Having a crystalized idea of Mondrian in regard to his concept of equivalence and balance between form and space in mind, I move on to analyze his 1932-1944 paintings and writings.

Looking at 1932-1935 compositions (see figures 6.1 to 6.10), we see that, in line with the premises of the second principle, the equivalence between lines and planes of color and noncolor is not achieved through similarity in the appearances of the means of imaging. Instead, equivalence in these paintings is attained, as Mondrian had demonstrated and explained in his pre-1932 paintings and writings, through an equal manifestation of duality, or equivalent duality, of the means of imaging. In these 1932-1935 compositions, lines in different thicknesses and lengths as well as planes in various dimensions are in equivalence. Although in some cases such as *Composition in Line and Colour III* (figure 6.10) and *Composition of Red and White: Nom I/Composition No. 4 with red and blue* (figure 6.15) equivalence is attained between lines in different lengths, thicknesses, and size of the planes, I argue that in some of the post-1936 compositions (see figures 6.11, 6.13, 6.14, and 6.19) lines are in unity through similarity of their lengths and thicknesses. Therefore, in contrast to Mondrian's statement in his second principle, we see that in some instances in post-1932 compositions equivalence among the lines is achieved through their similar lengths. However, in other cases, especially in the repainted compositions (figures 6.14 & 6.16), it is evident that equivalence is expressed through an exact representation of duality between dissimilar dashes and stripes of color and lines. Interestingly, we find that in New York compositions (see figures 6.21 to 6.25) equivalence among the lines is attained, to some extent, based on sameness in the lengths of lines. Although in New York paintings lines are in different hues, we find the lines in balance because of their

similarities as well as distinct duality. In contrast, in the last two New York compositions *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.26) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.27) equivalence in the whole composition was attained among the dissimilar elements of painting. In these two compositions, the lines, colors, and noncolors in different size and colors are dissolved and fused into unity. Overall, we deduce that in some cases in the 1932-1944 compositions, equivalence is partly attained through similarity of the means of imaging. This means that throughout 1932-1944 Mondrian slightly deviated from what he had written in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism.

In the latter part of the second principle, Mondrian also talked about the equivalence between form and space. He explained that equilibrium is achieved through opposition between large planes of noncolor and small planes of color. In Chapter 5, I surmised that in majority of the 1924-1931 paintings equivalence between form and space is also expressed through relationship between large areas of noncolor (white areas of the canvas) and small areas of color. However, I contend that, in majority of 1932-1944 painting, balance between form and space is no longer achieved through what Mondrian had demonstrated in his pre-1932 paintings as well as what he had written in his second principle. In fact, in the majority of post-1932 compositions, particularly post-1936 ones, the whole area of the canvas is populated by the dense structure of lines. Only in the 1932-1933 compositions, there are comparatively large areas of white (noncolor) which are opposed to the color. As such, I argue that in the 1932-1944 paintings equilibrium between planes is no longer attained through the opposition of large planes of noncolor and small planes of color.

Looking at different group of studied 1932-1944 compositions, we see that in 1932-1935 compositions (see figures 6.1 to 6.6) the space is still detectable as part of the ground. In these paintings equivalence between form and space, similar to the pre-1932

compositions, is achieved through the interaction of larger areas of noncolor with smaller areas of color. However, due to the increase in the quantity of the all-over lines in the 1936-1938 compositions (see figures 6.7 to 6.10), the whole surface of these paintings is overpopulated with the lines. Moreover, in these paintings we see a very intense white oscillating spots in the intersection of the lines. As a result, in these paintings equilibrium is no longer expressed through interaction between large areas of noncolor and small areas of color. Similarly, in the repainted compositions (see figures 6.13 to 6.20) we see that the whole composition is bisected into numerous tiny white planes through the frequent intersections of the lines. Indeed, in these paintings space as a flat surface of the composition (background) no longer exists. Instead, in the majority of these works, particularly post-1938 compositions, space is perceived as an invisible and empty atmosphere (similar to the air) which is not confined by a flat surface of the canvas. That is to say, the space is no longer conceived as a concrete and flat white surface of the canvas. In these paintings, due to the plurality of lines and the depiction of the stripes and bands of color without any borders, lines and colors are reflected as stacked in different levels. Overall, we discern that in these post-1936 compositions the identity of space as background is changed, similar to what we saw in the 1917 paintings, to a void and atmospheric space.

Similarly, to what we discussed in relation to the repainted compositions, we find that in New York compositions (see figures 6.21 to 6.25) the colored lines passed over or beneath each other in a meshed and infinite void space. It seems in these paintings colors are stacked in different layers and, thereby, we no longer perceive the surface of the composition as a flat ground. Similarly, we see that the form and space in the last two compositions *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.26) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.27) are in equilibrium in a void and three dimensional space rather than on a flat plane as a background. Up to this point, we assert that what Mondrian experimented

in these repainted compositions to create balance between form and space is no longer in agreement to what he had theorized in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism and what he had experimented prior to 1932 in his paintings. In these late paintings we see that the balance between form and space is achieved through a total resolution and nullification of the network of the lines and space. In order to further understand the development of Mondrian's ideas, regarding the unity between form and space in his post-1932 paintings, it is necessary to examine what he also wrote as a result of his experimentations in this period.

In the first place, it is interesting that in some instances during 1932-1944 Mondrian reiterated and acknowledged what he had stated – as well as what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1931 paintings – in regard to the first part of his second principle. In this first section of his second principle, he had postulated that the equivalence of the means of imaging is an 'equal value' and not similarity in size or colors of those means. As he previously described in his 1917-1925 essays, the 'equal value' means equality in duality and oppositions of the means of imaging (vertical versus horizontal, color versus noncolors, and so on). In those early writings he had defined 'equal value' as an 'equivalent duality' or 'distinct duality' of the means of imaging. In his 1932-1944 writings, we find a few instances where Mondrian talked about his concept of equivalence similar to what he had set forth in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. For example, in his 1939-1940 essay *Liberation from Oppression in Art and Life* he stated: “[p]lastic art shows that real freedom is not mutual equality but mutual equivalence. In art, forms and colors have different dimension and position, but are equal in value” (Mondrian, 1939-1940, p. 327). Indeed, Mondrian in the previous statement re-stated what he had written in the second principle in 1926. In this statement, he distinguished between two concepts of 'equality' and 'equivalence.' He emphasized that it is the 'equivalence' in value (distinct duality) of the means of

imaging which results in the equilibrium between lines and planes of color and noncolor (means of imaging). In the same essay, he further stressed that equilibrium is achieved through the ‘equivalence’ of the means of imaging rather than their ‘equality’: “[i]n art, as in life, it is the *equivalence and not the equality* of opposite factors that creates unity” (Mondrian, 1939-1940, p. 329). From these statements I infer that in the theory of Neo-Plasticism ‘equality’ is synonymous to similarity or sameness of the appearance of the means of imaging. Nevertheless, in Neo-Plasticism it is the ‘equivalence’ of the means of imaging which is important. From Mondrian’s writings we learned that the equilibrium between the means of imaging is attained through the lines as well as planes of color and noncolor which are not similar but are in equivalence. In his autobiographical essay *Toward the True Vision of Reality*, he pointed to this matter: “[p]lastic art affirms that equilibrium can only be established through the balance of unequal but equivalent oppositions” (Mondrian, 1941, p. 341). Last but not least, in his 1942 essay *Pure Plastic Art*, Mondrian once again defined the equality of his means of imaging as an equivalence in ‘opposition,’ which is best manifested between two primary oppositions of the straight lines at right angle:

Hence art has to attain an exact equilibrium through the creation of pure plastic means composed in absolute oppositions. In this way, the two oppositions (vertical and horizontal) are in equivalence, that is to say, of the same value: a prime necessity for equilibrium. (Mondrian, 1942, p. 343)

When we read previous statements, it becomes clear that during 1932-1944 Mondrian’s artistic ideas, in respect to his concept of equivalence, remained unchanged before what he had theorized in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism; though, as we saw in the previous section, in the majority of the post-1936 paintings equilibrium between lines and planes is expressed through the equality and similarity in the length and thickness of the lines and dimension of the planes (see figures 6.8, 6.9, 6.11, 6.13, 6.14, and 6.19).

Therefore, in some cases we see that Mondrian, during his 1932-1944 experimentations, slightly departed from what he had defined as 'equivalence' in his writings and second principle of Neo-Plasticism.

Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings also discussed form and space and equivalence between them. As it was stated in the outset of this section, in the second part of his second principle he stated that equilibrium is generally achieved through opposition between large areas of noncolor (space) and smaller areas of color (form). In Chapter 5, we found that, except in 1926 and the second principle of Neo-Plasticism, in his other 1926-1932 writings Mondrian had not affirmed or acknowledged such an aesthetic condition for attaining balance between form and space. Similarly, we find that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings did not point to such an aesthetic condition expressed in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. We also find that, except to a few instances in 1932-1933 compositions, in the majority of 1932-1944 compositions unity between form and space is not attained based on the opposition of large planes of noncolor and small areas of color. It is inferred that Mondrian during 1932-1944 was no longer interested in what he had stated in his second principle in relation to the condition for the attainment of equilibrium between form and space.

In his post-1932 writings, Mondrian in many instances wrote about the characteristics of form and space in retrospect to what he had experimented in his early Neo-Plastic compositions. In the first place, similar to what he had emphasized in his pre-1932 writings,¹³⁵ in his 1932-1944 writings he assessed everything, inclusive of form,¹³⁶ based on the entity of space. In this respect he defined everything, except form, as 'empty

¹³⁵ As it was studied in Chapter 4, Mondrian as early as 1918-1919, in his essays used two concepts of 'filled space' or 'limited space.'

¹³⁶ Form here means intensified form which is indeed the universal elements of painting (means of imaging, plastic means) in Neo-Plastic art.

space.’ The form is considered as ‘filled’ or ‘limited’ space. In his 1938 essay *The Necessity for a New Teaching in Art, Architecture, and Industry*, he defined such filled (limited) and empty space as follows:

The plastic is expressed not only through the picture or the object itself, but also by what surrounds it: space. The picture, the object, and the space create relationships. The object itself has its own relationships, but space is empty and without relationships. The object is a limited space with relationships. (Mondrian, 1938c, p. 312)

In the above statement, Mondrian defined form and space as two mutually interdependable elements. That is to say, in the theory of Neo-Plasticism form as the filled or limited space needs the empty space for its expression and vice versa. For Mondrian, form (limited space) could only represent its relationships, that is to say, the relationship between the position of lines, dimension of planes, and so on, in the empty space. He propagated the idea that unity in composition is achieved through a mutual synthesis of form and its relationships with the empty space.

When we examine Mondrian’s late essays, we find that in his post-1938 essays he further distinguished between two kinds of space. First kind is a ‘natural’ or ‘undetermined’ space which is found in the nature and form of representational painting. He described this ‘natural space’ as an unfathomable, atmospheric, and three dimensional entity. This natural space is indeed everything which is unseen as air, or a complete void in the universe that hosts the mass (material). In his 1938 essay *The Necessity for a New Teaching in Art, Architecture, and Industry*, he described this natural space as follows: “[n]atural space is empty without determination as stars, moon, hills, trees, houses, man in it. It is the same in [the] plastic” (Mondrian, 1938c, p. 316). In Neo-Plasticism, the opposite pair or complimentary element for this natural space are naturalistic objects in nature. We understood that Mondrian as early as 1917 was already against the representation of such naturalistic objects and spaces as they appear

in the nature. He believed that such three dimensional space and objects in the nature which are recreated by the artist on a two-dimensional surface of the canvas through aerial and linear perspective are only an illusion of reality and they are not a true content of the art. Therefore, in his Neo-Plastic paintings, he abstracted the particularity of the forms and spaces into his universal means of imaging: two dimensional planes of color (intensified form) and planes of noncolor (abstract space). Hence, Mondrian favored an abstract version of the space over a 'natural space.' In the writings of in this period, he called such abstract space 'determined space.'

In his 1932-1944 essays, Mondrian talked about a new concept called 'space-determination.' Its true understanding will help us better discern the way form and space came into unity in post-1932 paintings. As Mondrian emphasized in his writings of this period, it is the 'space-determination' and not 'space-expression' which results in the expression of unity as a universal reality (1942-1943, p. 350).¹³⁷ Accordingly, we understand that space in Neo-Plastic painting should be 'determined' rather than 'expressed.' It is because Mondrian holds that the *expression* of the space results in a *tragic* or subjective expression in painting. Instead, space, similar to form, should be depicted in painting as 'determined' through the relationships between lines, colors, and noncolors. In his collection of notes (1938-1944),¹³⁸ we find Mondrian's negative stance toward the expression of natural space and natural forms in painting as follows:

Naturalistic space is filled-up with imaginary (subjective) naturalistic or geometrical forms. *All these forms have to be destroyed*, because they all are expressions of naturalistic space. Consequently, not the construction of space (form), but the destruction of it is what abstract art requires. (Mondrian, 1938-1944, p. 385)

¹³⁷ In his writings in this period, Mondrian considered this 'space-determination' as a plastic (imagery) way to visualize the pure reality in life. In his last collection of notes, he stated: "[a]ll plastic art shows that space-determination is the pure technical way' to express reality" (Mondrian, 1938-1944, p. 387).

¹³⁸ According to Veen (2017a), this note was written around April 1942 (p. 540).

In the previous statement, Mondrian emphasized that any kind of the ‘expression’ of space and forms, whether natural or geometric, should be avoided in Neo-Plastic painting. Mondrian’s emphasis on the destruction of form in this quote is also interesting. Indeed, based on what we deduced, Mondrian in his post-1932 compositions destroyed the previous entity of space (as well as form) as a geometric surface of the compositions (background). Similarly, in his writings he pointed to this matter. In other instances, in his notes he reinforced that space-expression should be abolished in Neo-Plasticism: “[s]pace-expression is naturalistic and thus has to be *destroyed* in order to create an abstract expression. Abstract [is here] understood as expression of movement which is the content of form”¹³⁹ (Mondrian, 1938-1944, p. 385).

From 1932-1944 writings, we also understand that to determine the space, three-dimensionality, which is the main characteristics of natural space, should be annihilated. That is to say, the natural space as the ‘background’ of the composition should be destroyed. As he had propagated since early years of Neo-Plastic period, form should be represented on a flat and a two dimensional surface of the canvas and the contrast between the naturalistic ground and figure should be cancelled. In his 1937 short notes he distinguished such ‘naturalistic background’ from his abstract ground, which is indeed a determined space:

In the painting of the past, particular forms are generally confused or lost in the background of the picture. In the new art they are shown with increasing clarity on a plane that is no longer the naturalistic background of the past but the abstract representation of space. On this "ground" the forms become determinate, distinctly separated, and display their inherent mutual relationships. (Mondrian, 1937, p. 301)

¹³⁹ The words inside the bracket are as they appeared in Holtzman and James (1986) edition.

Similarly, in his 1942-1943 essay *A New Realism*, he stated:

In architecture and sculpture three dimensional construction is inevitable, but in painting three-dimensional space has to be reduced to two-dimensional appearance. This is necessary not only to conform with the canvas but to destroy the natural expression of form and space. Only then is the equivalent space determination which abstract art requires possible in painting. (Mondrian, 1942-1943, p. 347)

According to Mondrian, the transformation of a three-dimensional space into a two dimensional one as the planes of noncolor is indeed a destruction of natural space and recreation of an abstract or determined space. At this point, we realize that Mondrian's definition of such abstract, determined, space is what he had experimented with and theorized since the proposal of his Neo-Plastic art in 1919. However, what is further needed is in the analysis of the writings of this period. He considered the two-dimensionality (flatness) of space as a condition for creating balance between form and space. In this regard, in his short 1942-1944 essay he stated that both form and space come to unity on a two-dimensional surface: "[i]n modern time the 'fond' [ground] of a picture, representing three-dimensional space, has become equivalent with the form. Like the forms, it is two-dimensionally established"¹⁴⁰ (Mondrian, 1942-1944, p. 351). Overall, it is understood that both form and space in Neo-Plastic painting are transformed from a three-dimensional corporeality to a two-dimensional (flat) planes of color and noncolor.

In contrast to what Mondrian discussed in his post-1938 writing about the two dimensionality of form, and particularly space, when we look at the surface of the 1932-1944 compositions, we infer that except to the 1932-1935 compositions (see figures 6.1 to 6.6), in a majority of the post-1935 compositions space is not a two dimensional

¹⁴⁰ The word in the bracket appeared in translated edition of Holtzman and James (1986) from Mondrian's writings.

surface. In this regard, many scholars, notably Bois, Blotkamp, Milner, and Cooper, argued that space in the late Neo-Plastic compositions, similar to 1917 ones, is a three dimensional, void space. For example, in the repainted compositions (see figures 6.14 to 6.20) we find that the boundless dashes and stripes of color are conceived in different levels in space. Or, the interlocked networks of the colored lines in New York compositions (see figures 6.21 to 6.25), as intensified forms and colors, are perceived in a volumetric space. Above all, the plurality of the lines destroyed the two dimensionality and flatness of the space in these paintings. Hence, I infer that what Mondrian delineated in his post-1938 essays about a ‘determined space’ as a two dimensional ground is mostly related to what he had demonstrated in his pre-1932 compositions.¹⁴¹ At this point, we understand that Mondrian in many cases in his 1932-1944 writings talked about his concepts and theories in retrospect to what he had explained and practiced in his pre-1932 writings and paintings.

In addition to what Mondrian wrote during 1938-1944 in retrospect to what he had stated on the concept of space, there are also instances where he discussed form and space and, especially, his concept of space-determination in relation to what he experimented in his post-1932 compositions. In this regard, he explained the method he used in his post-1932, especially his post-1936 compositions, to determine space. He delineated that the empty space in the composition (white surface of the canvas) is determined through the multiple divisions by the lines. In his 1942-1943 essay *A New Realism* – almost concurrent with his experimentations with his New York compositions – he delineated his tactic to determine the space:

¹⁴¹ As it was discussed, even in 1924-1931 compositions space was not an absolute two-dimensional surface. The variety in thickness and length of the lines as well as the spatial recession or expansion of the blue and yellow hamper us to see space in these paintings as a flat plane.

The action of plastic art is not space expression but complete space-determination. [...] Space-determination is here understood as dividing empty space into unequal but equivalent parts by means of forms or lines. It is not understood as space limitation. The limitation determines empty space to particular forms. Through this action the empty space obtains a more or less definite expression, but the limited space of these forms remains vague. In order to make concrete the dynamic movement of reality and to annihilate the particular expression of the limited space, division of these forms is necessary. (Mondrian, 1942-1943, p. 348)

There are few points in the above statement which need further elucidation. Firstly, Mondrian stated that the space could be determined through the frequent divisions of the space by lines. Similarly, we saw that in majority of his 1935-1944 compositions space as a background was destroyed through the plurality of lines. Secondly, in contrast to what he had stated in his pre-1932 writings, in the previous statement he stressed that lines should not 'limit' space. As he further described, a 'limited space' is indeed a natural space which represents particular forms. To destroy the particular characteristics of the space, such space should be divided and destroyed through the divisions of the means of imaging. In this regard, we saw that in the majority of the 1932-1944 paintings, the plurality of crossing lines annihilated the subjective characteristics of the planes as rectangular shapes, as well as the subjective identity of the space as a background. Overall, I find that what Mondrian delineated in the previous statement are his transformed aesthetic ideas in this period (1932-1944). They are in relation to the conditions required to attain balance between form and space in his post-classic Neo-Plastic paintings.

In his late writings, Mondrian also talked about the destruction of the particularity of planes as rectangular entities through the multiplicity of lines. Similarly, we saw that in majority of the post-1936 compositions it is no longer possible to identify any concrete dimension or proportion of the planes as rectangular entities. Indeed, Mondrian in his writings in this period expounded his rationale for destructing the particularity of

planes. As we understand, his destructive approach toward the elements of his painting aims at the determination of the particularity of space. According to Mondrian, the 'limited space' as intensified forms (planes of color and lines) could be dissolved into empty space through the plurality of their relationships. In this respect, at the end of his life he stated: "[v]olumes as well as planes are a limited part of universal space. In plurality, they are entities in themselves if they are not dissolved by equivalent parts of that space" (Mondrian, 1938-1944, p. 389). According to this statement, the means of imaging (line and planes of color) in multiplicity should be 'dissolved' into space. As it was studied, Mondrian holds that form could dissolve into space when the form is pluralized, and it divides space into equivalent parts. Similar to Mondrian's statement, we saw that in majority of the post-1932 compositions, the multiplicity of lines created many equal and unequal enclosed areas. We also found that these apparently enclosed areas are no longer conceived as rectangular planes. Instead, in these paintings we see series of glittering white areas which are indeed the outcome of a constant synthesis of lines into the white empty space of the composition. In such a dynamic interaction between lines, colors (intensified forms), and empty space, there is no borderline between form and space. That is to say, we no longer read composition as the dialectic between form and space, but we interpret it as a synthesis of form-space. I found a perfect fusion of form into space in the last two New York works *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.26) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.27) where the lines, colors, planes, and space all dismantled into tiny pieces as particles. At this point, we come to a theoretical understanding of Mondrian's method to attain the balance between form and space in his late Neo-Plastic period. Previously, scholars such as Deicher, Bois, and Blotkamp mainly examined the concepts of space and form in Mondrian's late Neo-Plastic period through the examination of successive experimentation of the painter to destroy the contrast between ground and figure (mainly a Greenbergian approach,

regarding flatness in painting). However, here we revealed Mondrian's own method to attain the equilibrium between form and space in his late Neo-Plastic compositions. Although some scholars, notably Blotkamp and Bois, well examined the destruction of form and space in late Neo-Plastic compositions, they had not expanded their research into the explanation of Mondrian's own method and aesthetic conditions that he preserved in this period for attaining the balance between form and space. As such, we find that form and space in these late Neo-Plastic paintings are dissolved into each other. In his sketch for an essay titled *Space-Determination in Painting, Sculpture*, Mondrian during 1942-1944 talked about the fusion of form into space. He postulated that the intensified forms as 'limited space' are dissolved into the space through the division of the space by the plurality of their relationships or oppositions:

A volume or plane absorbs a part of space. As limited spaces they are determined as entities apart in empty space. They can be dissolved as entities through division. In this way, opposition can produce the dynamic movement that destroys them as entities. But volume and plane must then be seen as micro spaces in the macro space. (Mondrian, 1942-1944, p. 355)

Mondrian in the above statement interestingly called the intensified form (limited space) which is dissolved into space as 'micro space.' This shows that Mondrian considered a dissolved form as part of the space. The assumption of form as micro space is reminiscent to what Mondrian had written in his early theoretical essays about the relation between parts to the whole or what he had stated, within a theosophical perspective, as the relation of microcosm to macrocosm. This means that neither micro space (intensified form) nor macro space (intensified space) could exist as standalone entities. We infer that the resolution of form into space is indeed a holistic expression of the unity in the composition. Overall, we assert that what Mondrian wrote in his late writings are his renewed and developed ideas regarding the unity between form and space. These are the outcome of his experimentations with his 1932-1944 paintings.

To sum up, we understood that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 experimentations remained consistent to what he had demonstrated and theorized in his pre-1932 paintings and writings (particularly to what he had postulated in his second principle) regarding his concept of 'equivalence.' In this regard, I found that the equivalence of the means of imaging in the 1932-1944 paintings was depicted as an 'equal value' - equality in the oppositions - rather than similarity in the appearance of the means of imaging. Nevertheless, in some cases we inferred that equivalence was also represented through the similarity of lines or colors. I also argued that the equivalence between form and space in the majority of his 1932-1944 compositions was no longer expressed in the way Mondrian had stated in his second principle through the opposition between large areas of noncolor and small areas of color. As it was studied, Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings discussed his ideas, regarding the form and space – premises of the second principle – mainly in retrospect to what he had practiced and theorized in his pre-1932 (classical Neo-Plastic) compositions. That is to say, what he wrote in this period in regard to the unity between form and space was largely in relation to the principles of Neo-Plasticism and the experimentations in his 1919-1931 compositions. However, in a few instances, particularly in his post-1938 writings, Mondrian clarified his matured ideas, considering space in Neo-Plastic painting that was related to his 1932-1944 experimentations. In this period, he talked about the new concept of 'space-determination.' Similar to what he had experimented with in his 1932-1944 paintings, he said that space could be determined through the division of space by the plurality of lines. Generally, I found a close relation between Mondrian's new experimentations on his 1932-1944 paintings to express a unity between form and space and what he furthered in his post-1938 writings about the concepts of form and space. In addition, we surmised that during 1932-1944 Mondrian's artistic vision in relation to the concepts

of form and space significantly developed, compared to what he had painted prior to 1932 and to what he had stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism.

6.2.3.3 Dialectic of oppositions, and concept ‘relationship’

In this section, I will examine Mondrian’s artistic ideas during 1932-1944, regarding his theory of oppositions. Looking at his 1932-1944 paintings, I contend that similar to what he had demonstrated and written during 1917-1932, his means of imaging are composed in an exact duality or opposition. However, I deduce that in contrast to what we saw in the pre-1932 paintings, in this period the duality or opposition between the means of imaging – and, thereby, the relationships between the lines and planes – is further pluralized and varied. Accordingly, we understand that the plurality of the dual oppositions has resulted in the destruction of the rectangularity of the planes as well as the lines themselves. Similarly, we see that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings discussed the role of the multiplicity of the relationships, or duality, between the means of imaging for destructing the particularity of the planes as rectangular entities. Overall, I surmise that Mondrian during 1932-1944 followed the core premises of his theory of oppositions, particularly what he had stated in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism. However, in this period he accentuated the oppositions for total annihilation of the subjectivity of, particularity, his planes, lines, colors, and space in order to express purer expression of equilibrium and rhythm independent from his means of imaging.

As it was studied in Chapter 5, Mondrian in 1926 in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism stated: “[t]he opposing duality is required within the means of imaging and also within the composition” (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). When we look at the 1932-1944 compositions, we realize that he used this principle at its best. In the 1924-1931 compositions, a very distinct duality is represented between the lines. In the 1932-1944 compositions, the representation of duality in the means of imaging, particularly

element of line, is further accentuated. Moving chronologically, we see that in the 1932-1935 compositions (see figures 6.1 to 6.6), the duality or opposition between the lines is slightly intensified. A good example of a concrete and exact opposition of the lines is discernible in the 1934 painting *Composition in Black and White, with Double Lines* (figure 6.4). In these paintings, the thick lines in absence of the colors are in an exact and dominant duality against the white surface of the composition. Thanks to the doubling of the lines, the duality between the lines is also intensified.

In the 1936-1938 compositions (see figures 6.7 to 6.12), the opposition between the lines is further pluralized. Furthermore, we find that in these paintings, compared to the 1932-1935 ones, the duality among the lines is manifested as more concrete because the lines are positioned almost evenly (see figures 6.7 & 6.11) and the intervals between the lines are increased. As a result, the intersections of the lines and, thereby, the principal opposition among the lines is represented as more palpable in these 1936-1938 paintings. In some of these paintings such as *Composition in Line and Colour III* (figure 6.10) and *Composition with Blue, Red and Yellow* (figure 6.11), the vertical lines are distributed more uneven compared to the horizontal ones. In these paintings, those vertical or horizontal lines which are closer to each other – formed a group of lines – are thinner. We find that the opposition between two thick vertical and horizontal lines of a similar breadth is represented as more dominant compared to the opposition between a thin and a thick line. Therefore, we see different degrees of dual opposition between the lines in each sides of the composition. I assert that the variety in the oppositions of lines boosted dynamism of the relationships among the lines.

Furthermore, I contend that in majority of the repainted works (see figures 6.13 to 6.20), the opposition among the lines is also dominant. Beside the lines, in these paintings we see that the duality among colors is also depicted as very exact. Here I would like to use

Tosaki's term of 'ostensive' or 'overt' in relation to the representation of duality among the means of imaging in these repainted paintings. That is to say, the opposition in these post-1935 compositions, compared to the pre-1932 paintings, is depicted very outwardly on the surface of these paintings. In these paintings we see that, thanks to painting, the colors as unbounded dashes and stripes of color, start to establish a distinct dialectic of relationships among themselves as well as to the white surface of the composition. The best examples where we find such boosted duality among the colors – as well as the lines – are discernible in the *Place de la Concorde* (1938-1943) figure 6.16, and *Trafalgar Square* (1939-1943) figure 6.19. In both paintings, the duality between the unbounded stripes of color and noncolor is represented as more dominant compared to the earlier paintings. Overall, we infer that in the 1932-1944 compositions, sometimes the duality is more dominant among the lines, and sometime it is more assertive among the colors. Mondrian in his 1938-1944 notes pointed to this matter: “[i]n abstract art, the accent can be on the expression of oppositions by planes, or on the expression of opposition by lines through oppositions of the surface of the planes, through oppositions of their limitation” (1938-1944, p. 384).

In compositions created in New York (see figures 6.21 to 6.25), the dual opposition among the lines is further varied. In these paintings, the duality is represented in different levels between red, yellow, blue, and in some cases the white lines. Moreover, there are many cases where a yellow line is intersected with a red or blue line. Considering the recession of the blue and expansion of the yellow lines in the space (Goethe's theory of colors) we see that the colored lines have established a dynamic relationship in different levels in the space. In addition, the variations of the relationships between colored lines is further accentuated by the actual thickness of the colored tapes in paintings such as *New York City II* (figure 6.24) and *New York City III* (figure 6.25). The lines are interwoven in a way that we perceive a totality of the

oppositions of a lattice rather than the duality in each colored line separately. Similarly, we see that in the last two New York compositions *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.26) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.27), the opposition between the means of imaging is represented holistically between dismantled pieces of form (tiny colored squares) and space (tiny noncolored squares). At this point, I surmise that Mondrian in his 1932-1944, particularly his post-1936, paintings manifested the duality between his means of imaging as more varied and accentuated compared to what he had painted in his 1924-1931 compositions.

When we look at the 1932-1944 compositions, it is obvious that the oppositions as relationship among the positions of lines is also expressed as more intensified and dynamic compared to the pre-1932 paintings. However, we assert that the relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes are not articulated as exact and distinct as in the 1919-1931 compositions. In these paintings, the relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes is almost dissolved into a dynamic rhythm and unity through the frequent division of the space by lines. Above all, we see that in these paintings the identity of the planes as a rectangular entity is almost abolished. As a result of a regular division of the space to almost similar-sized planes as well as the oscillating white spots in the intersection of the lines we cannot identify a concrete and exact relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes. Overall, I surmise that Mondrian during 1932-1944 adhered to his core theory of oppositions that he had stated in his third principle along with what he had demonstrated in his pre-1932 paintings. However, in this period, he had steadily accentuated the duality, or opposition, among his lines and colors to abolish a geometric and subjective identity of his lines, planes, and colors. In order to further understand the development of Mondrian's ideas in regard to his theory of opposition in this period, I will look at his post-1932 writings.

In some cases, Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings affirmed what he had stated in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism. In his writings of this period, he talked about the duality, or opposition, in his means of imaging in relation to the domain of life. In his third principle, Mondrian had mentioned that the duality is necessary both in his means and in the composition (the relationships among the means of imaging). In his 1938-1944 notes he pointed to this matter as follows:

Esthetically, we become aware of the dynamic movement of life by means of a rhythm of oppositions created by the different things in reality. These oppositions are manifested through the things as well as in the things themselves. These are the oppositions of form and color. (Mondrian, 1938-1944, p. 366)

Interpreting the above-mentioned statement, we discern that Mondrian in the first level considered the duality, or opposition, 'in the things,' or Neo-Plastically speaking, within the means of imaging (that is to say, vertical versus horizontal line, color versus noncolor). He also said that in the second level, the dual opposition exists 'through the things,' or Neo-Plastically speaking, among the means of imaging (that is to say, relationships among the position, dimension, and proportion of the lines and planes in the composition). Indeed, Mondrian throughout his writings tried to propagate the idea that equilibrium in everything attained through a constant interplay with its opposition. He stated that nothing exists as a standalone entity in absolute unity, or equivalence, in the universe, and everything is conceived in equivalence in relation to its opposite pair. In his 1941 essay *Toward the True Vision of Reality*, he pointed to this matter: "I recognized that the equilibrium of any particular aspect of nature rests on the equivalence of its opposites" (Mondrian, 1941, p. 339).

Mondrian in his 1932-1944 texts, similar to what he had stated in his pre-1932 writings, also stressed that the oppositions or duality among his means of imaging is essential to

establish the 'relationships.' In this regard, he considered two kinds of relationships in the composition: immutable and mutable. We learned that in the theory of Neo-Plasticism, the relationship among the positions of the lines is primary and immutable whereas the relationship between dimension and proportion of the color and noncolor planes is secondary and mutable. In his 1932-1944 writings he also talked about these two kinds of relationships. For example, in his 1939-1940 essay *Liberation from Oppression in Art and Life*, he pointed to this matter: "[i]n art, we distinguish oppositions of position and dimension. The principal, the most exact, and the only constant opposition of position is the right angle, in which two straight lines are opposed" (1939-1940, p. 329). Similarly, in his 1934 essay *The True Value of Oppositions in Life and Art*, he delineated the relation between these two kinds of relationships:

In plastic art the principal oppositions are absolute, constant. They are expressed by the rectangular relationships (whether determinately established or not). But this absolute relationship of "position" (height and breadth) achieves a relative and living expression through the secondary relationships: relationships of dimension and of value, always varying. The work never shows repetition of the plastic means but always their constant opposition. (Mondrian, 1934, p. 284)

Indeed, Mondrian in the previous statement reiterated what he had mentioned in his pre-1932 writings, regarding two kinds of relationships in Neo-Plasticism. He said that the relationships of dimension, proportion, and color to noncolor values of the planes are the offspring of the relationships among the positions of the lines at right angle. However, we saw that in majority of his 1936-1944 compositions, such rule is no longer in use. Due to the plurality of the lines, we hardly see the relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. In this regard, I realized that the relationships between colors and noncolors in those paintings, particularly in his repainted compositions, is represented independent from the relationships among the positions of

the lines. For instance, the relationships between the unbounded stripes and dashes of color in his repainted compositions (see figures 6.13 to 6.20) are no longer established through the relationships among the lines at right angle. Instead, the relationships among the positions of the lines are mainly a vehicle to destruct the particularity, or subjectivity, of the planes (geometric shape of the planes), lines, colors, and space as background. Overall, I assert that what Mondrian wrote in the previous statements in regard to the primary role of the relationship among the positions of the lines are no longer valid in many of his 1936-1944 paintings.

Mondrian in some instances in his 1932-1944 writings also explained his transformed aesthetic ideas in respect to the duality among his means of imaging which are akin to the experimentations on his post-1932 compositions. In the first place, he tried to propagate the idea that to express a universal equilibrium and rhythm, the particularity of the means of imaging (line as line, plane as plane, color as color, and space as space) should be abolished through the intensification of the oppositions, or relationships. For example, in his 1938 essay *Art without Subject Matter*, he stated: “[n]evertheless, lines and colors necessarily create forms. Thus, even with the purest plastic means, the main problem is still to annihilate all particular form through continuous opposition of line and color, that is, through the plastic expression of relationships” (1938a, p. 302). According to Mondrian, all subjective characteristics of the means of imaging – even though as a geometric rectangular form of the planes – should be cancelled through the intensification of their relationships. Indeed, in the previous statement we find the explanation of what he experimented in the majority of his 1932-1944 paintings to annihilate the particularity, or subjectivity, of his lines, planes, and colors. Overall, Mondrian in his writings of this period, in contrast to what he had theorized and manifested in his pre-1932 paintings and writings, postulated the idea that the pictorial entity of his means of imaging should be destroyed through the multiplicity of their

relationships. In his 1938-1944 notes, he once again outlined the new role of the oppositions in Neo-Plastic painting:

Then the great problem is to annihilate [annihilate] these new means of expression through continuous mutual opposition. [By] creating the equilibrium of these oppositions, it is possible to express in a clear way what is universal and beyond the particular appearance of forms, whether natural or abstract. (Mondrian, 1938-1944, p. 372)

As Mondrian stated, through the ‘continuous mutual opposition’ of the means of imaging the individual appearances of straight lines and planes of color and noncolor are abolished and a universal expression of the relationships is attained. Similarly, we saw that the pluralization of the relationships between the lines, color, and noncolors in 1936-1944 compositions resulted in the destruction of the individual identity of the lines, planes, and colors. As it was discussed in relation to his means of imaging and first principle, the destruction of the particularity of his means of imaging is in line with his intention to express equilibrium and rhythm, as much as possible, independent from the thingness of his means of imaging. In his 1938-1944 notes, Mondrian once again stressed that the particularity of his lines, colors, and noncolors should be cancelled through the multiplicity of their relationships: “[w]e have to destroy the entity through complexity. Multiplicity of forms, volumes, planes is needed to produce a relationship of constantly opposing elements” (1938-1944, p. 381).

In conclusion, we assert that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings represented the duality, or opposition, among his means of imaging different from what he had demonstrated in his pre-1932 paintings. In line to what he had theorized in his third principle, he represented his means of imaging in a distinct duality. However, we found that he pluralized the relationships, or opposition, between his lines and colors with the intention to further annihilate the particularity of his means of imaging. Indeed, in his

late experimentations, Mondrian assigned a new mission for his opposing the means of imaging to destruct their thingness in the composition. Similarly, I realized that in his post-1932 writings he explained the new task of opposing his means of imaging in the composition. Indeed, Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings pointed to a new task for duality, or opposition, of his means of imaging that had not implemented in his pre-1932 paintings. He said that the multiplicity in relationships, or oppositions, of his means of imaging is essential to abolish the particularity, or thingness, of his means of imaging and express a free and universal rhythm and equilibrium. Overall, I understood that during 1932-1944, Mondrian's ideas about his opposing means of imaging are refined compared to what he had demonstrated or written prior to 1932. Moreover, I found a parallel development of Mondrian's ideas, regarding his theory of oppositions, particularly in relation to his third principle, in 1932-1944 paintings and writings.

6.2.3.4 Method and conditions to express the equilibrium

In this section, I will examine the development of Mondrian's artistic vision during late Neo-Plastic period in respect to his key concept of equilibrium through analyzing his 1932-1944 paintings and writings. I argue that in majority of his 1932-1944 compositions, equilibrium is not expressed in the way Mondrian had demonstrated in his 1919-1931 paintings and what he had crystalized in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. I contend that equilibrium in majority of his post-1936 paintings is articulated through a holistic resolution of the multiplied relationships among autonomous and freed lines, colors, and noncolors. Similarly, I will show that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings introduced a new method for expressing equilibrium differently from what he had explained in his pre-1932 writings. In this period, he talked about a new concept, 'dynamic equilibrium,' which signals his transformed aesthetic ideas in relation to his concept of equilibrium. Overall, I will reveal a parallel

development of Mondrian's ideas, regarding the concept of equilibrium in his 1932-1944 paintings and writings.

As it was studied in Chapter 5, Mondrian in 1926 and through his fourth and fifth principles crystalized his ideas in regard to the expression of harmony or equilibrium in the Neo-Plastic painting. In his fourth principle he stated: "[t]he constant equilibrium is achieved by the relationship of position, and is expressed by the straight line (limit of the means of imaging) in its principal opposition (rectangular)" (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). In the fifth principle he said: "[t]he equilibrium, that neutralizes and annihilates the means of imaging, is possible by the relationships of proportion in which they are placed and which create the living rhythm" (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). In the fourth and fifth principles Mondrian stated that the so-called 'constant equilibrium' is achieved through the relationship among the positions of the lines at right angle as well as the relationships among the proportions of the planes. Moreover, such 'constant equilibrium,' as stated in the fourth principle, is primarily expressed through the perpendicular opposition of the lines. In Chapter 5, I surmised that equilibrium in the 1924-1931 compositions was achieved and expressed in line to what Mondrian had written in his fourth and fifth principles.

When we look at 1932-1944 compositions, especially the post-1936 ones, we find that equilibrium is not attained in the way Mondrian had manifested in his pre-1932 paintings and had mentioned in his fourth and fifth principles. Only in the 1932-1935 compositions (see figures 6.1 to 6.6) we see that equilibrium is partly achieved through the interaction of the invariant relationships among the positions of lines and the variant relationships of the dimensions of the planes. In majority of the post-1936 paintings, however we see that the mutable relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes are not depicted as they were in the pre-1932 compositions. In these paintings the

variations between size and proportion of the planes is no longer detectable because of the regular divisions of the composition by the similar-sized lines as well as the blinking optical spots in the intersections of the lines. We contend that in majority of the post-1936 paintings the mutability of the relationships is not represented through the variety of the dimensions and proportion of the planes. As we understood in Chapter 5, relationships among the positions of the lines in the 1919-1931 paintings acted as an origin to establish other mutable relationships between the size and proportion of the planes. Nevertheless, we realize that the mutable relationships in his post-classical Neo-Plastic - post-1932 - compositions are represented independently from the lines. In these paintings variety in the relationships is depicted as a vivid fluctuation of the lines and their intervals as well as the relationships among the hue (value) of the colors. Indeed, we realize that equilibrium in majority of the post-1936 compositions is expressed through a dynamic interaction of the lines and their intervals as well as colors.

It is noteworthy that in the absence of the mutable relationships among the planes in the post-1936 compositions, small areas of colors (either as bounded or unbounded) have a crucial role to vary and boost the dynamism of the absolute expression of equilibrium. For example, in the repainted compositions (see figures 6.14 to 6.20) unbounded dashes and stripes of colors create a varying relationship with the other enclosed areas of the color. As a result, equilibrium is expressed more dynamically compared to the pre-1932 compositions. In New York compositions (see figures 6.21 to 6.27), equilibrium is expressed more dynamically through a very syncopated rhythm of the unbounded color planes and lines. In these paintings, it is almost impossible to envision variant relationships among the dimensions or proportions of the planes. In fact, in New York compositions the relationships among the positions of the lines is overpopulated to the extent that their duality, or opposition, is completely dissolved into unity. That is to say, the static equilibrium, or repose, between vertical and horizontal lines, as we perceived

in the pre-1932 compositions, no longer exists in the post-1936 compositions. Instead, in these paintings equilibrium is achieved through a dynamic rhythm of freed and distilled lines, colors, and noncolors.

Overall, we contend that equilibrium in majority of the 1936-1944 compositions is no longer expressed through what Mondrian had demonstrated in his pre-1932 paintings. We find that, in majority of the 1936-1944 paintings the variant relationships among the dimensions of the planes is destructed through the plurality of relationships among the perpendicular lines. In fact, in these post-classical compositions equilibrium is expressed through a dynamic rhythm of the freed means of imaging¹⁴² rather than the mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. Thus, we assert that the new method which Mondrian used in majority of his 1932-1944 paintings to express harmony and equilibrium is no longer in agreement with what he had practiced in his pre-1932 paintings as well as what he had mentioned in the fourth and fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism. To further examine the transformation of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in this period in respect to the expression of equilibrium, I will examine his 1932-1944 writings as follows.

In his 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian in many instances defined equilibrium as a dynamic expression of reality in life. In this regard, he called such vivid expression of a 'new harmony' 'dynamic equilibrium.' Indeed, Mondrian in his writings in this period emphasized on a dynamic expression of equilibrium which he envisaged as a Neo-Plastic expression of dynamic rhythm of life found in relation among people in metropolitan cities such as Paris and New York.

¹⁴² As it was discussed, throughout 1932-1944, Mondrian tried, as much as possible, to free the reliance of the colors on the lines. To this end, he pluralized his lines to destruct the particularity of lines and the geometric identity of the planes of color. He also depicted his colors as free unbounded dashes and stripes of color. He demonstrated that the colors could be used in the composition without any need to be delimited or determined by the lines.

In some instances, in his 1932-1944 paintings Mondrian affirmed what he had expressed in 1926 in the fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. He said that equilibrium is achieved through the mutual interaction of unchangeable relationships among the positions of the lines and changeable relationships among the dimensions of the planes. It is interesting that in these cases, in which he talked about the concept of equilibrium in retrospect to what he had manifested in his pre-1932 paintings and argued in the fourth and fifth principles, he did not mention his new term of 'dynamic equilibrium.' This demonstrates that in these instances Mondrian defined his concept of equilibrium in relation to the experimentations he had done during his classic period of Neo-Plasticism (prior to 1932). For instance, in his 1936 essay *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art*, he stated:

As regards the relations of dimension, they must be varied in order to avoid repetition. Although, as compared with the stable expression of the rectangular relationship, they belong to individual expression, it is precisely they that are most appropriate for the destruction of the static equilibrium of all form. (Mondrian, 1936, p. 294)

In the above-mentioned statement, Mondrian similar to what he had explained in his pre-1932 writings, stated that the variant relationships among the dimensions of the planes are the main factor which varies, or relativizes, the static expression of equilibrium, that are relationships among the lines in perpendicular opposition. Similarly, in his 1941 essay *Toward the True Vision of Reality*, Mondrian once again, in retrospect to what he had mentioned prior to 1932, stressed that the mutable relationships among the dimensions of his planes dynamize, or animate, the static relationships among the lines: "I found that the right angle is the only constant relationship, and that, through the proportions of dimension, its constant expression can be given movement, that is, made *living*" (1941, p. 339). Nevertheless, as it was analyzed, except the 1932-1935 compositions, in most of the 1936-1944 compositions

the variant relationships among the dimensions of the planes were not a factor for dynamizing the static equilibrium. Moreover, and in contrast to what Mondrian stated in his 1936 essay, in post-1932 compositions the relationships of the dimensions are not 'varied' in order to avoid 'repetition.' In these compositions, we find many repeated enclosed planes. We argue that in these compositions the expression of equilibrium is varied through the dynamic rhythm of the freed and self-reliant lines, colors, and noncolors.

Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings, especially the post-1934 ones, wrote about his new and developed ideas in regard to his concept of equilibrium. In this period, he talked about a new concept called 'dynamic equilibrium.' Indeed, his definition of 'dynamic equilibrium' is the explanation on what he expressed in his post-1932 paintings as an animated and vivid harmony. In this regard, throughout his post-1932 writings, he distinguished between two kinds of equilibrium: 'static equilibrium' and 'dynamic equilibrium.' For example, in his 1936 essay *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art*, he introduced 'dynamic equilibrium' in contrast to the 'static equilibrium' as follows: "[f]irst and foremost there is the fundamental law of dynamic equilibrium which is opposed to the static equilibrium necessitated by the particular form" (Mondrian, 1936, p. 294). Similarly, in his 1942-1943 essay *A New Realism*, he shed more light on these two kinds of equilibrium in this way:

It must be emphasized that it is important to discern two sorts of equilibrium: (1) a static balance and (2) a dynamic equilibrium. The first maintains the individual unity of particular forms, single or in plurality. The second is the unification of forms or elements of forms through continuous opposition. The first is limitation, the second is extension. Inevitably dynamic equilibrium destroys static balance. Opposition requires separation of forms, planes or lines. (Mondrian, 1942-1943, p. 349)

According to what Mondrian stated, the static equilibrium is a balance which is attained among particular forms whereas dynamic equilibrium is achieved through the constant oppositions of freed and distilled elements of painting. From the above statement we deduce that the main difference between these two kinds of equilibrium is that the dynamic equilibrium is expressed through constant oppositions between abstract elements of painting. In this regard, I agree with Tosaki (2017) who defined the dynamic equilibrium as: “the equilibrated point of the force of opposition” (p. 69). As Tosaki also asserted, Mondrian wished to destroy the symmetry he found in his geometric rectangular planes. Indeed, Mondrian tried to propagate the idea that as long as the particularity, or subjectivity, of the elements of painting (either as naturalistic or abstract forms, colors, and lines) is not abolished, a dynamic equilibrium could not be expressed in painting. In fact, by particularity Mondrian means the ‘thingness’ of the lines, colors, and planes which should be annihilated through the multiple and constant oppositions. Similarly, we found that in majority of the 1936-1944 paintings, the particularity of the planes as rectangular entities was destroyed through the constant relationship among the positions of the pluralized lines at right angle. As a result, the equilibrium in these paintings is expressed as more dynamic and autonomous to the pictorial entity of the lines as well as the planes of colors and noncolors. Indeed, Mondrian in his writings of this period stated that to destroy the expression of a static equilibrium and attain a dynamic equilibrium, such thingness of his lines and planes should be abolished through constant relationships. In the sketches he wrote for essays during 1942-1944, Mondrian pointed to this matter as follows:

In relation to the whole, single forms show a static balance. Appearing as entities in empty space, they show false unity, because they are separated from the whole. To establish true unity, their static balance has to be destroyed: their particular expression has to be annihilated. The static balance has to be transformed into the dynamic equilibrium that the universe reveals. (Mondrian, 1942-1944, p. 352)

According to Mondrian, a dynamic equilibrium could not be expressed among the elements of painting as separate entities. In contrast, the dynamic equilibrium is the outcome of the perpetual oppositions among distilled, autonomous, and neutral lines, colors, and planes. In order to abolish the expression of a static equilibrium, the particularity, or thingness, of the means of imaging should be dissolved or nullified through the multiplicity of their relationships in the composition. In this regard, in his interview in 1943, Mondrian said: “[t]he great struggle for artists is the annihilation of static equilibrium in their paintings through continuous oppositions (contrasts) among the means of expression” (1943, p. 357). Up to this point, we understand that in the theory of Neo-Plastic painting the main prerequisite to express a dynamic equilibrium is to abolish the subjectivity, particularity, of the lines, colors, and planes through the plurality of their relationships. In addition, we found that the dynamic equilibrium is the outcome of the constant oppositions between those distilled and universal elements of paintings.

In the post-1938 writings, we find Mondrian’s explanation in regard to the way a ‘dynamic equilibrium’ is expressed and achieved in the composition. From his text, we find that the dynamic equilibrium is the outcome of a holistic resolution of the constant oppositions of the means of imaging. We saw that equilibrium in the 1919-1931 painting was also expressed through the perpetual relationships or oppositions among the means of imaging. Nevertheless, the difference is that the ‘dynamic equilibrium’ is attained through the ‘repetition’ and ‘multiplicity’ of the oppositions and relationships among lines, colors, and noncolors. As Mondrian stated, the plurality of the relationships annihilates the particularity of his lines, colors and noncolors, and these distilled and freed means of imaging are the only means that could be resolved into a dynamic equilibrium. Based on Mondrian’s definition of a ‘dynamic equilibrium,’

equilibrium in the pre-1932 compositions should be considered as what he called a 'static equilibrium.' It is because the lines and planes of color and noncolor in those classic Neo-Plastic paintings (pre-1932) assert themselves as a thing or entity rather than dissolving in the composition. In his 1938 essay *The Necessity for a New Teaching in Art, Architecture, and Industry*, Mondrian further delineated a dynamic equilibrium as follows:

To the extent that this opposition is harmonious, the object is equilibrated. But this equilibrium still creates a "thing." The "thing" must be annihilated by multiplicity in order to be destroyed as something separate. A building is not a totality. A city is more of a whole—everything is relative. In a building there are rooms: the rooms form the building. This resolution into a complete whole is dynamic equilibrium. It annihilates the static equilibrium of the "thing" alone. (Mondrian, 1938c, p. 312)

From the above-mentioned statement we find that the 'multiplicity' of the means of imaging and, thereby, their relationships firstly annihilates the particularity or subjectivity of the means of imaging (line, colors, noncolors, and planes). Subsequently, and through a holistic resolution of such distilled means of imaging, a dynamic equilibrium is achieved. As such, a dynamic equilibrium is indeed outcome of the 'resolution' of the dynamic movement and duality of all neutral and free means of imaging into oneness or what Mondrian called a 'complete whole.' The prerequisite to attain a dynamic equilibrium is to use lines, colors, and noncolors as similar units. We deduced that Mondrian in his pre-1932 paintings always considered a more important role for his lines compared to his colors. As such, equilibrium in those compositions was chiefly the result of the relationships among the positions of the lines at right angle. In contrast, we find that in majority of the post-1932 paintings, equilibrium is attained through an equal resolution of the pluralized lines, colors, and noncolors. Such expression of the dynamic equilibrium is most discernible in the post-1936 compositions between similar-sized units of noncolors (space) and colors (forms). As it

was discussed in relation to the second principle, Mondrian considered his free and autonomous lines and colors as micro divisions of an empty space. That is to say, the dynamic equilibrium is the result of a holistic resolution of the pluralized relationships among such micro spaces (that is to say, freed and autonomous lines, colors, and noncolors). We see the best demonstration of a ‘dynamic equilibrium’ in Mondrian’s last two New York compositions *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.26) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.27). In these paintings the dynamic equilibrium is expressed through a very vivid and constant opposition among the dismantled pieces of form (as tiny units of color), line, and noncolor (space). Indeed, by freeing the colors from the limitation of lines in the post-1936 compositions, equilibrium in these paintings is no longer expressed through the stabilized relationships among the positions of lines. In these paintings we see a holistic synthesis of the immutable relationships among lines and mutable relationships between color values to noncolor. To put it differently, the dynamic equilibrium is achieved through integrated relationships and resolution of the lines, colors, and noncolors as similar units. In such universal expression of the dynamic equilibrium neither lines and colors, nor space (noncolors) are prioritized. Indeed, the lines and colors are micro spaces which are dissolved into empty space through constant oppositions. Mondrian in one of his 1938-1944 notes pointed out to such holistic expression of dynamic equilibrium as follows:

Dynamic equilibrium is created by continuous opposition of lines, colors and relationships. But for form not to appear in a static equilibrium that limits it to a thing-in-itself, a plurality of forms is required. Form cannot be alone in space, but must be resolved, united in space so that the whole shows what particular form establishes: dynamic equilibrium. (Mondrian, 1938-1944, p. 383)

To sum up, we understand that in majority of the 1932-1944 compositions, especially the post-1936 ones, equilibrium is no longer expressed through what Mondrian had stated in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism as well as what he had

depicted in his pre-1932 paintings. I assert that harmony as equilibrium in these post-classic Neo-Plastic paintings is articulated and achieved through the multiplicity of the relationships among freed and autonomous lines, colors and noncolors. I also realized that such an expression of a vivid equilibrium is attained through the means of imaging that have lost their pictorial entity or thingness through the plurality of their relationships. I also found that Mondrian in many cases in his 1932-1944 writings, particularly his post-1938 ones, indicated the results of his experimentations with his post-1932 paintings to express a vivid and universal equilibrium. In this regard, he defined a new concept called 'dynamic equilibrium.' He delineated that such dynamic equilibrium is expressed as a holistic resolution of the constant oppositions of such freed lines, colors, and noncolors in the composition. Overall, I found that after 1935, Mondrian's aesthetic ideas toward his concept of equilibrium were considerably transformed compared to what he had stated in his 1926 fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism and painted prior to 1932. At the end of this section, we see that by examining Mondrian's 1932-1944 paintings and writings we furthered our knowledge about the core Neo-Plastic concept of 'dynamic equilibrium' which had been previously explained through other lenses. In the earlier analysis of the concept of dynamic equilibrium, Mondrian's transformation of his artistic ideas from a static to a dynamic equilibrium was mainly delineated by examining the influences he received from his environment such as Jazz music and, particularly, the live and dynamic atmosphere of metropolitan city of New York. However, here instead of focusing on the external stimuli or causes in the development of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas toward the concept of equilibrium in his late Neo-Plastic period, I studied the offspring, of all those external stimulus: Mondrian's post-1932 writings and paintings. That is to say, now we can explain within a Neo-Plastic vocabulary the very components of dynamic equilibrium in the theory of Neo-Plasticism. In this respect, now we not only have a more transparent

understanding of the method the dynamic equilibrium achieved in post-1935 paintings, but also we can discuss within a Neo-Plastic vocabulary Mondrian's success in expressing such dynamic expression of balance in different periods of his post-classic Neo-Plastic period.

6.2.3.5 The articulation of the 'rhythm' as well as symmetry and repetition

In this section, I will investigate the development of Mondrian's artistic standpoint during 1932-1944, on his concept of rhythm by examining his 1932-1944 paintings and writings. We see that in majority of his 1932-1944 paintings rhythm is not expressed as he had depicted in his 1919-1931 paintings and had mentioned in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism. As such I argue that rhythm in the 1932-1944 compositions, particularly the post-1936 ones, is no longer articulated through the mutable relationships among the dimensions or proportions of the planes. Instead, rhythm in these paintings, similar to equilibrium, is achieved through the perpetual oppositions of freed and distilled lines, colors, and noncolors. We find that Mondrian, in line with his post-1932 experimentations, in his post-1938 writings stated that rhythm is the outcome of dynamic fluctuations and relationships among the lines and their intervals. He called the rhythm as a dynamic equilibrium which is created through the constant relationships between freed and autonomous means of imaging. Overall, we find a development of Mondrian's ideas in respect to his concept of rhythm in both his 1932-1944 paintings and writings, compared to what he had practiced and wrote prior to 1932 about rhythm.

As it was studied in Chapter 5, in 1926 Mondrian in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism wrote about the expression of rhythm. We realized that what he had stated in his fifth principle was indeed a recapitulation of what he had experimented and written during 1917-1925, regarding the expression of rhythm. In the fifth principle he said: "[t]he equilibrium, that neutralizes and annihilates the means of imaging, is possible by

the relationships of proportion in which they are placed and which create the living rhythm” (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). Mondrian in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism stated that the rhythm is expressed through the relationships among the proportion of the planes. As I discerned in Chapter 5, the rhythm in the 1924-1931 compositions was created in the way Mondrian had delineated in his fifth principle. However, I also deduced that in those paintings the rhythm was not merely articulated through the variation in the dimensions of the planes. The dynamic expression of the rhythm in those paintings was further boosted through the variations in the thickness and lengths of the lines as well.

Mondrian in his sixth principle in 1926 also succinctly mentioned that symmetry and repetition should be avoided in Neo-Plastic painting: “[a]ll symmetry shall be excluded” (as cited in Veen, 2017b, p. 6). It is noteworthy that as it was also described in chapter 5, in another translation of the sixth principle, Holtzman and James included the term ‘repetition’ in this principle. Nevertheless, Mondrian in many instances in his 1917-1932 writings had indicated that both symmetry and repetition should be avoided for expressing the harmony or equilibrium. He propagated the idea that the rhythm should be created through the constant oppositions of his means of imaging rather than the conventional rules of harmony: symmetry and repetition. Indeed, he believed that the opposition or, duality between his means of imaging is a substitute for symmetry and repetition in Neo-Plastic painting. Having a brief overview of Mondrian statements about the rhythm and its expression in his fifth and sixth principles, I move on to explore Mondrian’s artistic ideas in regard to rhythm during 1932-1944 by analyzing his paintings and writings.

In the 1932-1944 compositions rhythm is not expressed through mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. That is to say, rhythm in majority

of the post-1932 compositions is no longer created in the way Mondrian had indicated in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism and expressed in 1919-1931 paintings. Similar to what I discerned in the previous section, due to the plurality of the means of imaging, the mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes are not represented as palpable as to the pre-1932 paintings. We see that, except the 1932-1935 paintings (see figures 6.1 to 6.6), in the post-1936 compositions rhythm is not created through mutable relationships among the planes. I contend that in majority of the 1936-1938 compositions (see figures 6.7 to 6.12), a vivid rhythm is expressed through the variety in thickness of the lines and intervals among the lines. Beside the lines, the small cells of color are secondary elements to further boost dynamism in the expression of the rhythm. In relation to the role of double line in Mondrian's post-1932 paintings for expressing a dynamic rhythm, Tosaki (2017) offered insightful knowledge. Tosaki argued that Mondrian's single straight lines provoke in us a sense of speed and this is against the fourth dimension (time) whereas double line in Mondrian's paintings creates in us a sense of duration or movement based on Gestalt theory and time. As a result, he asserted that in pre-1932 paintings rhythm changes from an 'overt' and 'schematic' expression into a moving, physical, and 'kinetic' expression in post-1932 paintings.

In the repainted compositions (see figures 6.13 to 6.20), the short stripes and dashes of color further boosted the dynamism of the rhythm between lines and colors. In these compositions, rhythm is expressed as independent as possible to the 'thingness' and pictorial entity of the means of imaging. In these paintings, all elements either as boundless colors or delimited colors and lines equally and holistically start a very dynamic dialectics between each other. We see that in the paintings created in New York and, particularly, in the last two compositions *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.26) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.27), rhythm is further expressed as independent and universal as possible to the pictorial characteristics of the line as line,

plane as plane, and color as color. We argue that rhythm in these paintings is expressed through a constant opposition between synthesized lines, colors, and noncolors. To put it differently, rhythm in these New York compositions is created through a dynamic interaction among the dissolved entities of lines, colors, and noncolors. Up to this point, I contend that the rhythm in a majority of the 1936-1944 paintings is articulated differently from what Mondrian had shown in his pre-1932 paintings and had stated in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism.

In respect to what Mondrian had mentioned in his sixth principle in relation to symmetry and repetition, I contend that Mondrian in this period widely used repetition as a tactic to annihilate the particularity of his means of imaging. Using repetition in the 1932-1944 paintings is apparently in contrast to what Mondrian had stated in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism. In fact, in order to express a dynamic equilibrium, Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings repeated and pluralize his lines and, sometimes, colors to boost the level of dynamism in the expression of harmony. The repetition and symmetrical position of the lines and colors is palpable in some of the repainted works (see figures 6.13, 6.14, and 6.19). Lines are more symmetrically painted in New York paintings. For example, two vertical bands of red in *New York City, 3* (figure 6.22) are exactly in symmetry. Moreover, we see that two horizontal blue lines in *New York City I* (figure 6.23) and two horizontal black lines in *New York City II* (see figure 6.24) are also positioned in symmetry in respect to each other. Beside symmetry, Mondrian in the majority of his 1932-1944 paintings also repeated his lines and colors. Although Mondrian repeated his means of imaging in his post-1932 experimentations, I argue that such repetition of distilled and freed lines and colors is not a deviation from what he had stated in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism. I surmise that, Mondrian during 1932-1944 no longer considered the pluralization or repetition of his opposing means of imaging in contrast to his theory of Neo-Plasticism. Moreover, I infer that he was

chiefly against the repetition of ‘particular forms’ in the representational painting. After 1932, he allowed himself to repeat his distilled and freed lines, primary colors, and noncolors to express a dynamic equilibrium as rhythm. Indeed, repetition of freed lines, colors, and noncolors for Mondrian was the best tactic to represent or visualize a dynamic expression of rhythm in his paintings as the manifestation of dynamic rhythm of life in metropolitan cities such as Paris and New York. In this regard, I agree with Tosaki (2017) who argued that Mondrian in his New York compositions succeeded, at its best, to bring rhythm, as a kinetic, “flickering, oscillating, bouncing rhythm” to the very surface of his compositions (p. 73). To further reinforce my understanding of Mondrian’s ideas about his concept of rhythm, I will look at his 1932-1944 writings in the following section.

In his 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian in many instances wrote about the expression of rhythm. Indeed, in his writing, especially in his post-1938 texts, more than before he propagated the idea that the vital rhythm in his compositions is a Neo-Plastic representation of a dynamic movement in life. In one of his 1938-1944 notes, he pointed to this matter: “we feel the vitality of reality in everything that exists. In plastic art this feeling of vitality is created through the dynamic rhythm of forms and colors. This rhythm is the pure plastic expression of art” (1938-1944, p. 387). Indeed, as majority of scholars have also stated, the metropolitan and urban atmosphere of New York, its crowded streets, colorful nightlife, and syncopated rhythm of Boogie-Woogie Jazz music are among the seminal factors which further provoked Mondrian in the last decade of his life to increase the level of dynamism in the rhythm between his means of imaging.

In his 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian furthered what he had propagated in his 1930-1931 essays about the expression of rhythm.¹⁴³ In 5, I found that Mondrian in his late 1920's essays pointed out that rhythm should be expressed as a free and dynamic expression, independent from the particularity or subjectivity of the means of imaging. In relation to this point, Mondrian in his post-1932 writings talked about the element of rhythm in close relation to his new concept of 'dynamic equilibrium.' In this respect, Mondrian in a few instances in his 1932-1944 writings indicated that a dynamic equilibrium is indeed a resolution of a rhythm of the freed and neutralized means of imaging. As Mondrian explained, in representational painting (old art), the main intention of the artist is to express harmony – Neo-Plastically speaking equilibrium – rather than to represent a dynamic rhythm among the elements of paintings. However, he believed that in Neo-Plastic painting rhythm is a primary expression in the composition, and the means of imaging are only secondary elements to represent and express the movement and dynamic rhythm of the reality found in the life. In this regard, in his short 1938 essay *Neo-Plastic*, he stated:

All plastic art reveals that its essential content moves us aesthetically through the expression of vital equilibrium. All plastic art achieves this by establishing a dynamic rhythm of forms, lines, colors, and relationships. These forms, lines, and colors are only the "means" for establishing rhythm. These means determine its character, but it is their mutual relationships that create its dynamic expression. (Mondrian, 1938b, p. 305)

In the above-mentioned statement we find out a dynamic rhythm as dynamic equilibrium should be expressed self-reliantly to the thingness and pictoriality of the means of imaging. Similarly, in his 1939-1940 essay *Liberation from Oppression in Art and Life*, he stated: “[v]itality reveals itself as dynamic continuous movement in equilibrium. A study of plastic art shows us that it establishes dynamic equilibrium

¹⁴³ As it was studied in Chapter 5, Mondrian in his 1930-1931 essays *Cubism and Neo-Plastic*, *Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)*, and *The New Art—The New Life: The Culture of Pure Relationships*, started to talk about the idea that rhythm should be expressed as dynamic, free, and independent from the particularity or thingness of his means of imaging.

through a rhythm of forms, lines, and colors in a manner that evokes aesthetic emotion” (1939-1940, p. 328). Indeed, during 1932-1944 we find the continuity of Mondrian’s aesthetic ideas in regard to what he had introduced in his 1930-1932 essays about a free and autonomous expression of the rhythm in Neo-Plasticism. From these statements, it is inferred that a ‘dynamic equilibrium’ is created through the rhythm of the freed and universal means of imaging. Indeed, Mondrian tried to propagate the idea that the animated rhythm of universal lines, colors, and noncolors dissolves into a dynamic equilibrium. Similarly, in majority of the 1936-1944, dynamic equilibrium is attained through a pulsing and vivid rhythm of the lines and colors. This means that by the intensification of rhythm, equilibrium is also expressed as dynamic. Therefore, we realized that Mondrian during 1932-1944 paid particular attention to animate rhythm in his compositions. In this regard, in his 1939-1940 essay *Liberation from Oppression in Art and Life*, he said: “[a]rt has to accentuate rhythm, but in such a manner that rhythm dissolves in unity” (1939-1940, p. 328). Hence, I contend that a dynamic equilibrium is the offspring of rhythm. That’s why in his post-1932 writings Mondrian called rhythm a dynamic equilibrium and vice versa. Conversely, I found that during 1919-1931, the rhythm was an aftermath consequence of the expression of equilibrium. However, when we watch a post-1935 painting, we first read the painting through a very pulsing and moving rhythm and only after that we feel a sense of a holistic unity or balance among the all elements.

Up to this point, we understood that the expression of rhythm, similar to a dynamic equilibrium, is possible among the means of imaging which have lost their particularity through the plurality of their relationships. In the post-1932 paintings, particularly the post-1936 ones, the plurality of the lines resulted in the destruction of the thingness of the lines, colors, and planes. In this regard, Mondrian in his 1942-1944 essay *Space-Determination in Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*, said that a dynamic rhythm is

not a representation of lines and planes. Instead, a dynamic rhythm is expressed independently from the pictorial entity or thingness of the means of imaging: “[h]owever, the great technical problem is that neither lines nor planes speak for themselves but become resolved within the whole. Neither the lines nor the planes are the purpose, but the dynamic rhythm which establishes life” (Mondrian, 1942-1944, p. 354). Likewise, in one of his 1938-1944 notes, Mondrian once again stressed that the resolution or destruction of the thingness of the means of imaging is a prerequisite to express a vital and dynamic rhythm.

When we observe the fact that Cubism has accomplished not only the mutual separation des [of] forms, [previously] mixed up together and confused in an apparent unity, but also the separation of their constituent elements, we see the great importance of that art tendency. For this separation leads to the independent establishment of volumes, planes, lignes [lines] and couleurs [colors]. Freed from subject-matter, these expressive means can be composed in such a relationship that they dissolve themselves and establish only the dynamic rhythm which is the true expression of plastic art. (Mondrian, 1938-1944, p. 380)

In the above-mentioned statement, Mondrian praised the Cubist artists’ innovative experimentations. He believed that breaking form into its fundamental elements (lines, colors, and flat forms) as well as the separation of those elements was one of the most significant accomplishments of the Cubist artists. Nevertheless, in his writings of this period, he always emphasized that only in Neo-Plastic painting a dynamic rhythm of the life could be represented and expressed through the interaction between distilled and freed elements of his painting (means of imaging).

In Mondrian’s late writings, especially the post-1938 ones, we also see his explanation on the way a dynamic rhythm is created and expressed in Neo-Plastic theory. As we understood, rhythm in majority of the 1932-1944 paintings is represented as a dynamic movement of the freed and independent means of imaging. I also inferred that rhythm in

these post-classic Neo-Plastic paintings is no longer created by the mutable relationships among the dimensions or proportions of the planes: the premises of the fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism. Instead, I found that rhythm in these works is articulated as a dynamic movement of the repeated lines, their white intervals, and the colors and noncolors. In many of his post-1932 compositions (see figures 6.7, 6.11, 6.15, 6.17), we see that the plurality of the lines creates the illusion of the movement and fluctuation of the lines and their white intervals. Similar to what Mondrian experimented in his post-1932 paintings to express a dynamic rhythm, in his post-1938 writing he indicated that rhythm is achieved through a holistic interaction or relationships among the means of imaging, their intervals, and the empty space. For instance, in his 1939-1940 essay *Liberation from Oppression in Art and Life*, he said: “[t]he expressive means by which the rhythm of forms, lines, colors is established are not only these, but also the empty space between them. Plurality of forms, lines, colors and empty spaces creates relationship” (1939-1940, p. 328). In the same way, in one of his 1938-1944 notes¹⁴⁴ he stated: “[t]o this rhythm—essential in art—forms, lines and colors and the empty space between them are important, but equally important are their mutual relations” (1938-1944, p. 376). Therefore, I infer that Mondrian in his post-1932 paintings and writings demonstrated a new method to express the rhythm which is different from what he had crystalized in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism as well as what he had painted prior to 1932.

Mondrian in a few instances of his 1932-1944 writings also stressed that symmetry and repetition should not be used in Neo-Plastic painting. That is to say, he affirmed what he had briefly mentioned in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism. As it was discussed in the outset of this section, Mondrian in his sixth principle as well as his pre-1932

¹⁴⁴ According to Holtzman and James (1986), Mondrian wrote this note during 1941-1942 which is concurrent with his experimentations on his repainted compositions as well as his New York compositions.

writings banned the use of symmetry in his Neo-Plastic compositions. He propagated the idea that symmetry and repetition are old rules of harmony and, thereby, should be excluded from Neo-Plastic painting. He suggested the opposition among his universal means of imaging as a replacement for symmetry and repetition in Neo-Plasticism. In this regard, in his short 1938 essay *Neo-Plastic*, he stated that the variety in the relationships among the dimensions of the planes cancels the symmetric representation of his means of imaging: “[t]he relationship of position—the right angle—is constant. Through opposition, the relationships of dimension vary continually so that all symmetry can be destroyed” (1938b, p. 305). Thus, we see that Mondrian in his late writings hold a similar standpoint to what he had stated prior to 1932, regarding the destruction of symmetry and repetition through the plurality of oppositions or relationships. Similarly, we see that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings tried, as much as possible, to annihilate the symmetry and apparent repetition of his lines through the plurality of the relationships among his lines and colors. Although some scholars argued that Mondrian in his post-1932 paintings used symmetry and repetition contrary to what he had mentioned in his sixth principle, I contend that the repetition of lines and colors in the post-1932 paintings is not really a departure from what he had postulated in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism. When we look at these post-classic Neo-Plastic paintings, the repetition and symmetry are apparent in the first glance. However, we find that rhythm as dynamic equilibrium in these paintings is not the outcome of repetition or symmetry. Instead, rhythm and harmony in these paintings are achieved through the pluralized relationships among the lines and colors than the repetition of the lines.

Indeed, Mondrian during 1932-1944 repeated his lines and colors to intensify the relationships among his lines and colors.¹⁴⁵ As a result, we see that equilibrium in these paintings is achieved through a total resolution of such apparently repetitive lines and colors into a universal harmony or unity. I also assert that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings, in contrast to what he said in his 1938 essay *Neo-Plastic*, destroyed symmetry through repeating lines and colors. In this regard, in his 1942-1943 essay *A New Realism*, he indicated that the plurality (repetition) of ‘similar’ means of imaging more ‘completely’ abolishes the particularity of his means of imaging: “[i]n art as in reality, the plurality of varied and similar forms annihilates the existence of forms as entities. Similar forms do not show contrast but are in equivalent opposition. Therefore, they annihilate themselves more completely in their plurality” (1942-1943, p. 349). Similarly, in one of his 1938-1944 notes, Mondrian wrote: “[t]he existence as entity is in reality annihilated by [the] variety or similar plurality of forms. Similar forms annihilate [annihilate] more than varied [forms]. They do not show contrast but are in equivalent opposition”¹⁴⁶ (1938-1944, p. 381). Therefore, we realize that Mondrian had not considered the repetition of his similar elements of paintings (lines and colors) in his 1932-1944 paintings, in contrast to what he had theorized in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism. Although Mondrian rationalized his intention to repeat his similar means of imaging in his post-1938 writings, in some instances, particularly in his repainted compositions as well as his New York paintings, we cannot ignore that harmony is partly expressed through the repetition of lines and colors. Nevertheless, I infer that in majority of his 1932-1944 paintings, repetition was chiefly used as a tactic to annihilate

¹⁴⁵ As it was explained in the outset of Chapter 4, in the original French version of the sixth principle it is stated: “[i]oute symétrie sera exclue” (Veen, 2017a, p. 283). Veen (2017) translated this French text as: “all symmetry shall be excluded” (p. 6). However, Holtzman and James (1986) added ‘repetition’ to their translation of this principle: “[n]aturalistic repetition, symmetry, must be excluded” (p. 214). Regardless of such dichotomy in the translation of the sixth principle, in this study, both concepts of ‘repetition’ and ‘symmetry’ are discussed in relation to the sixth principle.

¹⁴⁶ The words inside the brackets are corrections added by Holtzman and James to the original English text.

the thingness of the means of imaging rather than achieving equilibrium through repetition. Overall, I deduce that Mondrian during 1932-1944 did not deviate from what he had mentioned in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism.

To sum up, I surmise that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings and writings demonstrated a new method to express rhythm. I found that rhythm in the post-1932 paintings, in contrast to what he had manifested in his 1924-1931 paintings and had written in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism, was no longer created based on mutable relationships between the planes of color and noncolor. Instead, I saw that in these paintings rhythm, as dynamic equilibrium, was attained through multiplicity or plurality of the freed and distilled lines and their intervals. Similarly, I realized that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings further talked about new characteristics of rhythm, manifested in his post-1932 paintings. This was a continuation of the new ideas he had postulated in his 1930-1931 essays. Generally, during 1932-1944, Mondrian's significantly developed his ideas in relation to the expression of rhythm. This is in comparison to what he had demonstrated in his pre-1932 paintings and, particularly, to what he had crystalized in the fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism.

I also discerned that during 1932-1944 Mondrian's ideas in regard to what he had stated in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism was not altered. Although we saw that the lines and colors with similar size were repeated, or sometimes painted in symmetry, harmony and rhythm were not articulated through the 'repetition' and symmetry in these paintings. Instead, harmony as dynamic equilibrium was expressed through the resolution of pluralized rhythm, or oppositions, of lines and colors. I also deduced that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings explained that the 'repetition' and pluralization of similar means of imaging is the most effective method to annihilate the particularity, or thingness, of his means of imaging and to express a dynamic rhythm in Neo-Plastic

painting. In short, I found that Mondrian similar to his pre-1932 experimentations and what he had mentioned in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism, avoided using symmetry and repetition to express harmony and rhythm in his 1932-1944 paintings. Indeed, he multiplied relationships among his lines and colors to abolish the particularity of his means of imaging as well as symmetry. In a nutshell, I surmise that during 1932-1944, Mondrian did not alter his artistic vision in relation to what he had stated in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism.

6.2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, I contend that in many cases what Mondrian painted and wrote during 1932-1944 was no longer in agreement to what he had painted prior to 1932, particularly what he had stated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. By examining his 1932-1944 paintings I found that Mondrian used his elements of painting (means of imaging), and expressed equilibrium as well as rhythm differently from what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1931 paintings. In his 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian also had pointed to his transformed aesthetic ideas in regard to his means of imaging, the creation of the balance between form and space, and expression of equilibrium and rhythm, which were the result of his post-1932 artistic experimentations. Overall, I found that during 1932-1944 Mondrian's artistic ideas on his key Neo-Plastic concepts noticeably developed, compared to what he had painted and written, particularly what he had stated in his six principles of Neo-Plasticism - prior to 1932.

Regarding his elements of painting, I saw that the characteristics of the means of imaging in 1932-1944 compositions, especially in the post-1936 ones, differed from what he had painted during 1919-1931 as well as what he had defined in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism. In the post-1932 paintings, due to the plurality of lines, the planes were no longer represented concretely as rectangular shapes. Moreover, I saw

that in contrast to what Mondrian had demonstrated in his 1919-1931 paintings, in some of his post-1932 compositions colors were used as free elements, independent from the lines. Similarly, Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings, particularly his post-1938 ones, pointed to the new characteristics of his means of imaging. This was the expansion of what he had stated in his 1930-1931 essays. He propagated the notion that his means of imaging (line, color, and noncolors) should be depicted as 'free' and 'neutral' as possible in the composition. In this regard, he stressed that the reliance of the colors on the lines should be abolished. In addition, he proposed the new idea that the rectangularity of the planes should be annihilated in the composition through the multiplicity of their relationships. Overall, I surmised that during 1932-1944, Mondrian's artistic standpoint in relation to the role and characteristics of his means of imaging altered compared to what he had stated in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism as well as what he had experimented prior to 1932.

In respect to the concept of 'equivalence' in his means of imaging and the balance between form and space, I found that in line with the premises of his second principle in some of the 1932-1944 paintings, the means of imaging were in equivalence through their equivalent duality and opposition and not based on their similarity. However, I also contend that in some of the post-1932 paintings, particularly the repainted compositions as well as New York paintings, the equivalence was represented through the similarity of the lines and colors. Regarding the balance between form and space, however I argued that in a majority of his 1932-1944 paintings, the equivalence between form (planes of color) and space (planes of noncolor) was not attained in the way he had stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. As such, the equivalence between the planes in the 1932-1944 compositions, particularly his post-1935 ones, was not achieved through the opposition between large areas of noncolors (space) with small areas of color (form). Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings also wrote about his

developed ideas, regarding his concepts of form and space. In this respect, he defined a new concept called 'space-determination.' He stated that form should be determined in the empty space through frequent divisions of the space. He further explained that the forms (as part of the space, micro space) should be resolved into the empty space through the plurality of the lines at right angle. Overall, I inferred that Mondrian both in his 1932-1944 paintings and writings proposed new conditions for attaining the balance between form and space. They were no longer in agreement with what he had postulated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism as well as what he had painted prior to 1932.

Regarding his theory of opposites, I deduced that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings and writing adhered to what he had manifested in his 1919-1931 paintings and what he had crystalized in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism. In his post-1932 paintings, he intensified the immutable relationships between position of his lines to express a more universal equilibrium and rhythm. Similarly, I understood that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings affirmed the premises of his third principle and stated that the oppositions, or duality, among his means of imaging are essential in composition. He further propagated a new notion that the duality, should be used to destruct the particularity (geometric identity of the planes) of his means of imaging. Overall, I found that what Mondrian wrote in his 1932-1944 writings about his new ideas in relation to the role of dual oppositions and his emphasis on the pluralization of the relationships agreed with what he experimented in his 1932-1944 compositions.

Regarding the concept of harmony or what Mondrian called 'equilibrium,' we surmised that equilibrium in majority of the post-1935 compositions was no longer expressed in the way Mondrian had mentioned in his fourth and fifth principles as well as what he had painted in his 1919-1931 compositions. Indeed, equilibrium, except to a few of the 1932-1935 paintings, in the majority of the post-classic Neo-Plastic paintings was not

achieved through the mutual interaction of the immutable relationship between the position of lines and the mutable relationships among the dimensions of the planes. I found that, in contrast to the 1919-1931 paintings, due to the plurality of lines in the post-1935 paintings, the relationships among the dimension and proportion of the planes was not represented and expressed. However, equilibrium in these paintings was expressed through a dynamic rhythm of the freed and distilled lines, colors, and noncolors. In his 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian also introduced his refined ideas, regarding the expression of equilibrium that was related to his 1932-1944 experimentations. He defined his harmony as 'dynamic equilibrium' that was achieved through the resolution of the relationships, among free and self-reliant lines, colors and noncolors. Overall, I found that throughout 1932-1944, Mondrian altered his artistic thoughts about the expression of equilibrium, compared to what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1931 paintings and writings as well as what he had crystalized in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

Lastly and in relation to the concept of rhythm, I realized that rhythm in majority of the 1932-1944 compositions, especially the post-1935 ones, was not created in the way Mondrian had indicated in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism. I surmised that rhythm in many of these post-classic Neo-Plastic compositions was no longer the outcome of the mutable relationships among the dimensions or proportions of the planes. Instead, rhythm in these paintings was created through the relationships among pluralized lines and their intervals. In his 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian in many instances talked about new characteristics of the rhythm that he practiced in his post-1932 paintings. In this regard, he said that the rhythm is indeed a dynamic equilibrium that is created through constant and dynamic relationships among lines, colors, and the intervals among the lines. Overall, I surmised that during 1932-1944, Mondrian's ideas in respect to the

expression of rhythm developed compared to what he had demonstrated in his pre-1932 compositions and what he had mentioned in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism.

I also saw that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings avoided, as much as possible, to use symmetry and repetition to express harmony. That is to say, I contend that Mondrian during 1932-1944 adhered to what he had stated in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism. Although in some cases I found that he repeated his lines and colors in similar size to attain harmony and to create rhythm in the majority of his post-1932 paintings. I deduced that the symmetry and repetition were replaced with the multiplicity of oppositions or relationship between lines and colors. In 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian also argued that symmetry should be destroyed and excluded in Neo-Plastic painting through the plurality of the relationships among 'similar' means of imaging. Overall, I surmised that during 1932-1944, Mondrian did not change his standpoint toward what he had stated in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Throughout the analysis of Piet Mondrian's 1917-1944 Neo-Plastic compositions and writings in three different periods, I identified and demonstrated a very steady, and almost, parallel evolution of his aesthetic ideas in regard to his core Neo-Plastic concepts and theories. I also realized slight, sometimes major, differences between what he had experimented in his Neo-Plastic compositions to express equilibrium and rhythm and what he had explained in his writings about his core formal concepts and theories. Throughout the analysis of Mondrian's 1917-1944 painting and writings, I addressed what I had proposed in the outset of this thesis as research questions. In this regard, I understood about the emergence of Mondrian's ideas in regard to his core Neo-Plastic concepts and theories in his pre-1926 paintings and writings. I found that Mondrian in his 1917-1925 writings – as demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings – introduced and defined the core values of his theory of Neo-Plasticism such as his elements of painting (means of imaging, plastic means), the 'equivalence' of his elements of paintings as well as the balance between form and space, and the expression of harmony (equilibrium) and rhythm. Interestingly and contrary to the widely acknowledging fact that Mondrian's writings came after the creation of his paintings, I surmised that in many cases Mondrian in his 1917-1920 essays pointed to new concepts and theories which were not yet manifested in his 1917-1919 paintings.

We saw that Mondrian in 1926 wrote six principles of Neo-Plasticism. These were a recapitulation of what he had written and demonstrated in his 1917-1925 writings and paintings in relation to his formal theories. Throughout the analysis of his 1924-1931 paintings and 1926-1932 writings, I inferred that Mondrian adhered to what he had crystalized as his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. Nevertheless, I also identified some subtle alterations and developments of ideas in his 1929-1931 paintings as well as his

1930-1931 writings. I also inferred that during 1932-1944, Mondrian further departed from what he had theorized and manifested in his pre-1932 paintings and writings, particularly his six principles of Neo-Plasticism. I demonstrated that in many cases what Mondrian experimented in his 1932-1944 compositions was no longer in agreement to what he had practiced and theorized in his pre-1932 paintings and writings.

In addition to understanding major and minor development of Mondrian's ideas in relation to his key Neo-Plastic concepts in different period of Neo-Plasticism, in this thesis I elaborated on the relation between Mondrian's paintings and writings in each period. In this regard, I found that in many instances, except 1917-1920, Mondrian in his writings pointed to what he had experimented in his paintings. However, in different periods, I found different levels of the relationship between his paintings and writings.

I found that by examining the development of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas through a context-independent approach, we come up with insightful and new knowledge about the very core theory of Neo-Plasticism. In this thesis I excluded the historical, humanistic, and philosophical roots of Neo-Plasticism which are external stimuli in the formation of Neo-Plastic theory. Instead, I confined the scope of my research to the outcome of all those external stimuli of Neo-Plasticism: Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings and his theoretical writings. By looking at Mondrian's paintings and writings in different periods of Neo-Plasticism, I achieved three main goals. In the first place, I equipped myself with a thorough knowledge about the components and key concepts of the pure abstract theory of Neo-Plasticism. At this point, I am able to explain the transformation of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in different periods of Neo-Plasticism in regard to his elements of painting, his ideas about abstract form and space, his definition of a universal, pure, abstract painting and its differences from a representational painting, his destruction or construction of the elements of painting, his aesthetic

conditions for the creation of 'equivalence' in his elements of painting as well as balance or unity between form and space, his theory of the dialectics of oppositions and its components, the methods and aesthetic conditions to achieve a pure, absolute, and dynamic equilibrium (harmony) and rhythm, and lastly his aesthetic standpoint toward using symmetry and repetition in his Neo-Plastic paintings. We saw that, in the previous publications, many of these theoretical concepts have been either explained through a historical, humanistic, or philosophical context, or they had not been analyzed. The results of this thesis can be used to further examine each of these concepts and their components within different contexts in relation to aesthetic theories of pure abstract painting. Moreover, this knowledge can be further used in relation to other abstract, pure abstract, and artistic ideas of painters such as Jean Gorin, Burgoyne Diller, Fritz Glarner, Marlow Moss, and Cesar Domela whose aesthetic assumptions are intimate to Neo-Plastic theory. Furthermore, this knowledge can be further used to analyze the differences and similarities of Neo-Plastic theory with other abstract theories in modern art history. Lastly, having a comprehensive awareness of the underlying theory of Neo-Plasticism furthered our understanding from one of the main pure abstract tendencies in the history of modern art. In this respect, I deduce that a coinciding study of paintings and writings of an experimental painter, such as Piet Mondrian, helps us develop a more refined, well-rounded, understanding of the evolution of his aesthetic ideas in different periods of his artistic career. In this thesis, contrary to the earlier arguments of scholars, notably Champa and Blotkamp, I demonstrated that using Mondrian's theoretical writing as a main source to analyze his aesthetic vision in relation to his paintings is very important in case of Mondrian's stark and seemingly cold Neo-Plastic artworks which had rendered scholars reluctant to interpret his paintings. Such a novel approach can be further employed to gain more in-depth knowledge about the formation and transformation of other abstract and pure abstract artists' aesthetic ideas, particularly

those like Kandinsky, Malevich, and Kupka who extensively wrote their artistic ideas in parallel to painting. Indeed, I showed that a painter's own writings on his artistic thoughts – though in some cases like Mondrian they are hard to fathom – is one of the most reliable and authentic sources to rely on. In most cases, particularly in the case of Mondrian, when we read a book published in regard to abstract and pure abstract artists, we see that the scholars mostly employed a historical and sometimes philosophical lens of scrutiny. By reading those publications we understand that the genuine intention of artist to paint in a certain way or the artistic methods or tactics that he used to achieve harmony, rhythm, and unity in his painting had been overshadowed by the explanations about the influences, either artistic or philosophical, he received from his environment. As such, in this thesis I started to exclude all the external factors which were undeniably important for the formation of the theory of Neo-Plasticism, in order to gain new and refined knowledge of the very core theory of Neo-Plasticism.

Secondly, by examining Mondrian's 1917-1944 paintings and writings in three different periods of Neo-Plasticism, I developed new and interesting conclusions about the relationships between his paintings and writings. Contrary to the commonly accepted belief that Mondrian's writings are posterior outcome of his experimentations on canvas, I found that in some cases particularly in early Neo-Plastic period (1917-1920), such relationship is reverse. These data later can be examined through a historical or philosophical lens to find out about the rationales for such reverse relations between his paintings and writings.

In the third place, after analyzing Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings and writings, I grasped a thorough knowledge about the emergence, development, and transformation of core Neo-Plastic concepts and its components in different periods of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic career. The outcome can be later investigated in relation to the stylistic and

theoretical maturation of other abstract and pure abstract artists of the 20th century such as Kandinsky, Malevich, and Kupka. Moreover, the result, can also be used to examine Mondrian's stylistic and aesthetic evolution in relation to his other fellow De Stijl and Neo-Plastic artists such as Bart van der Leek, Theo van Doesburg, Jean Gorin, and Marlow Moss. As such, I can further answer questions such as: to what extent the fellow De Stijl and Neo-Plastic artists were influenced by Piet Mondrian as the father of Neo-Plastic art? Or, how these artists' artistic ideas developed, departed, or transformed in relation to the theoretical principles of Neo-Plasticism, founded by Mondrian, throughout their artistic career? Last but not least, having a transparent picture of Mondrian's artistic evolution, I can further use such knowledge to find out the kinships or differences between Mondrian's steady evolution of his Neo-Plastic style and philosophical concept of 'evolution,' proposed by philosophers such as Hegel, Darwin, Bergson, and Jaworski.

In the following sections, the formation, development, and alterations of Mondrian's artistic vision during 1917-1944 in regard to each of his formal concepts and theories is recapitulated. Furthermore, in the following section the relation between Mondrian's paintings and writings in respect to each of his concepts and theories in different periods of Neo-Plasticism is discussed.

7.1 The evolution of Mondrian's artistic ideas during 1917-1944 in regard to his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories

7.1.1 Characteristics of the means of imaging, plastic means

Mondrian in his 1917-1925 theoretical writings, majority of which were written for De Stijl magazine in the form of essays, introduced and defined his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories. In his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*, he defined the elements of his pure abstract painting as means of imaging that were straight lines at right angle and

triad of primary colors. We found that his emphasis in this period was on the purification and intensification of his elements of painting, especially colors. He introduced the straight lines at right angle as abstract and intensified version of the curved and oblique lines. Moreover, he considered the triad of primary colors as purified version of the spectrum of the colors found in the nature. Lastly, he propagated the idea that these abstract versions of lines and colors should be composed as flat rectangular planes. In his 1917 essay, he further pointed to three interrelated aesthetic conditions, for a color to be counted as pure and universal in Neo-Plasticism. In this regard, he said that in the first step the naturalistic colors should be confined into three primary hues red, yellow, and blue. Secondly, the colors should be painted on a flat, that is to say solid hue, plane. Thirdly, the colors should be delimited by the straight lines and, thereby, they should be used as rectangular planes of color. When I compared these characteristics of the elements of paintings or means of imaging with the 1917 compositions (figures 4.1 to 4.5), I realized that the characteristics of the means of imaging in the 1917 paintings was not in agreement to what Mondrian had explained in his 1917 essay. Although colors in the 1917 paintings were confined to the triad of red, blue, and yellow, they were still very impure. Moreover, the lines either were completely absent, or whenever they were used (figures 4.1 & 4.2), they were not used to delimit or enclose the boundaries of the colors.

I further deduced that during 1919-1920, Mondrian in his essays, *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*, reiterated what he had written in his 1917 essay about the characteristics of his elements of painting. However, I found in his 1918-1919 essays his especial stress is on the idea that colors should be delimited through the straight lines in principal, right angle, which is opposition. I also realized that Mondrian's explanation about his means of imaging in this period was indeed the results of his 1918-1919 experimentations. In this respect, in some of his 1918-1919

paintings he had used lines to delimit, as he called to ‘determine,’ the colors. Nevertheless, in contrast to what he had stated in his writings, I found that the colors were impure.

In his 1920-1925 writings, in line with what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings, Mondrian for the first time introduced triad of ‘noncolors’ (white, grey, and black) as opposite pair for his triad of primary colors. He defined his means of imaging as flat rectangular planes of color and noncolor. I inferred that what Mondrian wrote during 1920-1921 about his means of imaging were indeed his refined, matured, ideas about his elements of paintings which he later, in 1926, wrote in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism. I also found that the triad of noncolors were used in opposition to the triad of primary colors in the 1919-1923 paintings. Moreover, compared to the 1917-1919 compositions, colors were pure state of primary colors. In the 1920-1923 paintings, the lines were also thicker. Overall, I realized that during 1920-1925 Mondrian’s artistic ideas in relation to the characteristics of his means of imaging developed, compared to what he had demonstrated in his 1917-1919 paintings and writings.

I found a crystalized aesthetic idea of Mondrian in relation to his means of imaging in the first principle of Neo-Plasticism which he wrote in 1926. In the first principle he defined his means of imaging as rectangular planes of color and noncolor. I contend that the characteristics of the means of imaging in the 1924-1931 compositions was in agreement to what Mondrian had also stated in his 1926-1932 writings. That is to say, during 1924-1931 we found almost no alterations in Mondrian’s aesthetic vision in regard to his means of imaging. However, I also demonstrated that in majority of 1924-1931 paintings, particularly 1929-1931 ones, the characteristics of means of imaging slightly changed compared to those earlier 1919-1923 paintings. I argued that in the

post-1924 paintings the lines were not primarily used to create enclosed rectangular planes. Due to the decrease in the quantity of the lines as along with variations in their length and thickness, the colors and noncolor were not completely enclosed. As a result, I found that the planes had slightly freed themselves from the circumferences of the lines. Similarly, I saw that Mondrian in some instances in his 1926-1932 writings, had started to define a new identity for his means of imaging, particularly for his lines. He propagated the notion that the means of imaging should be depicted in the composition as 'neutral' and 'free' elements to merely express relationships rather than to construct rectangular planes. Interestingly, I found that only after 1929 he started to talk about his new ideas in regard to his means of imaging. During 1929-1932, he further delineated that the rectangularity of the planes as well as the subjective interpretation of the lines as cross sign could be annihilated through the multiplicity of the opposition (relationship) among the lines. Indeed, Mondrian in his 1929-1932 writings started to redefine an autonomous identity for his lines, colors, and noncolors. He clarified that the means of imaging should exist independent from each other. In this regard, he stressed on the idea that the colors should be used freely, without any obligation to be delimited or restricted by the lines. Overall, I argued that after 1928 Mondrian's ideas in respect the role and characteristics of his lines slightly developed compared to what he had manifested earlier in his paintings and writings. In contrast to what he had postulated in his first principle, in addition to what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings, after 1928 he further started to question the aesthetic condition of the rectangularity of the planes. Nonetheless, I understood that in the 1928-1931 paintings the rectangularity of the planes had not yet been abolished through the multiplicity of the lines. That is to say, the development of Mondrian's ideas in regard to his means of imaging was more palpable in his 1929-1932 writings rather than his 1924-1931 paintings. Overall, I asserted that regardless of the slight developments in Mondrian's ideas in late 1920's in

respect to the role of his lines, the aesthetic conditions in relation to his elements of painting remained constant compared to what he had theorized in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism.

When I looked at the 1932-1944 paintings, I found that the characteristic of the means of imaging was no longer in agreement to what Mondrian had postulated in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism as well as what he had practiced prior to 1932. First of all, due to the pluralization of the lines and an intense optical spots in the intersection of the lines, in these paintings we could no longer identify the planes as rectangular shapes with a concrete dimension or proportion in respect to the composition. Only in the 1932-1935 compositions the planes were almost depicted as rectangular planes of color and noncolor. However, by the increase in the quantity of the lines in the 1936-1938 compositions (figures 6.7 to 6.12), I realized that the consequence of the intersection of the lines was an intense flickering effect among the lines rather than a rectangular shape. In the repainted compositions (figures 6.13 to 6.20), lines were further pluralized and they were turned into a very dense lattice. Moreover, in these paintings, the colors for the first time, since 1917, were used as unbounded dashes and stripes of color. Finally, in New York compositions (figures 6.21 to 6.27), I contend not only the rectangularity of the planes were completely abolished, but also the pictorial entity of the lines, planes, and space were totally cancelled. Overall, I deduced that in majority of the 1932-1944 paintings the characteristics of the means of imaging was no longer in agreement to what Mondrian had defined in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism.

I saw that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings had talked about his transformed ideas toward the elements of paintings. He emphasized that the means of imaging should dissolve their entities, or thingness, in the composition through the multiplicity of their relationships, or oppositions. In this respect, he delineated that line and colors (or planes

of colors) should be used as 'free' and objective as possible in the composition. That is to say, the equilibrium and rhythm should be expressed as independent as possible to the pictorial entity, or thingness, of the lines, colors and planes. Similarly, I saw that in the post-1935 compositions the reliance of colors on the lines was noticeably cancelled through the multiplicity of lines and colors. Overall, I surmise that during 1935-1944 Mondrian's ideas on his means of imaging noticeably developed compared to what he had postulated in his first principle of Neo-Plasticism and what he had painted in his 1919-1931 paintings. Interestingly, I demonstrated that Mondrian in his post-1936 writings wrote about the new characteristics and role of his means of imaging which was concurrent to radical changes in the appearances of his paintings. That is to say, I found a similar development of Mondrian's ideas on his means of imaging in his 1932-1944 paintings and writings.

7.1.2 'Equivalence' of the means of imaging and balance between form and space

I realized that Mondrian, as early as 1917, introduced a Neo-Plastic definition for the similarity, or unity, of the means of imaging that he called 'equivalence.' In his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*, he propagated the idea that the equality of his the means of imaging is indeed an equivalent representation of the duality, or opposition, among the means of imaging. Moreover, in his 1917 essay he also talked about the balance between form and space. He had theorized that balance between form and space is achieved through mutual interactions between two forces that he called 'limitation' and 'expansion.' Mondrian introduced form, especially in the case of line, as a limited version of the 'expansion' or space. When I looked at 1917 compositions, I found that the unbounded color planes in these paintings had shown balance, or unity, through the similarity of their size rather than a distinct duality and opposition of the colors. Moreover, I deduced that in these 1917 paintings the balance between form and space was not an outcome of a mutual interaction between the expansion and limitation forces

because the limitation force (lines) was absent in these paintings. Therefore, once again I argued that, contrary to the common idea that Mondrian's writings are posteriori product of his paintings, Mondrian in his 1917 essay wrote theories which he had not yet fully experimented in his canvases.

I found that in his 1919-1920 essays, Mondrian talked more about his concept of equivalence. He argued that equality in Neo-Plasticism is not a similarity in size or color of the planes and lines. I inferred from the content of his essays that equality, as sameness, in Neo-Plastic painting is indeed what he called an 'equivalent duality' of the means of imaging. As I asserted, Mondrian's definition of the concept of equivalence in this period was indeed his renewed ideas which, later in 1926, appeared in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism.

I also deduced that in some of the 1918-1919 compositions (see figures 4.6, 4.9, and 4.10) the equality of the means of imaging was no longer represented through the similarity of size or color value of the planes. Generally, I found that only in some cases in the 1918-1919 paintings the means of imaging were represented in equivalence, in the way that Mondrian had defined in his 1919-1920 essays. Overall, I surmised that in the 1918-1919 paintings, the equivalence of the means of imaging was more represented in relation to what Mondrian had defined in his 1917-1920 essays.

In his 1920-1925 writings, Mondrian mostly affirmed what he had mentioned in his 1917-1920 essays about the equivalence of his means of imaging. Similarly, I found that except the first two 1919-1920 compositions (see figures 4.13 & 4.14), in other paintings (see figures 4.15 to 4.22) equality between the planes of color and noncolor was represented as an 'equivalent duality' rather than a sameness in size or color value of the planes or lines. I found the best demonstration of the 'equivalence' of the means of imaging in the 1922-1923 compositions (figures 4.20 to 4.22). Overall, I deduced

that in majority of the 1919-1923 compositions, the equivalence among the means of imaging was depicted in the way Mondrian had explained in his 1920-1925 writings.

I also demonstrated that Mondrian in his post-1922 writings, particularly his 1925 essay *The Neo-Plastic Architecture of the Future*, had pointed to a new method for attaining balance between form and space. He postulated that the balance in the composition was attained through the mutual interaction between large areas of noncolor (space) and small areas of color (form). I realized that what Mondrian had mentioned in his 1925 essay was indeed a signal to his matured ideas in respect to the condition for the balance in the composition that later in 1926 appeared in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. Similarly, I found that the equivalence in majority of the 1922-1923 compositions (see figures 4.20 to 4.22) was attained through the confrontation of large areas of white or light grey (as noncolors or space) and tiny planes of color (as intensified form). Overall, I surmised that after 1921, Mondrian's aesthetic conditions for the attainment of balance, or unity, between form and space developed. I saw that in his post-1922 paintings and writings he demonstrated a new method to achieve balance between form and space.

In his 1926, the second principle of Neo-Plasticism, I found the upshot of Mondrian's ideas in regard to his Neo-Plastic conditions for attainment of unity among the elements of his painting as well as the unity between form and space. He mentioned that the equivalence of the means of imaging is not a similarity, or sameness, of the means of imaging. Instead, he had defined his concept of equivalence as an 'equal value' of the oppositions of his means of imaging. In parallel to what he had manifested in his 1924-1931 compositions, in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism he also said that the equilibrium between form and space is attained through opposition between a large area of noncolor and small areas of color.

In the case of 1924-1931 paintings, I found that the equivalence, or unity, among the means of imaging was represented through 'equivalent duality,' or exact opposition, of his lines and planes rather than similarity in their appearances. I also found that in majority of the 1924-1931 compositions, particularly the post-1926 ones, the balance between form and space was expressed in the way Mondrian had theorized in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. Overall, I surmised that during 1924-1932 Mondrian adhered to what he had demonstrated in his pre-1926 paintings as well as what he had mentioned in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism, regarding the equivalence of the means of imaging and the balance between form and space. That is to say, I discerned no alteration or development in Mondrian's aesthetic vision toward the second principle of Neo-Plasticism during 1924-1931.

I also realized that in majority of the 1932-1944 compositions the equivalence of the means of imaging was attained, as Mondrian had stated in his second principle, through an equivalent duality, or opposition, among the means of imaging rather than being represented as similarity in size or color value of the planes and lines. Nevertheless, in some cases (such as in figures 6.11, 6.13, 6.14, and 6.19) I contend that the balance, or unity, between lines was attained through the similarity of their length and thickness. In general, I figured out that Mondrian during 1932-1944 remained constant about what he had mentioned in his second principle of Neo-plasticism about the equivalence of his means of imaging. However, I asserted that in majority of the 1932-1944 paintings the equivalence between form and space was not achieved in the way Mondrian had indicated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism. I saw that except the 1932-1933 compositions, due to the plurality of the lines there were no large planes of noncolor (space) to be opposed with smaller planes of color (form). Therefore, I found out that in the post-1935 compositions the balance between form and space was no longer achieved through the confrontation of a large plane of noncolor and small planes of color. I

contend that in majority of the 1932-1944 paintings, the balance, or unity, between form and space is achieved through the resolution of the multiplied lines and their intervals. Above all, in the post-1935 compositions, the space as a surface of the composition was no longer detectable. In these compositions, we could not separate form (lines and colors) from empty space (noncolors; commonly seen as white surface of these compositions). I found the best example of the integration of form and space in New York compositions (figures 6.21 to 6.25), especially in the last two New York compositions (figures 6.26 & 6.27), where lines, colors, and noncolors were dismantled into similar tiny pieces. Overall, I inferred that in the 1935-1944 compositions form and space were in unity, totally different from what Mondrian had practiced in his 1919-1931 paintings and stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism.

I realized that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings had defined his concept of equivalence similar to his pre-1932 writings. In his post-1936 writings, he stated that the 'equivalence' means equality in the oppositions of the means of imaging rather than their 'equality' in size or appearance. In a similar way, I saw that in majority of his 1932-1944 paintings the equivalence of the means of imaging is expressed through an equivalent duality, or opposition of the means of imaging. In a nutshell, I found that during 1932-1944 Mondrian's artistic thoughts about his concept equivalence did not alter or develop.

Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings in many instances talked about his concepts of form and space. Interestingly, I saw that Mondrian in his post-1938 writings had pointed to his transformed ideas about the attainment of balance between form and space. This was in line with what he had experimented with in his late Neo-Plastic compositions. In this regard, in his late – particularly his post-1942 – writings he introduced and defined a new concept called 'space-determination.' He delineated that such space-

determination is attained through the destruction of the subjective expression of the limited space (lines and colors as intensified forms and line). I found that in order to abolish the subjective, tragic, expression of such limited space (form) in Neo-Plastic painting, the relationships among the positions of the lines should be multiplied. In his late theoretical writings, he called form (intensified lines and colors) a 'micro space' that should be resolved into a 'macro space' (empty space) through the frequent divisions of the space by the lines. Similarly, I saw that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings pluralized the lines to further resolve the form (lines and colors) into space. Overall, I deduced that in 1932-1944 writings, particularly in his 1942-1944 ones, Mondrian pointed to a new aesthetic condition, or method, for creating balance between form and space. This was different from what he had stated in his second principle of Neo-Plasticism.

7.1.3 Theory of the dialectic of oppositions

We understood that Mondrian's theory of oppositions was fundamental in Neo-Plasticism. In his 1917 essay *The New Plastic in painting*, he had postulated that everything exists in relation to its opposite. In this regard, he indicated that his elements of painting (means of imaging) should be painted in duality (horizontal versus vertical lines, primary colors versus noncolors). Additionally, he said that these opposing plastic means should be composed in a way that lets them establish what he called 'relationship.' From his 1917 essay, I understood that there are two kinds of relationships in the theory of Neo-Plasticism: immutable relationships among the positions of the lines at right angle and mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. According to Mondrian, the relationships among the positions of the lines are immutable and primary because they create the mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. I found that in the 1917 paintings (figures 4.1 to 4.5) the color planes (means of imaging in these works)

were not depicted in duality. I argued that in the absence of any pair of colors to be opposed with the triad of colors (red, blue, yellow), the duality, or opposition, was not exactly represented. In addition, I found that in these paintings the relationships among the lines in perpendicular positions – as the most principal and distinct duality – were also absent. Overall, I surmise that Mondrian during 1917 had not adhered to what he had written in his 1917 essay about his theory of oppositions.

We saw that Mondrian in his 1919-1920 essays expanded his discussion on what he had postulated in his 1917 essay about the dialectics of oppositions. Firstly, he emphasized that duality, or opposition, is an essential prerequisite to express relationships and, thereby, equilibrium in the composition. Furthermore, in his 1919-1920 essays Mondrian explained more on the role of two kinds of relationships (immutable and mutable) in Neo-Plasticism. He stated that the immutable relationships between the positions of the lines stabilize the mutability, or relativity, of the relationships between dimension and proportion of the planes. Similarly, I saw that in his 1918-1919 paintings the lines were composed in a distinct opposition. Nevertheless, I realized that the colors were impure and they were not opposed with a pair of other colors. In some the 1918-1919 paintings, particularly in diamond paintings and two Checkerboards, I found a good manifestation of what Mondrian had explained in his 1919-1920 writings in respect to the relation of parts to the whole. Overall, I understood that during 1918-1919 means of imaging (especially lines) were represented in a more exact and distinct opposition compared to the early 1917 compositions.

In his 1920-1925 writings, Mondrian extended his discussion about the theory of the dialectics of oppositions to other arts and the domain of life. In this period, he talked more on the essential role of the dual oppositions to express what he called ‘equivalent relationships’: harmony or equilibrium. In this period, he had discussed two kinds of

relationships (immutable and mutable) in relation to the concepts of relative and absolute. He defined the immutable relationship among the positions of the lines as 'absolute' or objective expression whereas he introduced the mutable relationship between the dimension and proportion of planes as 'relative' or subjective expression in the composition. In line with his emphasis, in his 1920-1925 writings, on the importance of the immutable relationships among the lines at right angle, I saw that in 1919-1923 compositions both lines and colors were opposed as more exact and distinct compared to the pre-1919 paintings. In these paintings, the triad of noncolors (white, grey, black) was used in opposition to the triad of colors. Moreover, the vertical and horizontal lines were thicker and they were represented in opposition as more 'absolute' compared to the pre-1919 paintings. Overall, I surmised that what Mondrian had explained in his 1920-1925 writings about the dialectics of oppositions and different kinds of relationships were in relation to what he had experimented in his 1919-1923 paintings.

In his 1926-1932 writings, Mondrian also talked about his theory of oppositions. Most importantly, in 1926 he wrote in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism about the importance of the duality or oppositions of the means of imaging. I found that Mondrian during 1926-1932, in addition to his third principle of Neo-Plasticism, repeated what he had stated in his pre-1926 essays about his theory of oppositions. In this period, he mainly discussed his theory of dual oppositions in relation to the social and cultural domain of life. In majority of the 1924-1931 paintings, especially in those stark diamond compositions (figures 5.3, 5.5, 5.19, and 5.21), the means of imaging, particularly the lines, were shown in a very absolute opposition. Due to the complete extension of the lines to the edges of these paintings, the dual opposition had been expressed as more concrete and dominant compared to the earlier 1919-1923 paintings. Moreover, in some of these paintings, due to the absence of the colors, the duality of

thick black lines had been depicted as very dominant and ostensive. I also realized that in majority of the 1924-1931 paintings, particularly the 1924-1925 ones (figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3), along with some 1928-1930 compositions (figures 5.9, 5.10, 5.12, 5.15, and 5.16), the duality between the colors and noncolors was represented as very absolute and concrete. Lastly, I deduced that in these post-1924 paintings the variations in the thickness and length of the lines resulted in a dynamic representation of the duality, or oppositions, among the lines. Overall, I inferred that Mondrian in his 1924-1931 paintings manifested a very absolute duality, or oppositions, between his lines and colors.

Through the analysis of the 1932-1944 compositions, I figured out that the duality, or opposition, in these paintings had been pluralized, more evenly, among the means of imaging. In the 1932-1938 paintings (figures 6.1 to 6.12), the duality had mainly been represented among the lines rather the colors. In these paintings, the relationships among the positions of the lines were multiplied through frequent crossing of the lines. In the repainted compositions (figures 6.13 to 6.20), the colors were also shown in a distinct duality. In these compositions, the unbounded dashes and stripes of colors were opposed to other colors which were delimited by the lines. In the New York compositions (see figures 6.21 to 6.25) the duality or oppositions among the means of imaging had been represented more diversely among the colored lines. Lastly, in his last two New York compositions *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.26) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (figure 6.27), I deduced that all means of imaging, regardless of their identity as lines or planes of color or noncolor, had been depicted in a very dynamic opposition.

Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings reiterated what he had explicated in his pre-1932 writings, as well as what he had mentioned in his third principle of Neo-Plasticism,

about his theory of oppositions or relationships. I discerned that Mondrian in his late Neo-Plastic writings, especially in his post-1938 ones, has also talked about his transformed aesthetic ideas, regarding his theory of dual oppositions. This was in line to what he had experimented in his 1932-1944 compositions. He stated that the particularity, or thingness, of lines, colors, and noncolors could be annihilated through the multiplicity in the opposition of the means of imaging. Similarly, in the case of his 1935-1944 paintings, I contend that it is not possible to recognize any elements such as surface (ground), lines, as well as the planes of color and noncolor due to the plurality of the lines. Overall, I surmised that after 1935, particularly in his post-1938 paintings and writings, Mondrian's ideas were transformed in respect to the role of his oppositions (particularly his lines). This is in comparison to his pre-1935 Neo-Plastic period. In this regard, in his late paintings and writings he considered a destructive role for the relationships between his lines and colors rather than a constructive one. On the whole, I found a close relation between what he had practiced in his 1935-1944 paintings and what he had mentioned in his writings, in similar period, about the destructive role of relationships, or oppositions, of his means of imaging in composition.

7.1.4 Equilibrium

Mondrian in majority of his writings talked about harmony or what he called 'equilibrium' and its expression in composition. Chronologically moving, in his 1917 essay, *The New Plastic in painting*, he stated that the equilibrium is attained through the 'equivalent relationship' among the positions of the lines at right angle. He further delineated that the equilibrium is expressed through a mutual interaction of the immutable relationships between lines in perpendicular positions and the mutable relationships between the dimensions and proportions of the planes. In contrast to what he had written in his 1917 essay, I found that in 1917 compositions, the equilibrium had

not been achieved through relationships among the positions of the lines. Above all, in these paintings the element of line was absent and, thereby, the relationships among the positions of lines in principal opposition (right angle) could not be established. That is to say, in 1917 compositions the equilibrium was not achieved and expressed through the method Mondrian had explained in his 1917 essay.

In his 1919-1920 essays, *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*, Mondrian reemphasized that the equilibrium is expressed through the perpetual interaction of invariant relationship among the position of the lines and variant relationships among the sizes of the planes. I deduced that what Mondrian wrote in his 1919-1920 essays were indeed the result of his experimentations with his 1918-1919 compositions (figures 4.6 to 4.12). In these paintings (figures 4.6, 4.9, and 4.10), the lines were used for the first time to delimit the planes and to divide the composition to unequal planes. As a result of the absolute and exact opposition of the lines, I perceived a more stable and concrete expression of the equilibrium in these paintings. However, I noted that the equilibrium in some cases could not be attained as exact and concrete due to the light hue of the greyish lines. Moreover, in some of his paintings, such as his first two diamond paintings (figures 4.7 & 4.8) and two Checkerboards (see figures 4.11 & 4.12), the equilibrium had been attained differently. Indeed, in these paintings the equilibrium had been achieved through the plurality of the lines as well as colors. Overall, I surmised that only in some instances Mondrian's experimentations to express the equilibrium in his 1918-1919 compositions were in agreement to what he had postulated in his 1919-1920 essays about the expression of equilibrium.

Mondrian in many instances in his 1920-1925 writings affirmed what he had stated in his 1917-1920 essays, regarding the expression of the equilibrium. In this period, he discussed the possibilities of the implications of the equilibrium into other arts and life.

In this period, he envisaged the primary relationships among the perpendicular positions of the lines as 'absolute' expression of the equilibrium. Furthermore, he said that the relationships among the positions of lines at right angle are 'self-neutralizing' and, thereby, the equilibrium is the outcome of a resolution of duality between the vertical and horizontal lines. He defined the relationship between the size and proportion of the planes as a 'relative' expression in the composition. He further delineated that in Neo-Plastic painting a universal equilibrium could be expressed through the 'equilibrated' or 'equivalent' state between the absolute and relative expressions. I realized that Mondrian writings about the expression of the equilibrium in this period were his refined ideas which later, in 1926, appeared in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

Similar to what Mondrian had explained in his 1920-1925 writings about the expression of the equilibrium, the equilibrium in all 1919-1923 compositions was achieved through the relationships among the lines at right angle. We deduced that due to the abolition of the regularity of lines as well as increase in the width of the lines in these paintings, the relationship among the positions of the lines in principal opposition had been represented as very concrete and dominant compared to the 1918-1919 paintings. Furthermore, the colors and noncolors had completely been delimited and, thereby, the mutable relationship between the dimensions of color and noncolor planes had been established as more concrete compared to the 1917-1919 paintings. In general, I found a close relation between what Mondrian had experimented to express the equilibrium in his 1919-1923 paintings and his explanation of the expression of the equilibrium in his 1920-1925 writings.

In his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism in 1926, Mondrian wrote about his aesthetic conditions for the attainment and expression of the equilibrium. This was an

upshot of what he had experimented in his 1919-1923 paintings as well as what he had theorized in his 1917-1925 writings. In his fourth and fifth principles he stated that equilibrium is achieved through the immutable relationships among the positions of the lines at right angle as well as mutable relationships among the proportion and, thereby, dimensions of the planes. In his fourth principle he also delineated the equilibrium expressed through the perpendicular opposition of the lines. Looking at the 1924-1931 paintings, I contend that the equilibrium in these paintings had been expressed and attained similar to what Mondrian had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings as well as what he had crystalized in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. Due to the complete extension of lines to the edges of canvas as well as the thick width of the lines, in the 1924-1931 paintings the relationships among the positions of the lines at right angle are established as more concrete and exact compared to the pre-1924 paintings. Overall, I surmised that during 1924-1931 Mondrian's artistic vision in regard to his concept equilibrium remained constant in relation to what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings and what he had mentioned as fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

Other than his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism, Mondrian in his 1926-1932 writings also discussed his key concept of 'equilibrium' and its expression in his Neo-Plastic art. In the case of his 1926-1932 writings, I found that his particular emphasis is, more than before, on the distinction between what he called a 'universal equilibrium' as a 'new harmony' in Neo-Plastic painting and an 'individual equilibrium' that he considered as 'old harmony' in the representational painting. He further described that the invariant relationships among the positions of the lines in perpendicular opposition stabilizes the expression of the equilibrium. However, Mondrian in this period no longer talked about equilibrium as a static balance, or what he had called a 'repose' or rest. In his 1926-1932 writings, he stressed that the stability, or immutability, of the expression

of the relationships between the vertical and horizontal lines is relativized and, thereby, dynamized through the variant relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. Overall, I surmised that Mondrian in this period (1924-1932) in both his paintings and writings emphasized that the equilibrium should be expressed as more dynamic.

However, I observed that in the 1932-1944 compositions, the equilibrium had not been attained and expressed based on what Mondrian had demonstrated in his 1919-1931 paintings and writings and what he had written in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. After analyzing these late Neo-Plastic paintings, we deduced that in majority of these compositions, the relationships among the positions of the lines as well as the relationships among the dimensions of planes could not be established as distinct and detectable as they did in the pre-1932 paintings. Due to the plurality of the lines and the existence of an intense optical spots in the intersection of the lines, the equilibrium was not achieved through the mutual interaction between two kinds of relationships: immutable and mutable. I found that due to the glittering white spots in the intersection of lines, lines seemed to be constantly broken into long and short pieces. As a result, the equilibrium could no longer be expressed based on what Mondrian had previously theorized in his 1917-1931 writings and the fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism. Instead, I contend that the equilibrium in these compositions is expressed through a dynamic rhythm of freed lines, colors, and noncolors. The best example of such vital expression of the equilibrium as rhythm is demonstrated in the post-1935 compositions, particularly, the repainted (see figures 6.13 to 6.20) and New York ones (figures 6.21 to 6.27).

Interestingly, I found that Mondrian in parallel to his new experimentations with his 1932-1944 paintings to express a vivid expression of the equilibrium, in his 1932-1944

writings elaborated on his new standpoint toward his concept of equilibrium. In this regard, he introduced his new concept of 'dynamic equilibrium.' In his texts of this period, particularly his 1929-1931 essays, he tried to propagate the idea that a static equilibrium should be transformed into a 'dynamic equilibrium' through the multiplicity of the relationships among the freed, neutral, and self-reliant means of imaging. Mondrian in his writing of this period, frequently stressed that the particularity of the means of imaging (rectangular and geometric form of planes) should be abolished through the plurality of the relationships among the lines at right angle. He considered the self-existent character of the lines, colors, and noncolors a prerequisite to express a dynamic equilibrium. Similarly, I understood that equilibrium in majority of 1932-1944 compositions is expressed through a vivid rhythm of such freed, and independent lines, colors, and noncolors. Overall, I found that what Mondrian had experimented with in his 1932-1944 paintings to express a dynamic equilibrium was no longer in agreement to what he had manifested in his pre-1932 paintings and writings in regard to his concept of equilibrium. Overall, I found a noticeable aesthetic shift in Mondrian's artistic ideas in respect to the expression of the equilibrium during 1932-1944, compared to what he had theorized in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

7.1.5 Rhythm, symmetry, and repetition

Mondrian in his 1917-1925 writings also discussed rhythm. In his 1917 essay he defined the rhythm differently from rhythm in the representational painting. He stated that the rhythm in the representational painting is achieved through traditional rules of harmony such as repetition and symmetry whereas the rhythm in Neo-Plastic painting is achieved through the mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. In fact, I understood that in Neo-Plastic theory the relative relationship between the dimension and proportion of color and noncolor planes is a substitute for the conventional rules of harmony such as symmetry and repetition. In 1917 essay,

rhythm was introduced as a relative expression since it is the outcome of the mutable, variant, relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes. When I looked at the 1917 compositions (figures 4.1 to 4.5), however I understood that rhythm was not the outcome of the relationships among the dimensions of the planes. In absence of the lines, the relationships between the size and proportion of the planes could not be established. Instead, we asserted that the rhythm was, contrary to what Mondrian had explained in his 1917 essay, created through repetition and symmetry. Overall, I interestingly found that in 1917 Mondrian's method to express the rhythm was not in agreement to what he had written in his 1917 essay.

In his 1919-1920 essays *Dialogue on the New Plastic* and *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*, he had further distinguished 'natural rhythm' – used in representational painting – from a new rhythm he called 'inward rhythm.' He said that such inward rhythm was the outcome of the variant relationships among the dimensions of the planes. When we further interpreted Mondrian's writings, we understood that rhythm indeed depends on the relationships among the positions of the lines at right angle. Because, without the opposition of the lines, there is no possibility to establish a relationship between the dimension and proportion of the planes. Therefore, I deduced that the rhythm in early Neo-Plastic paintings was the offspring of the equilibrium. In his 1919-1920 essays, he further delineated that rhythm should be articulated as live and dynamic expression through the multiplicity of the means of imaging and their relationships. In line with what he had postulated in his 1919-1920 essays, I also found that in majority of the 1918-1919 paintings the rhythm had been expressed through the plurality of the lines and colors. In most of his paintings, particularly the first two diamond compositions (figures 4.7 & 4.8) and the two checkerboards (figures 4.11 & 4.12), the rhythm was represented through the multiplicity and a regular pattern of the lines. I also contend that in some of these 1918-1919 paintings, contrary to what

Mondrian had stated in his 1919-1920 essays, the rhythm had been expressed through the repetition and symmetry of his lines and colors. Overall, I deduced that only in some of the 1918-1919 compositions, the rhythm had been articulated in the way he had explicated in his 1919-1920 essays.

Mondrian throughout his 1920-1925 writings had mostly talked about the possibilities of the implications of his inward rhythm in other arts, particularly music as well as life. When I looked at his 1919-1923 paintings, I saw that the lines had sliced the canvas asymmetrically into planes with various dimensions. Indeed, Mondrian in these paintings ceased to slice his compositions by regular grid lines. As a result, I found that in these paintings more dynamic and varied relationships among the dimensions of the planes had been established. That is to say, in the 1919-1923 paintings the rhythm, similar to what Mondrian had stated in his writings, had been expressed through mutable relationships among the dimension of the planes. However, I also contend that in most of the 1920-1922 compositions the relationships among the dimensions of the planes are not established evenly between the peripheral and central enclosed planes. It is because the lines in the periphery of these paintings were not completely extended to the edges of the canvas (see figures 4.16 to 4.22). Nevertheless, I surmised that the rhythm in most of the 1919-1923 paintings is expressed similar to the method Mondrian had theorized since 1917.

Mondrian in 1926 in his fifth and sixth principles of Neo-Plasticism recapitulated what he had explained in his 1917-1925 writings about his concept of rhythm. Similar to what he had explicated in his pre-1926 essays, in the fifth principle he said that the rhythm as a live and dynamic expression is attained through the changeable relationships among the proportions of the planes. In the sixth principle he also shortly stressed that the repetition and symmetry should be excluded in Neo-Plastic painting.

When I looked at the 1924-1931 compositions, I argued that the rhythm in these compositions, particularly the 1929-1931 paintings, was not merely expressed through the mutable relationship among the proportion of the planes. Instead, I found that the rhythm in most instances had been expressed through the variation in the thicknesses and lengths of the lines rather than the variations in the dimensions of the planes. I argued that due to the reduction in the quantity of the lines and colors, the relationships between the dimension and proportion of planes had not been represented as dominant as the earlier 1919-1923 compositions. Except in the 1924-1925 compositions (figures 5.1 & 5.2), in the rest of 1925-1931 paintings I saw that Mondrian intersected the lines in a way that they had not created enclosed planes as much as possible. Contrary to the 1919-1923 compositions, I understood that the lines in the 1924-1931 compositions, especially in those 1929-1931 paintings, were composed in a way that planes had partly lost their geometric identity and, thereby, the immutable relationships among the dimensions of the planes could not be established as very dominant. Overall, I asserted that Mondrian in some of his 1924-1931 paintings used methods other than what he had theorized in his fifth principle to express the rhythm. Nevertheless, I argued that during 1924-1931 Mondrian had completely adhered to what he had mentioned in his six principle of Neo-Plasticism, regarding the exclusion of the repetition and symmetry for expressing the rhythm and harmony.

Disregarding his fifth and sixth principles, during 1926-1932 Mondrian in many instances talked about the rhythm. In some cases, he reiterated what he had postulated in his 1917-1925 writings about the expression of the rhythm. Interestingly, and concurrent with what he was experimenting in his 1924-1931 paintings with the thickness and length of his lines to express a freer and more dynamic rhythm, in his 1929-1931 essays he also emphasized that the rhythm should be expressed as 'free' as possible to the particularity of the lines and planes (particularly the rectangular shape of

the planes). To put it differently, he tried to propagate the notion that rhythm in the composition should be expressed independent from the pictorial entity of the means of imaging. In his 1926-1932 writings, Mondrian further delineated that the relationships among the positions of the lines is also essential for creating the rhythm. Similarly, I saw that in a majority of his 1924-1931 compositions, the rhythm is expressed mainly through the variations of thicknesses and lengths of the lines rather than a mutable relationships among the sizes of the planes. Overall, I found that during 1929-1931, Mondrian's artistic ideas in regards to the expression of the rhythm had slightly developed compared to what he had mentioned in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism and what he had demonstrated in his 1919-1923 paintings.

However, I identified more discrepancies between what Mondrian had written in his pre-1932 writings – as it was also demonstrated in his pre-1932 paintings – in regard to the characteristic of his rhythm and the way the rhythm had been expressed in the 1932-1944 paintings. I asserted that in majority of these late Neo-Plastic compositions the rhythm had not been created through the mutable relationships between the dimension and proportion of the planes. Due to the plurality of the lines and colors, the planes were no longer detectable as concrete rectangles with a definite size and proportion. I inferred that in majority of the 1932-1944 paintings, particularly the 1935-1944 ones, the rhythm was created through the plurality of the relationships between the positions of the freed lines and colors as well as the intervals among the lines. I found the best manifestation of such free rhythm in the repainted (figure 6.13 to 6.20) and New York compositions (figures 6.21 to 6.27). Overall, I surmised that in majority of the 1932-1944 paintings, the rhythm was no longer expressed in the way Mondrian had explained in his pre-1932 writings, particularly what he had written in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism. Indeed, I found that during 1932-1944, Mondrian's ideas in respect to the expression of

the rhythm is significantly transformed compared to what he had mentioned in his fourth and fifth principles of Neo-Plasticism.

Besides, I contend that contrary to what Mondrian had mentioned in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism, in majority of the 1932-1944 paintings the means of imaging were repeated. The lines in majority of the repainted compositions such as figures 6.13, 6.14, and 6.19, particularly in New York compositions such as figures 6.22, 6.23, and 6.24, were repeated. Sometimes they were in symmetry. Nevertheless, I deduced that the symmetry of the lines and colors is abolished due to the plurality of the relationships among the positions of the lines. Indeed, I inferred that Mondrian in his 1932-1944 paintings repeated his similar-sized lines to destruct the pictorial entity of his lines, as he had also explained in his writings in this period.

In many instances in his 1932-1944 writings, Mondrian also discussed rhythm. Interestingly, I understood that in line with his new experimentations in his 1932-1944 paintings to express a vivid rhythm, he had introduced the rhythm as 'dynamic equilibrium.' He postulated that such dynamic rhythm could only be expressed between the universal and freed means of imaging that are depicted as self-existent entities. Mondrian in his 1932-1944 writings also pointed to a new method, different from what he had theorized in his fifth principle of Neo-Plasticism, to express the rhythm. He stated that the rhythm could not only be expressed through the relationships among lines, colors, and noncolors but also through the relationships among the spacing of the lines. Similarly, I deduced that the rhythm in majority of his 1932-1944 compositions such as figures 6.4, 6.6., 6.7, 6.10, 6.11, 6.14, 6.16, 6.17, 6.21, and 6.23 was created through variable relationships between lines and their intervals. As such, I found a close relation between what Mondrian had experimented in his 1935-1944 paintings to

express the rhythm and what he had explained in his 1938-1944 writings about the expression of a dynamic rhythm among the self-reliant means of imaging.

We also found out that Mondrian in a few instances in his 1932-1944 writings had affirmed what he had said in his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism, regarding the exclusion of the repetition and symmetry in Neo-Plastic painting. He stated that symmetry in the composition should be annihilated through the repetition of variant relationships among the dimensions of the planes. In relation to what he had experimented with in his 1932-1944 paintings, he said that the symmetry could be annihilated through repetition, or multiplicity, of similar lines and colors. In his post-1932 writings, Mondrian also rationalized the usage of the repetition and plurality of the lines and colors as a prerequisite to destruct the thingness and pictorial entity of his means of imaging. Similarly, I saw that in majority of his 1932-1944 paintings he had repeated his lines to abolish the particularity of his planes and lines and express a pure and dynamic rhythm and equilibrium between self-existent lines, colors, and noncolors. Overall, I surmised that during 1932-1944 Mondrian had not really deviated from the premises of his sixth principle of Neo-Plasticism.

7.2 The relation between Mondrian's Neo-Plastic paintings and writings

At the end of this thesis, I can explain through a Neo-Plastic language the minor and major transformations of Mondrian's artistic ideas in regard to his core Neo-Plastic concepts and theories. I used Mondrian's theoretical writings and paintings as an integral body of his Neo-Plastic oeuvre to analyze the evolution of his artistic vision in his key Neo-Plastic concepts in three different periods of Neo-Plasticism. Throughout the analysis of his pre-1926 writings during De Stijl period and paintings, I understood about the emergence of Mondrian's ideas in regard to the Neo-Plastic concepts that he later, in 1926, recapped as six principles of Neo-Plasticism. During the analysis of his

1924-1931 paintings and 1926-1932 writings, I found out about the maturation and development of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in respect to what he had mentioned in his 1926 principles of Neo-Plasticism. Lastly, throughout the examination of 1932-1944 paintings and writings, I identified and explained the transformation of Mondrian's aesthetic ideas in regard to his Neo-Plastic concepts and principles. I also found that during 1935-1944, Mondrian had departed from what he had written as his core theory of Neo-Plasticism. In the end, I have a roadmap of Mondrian's development of his artistic ideas on his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories in different Neo-Plastic periods.

In many instances, except his early 1917-1920 paintings and writings, I saw that Mondrian in his writings in each period had pointed to his developed aesthetic ideas in regard to his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories. Although Mondrian never mentioned in his writings that he had deviated, particularly during 1932-1944, from his own principles of Neo-Plasticism, I identified those departures and development of Mondrian's ideas in respect to his core Neo-Plastic theories through examining his paintings and writings. Generally, I found interesting relations between Mondrian's paintings and writings. Throughout his early Neo-Plastic career (1917-1920), contrary to the acknowledging fact that his writings came after the creation of his paintings, I discerned that such relation was reverse. In a way, in many instances what he had mentioned in his 1917-1920 essays about his formal theory of Neo-Plasticism had not yet been fully implemented in his 1917-1919 paintings. I rationalized such reverse relation between early Neo-Plastic paintings and writings with two reasons. Firstly, because throughout 1917-1920 Mondrian had dedicated most of his time to write his long theoretical essays which were the gist of his earlier 1914-1919 (transitional years) experimentations on his canvases. As a result, during 1917-1919 he could not fully try all possibilities, of his own new theories on his compositions. The evidences for such an argument are the various methods Mondrian used in this period to express a pure,

universal, expression of harmony and rhythm. It was only after 1920 that he found his most accurate method to express harmony (equilibrium) and rhythm. During 1917-1920, I found two subtle phases of development in Mondrian's aesthetic vision in his writings and paintings. During 1917-1918, most importantly in his long essay *The New Plastic in Painting*, he introduced and defined a raw state of his theory of Neo-Plasticism within a philosophical and theological perspective. However, in 1919-1920 essays, particularly in the long essay *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*, I found Mondrian's more matured and refined theoretical ideas, mostly in relation to his paintings. As a result, I identified a closer relation between 1918-1919 paintings and 1919-1920 writings. Subsequently, I found an almost real-time relation between his 1919-1923 paintings and his 1920-1925 writings. I saw that what he had painted in his 1919-1923 paintings was in agreement to what he had explained in his 1920-1925 essays about his formal concepts and theories. From late 1921 to 1923, I also identified some subtle changes in Mondrian's artistic practice when the quantity of the elements of paintings, or means of imaging, had been noticeably reduced and the color planes were shifted to the periphery of his compositions. I found closer relation between the characteristics of 1921-1923 paintings and what Mondrian had explained in his 1920-1925 writings about his matured Neo-Plastic theories. Furthermore, I marked another phase of transformation in Mondrian's late 1920's writings and paintings. In the late 1920's, I identified Mondrian's transformed aesthetic ideas in regard to his means of imaging and the expression of equilibrium and rhythm which demonstration I also found, although not obviously, in the 1926-1931 compositions. I surmised that Mondrian's artistic ideas were more palpable in his 1929-1932 writings rather his 1924-1931 paintings. Although I identified some subtle changes in the use of lines and colors in the 1926-1931 paintings, I found that Mondrian had started to write about his new aesthetic ideas only after 1929 and around three years after experimenting them on his canvases.

During 1932-1944, Mondrian, only after 1936, and in most cases after 1938, had started to talk about his transformed ideas in regard to the concepts and theories that he had experimented with in his canvases as early as 1932.

Overall, I found three major turning points in the change of Mondrian's artistic ideas in regard to his Neo-Plastic concepts and theories, compared to what he had postulated in his 1926 six principles of Neo-Plasticism. First turning point, although not as a very monumental change, was during 1919-1920, when Mondrian's ideas in regard to his means of imaging, mainly in respect to the triad of noncolors, developed compared to his earlier 1917-1918 period. Second instance was during 1929-1931 when Mondrian started to write about the new roles and identity of his means of imaging as well as new conditions for expressing the rhythm. The third major turning point was indeed during 1938-1943, when I found Mondrian's very radical and transformed ideas in respect to the new characteristics and the role of his means of imaging, expression of balance between form and space, as well as the expression of equilibrium and rhythm. Therefore, in the case of his 1932-1944 paintings and writings, I found that Mondrian had started to write about his transformed ideas in relation to his core Neo-Plastic concepts and theories around 4-6 years after his novel experimentations, particularly the use of double lines on his post-1932 compositions.

At the end, I surmise that Mondrian's theoretical writings, although hard to fathom and perplexing in structure, helped me better interpret steady development of Mondrian's ideas in regard to each of his concepts in different periods of his Neo-Plastic career. Within this thesis, it was demonstrated that examining his Neo-Plastic paintings and writings through a context-independent approach in different periods was an effective method to understand the minor and major changes in Mondrian's artistic ideas in regard to his key Neo-Plastic concepts and principles. Indeed, this thesis tried to

compliment what was absent in the previous contributing works of scholars, namely Blotkamp, Champa, Milner, Seuphor, Bois, Schapiro, Carmean, Jaffé, and Fauchereau. As such, disregarding what *caused* Mondrian to use his means of imaging differently or to express the equilibrium and rhythm differently in each period of his Neo-Plastic career, now we can explain about the development of Mondrian's ideas in relation to each of his formal concepts and theories, based on what he had experimented with in his paintings and what he had explicated in his writings. To put it differently, in this thesis, instead of explaining the development of Mondrian's artistic vision through the examination of his external stimulus (Theosophy, Hegel, Platonism, De Stijl, and so on), I directly looked at what he had painted and written as a result of those external influences.

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