

Mimesis, Scandal, and the End of History in Mondrian's Aesthetics

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The end of history and the end of art are one and the same in Mondrian's aesthetics: the harmonious balance of opposites in a differentiated, hierarchical whole. In painting, this "dynamic equilibrium" (Mondrian, 1945, p. 25) of opposing elements is expressed by the right angle; in history, by human community in which all conflicts between self and other, heart and mind, particular and universal disappear. In both art and history, unity and repose are the consequence of the violent eradication of scandal embodied in all traditional art and most modern art. Art and history can only express the wholeness that is their end by excluding the mimetic relations, which, because they are inextricably bound up with desire, create disequilibrium, undifferentiation, and tragic disorder. Both De Stijl and the human community it is supposed to engender originate in the sacrifice of a victim. The victim is art itself. Pepper's theory of organicism fails adequately to explain the transition from conflict to integration because it does not take account of the role of violence, especially violent exclusion, in the constitution of organic wholes.

The mature paintings of the De Stijl artist Piet Mondrian are apocalyptic: they are images of the end—the end of art and the end of history. In Mondrian's aesthetics, the end of art and the end of history are one and the same: the harmonious balance of opposites in a differentiated, hierarchical whole. In painting, this "dynamic equilibrium" (Mondrian, 1945, p. 25) of opposing elements is expressed by the right angle; in history, by human community in which all conflicts between self and other, particular and universal, heart and mind disappear. But in both cases—in art and history—unity and repose are the consequence of something violent: what Mondrian calls "*the abolition of all particular form*" (p. 14). Art and history, he believes, can only express the wholeness that is their end by eradicating mimetic relations, which, because they are inextricably bound up with desire, create disequilibrium, undifferentiation, and tragic disorder. This means that history's immanent, organic end requires the violent exclusion of all figurative modes of visual representation together with the formist, mechanistic, and contextualist assumptions from which these ways of seeing derive. Both De Stijl—the style to end all styles—and the human community it is supposed to engender originate in the sacrifice of a victim. The victim, as we shall see, is art itself.

We can best understand this, I think, if we examine one of Mondrian's mature paintings, first as it appears to us visually and then in the light of what Mondrian himself says about art. "Composition with Blue and Red" (Figure

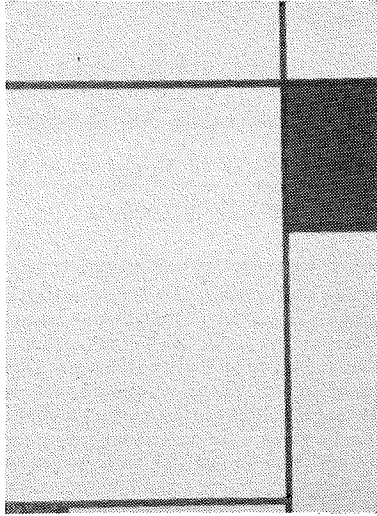


Figure 1: Mondrian, "Composition with Blue and Red"; Collection: Haakon Onstad, Villars-sur-Ollon, Switzerland

1), painted in 1927, is characterized above all else by extreme clarity and simplicity—also by what is *not* there. It presents itself to us as a pattern of straight lines. The lines intersect to form a number of rectangles of varying size and shape. Some are vertical, some horizontal, one nearly square. The lines forming these rectangles are of differing width and length. They share two important qualities: tension and tautness on the one hand, and continuous, perhaps infinite extension beyond the boundaries of the picture plane on the other. All angles in the composition are right angles: right angles and empty, open areas dominate the painting. The rectangles themselves vary in intensity. Three are white, two colored, and two (lower center and right side) gray. The areas of primary color are for the most part smaller than the white and gray areas. Color, in fact, is altogether subordinate to line and form. There is a hierarchy of *dimension* in the painting (the colored areas are small) as well as one of *position* (color has been pushed away from the painting's center onto the margins). Overall, the composition gives the impression of extreme flatness: colors that would establish or suggest depth have either been left out or (for example, red, which typically emerges from the canvas, and blue, which characteristically recedes into depth) are isolated and restrained by the grid program. The formal order and balance of the painting suggest stability, stasis, permanence, strength.

What is missing in this composition? According to traditional canons of art, nearly everything: all detail, for example; naturalistic forms; any narrative or apparent symbolic content; particularizing textures; a subject in the traditional

sense. Mondrian is at pains to preserve the integrity of the flat two-dimensional picture plane. He has also rigorously separated the formal elements of the painting, established their independence, and balanced them against each other: there is no blurring of forms in the picture, no interpenetration or fusion of forms or pictorial elements. They are strictly differentiated, with no blending or metamorphosis of one into another.

The rigor and severity of this image become even more evident if we briefly examine a representative sequence of Mondrian's earlier paintings (Figures 2-6). We then see at once that the mature painting came into existence by a deliberate and prolonged intellectual *askesis*, a stringent leaving-out of phenomenal reality as Mondrian himself painted it. The striking presence of human artifacts embraced by natural forms in "Drydock at Durgerdam" (c. 1898-99, Figure 2), for example, renders dramatic the lack of subject and space in "Composition with Blue and Red." The later work has eliminated *things* (the fishing boat and surrounding buildings, for instance) and all reference to human activity. Abstract geometry has replaced the haphazard clutter of objects on the dock, the masts, the plank in the left foreground, and the ladder placed unpredictably against the boat on the right. A smooth, lifeless surface has been substituted for brushstroke and paint; flat areas of primary color for the weathered, rustic textures of the buildings and boats and for the vibrancy and luster of the water on the left. In the mature painting there is no hint at all of nature—present, for example, in the shapes and colors of the flat, relatively abstract "Landscape near the Kalfje Cafe" (c. 1900-02, Figure 3), in the

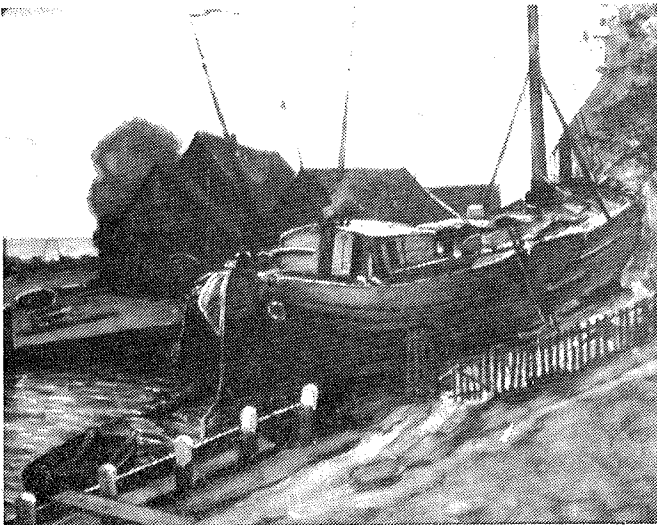


Figure 2: Mondrian, "Drydock at Durgerdam"; Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Bruce B. Dayton, Minneapolis



Figure 3: Mondrian, "Landscape near the Kalfje Cafe"; Collection: Peter Gimpel, London

curvilinear forms of "Red Tree" (1908, Figure 4), and in the greens and browns of the geometric "Blue Facade (Composition 9)" (1913-14, Figure 5). No hint, either, of any reference to nature even in the title of the work (as, for example, in Mondrian's schematic and distant "Pier and Ocean" of 1914) or any nature symbolism, no matter how abstract (for instance, the plus-minus motif in "Composition with Line [Pier and Ocean]" of 1917, suggestive of the back-and-forth, up-and-down motion of waves). Absent, finally, from "Composition with Blue and Red" are the indeterminate, hesitant lines that lead a ghostly, interrupted existence in "Composition VII" (1913, Figure 6) and its blurred, overlapping areas of color.

The problem, then, is to account for what is present in Mondrian's painting in terms of what has been excluded. Once we have discovered that, we will have determined what the picture is about and we can begin to read it. What has been deliberately eliminated is the world itself. What is left? According to Mondrian, an image, contemplative and austere, of an organic totality—a system such that, in Pepper's words, "every element within it implies every other," or, alternatively, one in which "an alteration or removal of any element would alter every other element or even destroy the whole system" (1942, p. 300).

Art realizes itself, Mondrian believes, when it creates images of the whole—the permanent, unchanging ground of nature and history. Thus he writes that the "task of art" is to "express a clear vision of reality" (Brown, 1968, p. 207). He returns to this point, emphatically, again and again, with what seems to be

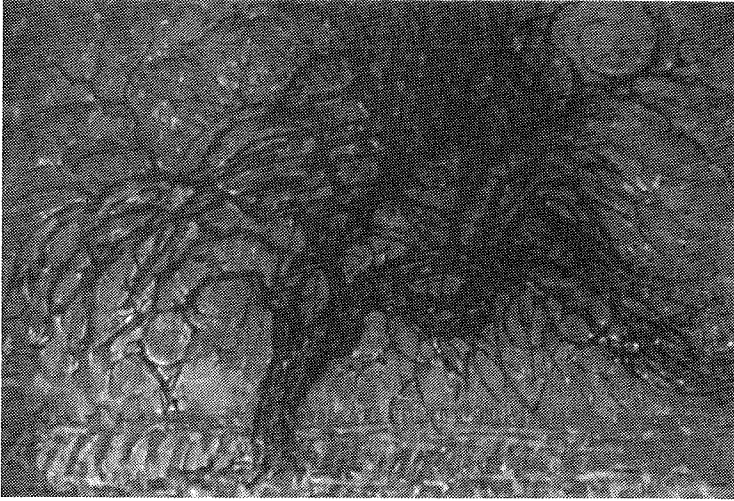


Figure 4: Mondrian, "Red Tree"; Collection: Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

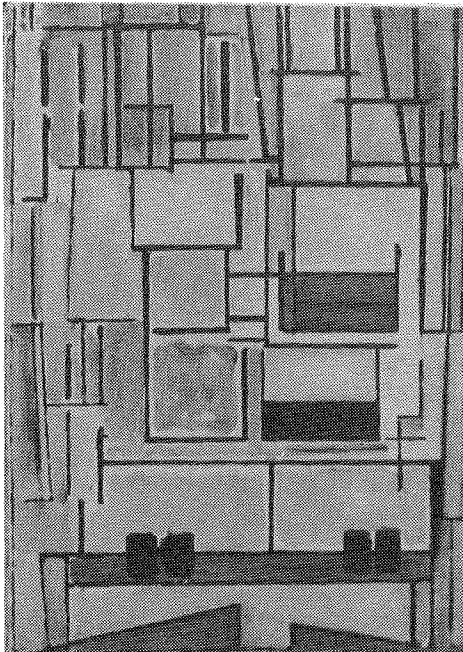


Figure 5: Mondrian, "Blue Facade [Composition 9]"; Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York City

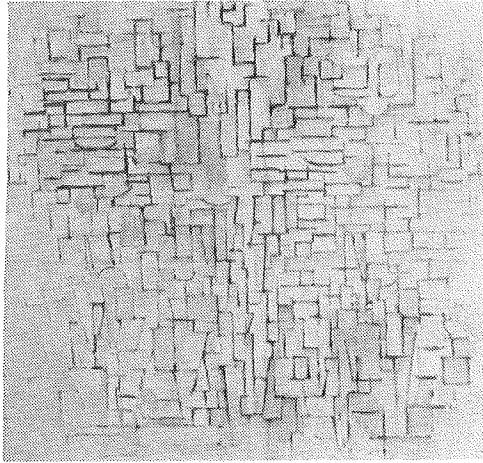


Figure 6: Mondrian, "Composition VII"; Collection: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City

obsessive frequency. It has an incantatory presence in his writings. He insists, for instance, that art aims at the expression of "pure" or "intrinsic" reality (Mondrian, 1945, pp. 10, 25). Art, he argues, should not be guided by "intuitions relating to our life in time" but by "those intuitions relating to true reality" (p. 15). Its goal cannot be the imitation of "*the appearance of reality such as we see it, nor . . . the life which we live,*" but the description of "*true reality and true life*" (p. 60). This means that art can never simply be a representation of things or people: it is "always" an intuitive "establishment of beauty, that is of intrinsic reality" (p. 25).

"Pure" or "intrinsic" reality is, in Mondrian's organicist conception of the world, a hierarchical, differentiated, integrated totality hidden beneath the appearances. Its only proper expression in art is a "dynamic equilibrium" (p. 25) of opposing elements, a representation of the universal harmony in which the repose, unity, and stable permanence of the world are grounded:

The plastic expression of true reality is attained through dynamic movement in equilibrium. Plastic art affirms that equilibrium can only be established through the balance of unequal but equivalent oppositions. The clarification of equilibrium through plastic art is of great importance for humanity. It reveals that although human life in time is doomed to disequilibrium, notwithstanding this, it is based on equilibrium. It demonstrates that equilibrium can become more and more living in us. (p. 15)

Thus, what Mondrian calls "real life" is subsurface, nonempirical, noumenal; it is the "*mutual interaction of two oppositions*" of identical "*value*" but of differing "*aspect and nature.*" The "plastic expression" of life is "universal beauty" (p. 53). Universal beauty, embodied in the abstract work of art,

reveals the logos, gathers and attunes human beings to it. Non-figurative art, Mondrian writes, allows us to see the unchanging ground of existence, its guarantor and protector, the cosmic center around which we meet and are sheltered from disorder and what is merely banal in human experience:

We can see now that something else is real besides the bustle of human pettiness We see a whole . . . we contemplate the unchangeable My view is that contemplation, plastic vision, has great importance for man. The closer contemplation brings us to a conscious vision of the unchangeable and the universal, the more the changeable, the individual, and human pettiness in us and around us, will seem futile to us. (Brown, 1968, pp. 207-208)

The primary characteristic of such an image of pure, harmonious relations is rhythm. What is "identical" in all art, according to Mondrian, is "vitality" or "pure life," and the vitality of the work of art and the life of the world are the same: "dynamic continuous movement in equilibrium." In art, dynamic equilibrium manifests itself through a "rhythm of forms, lines, and colors"—a dance of purely formal elements, but also a proleptic image of accord and harmony that men and women can, Mondrian believes, be moved to emulate. In this sense, the work of art is the fire that draws human beings together, around which they meet for warmth, light, and nourishment. Mondrian describes rhythm as a deliverance from disequilibrium and conflict to the integrated wholeness of community:

Far from ignoring our individual nature, far from losing the "human note" in the work of art, pure plastic art is the union of the individual with the universal. For liberated rhythm is composed of these two aspects of life in equivalence. Hence art has to attain an exact equilibrium through the creation of pure plastic means composed in absolute oppositions. (Mondrian, 1945, p. 31)

What impedes rhythm is what Mondrian calls "*the oppression of the past*" (p. 41):

In all ages, oppression destroyed culture and life—at least for a time. At any time, oppression robs us of the individual and common freedom necessary to cultural construction.

Freedom constitutes our personal well-being as well as the well-being of the whole of society: it constitutes life. Oppression retards human progress: the constant movement towards the better, the deeper, the more intense—toward the balance of destruction and construction. (p. 38)

More specifically, all mimetic tendencies in art oppress us; they are what must be cast out, annihilated; their exclusion is the very precondition of the communal dance Mondrian writes about. The figurative tradition in art, originating in imitative impulses and actively stimulating them, is the *scandal* (Girard, 1982, p. 190) in the etymological sense of the word (from the Greek word *skadzein*, meaning "to limp," and *skandalon*, the stumbling block or that

which repels and attracts at the same time)—in other words, the obstacle that makes us stumble or limp, that oppresses us by impeding rhythm and the dance of human community. *Scandal* in this sense is one with caprice, disorder, and unfreedom. Its origin is the impulse toward imitation, which has been expressed concretely in figurative works of art. “Objectively,” Mondrian (1945) writes, “all particularities of forms and colors oppress pure rhythm” (p. 44). The scandal of mimetic art and the conflictual relations it promotes is associated in Mondrian’s texts with darkness and blindness, just as community and abstract art are linked with vision as well as with dance:

In general, all particularities of the past are as oppressive as darkness. The past has a tyrannic influence which is difficult to escape. . . . Fortunately, we can also enjoy modern construction, marvels of science, technique of all kinds, as well as modern art. We can enjoy real jazz and its dance; we see the electric lights of luxury and utility; the window displays. (p. 41)

Figurative art, with its oppressive emphasis on desire and on the evanescent, illusory surface of existence “shows only veiled relations”; but universal reality and the art that expresses it are “bound to be clear” (p. 60). And “we all pay homage to clarity,” Mondrian concludes (p. 58). The way of the modern artist leads ineluctably toward a “search for the equivalence of life’s unequal oppositions” (p. 15) and a vision of the integrated, communal totality from which all scandal has been removed.

The primary consequence of the scandal of mimetic relations is tragic disorder. They are, Mondrian argues, inherently conflictual, always and everywhere destructive of order, stability, and wholeness in human communities and in art. For Mondrian, figurative re-presentations of events, things, people, of the successive appearances of nature and history are a “subjective,” blinded mode of seeing that brings tragic suffering by promoting illusion and conflict:

Reality only appears to us tragical because of the disequilibrium and confusion of its appearances. It is our subjective vision and determined position which makes [sic] us suffer. Although tragical manifestations and feelings exist only in time, for us human beings, time is reality. Our subjective vision and experience make it impossible to be happy. (1945, p. 15)

All traditional art and most modern art as well—whether based on a mechanistic criterion of beauty (the aesthetic work should provide *pleasure*), a formist standard of excellence (it should represent a *norm*), or contextualist assumptions (it ought to preserve the vividness and singularity of the concrete *event* or *situation*)—are an *obstacle* to history’s self-realization and the attainment of art’s regulating end. Even surrealism, for example, despite its intention of escaping from the given, is such an obstacle: essentially imitative, it cannot show us how to transcend the savagery and disorder around and within us. Thus, Mondrian argues, surrealism is only one more version of

individualism—which he repeatedly associates with blind, imitative, conflictive desire, with tragic isolation and contradiction:

It must be obvious that if one evokes in the spectator the sensation of, say, the sunlight or moonlight, of joy or sadness, or any other determinate sensation, one has not succeeded in establishing universal beauty, one is not purely abstract.

As for surrealism, we must recognize that it deepens feeling and thought, but since this deepening is limited by individualism it cannot reach the foundation, the universal. So long as it remains in the realm of dreams, which are only a rearrangement of the events of life, it cannot touch true reality . . . Even the intention of freeing life from its conventions and from everything which is harmful to the true life can be found in surrealist literature. Non-figurative art is fully in agreement with this intention but it achieves its purpose; it frees its plastic means and its art from all particularity. (1945, p. 59)

Mondrian never tires of saying that we have, most of us, been deceived by illusory appearances, by simulacra. For that reason, we have surrendered ourselves to a violent and terrifying simulacrum of life. Modern men and women, he believes, are trapped in an imitative cycle that is at the same time a cycle of violence: they imitate the disorder around them; thereby they allow violence to proliferate intolerably. This violence can only come to an end, Mondrian insists, by a violent act—the expulsion of all forms of figurative art from the city. *They* are the scandal; *they* are the victims whose violent eradication can make us whole.

For Mondrian the right angle is a precise, compelling expression of this release from tragic conflict into the complicated harmony of opposites that he believes to be the *telos* of history. Painting, he argues, can *only* express this universal concord and equilibrium if it becomes completely abstract, completely dissociated from the particularities of experience:

When dynamic movement is established through *contrasts* or oppositions of the expressive means [as we have seen, a balanced unity of contrasting elements is what art aims at], relationship becomes the chief preoccupation of the artist who is seeking to create equilibrium. 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. (1945, p. 10)

In another text, Mondrian distinguishes between oppositions of position and dimension, and then goes on to say, “The principal, the most exact, and the only constant opposition of position is the right angle, in which two straight lines are opposed” (p. 47). Nonreferentially (to what natural, existing objects do the rectangles in a mature Mondrian refer?), the right angle describes the immutability, the unity in multiplicity that is history’s end. How? By balancing formally contrasting elements against one another, elements that cannot be mistaken for changeable objects in a changeable world—in this case, two lines pitted against each other, one horizontal, the other vertical. By means of a precise, geometric opposition of these elements *within* the composition

itself—an abstract structure that exists in an ideal space (the cleared area, the space of expulsion) and is for that reason beyond the modifications and violence of history. (We have here the reason, incidentally, why Mondrian is not a mystic in Pepper's sense [pp. 128-134]: his vision of the Absolute is a mediated, highly intellectual one.) In nature and figurative art, which imitates the disorder of the world and in so doing *transmits* that disorder like a carrier of the plague, these relations are veiled. They withhold themselves from us. In nature and art, the inspiring *beauty* of this harmonious integration of opposites is obscured, and the promise—indeed, for Mondrian the very image—of human community is lost in the contagion of epistemological and social disorder, the suffering and disequilibrium that characterize ordinary experience. As Mondrian says, "I felt that the tragic is created by unequivalence. I saw the tragic in a wide horizon or a high cathedral" (p. 13). The horizon, for Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1956, pp. 136-137) a symbol of limits, social order and harmony, and the humane transmission of tradition, is, in Mondrian's texts, an emblem of monumental dislocation and contradiction.

Why? That will perhaps become more clear if we look briefly at Caspar David Friedrich's "Monk by the Sea," painted in 1809-10 (Figure 7). This picture of a holy man standing contemplatively before an expansive horizon can contain nothing comforting, according to Mondrian's criteria, nothing even suggestive of the way out of tragic disorder. The painting cannot express the Infinite or the beauty of the world—even though it is a representation of the sublime as Burke (1968, p. 57) describes it—here, the power of an endless sea and sky to arouse in a solitary monk feelings of reverence, wonder,



Figure 7: Friedrich, "Monk by the Sea"; Collection: Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin

astonishment. (In Pepper's terminology, this is a formist painting: it is the exemplification of a norm [the sublime] in a particular place and time.) The event depicted in this painting is marginal, uncentered in every respect. The monk is dramatically alone, isolated in a region between heaven and earth, on the border of the land, where earth meets water—a liminal space. But from Mondrian's point of view, liminality is not what renders this painting tragic. After all, what could be more marginal than Mondrian's art—even in his own terms? "Liminality" is another word for renewal, transition, community (Turner, 1969, chap. 3). The social order can, he believes, be revitalized by means of art that in extreme ways tests the limits of art, that fulfills itself and creates community by abolishing itself as art. We shall soon see that for him, art can itself live and engender collective order only if it passes through a liminal stage and reemerges, renewed, in a different form. The tragic nature of Friedrich's painting from the perspective of Mondrian's aesthetics is therefore not that it is marginal in these ways, but that what it depicts—an evanescent moment in nature—is vertiginously, terrifyingly unbalanced, disharmonious. From Mondrian's point of view, this painting could only promote tragic suffering, whatever Friedrich's intentions. The horizon is, for the most part, taut, a determinate line, almost perfectly straight and undisturbed. But there is no comparable vertical line, no opposing element in the painting of equal magnitude to balance this horizontal that extends endlessly beyond the borders of the composition. The monk's body, for example, is serpentine, not vertical, an indeterminate, curvilinear mass. And even if the figure of the monk *could* function formally as an offsetting vertical, it is certainly not equal in *dimension* to the horizon. From the point of view of *line*, there are strictly speaking no opposites in the painting. Also, therefore, no *balance* of opposites.

Even cubist art, which Mondrian had seen first-hand in Paris just before World War I, is for him a crucial stage on the way toward the final integration of De Stijl. Like De Stijl which it inspired, cubism was a seminal version of early geometric abstraction. According to Mondrian, the cubist "delivered a . . . blow" (p. 47) to the scandal—the mimetic outlook that destroys universal unity and beauty. Cubism was an essential moment in the "deepening" (p. 60) of art, in its movement away from the tyranny of desire, the oppression of individualism, inclination, and "subjective vision" (p. 15). By bringing together aspects of a situation using abstract, geometric means, cubism moved toward an expression of the "mutual relations [i.e., the equilibrium] . . . inherent in things" (p. 52). Cubism thus anticipated De Stijl's geometric vision of wholeness. But cubist art, according to Mondrian, is "still fundamentally naturalistic" (p. 60). That naturalistic basis makes it dispersive and open rather than integrative and totalizing.

I believe that Mondrian is right here, but his point remains only partially elaborated in his texts. What distinguishes these two competing versions of early geometric abstraction is that cubism is nostalgic, situational, and blind

rather than, as in the case of De Stijl, prophetic and visionary. Cubist painting is preoccupied with what *cannot* be seen. Its focus is the concrete event rather than the underlying order and permanence of the world—event in the sense of the coming-to-be of the work of art itself, the act of interpretation needed to complete it in fresh and unpredictable contexts, and the historical flux that the painting's images wistfully recall. In its emphasis on the relation of disorder to the creative and re-creative acts on the one hand, and to history on the other, cubism is a version of contextualism in the sense given this term by Pepper in *World Hypotheses*:

Disorder is a categorial feature of contextualism, and so radically that it must not even exclude order. That is, the categories must be so framed as not to exclude from the world any degree of order it may be found to have, nor to deny that this order may have come out of disorder and may return into disorder again—order being defined in any way you please, *so long as it does not deny the possibility of disorder or another order in nature also.* (1942, p. 234)

Cubist art attempts to preserve the irreducibility and transcendence of the events to which it alludes, their singular and nonrepeatable character; and also the integrity of the situations in which viewers will look at the work as well as the sense of the artist's freedom (viewer and artist—each, in different ways, is the work's context).

Picasso's "Violin, Glass, Pipe, and Inkstand" (Figure 8), for example, painted in Paris during the spring of 1912, presents a geometry that simultaneously reminds us of the world outside the painting, teases us with hints of it, and frustrates any attempt to bring these hints together into a totality. Here and there we can see ghostly fragments of words—"PAR," for instance, in the lower part of the painting, "BO" and "JO" in the upper part, and "AVRE" on the right. Solitary letters and numbers ("W," "75," "S" at the top, "B" and "A" at the bottom) wander like nomads along the margins of this desiccated space. Throughout the composition there are shadowy suggestions of objects referred to in the title of the work: the distorted outline of the glass on the left, the spindly white pipe in the center, and the sound holes, curvilinear shapes, and mellow browns that provide faint visual memories of the violin. The jutting, fractured surfaces, the broken forms have opened up a world of objects to inspection from multiple points of view. But in my experience with the painting, all attempts to find or fix with precision the naturalistic objects take the eye back again and again to the surface of the picture and to an experience of the work as an interplay of lines, colors, paint, and textures on canvas with their own autonomous beauty and fascination. We are left with an image of the transitory, not the organic ground of existence. With a work of art that is radically opaque rather than transparent and revelatory. A partially blind view of the world. An analysis of an imaginary structure not given in the world of palpable, visible objects, a contingent structure that deliberately does

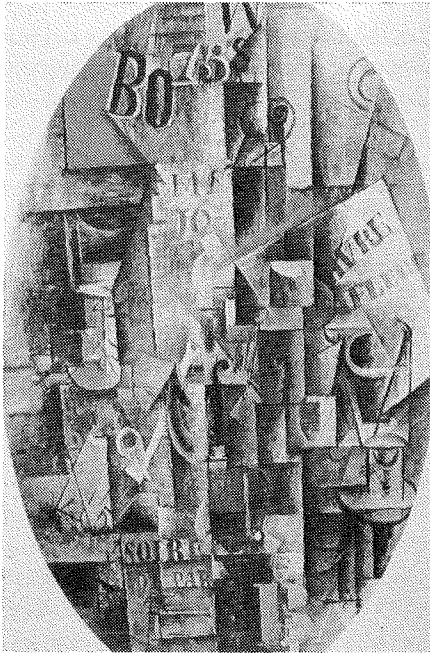


Figure 8: Picasso, "Violin, Glass, Pipe, and Inkstand"; Collection: The National Gallery, Prague

not describe a permanent order of things.

These characteristics of cubism make it, for Mondrian, a moment in the history of art that must be left behind—indispensable as a point of departure, to be sure, but a point of departure just the same. De Stijl, he argues, must make radical the exclusions begun by the cubists in order to transcend the "naturalistic foundation" upon which cubism rests and the "individualist expression" still present in it—in order to make "*a complete break-away from it and all that has existed before it*" (p. 60). This means that all naturalistic colors, lines, textures, forms—in fact, all particularized forms no matter how abstract they may seem—and space itself—must be violently excluded so that the artist is left with the purely formal means that alone can express universal harmony and beauty: the primary colors (red, blue, and yellow); the neutrals (gray, white, and black); horizontal and vertical lines; flat planes. Cubism points toward the culminating *telos* of art—"a dynamic rhythm of determinate mutual relations which excludes the formation of any particular form," which "destroy[s] particular form" (p. 58). But the violence of this expulsion must surpass the violence even of cubist deformations. "In order to establish universal unity," Mondrian writes, the "proper unity" of figurative relations must be "destroyed: their particular expression has to be annihilated" (p. 25). The subject,

especially and most of all, must disappear if art and life are to express harmony—the subject in the sense of what is represented mimetically in the painting; but also in the sense of what has tyrannized and diminished art as well as, in general terms, what has been subjugated and reduced by the Other:

As a consequence of the accentuation of rhythm and the reduction of natural forms and colors, the subject loses its importance in plastic art Objectively, the subject is more or less tyrannical. It thrusts plastic art into literature, psychology, philosophy—narrative. To enjoy the pure plastic expression of a work of art, one has to rule out the psychological factors that the subject awakens. (Mondrian, 1945, p. 47)

De Stijl, Mondrian repeatedly asserts, has taught men and women to see for the first time their rational destiny—the integrated totality that is the starting point for a new history. This vision of the whole is both prophetic and redemptive, he believes. It can free us from “tragical oppression through a clear vision of true reality, which exists, but which is veiled” (p. 15). It can both guide and renew the moral life of the collective. More importantly, as we have seen, it can create a unified, stable ethical community in which the discontinuities, violence, and unfreedom of collective egoism are overcome. In such a community, individuals know themselves in the universal: reason and desire are harmonized and directed teleologically toward the good. Aesthetic vision comes for Mondrian to fulfill the function of the religious *Gemeinde* in Hegel’s early writings: it links particular and universal aspects of the self in a living unity; feeling and thinking are comprehended within the integrative structures of art and directed toward the Absolute. In this community, the individual exists concretely, as a whole person related to other whole persons by the very ethical bonds that constitute the self. As Mondrian says, De Stijl is a model and stimulus for life because it embodies “*a real equation of the universal and the individual*” (p. 50).

As individual and collective are increasingly transformed in accord with the organical ideal, art will cease to exist. There will no longer be such a thing as the work of art as an autonomous entity or art as an independent set of practices, separate from life. Art will dissolve, becoming one with life: it will come to an end as it is realized in the totality of relations in the social world and the built environment. “Art,” Mondrian (1945) argues, “is only a ‘substitute’ while the beauty of life is still deficient. It will disappear in proportion as life gains in equilibrium” (p. 32). The plastic expression of the organic end toward which history and art are moving is a coherent man-made environment in which the distinctions separating painting, architecture, and sculpture will vanish. Even abstract painting will disappear as its universal beauty is transferred to living spaces through the organization of rooms into areas of primary color. Thus Mondrian writes that “in the future, the realization of pure plastic expression in palpable reality will replace the work of art Then we will no longer have the need of pictures and sculpture, for we will live in realized art”

(1945, p. 32). In prophetic, hortatory language, he predicts the progressive realization, over time, of this organic totality:

What is certain is that no escape is possible for the non-figurative artist; he must stay within his field and march towards the consequence of his art.

This consequence brings us, in a future perhaps remote, toward the end of art as a thing separated from our surrounding environment, which is the actual plastic reality. But this end is at the same time a new beginning. Art will not only continue but will realize itself more and more. By the unification of architecture, sculpture and painting, a new plastic reality will be created. Painting and sculpture will not manifest themselves as separate objects, nor as "mural art" . . . nor as "applied" art, but being purely constructive will aid the creation of a surrounding not merely utilitarian or rational but also pure and complete in its beauty. (pp. 62-63)

We are now in a position to understand the painting we began with (Figure 1). It is, above all else, an image of human wholeness—of the whole person in whom feeling is subordinated to thinking (as color is subordinated to line in the painting), whose feelings are harmonized with one another and with the good; an image, as well, of community; of the regulating end of history and the end of art; of the final style that, using minimal means, puts an end to all styles by fostering universal harmony. "Composition with Blue and Red," like other mature paintings of Mondrian, is an apocalyptic image of release from violence, from the oppression of styles and radical individualism, from desire, disequilibrium, and freedom.

This image of wholeness and accord is, I have argued, the outcome of a prolonged expulsion—of nature and figuration—from the work of art. From Mondrian's point of view, this expulsion was accomplished heroically, by intellectual fiat, by the thinking self that has eliminated all trace of scandal from a creation governed by measure, geometry, and light. The result is a homogeneous, uniformly lighted, nearly white area—an abstract, strictly differentiated region in which nature has been uprooted, extirpated, and from which art has been banished. This image is very like the *templum*, the cleared field at once white, sacred, and geometrical, the sacrificial space of Neolithic agriculture and ancient mathematics that Serres (1980a, pp. 237-242; 1980b, pp. 185-195) writes about, an outcome and emblem of victimage. Things and persons have been forcibly removed—also desire, pleasure, and tragic disorder, along with the mimetic relations that produced them—in order to create an image of an integrated totality in which each part sustains every other part and the whole, in turn, sustains each part. Here, in Mondrian's painting, we have a pacified, nearly empty area, but also a clearing-ground that extends to infinity reason's claims to dominion—an image of the thing itself, signifying and impelling, Mondrian believes, the final end of history, a proleptic vision of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that Mondrian's theories of art and history embody an implicit critique of Pepper's account of organicism in

World Hypotheses. In a series of powerful studies that we cannot afford to ignore, Girard (1977, 1978, 1982) has demonstrated the function of collective violence, especially violent exclusion and victimage, as a mechanism for restoring order in a sacrificial crisis. It is the passage from conflict to integration that Pepper's theory of organicism does not adequately account for, precisely, I believe, because it fails to take account of violence as a means of overcoming violence—here, the disorder of modernity that has not renounced violence but no longer believes, as archaic communities once could, in sacrifice or in the unique guilt of victims chosen unanimously as scapegoats. Mondrian, unable to believe in real victims, turns the violence around him toward art. Over and over again, he insists on what Girard has shown us: collective unity as the consequence of casting out, violently expelling, what is other—in this case, art itself, especially its mimetic characteristics. *There*, according to Mondrian, the scandal is to be found—localized, objectified, a victim ready to be sacrificed: the *pharmakos* that is malignant when it obstructs universal vision and harmony, but a beneficent cure when its expulsion begins the rhythmical dance of collective solidarity and effervescence.

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