Translated from Dutch and French by R. R. Symonds
and from German by Mary Wbitall

The Editor and Publishers regret that it was
necessary to omit from this edition some of the
material which appeared in the original
German edition.

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Theo van Doesburg

Notes on Monumental Art with reference to two fragments of a building
(hall in holiday centre at Noordwijkerhout)

The one cannot exist without the other.

The consciousness of the new plasticism implies cooperation of all the plastic arts in order to attain a pure monumental style on the basis of balanced relationship.

A monumental style implies proportional division of labour among the various arts.

Proportional division of labour means that each artist restricts himself to his own field.

This limitation implies plasticizing with the means appropriate to that art.

Plasticizing with the appropriate means implies true freedom; it frees the architect, for example, from much that does not belong to his plastic means such as colour and about which he will have other views from a constructional and aesthetic viewpoint than the painter.

These theories have already long been proclaimed by important architects, but in practice with a few exceptions the old ways continued to be followed: the architect also performed the role of the painter and sculptor, which was naturally bound to lead to the most arbitrary results, as, for example, to a pictorial, sculptured or, in one word, destructive architecture.

Each art, architecture, painting or sculpture, requires the whole man. Only when this is again realized, as in antiquity, will a development towards a monumental architecture, towards style, be possible.

When that happens the concept of applied art will also automatically disappear, as will every example of one art being subservient to another.

It is fortunate that young artists in architecture not only see this, but are also putting it into practice, so that they encourage and facilitate not only the culture of the house, but also the culture of monumentality.

The concept of monumentality has changed significantly in favour of
the feeling for style since architects no longer delight in the capricious play of the baroque with its excesses and excrescences.

There has also been, in relation to painting and applied to architecture, beyond Cubism and Futurism, a significant deepening of the concept of monumentality in favour of architecture, especially through conquest of the plane, the flat colour, the plane space and the concept of relationship.

Our spiritual climate no longer permits puppet-like figures painted on a wall — preferably accompanied by an appropriate motto . . . in the manner of chocolate box mottos — and bearing no organic relationship to that wall, to be regarded as monumental painting appropriate to the spirit of the age. Representation or symbolism is not the same as giving plastic expression and must be considered as belonging to a stage in human consciousness of one-sided reality, in which the spirit was afraid, as it were, to imprint itself in the concrete material as form, colour or relationship of opposites.

Such ‘monumental’ art, which, in reality, is no more than the decorative appearance of monumentality, perhaps fitted into the weak, feminine architecture of the past, but there will be no place for it in the masculine architecture of the future.

The ‘styling’ of the natural form into ornamental form, based upon the observation by the senses of natural forms devoid of any plasticism, based
upon natural symmetry and natural multiplication, has nothing to do with plasticism through aesthetic relationships deriving from internality.

As the notion gained ground that Concept must express itself in Form and Form in Means, monumental art underwent an important change. It had to reject its illustrative and ornamental character as being wholly in conflict with its essence, which is to create through colour relationship, aesthetic space (extension) on the constructionally closed plane. (Note: The relationship of the decorative to the plastic is referred to again in more detail in an article entitled ‘The Style of Relationship’.)

Architecture produces constructional, that is, closed, relief. In this respect it is neutral in relation to painting, which gives open relief by means of flat colour plasticism. Architecture joins together, binds. Painting loosens, unbinds. The very fact that they have to fulfil essentially different functions makes possible a harmonious combination. The latter arises, not from similar characteristics, but precisely from opposite characteristics. In this opposition, in this complementary relationship of architecture and painting, of plastic form and flat colour, pure monumental art finds its basis.

Not only does painting oppose the loose and open to the constructionally closed, extension to enclosure, it also releases organically closed relief from its confinement, opposing movement to stability.
This movement is, of course, not optical and material but aesthetic and, because it is aesthetic, this movement, which is plasticized in painting by means of colour relationship, must be brought to rest by a counter-movement.

The neutral character of architectural relief also works in this direction. This has now been successfully realized in the fragments of buildings reproduced here. In the first illustration we see how architecture, proceeding from a functional and constructional basis, is able to achieve an aesthetically monumental, organic relief. Precisely through the sacrifice of all external ornament and sculptural detail that does not serve architecture (figures, mouldings, etc.) the plastic rhythm of the architecture finds its most complete independent expression. This expression is independent and free because it is not tied to ornament and so does not take on the appearance of being something other than it really is—architectural and not sculptural expression. The idea is expressed in the form and the form is impressed in the material. Consequently the observer is compelled to see architectural relief.

The ascending staircase, the breached walls, the side benches and the bench in the upper passage all have a logical functional importance which, comprised in a single organic form, is plastically externalized. This form produces, from whatever side it is seen, a surprising rhythmical effect.

Both in the composition of the tiled floor and in the painting of the doors, etc., an aesthetic spatial effect through destruction has been achieved by other means, i.e., by means of painting-in-architecture. It is true that the floor is the most closed surface of the house and therefore demands, from an aesthetic point of view, a counter-gravitational effect by means of flat colour and open spatial relationships. It has been carried through consistently here from the entrance through the whole of the lower and upper halls and passages. A small part of this may be seen in the second illustration.

The development and working out of this whole composition—constructional-destructional—can be seen only at the place itself, where, unfortunately, because of the too-dark stained glass windows, the light, one of the chief factors in the art of monumental space, cancels out much of the effect.

Through the consistent carrying forward and development of this complementary combination of architecture and painting, it will be possible to achieve in the future on a purely modern basis the aim of monumental art:
to place man within (instead of opposite) the plastic arts and thereby enable him to participate in them.

In what we show here much has already been achieved and yet more... learnt. Nevertheless, this must still be regarded as a beginning of monumentality.

[Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 10–12]

Piet Mondrian

The Determinate and the Indeterminate (Supplement)

The determinate is positive for us, absolute, insofar as we can establish it objectively. We can speak objectively only of the determinate—which is universal, the universal. Subjectively we know diverse determinations, all of which are more or less individual.

If the universal—outside of time—is the determinate, then the individual, in and through which the universal appears in time, must be indeterminate and so must be our vision of it.

The indeterminate has the appearance—in time—of being determinate; the determinate—in time—of being indeterminate. We always more or less subjectivize the one determined; and for us this subjectivization is the determined. We perceive—in time—the one determined with varying degrees of clarity, and each degree is—in time—determinate for us. As the individual in us matures, and the universal in us predominates, our various individual determinations grow towards the one determined.

Each individual determination—in time—is neither more nor less valuable than another: each individual determination is to us the true one—for the time being. That is why each subsequent individual determination annihilates the previous one, and the degree of clarity with which—in time—we perceive the one determined is not arbitrary: what seems determinate to us varies with the time.

In individual vision, the (one) determined appears as vague, and the indetermine as real. In time, the (one) determined is abstract: the indeterminate, concrete. Objectively seen—as far as this is possible—in time—the (one) determined is abstract-real.

Depending upon the character of our consciousness we see either the objective or the subjective as the determinate, the universal or the individual,