

REPORT ON PROBLEMS OF TERMINOLOGY

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This article does not suggest solutions but lists some of the inadequacies in our professional language. The same terms - viz., "abstract", "non-figurative", "non-objective", etc. - are used to describe the dramatic and convulsive improvisations of Kandinsky between 1910 and 1920 and the classical equations of Mondrian. Nevertheless, everyone knows that the plastic message of a picture composed of straight lines differs essentially from one made up of a feverish dance of colours. But the term "abstract" only suggests a general classification without being able to concretize subtle distinctions. To describe the work of Kandinsky and Mondrian in the same terms is equivalent to using the same word for sunrise and sunset.

Without being able to list the manifold applications of the term "abstract", I should like to stress its obvious ambiguity. This can be found in the learned definition given in one of the most reputable dictionaries of the world: "Abstract. Presenting or characterized by non-representational designs depicting no recognizable thing, only geometric figures, or abstruse diagrams, or mechanical or amorphous shapes."<sup>1)</sup> Here the tumultuous improvisations of Kandinsky (amorphous shapes) and the geometrical immobility of Mondrian are covered by the same word; the definition includes the amorphous phenomena of an ephemeral existence and the geometrical figures dear to those who claim Plato as the father of so-called abstract art. If we admit that the art ~~both~~ of both Kandinsky and Mondrian is situated "in the world of the imagination", it still seems necessary to me that we ask ourselves where their spiritual fraternity diverges, i.e. in which respective state of this world each carries out his pictorial exploration.

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1) Webster's Dictionary.

I shall try to summarize the various phases of their creative activity. We know the emotion that Kandinsky once experienced on seeing a canvas of Monet and one of his own which were by chance hung side by side. From this alienation of perception the result is a regression towards the primitive state of sight, recently described as follows: "The eye faces a turmoil of light stimulations; light rays impinging on the retina have no intrinsic order as such; it is the dynamic need and tendency of the mind to find an order which transforms the sensuous basis into meaningful unities." (G. Kepes) Kandinsky adopts the dissociation of forms and things, their reduction in the chaos which is the primitive germ of all future differentiation, and he re-conducts the empirical image of the world into a state which A. Ehrenzweig describes as "an early infantile state of oceanic consciousness when the child's ego was not yet differentiated from the surrounding external world". (On the spiritual level Kandinsky carries on his introspection until the elementary "flux" to which Bergson refers in his Introduction to Metaphysics.)

Every differentiated form is preceded by the prenatal amorphism from which it derives. Leonardo, in his famous notebooks, already referred to the birth of form in the formless: "I have seen in the clouds or on walls, spots which have awakened in me beautiful and new forms of inspiration....". It is enough to quote one of Cézanne's most happy phrases to demonstrate the common point of departure of the figurative and non-figurative painter: "I take from the left, from the right, here, there, everywhere, their shades, their colours, their tones, I fix them, I bring them together... They form lines. They become objects, rocks, trees, and if they are not there, I dream of them." Kandinsky also tried to consolidate the mobile universe of primitive emissions, but by inventing new figures. He proceeds from differentiation and hesitancy towards articulateness.

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For his part, Mondrian demands a multiform world to be able to extract his rectilinear relationships. Just as Kandinsky, his art sees in the life of forms the exact reflection of cosmic morphology, but he describes their final phase. For him, transformation means purification and simplification towards the final "Gestalt". In 1910, Kandinsky went to the source, he borrowed the instinctive and chaotic cries depicting the joyous and tormented birth of a world. Later, he invented the characters of this world of pure form. It goes without saying that this differentiation with its multiple lyrical or dramatic phases ~~xxx~~ (from 1922 to 1944) is further capable of simplification and reduction from variety to the calm of a few unbreakable axioms. Starting with the chaos that he found among the cubists, Mondrian finished that transformation of the multitude into unity through a system of vertical and horizontal lines. Certainly, a universal character can be attributed to chaos and balance. Kandinsky's universe is bursting with future possibilities, Mondrian's exhausts those possibilities in a <sup>equilibrium</sup> ~~final balance~~ of <sup>of finality</sup>.

Conclusion : To demonstrate the organic relationship between these logical and successive phases, to indicate their connection with the laws of optics (we know that "perception tends towards balance and symmetry" (Koffka)) and to establish a vocabulary which takes into account the "life of forms" in abstract art, seem to me to be the aims of a discussion on the terminology of art criticism. One can, at the same time as investigating these problems and obstacles of language, use as a basis of discussion, the vocabulary of gestalt psychology which distinguishes between the phases of the Vorgestalt, followed by the principle of the differentiation leading to the Gestalt and the reduction of the latter into the Mondrianesque state that I should describe as ~~xx~~ the "Reduktionsgestalt".