

# **The Aesthetics of Rudolf Steiner and Spiritual Modernism**

by

Jennie Louise Cain

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Germanic Languages and Literatures)  
in the University of Michigan  
2016

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Frederick Amrine, Co-Chair  
Associate Professor Kerstin Barndt, Co-Chair  
Associate Professor Andreas Gailus  
Professor Elizabeth Sears

**DEDICATION**

*for Mira and Devika*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my committee members, who have inspired and supported me all of these years at Michigan: Frederick Amrine, Kerstin Barndt, Andreas Gailus and Betsy Sears. It would have been impossible for me to pursue this topic without Frederick Amrine's deep and extensive knowledge of Rudolf Steiner and without his ability to patiently guide me to relevant concepts and works within Steiner's oeuvre of over four hundred volumes. I am especially thankful to Fred for his keen intellect and his exhortations to try to see the bigger picture. I owe a debt of gratitude to Kerstin Barndt for her continual prompting to think critically, the conscientiousness with which she closely read many drafts of my work in various states of disorder, and for her warm encouragement every step of the way. During the final months, Kerstin's guidance has been invaluable. Andreas Gailus provided critical feedback at various stages and I also appreciate Betsy Sear's detailed and insightful written feedback during the final stage of writing.

There are two people especially worthy of acknowledgement for their part in contributing to my growth as a teacher and a scholar. Hartmut Rastalsky helped me to discover the joy of teaching, has been an amazing mentor and has provided thoughtful feedback on my teaching as well as on fellowship and award applications. I also wish to thank Christian Clement for creating the online resource *Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv* that enabled me to easily access many texts by Steiner.

During my years here I have benefitted greatly from the highly skilled and dedicated administrative staff in the German department, including Sheri Sytsema-Geiger, Nancy Blasch, Rachelle Grubb, Jen White and Gitta Killough. Thanks are owed to each of them for guiding me and my colleagues through important administrative procedures. I am especially grateful to Jen White for the many needed reminders, pieces of practical advice and, above all, for all of our talks in her office that helped break up the monotony of dissertation writing.

Multiple institutions have supported my education as a scholar and a teacher. These include the Department of Germanic Languages and Literature, the Rackham Graduate School, the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD). I am thankful for the generous fellowships that enabled research in the US and in Germany and for many helpful seminars on aspects of research and teaching.

At the University of Michigan, I am indebted to my classmates and friends for their personal and intellectual support. To Seth Howes, Sara Jackson and Solveig Heinz I owe thanks for their mentorship. I also wish to acknowledge my classmates Biz Nijdam, Nick Heckner, Hannah McMurray, Emma Thomas, Ariana Orozco, Michael André, Simon Walsh and Claire Insel for their camaraderie and feedback on my work. To Kathryn Sederberg I owe special thanks for her friendship and support, for her fine editing skills, and for helping to keep me sane in graduate school.

Over the course of my life there have been a number of wonderful teachers whose passion and skill helped shape me. I thank my class teacher Frances Vig for her creativity and unbridled enthusiasm and my high school teacher Ed Vaitones for sparking a special interest in German. I wish to recognize Dr. Hans Michael Speier and Dr. Christine Geffers-Browne, two especially inspiring professors at the summer master's program held at Middlebury College. I also wish to thank Dr. Jochen Richter, long time director of the summer program, and the many other teachers and staff there who made this program an intensive and truly exceptional educational experience. To Dennis Klocek, director of the Consciousness Studies program, I owe thanks for igniting interest in further study of Goethe and of Steiner. The late Dr. John Mohan, professor of Russian literature and my favorite teacher at Grinnell College, will always be remembered for his love of literature and his cornball humor.

Finally I wish to extend my deepest thanks to my family. My parents, Beth and Roger, have always been so loving and supportive in all of my eclectic pursuits. I thank my dad for the way he has always modeled a love of ideas and an interest in spiritual practice. A very special thanks goes to Mira's and Devika's two beloved grandmothers—"Oma" and "Dadiba"—who have gone above and beyond in their support of me and my family by babysitting and also living with us for substantial periods here and even in Germany. Thanks to them, I was able to finish the PhD with the peace of mind that my little girls were in the best of hands. I also want to thank

caregivers who have become part of our extended family by loving our girls as their own:  
Areli Hernandez, SandraSartori, Mary Eldridge and Laura Ganzel.

Finally I want to thank my best friend and husband Hirak Parikh for his companionship, encouragement, and technical support and for keeping a cool head during moments of crisis. Above all, Hirak helped me maintain the perspective that the dissertation is just one stage of life. I look forward to the many years ahead with you!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ABSTRACT	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	
Rudolf Steiner' s Goethean Symbolism and his Influence on Wassily Kandinsky' s Theory of Abstraction	37
CHAPTER 2	
Against Mimesis: Steiner' s Theory of the Evolution of the Arts in Dialogue with Wilhelm Worringer' s <i>Abstraktion und Empathie</i> and Alois Riegl' s <i>Kunstwollen</i>	110
CHAPTER 3	
The first Goetheanum Building and Steiner' s Vision of Peace and Internationalism	174
CONCLUSION	247
BIBLIOGRAPHY	256

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>FIGURE 1:</b> THE FIRST GOTHEANUM	186
<b>FIGURE 2:</b> STEINER' S PAINTED MOTIFS OF THE ARCHETYPAL FIGURES OF THE SEVEN POST-ATLANTEAN CULTURES WITH A SERIES OF COLUMNS AND THE LARGE CARVED WOODEN SCULPTURE <i>DER MENSCHHEITSREPRÄSENTANT</i> BELOW. COLORED DRAWING BY VAN BEMMELEN.	235
<b>FIGURE 3:</b> CROSS-SECTION OF DOMES FROM A MODEL.	239
<b>FIGURE 4:</b> THE MAIN HALL WITH THE AUDIENCE AREA BELOW AND THREE OF THE COLUMNS WITH THEIR CAPITALS.	240
<b>FIGURE 5:</b> A CLOSE-UP OF THE SECOND COLUMN	242
<b>FIGURE 6:</b> A CLOSE-UP OF THE THIRD COLUMN	243
<b>FIGURE 7:</b> THE THIRD AND FOURTH COLUMNS	244



## ABSTRACT

Around 1900, a wave of European artists and intellectuals turned to spiritual themes and modes of thought to reform a society perceived as dominated by rationalism, materialism and mimetic art. My dissertation places at the center of this movement Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)—the Austrian philosopher, artist, architect, pedagogue and social reformer. I trace Steiner’s influence on canonical modernists and show that his writings are deeply resonant with contemporary developments in the visual arts, art theory and architecture. In Chapter One, I examine the influence of Steiner’s theory of dematerialization on Wassily Kandinsky’s conception of abstraction. While exploring significant points of connection between both thinkers, I argue that Steiner ultimately does not aim for abstraction but instead for a return to the phenomenological world in an immersive mode characteristic of Goethean thought. In Chapter Two, I bring Steiner’s art historical theory into dialogue with the writings of the German art theorist Wilhelm Worringer and the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl. I argue that both Steiner and Riegl conceive of the history of art as the expression of a collective aesthetic drive, what Riegl calls *Kunstwollen*, and that Worringer and Steiner understand “abstraction” in philosophical rather than periodic terms. Chapter Three turns to Steiner’s first *Goetheanum* building, placing it in the context of Expressionist architecture on the one hand and anti-war responses to the First World War on the other. I bring Steiner’s theory of the first *Goetheanum* as promoting peace into conversation with three contemporaneous thinkers and projects: Bruno Taut and his *Glashaus* Pavilion from

1914; the German fantasy writer and illustrator Paul Scheerbart; and Sigmund Freud's 1915 anti-war text "Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod."

My project makes three interventions into the field of modernism studies. First, by considering Steiner's place within Expressionism, it adds to the heterogeneity of this movement. Second, it contributes to the neglected subfield of what I call "spiritual modernism," arguing that the spiritual was never historically "excluded" from the modern. Finally, my dissertation broadens our understanding of modernism by complicating traditional binaries such as religious/secular and pre-modern/modern.

## INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the twentieth century, many German-speaking writers, artists, architects and art theorists felt that European society was in great need of *cultural* transformation after decades of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Observing the modern and increasingly secular society around them, they regarded their epoch as plagued by fragmentation, over-rationalization, mechanism, “materialism” and mimetic art. The dramatic changes in European society were noted by many well known modernist thinkers. In his essay from 1903 “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben,” German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) argued that society had become increasingly dominated by a calculating spirit: “Der moderne Geist ist mehr und mehr ein rechnender geworden.”<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, in 1917 German sociologist and economist Max Weber (1864-1920) gave a lecture to future scientists in which he argued that the increase in specialization within academe and rationality within greater society had led to the “disenchantment of the world” (“die Entzauberung der Welt”). In these conditions, Weber argued, people had lost the ability to understand the world as a unified, coherent whole. As an unavoidable result, spiritual, or “sublime” values had to recede from public life: “Es ist das Schicksal unserer Zeit, mit der ihr eigenen Rationalisierung und Intellektualisierung, vor allem: Entzauberung der Welt, daß gerade die letzten und

---

<sup>1</sup> “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben.” *Vorträge und Aufsätze zur Städteausstellung*. Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung Dresden, Th. Petermann, ed., Band 9, Dresden 1903, 185-206. < <http://socio.ch/sim/sta03.htm>>

sublimsten Werte zurückgetreten sind aus der Öffentlichkeit.”<sup>2</sup> In this lecture Weber uses a number of terms to characterize the retreat of some kind of incalculable, spiritual dimension. Here he calls it “sublime,” while in another instance he describes it as mysterious, immeasurable powers (“die geheimnisvollen unberechenbaren Mächte”).<sup>3</sup> As one possible reaction to this state Weber proposes that those who cannot tolerate the “disenchanted” state of modern life may choose to return to traditional religion.

My project centers around contemporaneous artists and intellectuals who, as opposed to thinkers like Simmel and Weber, believed that the modern world could be reinfused with spiritual meaning or “reenchanted.” These artists saw the state of their modern world as a catalyst for the start of a dramatically new cultural epoch based not in a recourse to traditional religion, but instead in a new turn toward the spiritual in such a way that it would be accessible to greater society. For all of the figures I treat art was the primary vehicle for this spiritual transformation. Russian Expressionist and pioneering abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky famously called this coming period “die Epoche des großen Geistigen.”<sup>4</sup> He described it as an unprecedented time when people, led by certain modern artists, would gain the ability to perceive the spiritual dimension underlying all of life. This dissertation traces the emergence of what I have termed “spiritual modernism” as a phenomenon that arose at the nexus of modern art, architecture and the esoteric between 1890-1920s. I argue that the intensive artistic

---

<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, “Wissenschaft als Beruf (1919),” in *Max Weber Schriften 1894-1922*, ed. Dirk Kaesler (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2002), 510.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>4</sup> Wassily Kandinsky. *Der blaue Reiter im Lenbachhaus München: Katalog der Sammlung in der Städtischen Galerie*. Eds. Rosel Gollek. München: Prestel, 1982, 313.

engagement with spiritual themes was a crucial and hitherto often overlooked part of the modernist project.

At the center of this engagement I position Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)—the Austrian philosopher, artist, architect, dramaturge, pedagogue, and social reformer. Steiner was the founder of Anthroposophy, a philosophy and spiritual movement whose aim was and still is to develop supersensible capacities that enable access to what Steiner described as a spiritual dimension underlying all of life. Anthroposophy has many roots, including German Idealism, German mysticism, and the Theosophical movement from which it drew some of its vocabulary. Between 1902 and 1912, Steiner was the secretary of the German branch of the Theosophical Society, a movement that draws from many mystical traditions and aims to provide insight into the origins and divinity inherent in all of life. The movement was begun in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge and still exists today. Steiner took issue with the differences in philosophical and spiritual orientation, including how Theosophy was more orientated toward eastern spiritual traditions. In 1913 Steiner and his approximately 2,400 members of the German section of the Theosophical society were expelled and in the same year Steiner founded his own movement of Anthroposophy.

Of particular importance for Steiner's thought and a focus of my project is his interpretation of Goethe's worldview, especially concerning the notion of evolution. Steiner worked intensively with Goethe's scientific thought as editor of his scientific writing. In Weimar between 1884 and 1897, Steiner published five volumes of *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* for the Kürschner edition of "Deutsche National-Literatur." Steiner argued for a revival of interest in Goethe's thought as essential to

understanding contemporary culture and as a needed intervention to contemporary scientific method. Of specific importance to my project is the way in which Steiner created his own concept of spiritual and cultural evolution based significantly upon the evolutionary and morphological ideas of Goethe, as well as drawing from other evolutionary thinkers, including Ernst Haeckel and Charles Darwin. In the first chapter, I argue that Steiner's aesthetic project ultimately aims for a return to engagement with the phenomenological in a way resonant with Goethean symbolism. I also show how Steiner gives a more spiritual reading of Goethe's concepts of developing perceptual capacity by arguing that supersensible powers can be honed through exercises like those suggested in Goethe's *Metamorphose der Pflanzen*. In the first chapter, I also introduce Eurythmy as a form of movement Steiner created to be an expression, in space and movement, of Goethe's morphology.

In 1913, Steiner began constructing the *Goetheanum* building in Dornach, Switzerland, near Basel, as the headquarters of the Anthroposophical movement and as its artistic center. Steiner's original plan was to locate his movement's headquarters in Munich, but this plan ultimately failed due to protests from non-Steinerian neighbors. The first *Goetheanum* was financed, constructed and adorned largely by volunteers from within the movement. It featured a large amount of hand-carved wooden decoration. The building held conferences and performances of Steiner's mystery plays and Eurythmy dance. Steiner wrote four mystery plays, between 1910 and 1913, meant as a modern interpretation of a Medieval form of religious play and they tell the story of multiple lives of fictional figures. Eurythmy is an expressive form of movement, created by Steiner and his colleague and later wife Marie von Sivers, meant to express the inner

nature of speech and music. The first building burned down during the night of New Year' s 1922/1923 due to suspected arson. Still remaining are multiple photos of the building, photos of models and lectures by Steiner in which he describes the first *Goetheanum*. The second *Goetheanum*, built in the same location, was begun in 1924 and opened in 1928, three years after Steiner' s death. It contrasts with the first building in that it is made nearly entirely of reinforced concrete and did not have the same level of handmade elements. Both buildings received praise from highly known architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, as well as a number of well-known architectural historians, including Wolfgang Pehnt. Today, this second building still serves as the headquarters of the international Anthroposophical movement and as its performance space and artistic center.

Steiner is best known for his pedagogical thought, as the founder of the Waldorf schools, and through his connection to Goethe. In the context of literary and artistic modernism, however, Steiner is often overlooked. When Steiner is considered at all, it is most often for his influence on more canonical modernist figures, above all the painter Wassily Kandinsky and the Expressionist *Blaue Reiter* group. During the modernist period there was a revival of interest in Goethe and I highlight the importance of Goethe' s thought for Steiner' s *modernist* project. In the first chapter, I also demonstrate how aspects of Steiner' s spiritual and aesthetic thought helped shape Kandinsky' s theory of artistic abstraction. In the second chapter, I also bring Steiner into conversation with the art historians Wilhelm Worringer and Alois Riegl. In the third chapter, I consider Steiner' s thought in the context of Expressionist architecture and pacifist sentiment regarding the First World War. I read Steiner alongside the architect Bruno Taut, the

fantasy writer and architectural theorist Paul Scheerbart and Sigmund Freud with his early anti-war essay “Zeitgemässes über Krieg und Tod.” My claim is that Steiner’s thought is not only deeply resonant with better-known figures in the visual arts, art theory and architecture, but that, in fact, Steiner helped formatively shape the discourse, in both explicit and implicit ways, on many of the key questions of contemporaneous culture. These include the questions of how to renew what many viewed as an ossified, overly “materialistic” and rationalistic society; the meaning of “geistige Kunst,” the definition and the origins of artistic abstraction; the relationship of the “spiritual” to the worldly and the link between art and politics. An important crux of my project is how I consider Steiner in relation to Goethe and to the *visual*: the visual arts, art theory and art history and architecture.

My dissertation intervenes in the interdisciplinary field of modernism studies in three ways. First, it contributes to the neglected subfield of what I call “spiritual modernism.” Scholarship has absorbed a view in which modernity, in more and less overt ways, is often defined as secular, divorced from the spiritual dimension. Yet my project shows that the spiritual was never historically “excluded” from the modern and modernism and that those artists whose work was shaped by an interest in the spiritual were engaging with modernity in their efforts to transform it, not transcend it. Second, by considering Steiner’s place within Expressionism, my project calls attention to the heterogeneity of this movement. Third, by complicating traditional binaries such as religious/secular, pre-modern/modern and non-political/political, this dissertation seeks to broaden our understanding of modernism.



## Steiner among Contemporaries

Steiner throughout his life engaged with contemporaneous thinkers and movements. There was a period at the turn of the century, though relatively brief, when he took a very active role in contemporary culture. In Vienna and Munich, he held many lectures on art. Munich was also an important center for Steiner as it is the location where he premiered his mystery plays and, in 1907, he organized the very well attended conference for the European section of the Anthroposophical society. As detailed in the third chapter, Steiner also tried to situate the headquarters of his movement in Munich, but protests from the neighboring church and other obstacles ultimately impeded this plan. More generally, Steiner gave a very large number of public lectures—many of which drew large audiences of over 1,000 attendees in locations all over Europe. As I discuss in my first chapter, Steiner was an important influence on Wassily Kandinsky and the Expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter* as well as on many Russian symbolists, many of whom lived in Munich as expatriates at the beginning of the 1900s.

Steiner was also, as I argue, only one of many “spiritual modernists”—artists, art theorists and intellectuals living during Steiner’s time—who, in varying ways, engaged with spiritual subjects in their work. Other such figures, only to name a few, include the Expressionist painter Wasilly Kandinsky (1866-1944), the members of the *Blaue Reiter* group, the writer and esotericist Stefan George (1868-1933), the author and founder of the *Dada* movement Hugo Ball (1886-1927) and Johannes Itten (1888-1967), the Swiss painter, art historian and member of the *Bauhaus* school.

Steiner contributed to the cultural discourse with myriad lectures and writings. Between 1897 and 1900, he was the co-editor with German writer Otto Erich Hartleben

of the weekly publication *Magazin für Literatur*, devoted primarily to contemporary literature.<sup>5</sup> As seen in the many reviews he wrote for this publication, Steiner had a sustained interest in the Austrian writer, playwright and critic Hermann Bahr (1863-1934). It seems this interest was mutual, as Bahr also cites Steiner in his treatise *Expressionismus* (1916), where he names him—along with Martin Buber and Johannes Müller—as one of the three most important thinkers to lead the aesthetic turn away from the visible and toward the invisible. Bahr argues that it is time “[Martin Buber], Johannes Müller und Rudolf Steiner, diese drei vor allem, sagen uns das an. Die Menschheit hat ja die Gewohnheit, immer wenn sie eine Zeitlang ganz zum Sichtbaren hin [...] nun wieder zum Unsichtbaren umzukehren [...]”<sup>6</sup> In 1898 Steiner also edited the *Dramaturgische Blätter*, the official organ of the Deutschen Bühnenvereins. He also corresponded with the writer Rainer Maria Rilke, an exchange that began with a glowing review by Steiner in the *Dramaturgische Blätter* of Rilke’s essay “Der Wert des Monologes.”<sup>7</sup> Steiner wrote theatre reviews with an anti-naturalistic bent but his attempts to join the dialogue on avant-garde theater won only a small audience. Throughout his career, he held public lectures, delivered in an accessible way to interested audiences with or without an Anthroposophical background. Between 1903 and 1918, Steiner held public lectures in the Berlin *Architektenhaus* that repeated every winter due to popular demand. As I will discuss in the first chapter, Wassily Kandinsky

---

<sup>5</sup> In one issue, for example, Steiner reviewed, among many others, three realist authors: Theodor Storm (1817-1888), the Austrian Emil Marriot (1855-1938) and the German author Theodor Fontane. He also provided a very favorable review of the female author, poet and dramaturge Marie Eugenie Delle (1864-1931). Rudolf Steiner, “Lyrik der Gegenwart. Ein Überblick,” *Magazin für Literatur* 1898, 1-41.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Bahr, *Expressionismus* (München: Delphin-Verlag, 1916), 41.

<sup>7</sup> Mateo Kries, ed., *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags* (Ditzingen: Vitra Design Museum, 2010), 322.

and a number of fellow artists attended some of these lectures. Between 1899 and 1905 Steiner also lectured at the workers' education school ("Arbeiterbildungsschule"), founded by Wilhelm Liebknecht in Berlin, covering the subjects of history, literature, rhetoric and the natural sciences.<sup>8</sup>

The period during which Steiner was quite prominent in wider, modernist circles, however, was relatively brief. The time at the workers' education school and as editor of *Magazin für Literatur* were both relatively short forays. In 1902, Steiner ended up accepting the post of Secretary of the German section of the Theosophical Society, a post that lasted until his break with Theosophy in 1912, in large part because he could not find another venue open enough to his ideas. The pattern of trying, but ultimately failing, to establish a more public profile is demonstrated in a physical manner in Steiner's failed attempt to construct the *Goetheanum* building in Munich before its ultimate placement in Dornach.

In 1922 German sociologist, journalist, cultural critic and film theorist Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966) engaged critically with Steiner's work in a piece entitled "Die Wartenden" in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. In it Kracauer argues that the secularization of modern society (what he calls the "Entleerung des uns umfangenden geistigen Raumes") resulted in one of three basic responses.<sup>9</sup> First, there are the skeptics who doubt any possibility for a renewal of spirituality within modernity. Second, there are the believers who envision some form of reconciliation. Third, there are those who wait to see what may materialize. Kracauer critiques Steiner as an example of the second form of thinker

---

<sup>8</sup> In 1902 Steiner also gave a lecture, along with Rosa Luxemburg, to celebrate the opening of the Arbeiterbildungsschule in Spandau. *Ibid.*, 322-23.

<sup>9</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "Die Wartenden (1922)," in *Siegfried Kracauer. Schriften. Aufsätze 1915-1926*, ed. Inka Müller-Bach (Frankfurt am Main: 1990), 160.

and as someone who attracted a large following due to an illusory and deceptive system that purported to be capable of reconciling science with religion (in the following

Kracauer speaks of the “absolute”):

Die große Gefolgschaft Steiners erklärt sich zum guten Teil daraus, daß Steiner auf Grund seiner Einsicht in die Unhaltbarkeit unserer geistigen Situation eine wissenschaftlich nachprüfbare Methode zu besitzen vorgibt, die zur Schau übersinnlicher Realitäten wie zur Erkundung menschlicher Bestimmung verhelfen soll und den trügerischen Anschein erweckt, als stelle sie gesicherte Beziehungen zum Absoluten her.<sup>10</sup>

Kracauer’s public response to Steiner, only one instance out of many others that could be cited, displays the level of prominence Steiner had within broader circles, even into the 1920s as leader of the Anthroposophical Society.

### **The Question of Terminology: “Geist” and “Spiritual Modernism”**

At this early juncture it is important to clarify some of the key terms and concepts I use, including the terms “spiritual” and “spiritual modernism.” What I have chosen to term the “spiritual” is a large and rather vague category, and even more so in German, where the notion of “Geist” has a complex philosophical, cultural and religious history. In addition, the figures I analyze, including Steiner and Kandinsky, do *not* limit themselves conveniently to the single term “Geist.” Steiner is especially fluid with terminology and uses the following terms, to name a few as examples: “Geist,” “das Göttliche,” “die Seele” and he also speaks of spiritual beings or forces, “Wesen” or “Kräfte.” In addition, while Kandinsky often talked of “Geist,” when speaking of the coming age of spiritual art he envisioned, his art also drew on religious motifs, including Apocalyptic imagery, as I discuss in my first chapter. One important aim of the project is

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 163.

to try to bring specificity to the terms used by Steiner, Kandinsky and the other figures under analysis. At the same time, in order to provide a thorough and honest treatment of these thinkers, I acknowledge and show the fluidity of terminology that is very often at play.

Within scholarship there is likewise a great variety of different terms used to describe what I call the “spiritual.” Terms such as “esoteric,” “occult,” “spiritual” and “spiritist” or “spiritualist” frequently overlap and each term also carries a diversity of meanings. Scholars whose work I reference for this project demonstrate this plurality of terminology. For instance, Kandinsky scholars Sixten Ringbom and Rose-Carol Washton-Long both prefer the term “occult.”<sup>11</sup> But Ringbom—as is clear even from titles of his analyses—varied his vocabulary: in 1966 he wrote of “Art in ‘ The’ The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’ Spiritual’ : Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” and in 1970 he chose *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*. Even considering the two titles cited below from Ringbom, however, the first includes the term “occult” and the second, written only four years later, includes the term “spiritualism.” Historian Corinna Treital also speaks of the “occult” and includes under this rubric a broad host of movements and activities that arose during the Wilhelmine period (1890-1918), especially focusing on the emergence of the “occult sciences.” She includes, among other phenomena, astrology, psychical research, dowsing, spirit photography and

---

<sup>11</sup> Sixten Ringbom, “Art in ‘ The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’ : Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966); Sixten Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting* (Abo Akademi, 1970); Rose-Carol Washton-Long, “Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky’ s Art of the Future,” *Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (1987).

Theosophy. Exhibits on the subject of modern art and the spiritual also demonstrate a variety of terms, including “occult” and “spiritual.”<sup>12</sup> Gísli Magnússon ascribes this diversity of terminology to differences in the nationality of the scholar—he names Germany, England and France in particular—and the era of publication.<sup>13</sup> Within the title of Magnússon’s *Magnússon’s Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik: esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R.M. Rilke* are an array of terms: “Metaphysik,” “esoterisch” and “okkultisch.” A full explication of the range of meanings of all of the terms used by artists, theorists and scholars would take me beyond the bounds of my project. It is important, however, to establish the great diversity within terminology that Steiner and his contemporaries as well as scholars have adopted to describe the interrelated phenomena under consideration. In the following I clarify the reasons behind my own choice of terms.

One of my primary motivations for choosing the term “spiritual” is that it represents one translation of the term “geistig,” and so captures the broad meaning even when Steiner and the other thinkers treated used a more varied vocabulary. Due to Kandinsky’s groundbreaking theory of a “geistige Kunst,” a concept also used by figures of the *Blaue Reiter* and other Expressionist artists, the modifier “geistig” has the specific connotation of a form of art that is innovative, spiritually inflected and also culturally transformative. As Thomas Anz explains, during this period Expressionism and the term “geistige Kunst” were considered nearly synonymous: “Expressionismus

---

<sup>12</sup> Veit Loers, *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: Von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900-1915: Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt* (Edition Tertium, 1995); Maurice Tuchman et al., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (Los Angeles : New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Abbeville Press, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Gísli Magnússon, *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik: esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R.M. Rilke* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 39.

und ‘ geistige Kunst’ ‘ geistige Kunst’ galten damals als weithin identisch, und das sowohl in den Selbstbeschreibungen der Autoren und Künstler als auch später in der Expressionismuskritik der 1920er Jahre.”<sup>14</sup> In my project I inscribe Steiner’ s aesthetic thought into this tradition of “geistige Kunst” and argue that his thought formatively shaped aspects of Expressionist thought.

Another advantage of the term “spiritual” is the way it stands in distinction to the traditionally “religious.” The thinkers I analyze did not advocate a return to preexistent forms of institutionalized religions. Instead, they were interested in concepts of supersensible dimensions, of a unity between the human being and the greater cosmos and other ideas that expanded a strictly rationalistic or secular worldview. This said, there was a certain blurring between the lines demarcating the “spiritual” from the “religious,” just as there is considerable blurring between terms more generally in the subfield of “spiritual modernism.” For instance, as discussed in the first chapter, many Russian symbolists were drawn to the thought of both Steiner and Kandinsky because of the way each discussed the Book of Revelation as a document relevant for modern times. Also, in the second chapter I show that Worringer, though he personally voiced skepticism toward religion, understood the aesthetic and psychic outlooks of “empathy” and “abstraction” as constitutively formed out of the religious view dominant in a given period. In addition, many Expressionist architects consciously drew upon the religious traditions of the temple or the Gothic cathedral to create more secular forms. Thus, these artists and theorists strove *not* for a stark departure from all things religious but, instead,

---

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Anz, *Literatur des Expressionismus* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2002), 60. Anz lists a number of publications contemporaneous with Kandinsky’ s *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* that feature “Geist.” They include: Heinrich Mann’ s “Geist und Tat” (1911); *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung* (1910) by Georg ibid., 60-62.

for a reworking and expansion of categories such that the spiritual, religious and secular intertwined in new, innovative ways.

My term “spiritual modernism,” though it has no German equivalent, resonates strongly with the concept “geistige Kunst” and I use it so as to suggest the notion of drawing from past traditions—including myriad spiritual streams, humanistic theories of the past and even sometimes religious traditions—to create innovative, future-oriented art forms. In addition, an important way that I define the term “spiritual modernism” is as a concept that eludes a strict binary between the spiritual realm and art or, more broadly, between the spiritual and the worldly. As I contend, especially in the third chapter, “spiritual modernism” does not exist outside of politics. Thomas Anz discusses multiple valences of the term “Geist,” three of which are especially relevant for my project. Anz shows first how the intellectuals of the period understood the term “Geist” as a form of cultural criticism (“kulturkritischer [...] Forderungen”).<sup>15</sup> The thinkers I analyze clearly utilized the term “Geist” as a form of cultural critique and shared the wider Expressionist aim of the reinscription of “Geist” as a needed intervention to over-rationalism in its various forms. Anz’ s second and third forms of “Geist” are defined as being diametrically opposed; whereas, I see *both* of them at play, especially in Steiner’ s work. One form Anz describes as overtly political, occurring in the work of Gustav Landauer, Ernst Toller and Heinrich Mann, and the other is anti-political, occurring in the work of Paul Kornfeld among others. This latter group, Anz notes, used anti-political language of “Innerlichkeit” and generally preferred “Seele” over “Geist.”<sup>16</sup> My project, especially

---

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Anz, *Literatur des Expressionismus*. (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2002), 60.

<sup>16</sup> Anz, *Literatur des Expressionismus*, 63.



my analysis of Steiner, seeks to analyze the work of thinkers who believed simultaneously in *both* of the above valences of “Geist.” Steiner and Kandinsky, for instance, highlighted the “inner” and immanent quality of spiritual experience and of art. Both also discuss the relationship between soul and spirit as exemplified in Steiner’s theory of multiple inner, spiritual sheaths that comprise the human being. At the same time, Steiner, as well as Bruno Taut, Paul Scheerbart and so many other Expressionists actively responded to the crisis of the First World War with clearly articulated, though diverse, political theories and political actions. This topic comprises the center of the third chapter.

### **The Scholarly Reception of “Spiritual Modernism”**

In the last two decades the subject of what I am calling “spiritual modernism” has become recognized as an important area of inquiry within both histories both of modernism and of German Expressionism in particular.<sup>17</sup> This has not always been the case, and the issues continue to be downplayed in certain lines of study. While much scholarship acknowledges the spiritual underpinnings of artistic innovation at the turn of

---

<sup>17</sup> The following titles are more recent examples of scholarly engagement with “spiritual modernism.” Christoph Wagner, ed. *Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee: das Bauhaus und die Esoterik* (Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber, 2005); Priska Pytlik, *Okkultismus und Moderne: ein kulturhistorisches Phänomen und seine Bedeutung für die Literatur um 1900* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2005); Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); John Golding, *Paths to the absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still*, A.W. Mellon lectures in the fine arts ;1997 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). There are also the recent studies of German poet and esotericist Stefan George (1868-1933): Ulrich Raulff, *Kreis ohne Meister: Stefan Georges Nachleben*, Stefan Georges Nachleben (München: Beck, 2009); Robert Edward Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002).

the twentieth<sup>th</sup> century, few scholars critically engage the category of the spiritual as constituent to modernist aesthetics.

One important reason for the neglect or superficial treatment of “spiritual modernism” is the assumption, explicit or implicit, that it is an atavistic phenomenon incongruous with modernist, aesthetic innovation. That is, the categories of “spiritual” and “modernist” are seen to represent an irreconcilable binary. Drawing on the binary, Cornelia Klinger, for example, situates aesthetic modernity within the wider constellation of what she theorizes as a “modernity process.”<sup>18</sup> She argues that the secularization process of the West—with the liberation of aesthetic values from theology and metaphysics—set the fine arts on the same path of secularization as science and technology.<sup>19</sup> In her account, the arts followed the course of the sciences and technology in their departure from spirituality.

A second influential line of thinking, first theorized by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1944, conceives of the increasing rationality that arose out of the Enlightenment as producing new “myths” about the possibility of a wholly secular world. Critiquing the equation of modernism with secularization, they argue that belief in the enlightenment promise and its Kantian claims to liberation from myth and authority fails to recognize the way it is part of a dialectical process that itself produces new myth. While Steiner and many contemporaries similarly critiqued the shortcomings of a world dominated by rationality, Steiner did *not* think of the spiritual dimension as

---

<sup>18</sup> Cornelia Klinger, “Autonomy-Authenticity-Alterity: On the Aesthetic Ideology of Modernity,” in *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism* (Barcelona: Museu D’ Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

belonging within the category of “myth,” as he believed in the tangibly transformative power of spiritually infused art. Art historian Beat Wyss asserts that many of his colleagues, in an effort to maintain a simplistic ideal of the Modern as tantamount to Enlightenment principles, under-emphasize that the period of industrial revolution also saw an expansion of esoteric movements, such as Theosophy, Anthroposophy and Freemasonry. Following the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, which Wyss cites explicitly, he argues that art historians often would rather deny that “die Moderne nicht nur Fortschritt, sondern auch Mythologie produzierte.”<sup>20</sup> With Adorno and Horkheimer Wyss argues that the categories of “Fortschritt” and “Mythologie” do not represent two poles but are, in fact, intertwined in a dialectical relationship. Wyss argues that those who downplay the cultural and historical importance of secret societies and esoteric movements misconstrue modernity as representing an ideal of rationality that, in fact, never existed: “Wer die kulturhistorische Bedeutung der Geheimgesellschaften und esoterischen Bewegungen herunterspielt, verengt die Moderne auf das rationalistische Wunschbild einer Epoche, die es nie gegeben hat.”<sup>21</sup> In a similar way, Thomas Anz speaks in similar terms when he argues that aesthetic modernism is constructed out of a process in which dual forces are at play: progress but also recourse to older models. Anz asserts the following: “Fortschritte sucht die ästhetische Moderne vielfach in Rückgriffen auf das, was dem zivilisatorischen Fortschritt voranging.”<sup>22</sup> One key intervention my project seeks to make is to productively complicate the notion that the modernist period, and aesthetic

---

<sup>20</sup> Beat Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst: zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne* (Köln: DuMont, 1996), 157.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> See “Thesen zur expressionistischen Moderne” by Anz in Sabina Becker, Helmuth Kiesel, and Robert Krause, *Literarische Moderne: Begriff und Phänomen* (Berlin ; New York: W. de Gruyter, 2007), 341.

modernism in particular, represents a break with spirituality and religion. In stressing that modernists were as concerned with the reconciliation between the artistic and the spiritual realm as their forbearers, I follow Jonathan Crary, who argues against prominent theories of modernism that hold that this period is typified by “rupture,” that is, a radical break with the past. He points out that, “there are no such things as continuities and discontinuities in history, only in historical explanation. [...] How one periodicizes and where one locates ruptures or denies them are all political choices that determine the construction of the present.”<sup>23</sup>

My project aims to show that Steiner, Kandinsky and other contemporaries created innovative, avant-garde art and art theory out of deep engagement with spiritual topics. That is, these thinkers draw in different ways from spiritual and religious traditions to help fashion their new, modernist aesthetic projects. For example, as I show in Chapter One, Kandinsky’ s pioneering theory of abstraction was created precisely in the years that he intensively read about Theosophy, including works by Steiner on dematerialization. Examining the question of “rupture” and periodization, the second chapter places Steiner into dialogue with two art historians writing at this time, Wilhelm Worringer and Alois Riegl, and shows how these scholars worked towards destabilizing the notion that artistic abstraction represents a radical break with the past. In the third chapter I show that Steiner’ s history of art, based on a spiritually based concept of the “evolution of consciousness,” deeply informed the forms of the Anthroposophical *Goetheanum* building in Dornach, Switzerland. In this chapter I also illuminate how Steiner’ s architectural theory and practice were politically engaged. Steiner conceived

---

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 7.

of his art and architecture as helping to promote peace and internationalism after the outbreak of the First World War. Thus, for Steiner, spiritual and artistic work did *not* mean an inherent break from societal and political engagement.

There are also political reasons for the scholarly neglect or mischaracterization of “spiritual modernism.” As curator of the 1986 exhibition “The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985,” Maurice Tuchman explained the subject was well studied until the 1930s when the National Socialist involvement in a fringe section of Theosophy led many intellectuals to view all facets of interest in Theosophy or Anthroposophy as suspect.<sup>24</sup> The most prominent offshoot of Theosophy was Ariosophy, an esoterically based doctrine defined in 1915 by the Austrian Lanz von Liebenfels that extolled the wisdom of the Aryans. In addition, the Italian Anthroposophical movement had members who were also involved in Fascism.<sup>25</sup> Historian Corinna Treitel explains that for five decades until the mid 2000s there was a strong trend within historical scholarship to regard “the German occult movement [as] significant mainly insofar as it helps to explain the ideological roots of National Socialism.”<sup>26</sup> Treitel asserts that it has been clearly established that there were indeed links between Adolf Hitler and Ariosophical circles. She argues, however, that this single line of interpretation that subordinates the occult to

---

<sup>24</sup> Tuchman et al., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*.

<sup>25</sup> For more details on the intersection of proto-Fascism and Fascism and the occult see the following works. Peter Staudenmaier, “Esoteric Alternatives in Imperial Germany: Science, Spirit, and the Modern Occult Revival,” in *Revisiting the “Nazi Occult.” Histories, Realities, Legacies*, ed. Monica and Eric Kurlander Black (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2015); Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Die okkulten Wurzeln des Nationalsozialismus* (Graz: Leopold Stocker Verlag, 1997); George Moss, *Die völkische Revolution. Über die geistigen Wurzeln des Nationalsozialismus* (Meisenheim: Athenäum, Königstein & Hain, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*, 24.

the *völkisch* has begun to reach its limit as more scholars have started to recognize that “there was much more to German occultism than proto-Nazism.”<sup>27</sup>

There are likewise political reasons, though of a more diverse nature, for the fluctuating status of modern art, especially abstraction, and Expressionism. I would argue that in more and less explicit ways these shifts in political attitude over time have also affected views on Steiner, as his thought, like a significant branch of Expressionism, was so strongly oriented toward spirituality. Rose-Carol Washton-Long, noted expert on Expressionism and Kandinsky, characterizes the various ways that in the 1920s and 1930s German political groups from both the political left and right leveled criticism against modern art:

In the 1920s and 1930 [...] critics on the left, abandoning the notion that vanguard art should be nonrealist, began to attack the perceived elitist direction of Expressionism and abstraction. From the right, modernist artists and schools, such as the Bauhaus, were denounced as “full of mysticism” and were charged with artistic Bolshevism, responsible for anarchy and disorder. By the late thirties, while the National Socialists were characterizing modernism as “entartete” [*sic*] (degenerate) as well as anarchistic, the left was attacking modernism, particularly Expressionism and abstraction, for its decadence, anarchism, mysticism, and bohemianism.<sup>28</sup>

With her mention of degenerate art Washton-Long is referring to the Nazi art exhibition in 1937 of so-called degenerate art (“entartete Kunst”) that began in Munich and subsequently travelled from city to city. Much of the art on display was Expressionist. When Washton-Long describes a critique of modernism from the left for its “decadence, anarchism, mysticism, and bohemianism,” she provides a footnote that references the

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>28</sup> Washton-Long, “Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky’s Art of the Future,” 39.

“Expressionist debate” (1937/1938). Georg Lukács played a part in inaugurating the debate in 1934 with an article entitled “ ‘ Grösse’ Grösse und Verfall’ Verfall’ des Expressionismus,” in which he argued that the Expressionist movement had helped to foster the spread of a form of mystical irrationalism attractive to the Nazis. This is not the place to detail the complex and varied arguments that comprised this famous debate, but it is possible to say that these various accusations against modern art, abstraction or Expressionism were formulated under very specific political circumstances of the late Weimar Republic. After World War Two, there was an important revival and reevaluation of Expressionism, including praise for Steiner’ s second *Goetheanum* building. Nevertheless, I contend that the early accusations still have a lingering affect, especially the suspicion of proto-fascism, of Expressionism and of “spiritual modernism” that also influences the reception of Steiner. As Treitel observed, within the field of history the tendency to focus on the proto-fascist roots of what she calls the “occult” lasted until the mid 2000s.

My project aims to contribute to this more recent shift within scholarship, marked by the work of Treitel and others, toward illuminating multiple “spiritual modernists” who emphatically did *not* have *völkisch* tendencies. In the third chapter I demonstrate how Steiner’ s aesthetic and political thought resonated with pacifist and Expressionist thinkers. I also show that Steiner responded to the outbreak of the First World War with a call for peace and internationalism, a response that directly countered nationalistic and *völkisch* ideologies. As I note in the third chapter, it was clear that German fascists were opposed to Steiner. In 1921 while Steiner lectured in Munich, the *Alldeutsch Alliance*, the same group that backed Hitler’ sHitler’ s putsch attempt in Munich, attempted to

assassinate him. Furthermore, Steiner's move to neutral Switzerland was akin to a forced exile. The attempted Hitler-Ludendorff putsch two years later in 1923 was an important factor in Steiner's decision to close his Berlin apartment and to move the Anthroposophical press out of Germany to Dornach, Switzerland.<sup>29</sup>

### **Scholarship on Rudolf Steiner**

While “spiritual modernism” has enjoyed significantly more attention in the past couple of decades, the neglect of Rudolf Steiner remains stubbornly persistent. In general, there is a dearth of scholarship on Steiner by mainstream non–Anthroposophical thinkers. The small body of scholarship that exists shows a polarizing trend: works by Steiner critics and enthusiasts. As one instance: in 2011, Helmut Zander published a biography of Steiner that casts him in a harsh light, deeming him a dilettante, a derivative thinker and an authoritarian leader.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, biographies and studies of Steiner published in Anthroposophical presses tend to cast him in a very positive light and lack a critical distance from their subject.<sup>31</sup> In addition, it is important to note that most of Steiner's works have been self-published by Anthroposophical presses. This

---

<sup>29</sup> For the sources on which I draw for this information, see the last paragraph of the section entitled “Steiner's Concept of the Modern Central European Cultural Mission as both Distinct and Inherently Internationalist” in Chapter Three.

<sup>30</sup> Helmut Zander, *Rudolf Steiner: Die Biografie* (München: Piper, 2011); Helmut Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland: theosophische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche Praxis 1884-1945* (Göttingen: Bandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Henry Barnes, *A Life for the Spirit: Rudolf Steiner in the Crosscurrents of Our Time* (Hudson, NY: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1997); Jan Davis, *Light for the New Millennium: Rudolf Steiner's Association with Helmut and Eliza von Moltke*, ed. T.H. Meyer (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1997); Christoph Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner. A Biography*, trans. Jon McAlice (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 2012); Peter Selg, *Rudolf Steiner 1861-1925. Lebens- und Werkgeschichte*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Ita Wegman Institut, 2012).



creates a barrier or “firewall” to mainstream researchers that further exacerbates the issue of neglect of Steiner within scholarship. There is a great need for more rigorous, scholarly research that falls between these poles, which I propose to offer as part of my project.

Though a robust body of scholarship on Steiner is still lacking, it is not uncharted territory. In the first chapter, I refer to the pioneering research of Sixten Ringbom who published in the 1960s through 1980s. Ringbom argued that the then little-known role of spiritual thought, especially Theosophy and the thought of Rudolf Steiner, decisively shaped Wassily Kandinsky’s aesthetic theory and his theory of abstraction.<sup>32</sup> In this chapter I also refer to the work of Rose-Carol Washton-Long, who, in the 1970s and 1980s, carried on Ringbom’s work of demonstrating how Theosophy, Steiner and other spiritual thought helped shape Kandinsky’s aesthetic theory. Very recently, Clement produced a critical edition of Steiner’s central texts, written between 1884 and 1910, in which he includes an account of the texts’ development, contextualizes the works with information on Steiner’s intellectual background and illuminates the myriad sources from which Steiner drew.<sup>33</sup> Christian Clement also wrote a book about Steiner’s

---

<sup>32</sup> Sixten Ringbom, “Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers,” in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, ed. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Los Angeles; New York: Abbeville Press, 1986); Sixten Ringbom, “Kandinsky und das Okkulte,” in *Kandinsky und München. Begegnungen und Wandlungen 1896-1914*, ed. Armin Zweite (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1982); Sixten Ringbom, “Die Steiner-Annotationen Kandinskys,” in *Kandinsky und München. Begegnungen und Wandlungen 1896-1914*, ed. Armin Zweite (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1982); Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*; Ringbom, “Art in ‘The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’: Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting.”

<sup>33</sup> Christian Clement, *Rudolf Steiner. Ausgewählte Schriften. Kritische Ausgabe*. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2013).

mystery plays in which Clement highlights the importance of Schiller and above all Goethe on Steiner's plays and his theoretical thought regarding theater.<sup>34</sup>

In my project I draw on a number of publications by Frederick Amrine. In the article "Discovering a Genius: Rudolf Steiner at 150," Amrine summarizes the many fields in which Steiner made innovations as well as the myriad reasons that Steiner's thought has often been misconstrued or neglected.<sup>35</sup> In "Idea, Theory, Emotion, Desire," Amrine illuminates the key Steinerian concept of the "evolution of consciousness," an idea theorized in greater detail by Owen Barfield.<sup>36</sup> The first chapter stands in dialogue with two articles by Amrine on Goethe. In "Goethean Intuitions" Amrine provides philosophical context for Goethe's scientific method and emphasizes especially the formative role of Spinoza's thought.<sup>37</sup> In "The Metamorphosis of the Scientist," Amrine argues that Goethe anticipated many of the main ideas of recent philosophy of science and, most importantly, that he understood science as developing not by a collection of facts but by transformations in perception.<sup>38</sup> I draw significantly on the forthcoming edition and translation of two of Steiner's lecture series by Frederick Amrine and John Kettle, and the commentary and annotations they provide. The first is the set of five

---

<sup>34</sup> Christian Clement, *Die Geburt des modernen Mysteriendramas aus dem Geiste Weimars : zur Aktualität Goethes und Schillers in der Dramaturgie Rudolf Steiners* (Berlin: Logos, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Amrine, "Discovering a Genius: Rudolf Steiner at 150," *being human* 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Frederick Amrine, "Idea, Theory, Emotion, Desire," *being human*, no. spring (2015). Amrine argues for links, and divergences, between this concept and the work of three contemporary thinkers: Julian Jaynes, Thomas Kuhn and Wilhelm Worringer. He argues that in the case of each of these three thinkers has some brilliant insights about the nature of the human psyche, but that each theory would be strengthened if its creator had been aware of the Steinerian concept of the "evolution of consciousness" to provide a coherent, interpretive context.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Amrine, "Goethean Intuitions," *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011).

<sup>38</sup> Frederick Amrine, "The Metamorphosis of the Scientist," *Goethe Yearbook* 5 (1990).

lectures Steiner presented over three weekends in October, ten to twelve weeks after the outbreak of the First World War, entitled “Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandlungsimpulse.” Amrine and Kettle give this lecture series the English title “The First *Goetheanum*. Architecture as Peacework.” The other work is the set of lectures Steiner gave in Bern in 1921 that accompanied a slide presentation of images of the first *Goetheanum* that was titled by Amrine and Kettle—”The First *Goetheanum*: Towards a New Theory of Architecture.” In my third chapter I treat the first lecture series in significant detail. All of the images of the first *Goetheanum* displayed in Chapter Three are taken from this second, forthcoming book by Amrine and Kettle.

Two noteworthy recent art exhibitions have recently touched on the topic of my dissertation: one devoted to Steiner, and the other to the little-known Expressionist artist Hilma af Klint who was significantly influenced by Steiner. The show *Rudolf Steiner: Alchemie des Alltags* was held at the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein to mark Steiner’s 150<sup>th</sup> birthday and ran between 2010 and 2012,<sup>39</sup> accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue edited by Mateo Kries and Alexander von Vegesack.<sup>40</sup> This exhibition also travelled to Wolfsburg where there was a parallel exhibition entitled *Rudolf Steiner and Contemporary Art* that focused on seventeen contemporary artists whose work was interpreted in light of Steiner’s thought. In 2013, the Hamburger

---

<sup>39</sup> It was a retrospective of Steiner’s entire oeuvre and included more than 200 works, including texts, art works, drawings, architectural models and furniture designs. The show illuminated links to social and artistic movements from his era to the present day. Parallels between Steiner’s work and the following thinkers are made: Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Antoni Gaudí, Erich Mendelsohn, Frank Lloyd Wright, Joseph Beuys and Olafur Eliasson.

<sup>40</sup> Kries, *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags* (Ditzingen: Vitra Design Museum, 2010).

Bahnhof Museum für Gegenwart in Berlin put on the exhibition “Hilma af Klint: Eine Pionierin der Abstraktion” with an accompanying catalogue.<sup>41</sup> It illuminated how, beginning in 1906, af Klint created over 200 abstract paintings, thus predating even Kandinsky in her move toward abstraction in the visual arts. The exhibition highlighted how her art was integrally informed by concepts of Spiritism, Theosophy and Anthroposophy.

The one aspect of Steiner’ s thought where the general rule of scholarly neglect does not apply is Steiner’ s *Goetheanum* buildings, which has been included in many studies of Expressionist architecture. The noted architectural historian Wolfgang Pehnt has devoted serious attention to Steiner’ s architectural theory in a number of chapters within anthologies and published a book-length study on the *Goetheanum* buildings.<sup>42</sup> As I discuss in my third chapter, many scholars have acknowledged links between Steiner’ s architecture and that of his contemporaries, and it is also well documented that the famous architects of the twentieth century—including Le Corbusier, Erich Mendelsohn and Frank Lloyd Wright—were impressed with the building.

---

<sup>41</sup> Iris et al. Müller-Westermann, ed. *Hilma af Klint: Eine Pionierin der Abstraktion* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Wolfgang Pehnt, *Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach, Opus 1* ([Berlin]: Ernst & Sohn, 1991). See also Dennis Sharp, *Modern Architecture and Expressionism* (Norwich, England: Longmans, 1966); Dennis Sharp, “Expressionist Architecture Today,” in *Expressionism Reassessed*, ed. Shulamith Behr, David Fanning and Douglas Jarman (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993). The third chapter references a number of other studies of Expressionist architecture that include Steiner. For a more comprehensive description of the secondary literature on Steiner within studies of Expressionism, see the bibliographic essay by Frederick Amrine in Rudolf Steiner, *The First Goetheanum. Architecture as Peacework*, ed. Frederick Amrine and John Kettle, vol. GA 287 (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, forthcoming). As Amrine points out, even though many scholars have recognized Steiner’ s architecture, it is still glaringly missing from a number of studies, including quite recent ones.

With my project I am broadening the scope of existing scholarship on Steiner by considering him, in the second chapter, as an art historian and by placing his theory into conversation with contemporary art historians Wilhelm Worringer and Alois Riegl. In the third chapter, I am also continuing the groundwork laid by Frederick Amrine and John Kettle in examining Steiner as a figure who took a stance against the First World War and whose thought resonates with contemporary, pacifist thinkers. Other aspects of my dissertation elaborate and deepen already existing scholarship. This includes the illumination of the link between Kandinsky and Steiner's thought as well as between Steiner and Expressionist architecture. In close analysis of Steiner's writings and those of his contemporaries I interrogate the notion of "the spiritual" by paying attention to linguistic and conceptual elements with a special emphasis on aesthetic theory.

### **The Scholarly Neglect of Steiner's Thought**

There are multiple reasons why Steiner's work has played so small a part within studies of modernism. In the following I suggest three of the most salient ones. The first reason for neglect I wish to discuss is how Steiner's relationship to Anthroposophy and Theosophy has affected his reception in mainstream scholarship. In an article entitled "Discovering a Genius: Rudolf Steiner at 150," Frederick Amrine catalogues a number of reasons why Steiner has been largely neglected in scholarship. Amrine points out that Anthroposophy has its own set of concepts and vocabulary and that Steiner's early period with Theosophy meant the adoption in early writings of Sanskrit terms that only add to the difficulty to comprehend Steiner's writings from a non-theosophical perspective. In researching and writing this dissertation, as well, Steiner's idiosyncratic vocabulary and specialized concepts have posed a challenge. Amrine also argues that,

seen superficially, Steiner might seem to deserve the negative titles he sometimes receives of “guru” or “occultist” or “mystic” but that, in fact, Steiner rejected categorically the idea of himself or anyone as an authority. Amrine also points out that there is a distinct lack of personal details in his lectures and his unfinished autobiography that point to how he worked against becoming a cult of personality, though there were followers who treated him with excessive reverence. Above all, as Amrine asserts, Steiner’s anti-authoritarian view is expressed the way that he defined Anthroposophy “from the very outset as a *philosophy of freedom*.”<sup>43</sup>

I argue, however, that a second factor has been at play in scholarly neglect of Steiner. Not only his language but his thought structures are difficult to penetrate, because his entire oeuvre is so fundamentally and thoroughly spiritual, and of such a complex nature, that it proves difficult for scholars to penetrate. In addition, Steiner’s own articulations reveal that his aim first and foremost in his engagement with contemporaneous institutions or movements was to pursue his spiritual agenda. For instance, when Steiner describes his motivation for taking over the editorship of the *Magazin für Literatur* he does not highlight the choice first and foremost as an opportunity to tap into the avant-garde literary world. Instead, he articulates it as a means to foster the spiritual impulses (“die geistigen Impulse”) of contemporary culture.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Amrine, “Discovering a Genius: Rudolf Steiner at 150,” 7.

<sup>44</sup> In his autobiography Steiner narrates that he lacked the funds to start a journal himself and so took the opportunity to become editor of *Magazin für Literatur* as an available means to communicate his spiritual ideas. Steiner states: “Ich hatte schon seit längerer Zeit daran gedacht, in einer Zeitschrift die geistigen Impulse an die Zeitgenossenschaft heranzubringen, von denen ich meinte, daß sie in die Öffentlichkeit getragen werden sollten.[...] Selbst eine Zeitschrift zu gründen, war damals etwas, woran ich nicht denken konnte. Die Geldmittel und die zu einer solchen Gründung notwendigen Verbindungen fehlten mir vollständig. So ergriff ich denn die Gelegenheit, die sich mir ergab, die

Steiner also speaks of the Expressionist movement as heading in this spiritual direction but argues that it could go further and extend more deeply into its exploration of the visual and a spiritual form of sight that can access the soul (“die Seele”):

Unser Seelenleben strebt eigentlich, wenn die Veranlassung zu der Seelenstimmung da ist, viel mehr als man glaubt, fortwährend dahin, sich umzugestalten im Sinne der Vision [...] Ich glaube, daß viele Betrachtungen der neueren Zeit, die sich ergehen innerhalb der Richtung, die als Expressionismus bezeichnet wird, nahe an dieser Wahrheit sind [...] nur geht man nicht weit genug, schaut nicht tief genug hinunter in die Seele und lernt nicht kennen diesen unwiderstehlichen Drang nach dem Visionären, der in jeder Menschenseele eigentlich ist.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, it is not surprising that Steiner had few extended exchanges—but many brief encounters—with contemporaneous writers and artists from within and beyond the Expressionist movement. For example, in 1899, there is evidence of encounters with the following contemporaneous writers and artists: Else Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945), Stefan Zweig (1881-1942), Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915) and Frank Wedekind (1864-1918), among others.<sup>46</sup> With the exception of Scheerbart, where there was some level of exchange, as discussed in the last chapter, these meetings seem to be one-time events. Similarly, while Steiner’s writings and lectures are replete with references to thinkers from German Idealism and Classicism, Steiner references contemporaneous writers, artists, art and architectural historians much less frequently.<sup>47</sup>

---

Herausgeberschaft des “Magazin für Literatur” zu erwerben. “Rudolf Steiner, Mein Lebensgang. Eine Autobiographie. (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2009), <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/schriften/028.pdf>. 334.

<sup>45</sup> Rudolf Steiner, “Das Sinnlich-Übersinnliche in seiner Verwirklichung durch die Kunst,” vol. GA 271 (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2010), <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>. 86.

<sup>46</sup> Kries, *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags*, 322.

<sup>47</sup> Steiner is more likely to explicitly reference contemporary philosophers and scientists as seen, for example, in his significant attention to Friedrich Nietzsche and Ernst Haeckel.

When he does acknowledge a contemporary, it is often only a passing reference, such as when Steiner briefly acknowledged having read the art historical treatise *Stilfragen* by Austrian art historian Alois Riegl in the course of Steiner's discussion of art history, a topic covered in the second chapter of this dissertation. This is the case despite the fact that Steiner was known to have been a voracious reader and kept up with the new ideas of the day in many fields.

The third and final reason for neglect I wish to introduce is the very large and particular nature of Steiner's corpus. Steiner's complete works include over 400 volumes! That all of these works were produced within the span of about three decades is an impressive feat. Steiner's written works are made up of forty books, including books, essays, four plays (the "mystery dramas"), volumes of mantric verse and an unfinished autobiography. It very important to highlight that the great majority of his output was in lecture form as it speaks to his method. These lectures are the artifact of a live performance that was directed at a particular audience and often to mark a particular occasion. Lectures were also written for different kinds of audiences. Some lectures were directed at a Steinerian audience with the assumption of a certain base level of conceptual knowledge and shared vocabulary. The majority of them, however, were composed for a public audience of non Steinerians. Steiner was trying to start a movement and to get people on board, so to speak. Therefore, there is something provisional and exemplary, as opposed to demonstrative, about many of the lectures. The nature of the oral delivery of a lecture requires a looser and less conceptually dense style. As already discussed, Steiner was often frustratingly loose with terminology, for example, he spoke of "the spiritual" dimension by using multiple terms. Fairly often, his



formulations sound simply vague. Steiner spoke often in lectures of the impossibility of translating what he held as supersensible, spiritual realities into everyday language. It was not uncommon that he created neologisms to try to approximate a particularly complex spiritually based concept.<sup>48</sup> In addition, some of the volumes of lectures have been edited by various people and some remain still unedited. Likewise, some lecture cycles have been translated into English and some remain untranslated. For the scholar, the lecture style combined with Steiner's particular fluidity with terminology means she often has to read many volumes of lectures on the same topics in order to glean a clear understanding of Steiner's concepts.

Amrine presents Steiner as a thinker and practitioner who was ahead of his time. He argues that his attempts to have a more visible role around 1900 failed because the culture was not yet ready for the kind of spiritual art proposed by Steiner. By the 1920s, however, Expressionist movements like the *Blaue Reiter* had fully embraced ideas formulated by Steiner. Amrine contends that "ideas that have become commonplace today, such as the reality of the unconscious, or the active role of the perceiver in constructing experience, were heresies in Steiner's youth."<sup>49</sup> Hence another reason for his neglect is a kind of "untimeliness."

This points to another way that Steiner's work evades easy categorization, that is, with respect to periodization. There is a focus in my project on the pre-war period–

---

<sup>48</sup> In one instance from the lecture "Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandlungsimpulse" (1914) Steiner coins the term "verseelichen" when he argues that Dante revived the Egypto-Chaldean age by filling it with soul: "Dante ist der Geist, der das Ägyptisch-Chaldäische "verseelicht", durchseelt wider auferweckt hat." Rudolf Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandlungsimpulse* (1914), vol. 287 (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1985), 23.

<sup>49</sup> Amrine, "Discovering a Genius: Rudolf Steiner at 150."

with the discussion of the intersection of Steiner and the *Blaue Reiter* group—and, more broadly, the many links with Expressionist artists and architects. The pre-war period is often regarded as the primary period for Expressionism, a movement often viewed as beginning with the pre-war *Brücke* and *Blaue Reiter* groups and ending with the shift to *Dada* and to *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Yet, it is important to point out that Steiner's thought does not adhere to strict pre- and post-war categories. The building of the second *Goetheanum*—which has been recognized for its links with many modernist and Expressionist architects—was not undertaken until 1925, a full twelve years after construction began in 1913 on the first *Goetheanum*. 1925 was the year of Steiner's death and also seven years after the end of the First World War. In addition, Steiner continued his parallel interests in *both* art and politics with his intensive theoretical work on the concept of the three-fold social order. Thus, I would argue that the way Steiner's thought bridges the divide between pre- and post-war and between art and politics is yet another way that the study of Steiner's thought productively complicates traditional binaries.

A central aim of my project, thus, is to bring Steiner into conversation with contemporaries even if in many cases Steiner and his peers may have been resistant to such a dialogue. I seek to make more explicit the ways that Steiner shared an interest with contemporaries in many of the most pressing issues of the day. These issues include questions of the intersection of art and spirituality; the history of art and the origins of artistic abstraction; the interplay of art and politics; Expressionist architecture and the response to the First World War, both artistically and politically.

## Chapter Outline

In Chapter One, “Rudolf Steiner’ s Goethean Symbolism and his Influence on Wassily Kandinsky’ s Theory of Abstraction,” I examine the brief period prior to the First World War, especially in Munich, when a number of artists and intellectuals—opposed to what they perceived as the over dominance of “materialism” and positivism—turned to spiritual concepts.<sup>50</sup> I focus primarily on the Russian Expressionist painter Wassily Kandinsky and indicate how his close reading of a few of Steiner’ s early works was instrumental in the development of Kandinsky’ s theory of abstraction. I argue that Kandinsky used Steiner’ s concept of “Imagination,” the first in a three-stage meditative process, in which one retreats from the sense world to hone inner capacities. While Kandinsky links this stage of dematerialization with abstraction, I argue that Steiner’ s spiritual and aesthetic vision does not aim for abstraction. On the contrary, I show that a central component of Steiner’ s aesthetics is a critique of the abstract mode, what he regards as an overly theoretical, disembodied approach typified by allegory. Steiner regards allegorical art an unfortunate tendency in Theosophical art. Ultimately, I show that Steiner aims for a *return* to the phenomenological world in a deep, immersive mode characteristic of Goethean thought. In terms of the significance of this narrative for the larger argument of my dissertation, this chapter illuminates how this moment of high modernism, when Kandinsky was developing his groundbreaking theory of abstraction,

---

<sup>50</sup> Much of the scholarship on Expressionism highlights Berlin as the prime center for the movement. I focus on Munich as another important center of Expressionism, though this is certainly not without precedent, as notable scholars have also drawn attention to Munich as well as to Vienna. See, for example, Rainer Metzger, *Munich: Its Golden Age of Art and Culture 1890-1920* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009); Peter Jelavich, *Munich and Theatrical Modernism: Politics, Playwriting, and Performance, 1890-1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

has roots in a much longer history that includes thinkers such as Goethe. This first chapter also raises productive questions that carry through the whole dissertation regarding the relationship of abstraction and spirituality, embodiment or disembodiment and contributes to the theory of abstraction within modernism.

In Chapter Two, “Steiner’ s Theory of the Evolution of the Arts in Dialogue with Wilhelm Worringer’ s *Abstraktion und Empathie* and Alois Riegl’ s *Kunstwollen*, I examine Steiner’ s theory of the history of art as part of what Owen Barfield termed Steiner’ s “evolution of consciousness,” according to in which artistic developments are manifestations of an evolving “consciousness” and subjectivity. I read Steiner’ s theory alongside the famous art historical treatise *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1907) by German art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965) and the early history of art by Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905): *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (1893). In my reading of Steiner with Worringer I focus on temporality to compare how Worringer’ s version of art history advances via a binary manner by positing oscillation between the two poles of abstraction and empathy. Contrastingly, Steiner’ s history of art is dialectical in nature: following Barfield’ s terminology, the three phases include that of “original participation,” the “onlooker stage” and the final, coming stage of “final participation.” In the second section of the chapter, I consider Steiner’ s aesthetic theory in dialogue with Austrian art historian Riegl’ s *Stilfragen* and compare their theories account for the origin of the acanthus motif, a vegetal ornament that commonly adorns Corinthian columns. I highlight this small example in order to illuminate larger issues: the critique of artistic naturalism and the adoption of the concept similar to Riegl’ s *Kunstwollen*, a collective artistic will that helps shape the artistic

production of a given cultural period. More broadly, this chapter is concerned with three thinkers for whom an encounter with contemporary—in particular Expressionist—art led each to look backward and to trace the long history of art. In differing ways, they subvert the radical break that modernism is supposed to represent by tracing much earlier roots to artistic abstraction, whether in the “primitive” period, antiquity or the Renaissance.

In Chapter Three, “The first *Goetheanum* Building and Steiner’ s Vision of Peace and Internationalism,” I focus on Steiner’ s aesthetic and political response to the First World War in his vision of the first *Goetheanum* as an art form that promoted peace and internationalism. In this chapter, I consider Steiner not only as an art and architectural historian and art theorist, but also as a practicing artist, architect and as someone who took a political stance vis-à-vis the war. I show how the first *Goetheanum* has been recognized as belonging within the canon of Expressionist architecture and the multiple links between this structure and other contemporaneous architectural creations of Expressionist and other “spiritual modernists.”

I draw especially from a series of lectures delivered only weeks after the outbreak of the First World War in which Steiner called for a tempering of nationalism by the recognition of a universally shared history of culture. Steiner promoted the idea that each culture had a distinct mission and he makes a case for special task of central Europe (“Mitteleuropa”) in promoting internationalism. I bring Steiner’ s aesthetic and political thought into conversation with two pacifist Expressionist thinkers: the German architect Bruno Taut (1880-1938) and the German writer, illustrator and architectural theorist Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915). I also briefly introduce a link between Steiner and Sigmund Freud’ s early anti-war text “Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod” (1915).

By highlighting how Steiner conceived of the *Goetheanum* as an aesthetic response to the war, I show that his spiritually inspired aesthetics were far from divorced from contemporary, political issues. I demonstrate that Steiner's spiritual thought is very grounded in both aesthetics and politics, a dual interest of so many Expressionists. This argument also links in broader ways with an argument made in the first chapter, namely that, despite the way his ideas of dematerialization influenced Kandinsky's theory of abstraction, Steiner's aesthetics were ultimately *not* oriented toward the abstract as divorced from the phenomenal.

## CHAPTER 1

### Rudolf Steiner's Goethean Symbolism and his Influence on Wassily Kandinsky's Theory of Abstraction

[Goethe] vertieft sich in dieselbe [die Wirklichkeit], um in ihrem ewigen Wandel, in ihrem Werden und Bewegen, ihre unwandelbaren Gesetze zu finden, er stellt sich dem Individuum gegenüber, um in ihm das Urbild zu erschauen [...] Das sind keine leeren Allgemeinbegriffe, die einer grauen Theorie angehören, das sind die wesentlichen Grundlagen der Organismen mit einem reichen, konkreten Inhalt, lebensvoll und anschaulich. Anschaulich freilich nicht für die äußeren Sinne, sondern nur für jenes höhere Anschauungsvermögen.  
--Rudolf Steiner<sup>51</sup>

Wenn wir aber bedenken, daß die geistige Wendung ein direkt stürmisches Tempo angeschlagen hat, daß auch die "festeste" Basis des menschlichen Geisteslebens, d.h. die positive Wissenschaft, mitgerissen wird und vor der Tür der Auflösung der Materie steht, so kann behauptet werden, daß nur noch wenige "Stunden" uns von dieser reinen Komposition trennen.  
--Wassily Kandinsky<sup>52</sup>

#### Introduction

At this point in Kandinsky scholarship it is well established that his aesthetics is deeply informed by spiritual and religious concepts. More specifically, as Sixten Ringbom points out, it was during a brief pre-war period, primarily in Munich that the developments of Kandinsky's theory of abstract art coincided with his greatest engagement with spiritual subjects. In the following instance Ringbom uses the term "occult" for what I am calling "spiritual:" "am intensivsten war Kandinskys Interesse an okkulten Phänomenen offenbar in der Zeit von etwa 1908 bis 1910, also gerade in den

---

<sup>51</sup> Rudolf Steiner, "Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik," GA 30 (1909): 9.

<sup>52</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 4 ed. (Sulgen: Benteli Verlag, 2013), 119.

Jahren, als er seine Theorie von einer abstrakten Kunst entwickelte.”<sup>53</sup> In another essay Ringbom asserts that Kandinsky had sympathy for Steiner’s thought lasted until at least the publication of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1911).<sup>54</sup> It was during this period that the painter closely read a number of Steiner’s works regarding theories of a dematerialized spiritual reality only perceptible to those with trained super-sensible capacities (without a provided visual referent). In one example, Kandinsky took notes on a passage from Steiner’s work *Stufen der Höheren Erkenntnis* (1905-1908) in which the first stage of higher spiritual experience is described as one in which colors, sounds and smells become unattached from objects and float freely in space.<sup>55</sup> These ideas bear striking similarity with Kandinsky’s notion that colors and forms are dissociated from objects.

In this chapter I begin by situating Steiner and Kandinsky in the prewar years, especially in Munich, and show how Kandinsky and a number of other significant modernist figures were exposed to Steiner, who at the time was a prominent figure as art theorist and spiritual teacher in modernist circles. I then look more specifically at the ways the two thinkers are united in their orientation: away from the “materialism” of positivist science and naturalism and toward an inner mode of experience that looks to depart from the sense world. In my analysis of Kandinsky I am especially guided by Sixten Ringbom’s pioneering research on the influence of Steiner on Kandinsky and

---

<sup>53</sup> Ringbom, “Kandinsky und das Okkulte,” 93.

<sup>54</sup> Ringbom, “Art in ‘The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’: Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” 392.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 403. The original includes the line: “Das macht eben die Beweglichkeit und Freiheit der imaginativen Welt aus, dass das Zwischenglied der äusseren Dinge fehlt, dass das Geistige ganz unmittelbar in den freischwebenden Tönen, Farben usw. sich auslebt.” See Rudolf Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, (Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2010), <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>. 23.



Theosophy more broadly. I also draw significant insights from Rose-Carol Washton-Long' s scholarship.

In the second section I show how the two thinkers diverge in important aspects of their aesthetics. Importantly, Kandinsky' s articulation of the spiritual dimension as abstract in nature (what he also alternately calls the “compositional” or “objectless”) is nowhere to be found in Steiner' s aesthetics. I argue that this omission is not a matter of wording. On the contrary, a central component of Steiner' s aesthetics is a critique of the abstract mode, what he regards as an overly theoretical, disembodied approach that is typified by allegory. Moreover, Steiner faults Theosophy with a tendency toward allegorical art. To show the critique of the allegorical as central to Steiner' s aesthetics, however, requires untangling how Steiner uses the terms “symbol” and “allegory,” as they are often conflated into one concept that stands for all that Steiner is against: alternately the mimetic or the theoretical. To shed light on this confusion, I follow Hazard Adams and his explication of Goethe' s pioneering distinction between the terms, an aspect of Goethean thought of which Steiner appears strangely unaware. In addition, I show that though Steiner stands in opposition to the allegorical his aesthetics is based in a promotion of a symbolic highly resonant, though not explicitly derivative of, a Goethean symbolic. With this argumentation, I depart from the thought of Sixten Ringbom who deems Steiner as more closely aligned with Theosophy than I do and who remains focused upon Steiner' s ideas of dematerialization.

In the final section of the chapter, I focus on Steiner' s aesthetics alone. Though Kandinsky and Steiner shared an impulse to leave the physical plane, their respective aesthetics ultimately end in very different places regarding the sense world. I argue that

albeit the earlier stages of Steiner' s spiritual model are similar to Kandinsky' s model in the way the meditant is asked to retreat from the sense world to hone inner capacities, the ultimate aim of Steiner' s aesthetic model is not to remain in a disembodied, abstract state. Instead the aim is to *return* to the phenomenological world in a deep, immersive mode characteristic of Goetheanism. In Steiner' s Goetheanism the symbol arises when the sense world is entered deeply and becomes transparent. This is why Kandinsky concludes with a groundbreaking theory and practice of abstract art, while Steiner' s oeuvre includes, along with his art and architecture, many thoroughly practical initiatives such as a form of farming, medicine and schools, all of which he viewed as manifestations of his Goethean aesthetics.

Before concluding the chapter, I discuss Steiner' s art dance of Eurythmy and how he theorized it as an expression and reworking, in movement form, of the Goethean *Metamorphosenlehre*. In this section I bring Steiner' s thought back into conversation with Kandinsky' s in a discussion of how each valued the spiritual potential of speech, music and tone and its importance for Steiner' s Eurythmy.

In terms of the significance of this narrative for the larger argument of my dissertation, this chapter illuminates how at a moment of high modernism when Kandinsky was developing his groundbreaking theory of abstraction he draws, in fact, from a much longer history to include thinkers such as Goethe. The subject of establishing a much longer genealogy to modern art is one that recurs prominently throughout this project.

In Chapter Two I show how Steiner, along with German art historian Wilhelm Worringer and Austrian art historian Alois Riegl, all write complex histories of art. In

each case they locate the origins of abstraction in much earlier periods, in the Renaissance, in “primitive” art and in Hellenistic antiquity, respectively. In addition, in Chapter Three I illuminate how many of the innovative Expressionist architectural creations, including Steiner’ s *Goetheanum* building, are inspired by earlier architectural traditions, most of which are religious or spiritual in nature. These earlier influences include temple architecture and the Gothic cathedral. My focus on thinkers who trace a longer history to modernism helps productively destabilize the notion of aesthetic modernism and abstraction as representing a clean rupture with the past. This first chapter in particular raises questions that carry through the whole dissertation regarding the relationship of abstraction and spirituality to materialism or de-materialism, embodiment or disembodiment and contributes to the theory of abstraction within modernism.

### **Kandinsky and the Spiritual**

Kandinsky’ s library, maintained by the Gabriele Münter and Johannes Eichner-Stiftung in Munich, reveals the wide range of esoteric subject matter that the painter gleaned as inspiration for his theory of abstraction. The collection included books on topics such as spiritism, animism, mediums, magnetism, mysticism, transcendental physics, esoteric color theory and Theosophy.<sup>56</sup> Scholars cite a range of influences that account for the spiritual or often explicitly religious thematic of some of his paintings from this period. Jelavich highlights that between 1908 and 1914 Bavarian and Russian

---

<sup>56</sup> Reinhard Zimmermann, “Der Bauhaus-Künstler Kandinsky-ein Esoteriker?,” in *Johannes Itten-Wassily Kandinsky-Paul Klee: Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, ed. Christoph Wagner (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2005), 47.

peasant art played a significant role in the development of Kandinsky's "spiritually expressive abstraction."<sup>57</sup> He argues that Kandinsky valued in peasant art a freedom from a faithful, realistic depiction and a joy in form, line and color for its own sake. This combined with the incorporation of religious figures and themes from Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity that expressed spiritual upheaval and the messianic role of the artist, including the Deluge, the Apocalypse, St. George and Angel Gabriel.<sup>58</sup> Long emphasizes the influence of Theosophy, Symbolism and the Russian religious movement.<sup>59</sup> Ringbom points out that the Theosophical movement, which had wide popularity at the turn of the century, helped spread knowledge of parallels in mystic strains of Western and Eastern religion and their long-held traditions of objectless contemplation.<sup>60</sup> He reasons that it is very likely that Kandinsky, as well as artists such as Piet Mondrian who was also involved with Theosophy for nearly twenty years and became a member of the movement, would have gained exposure to notions of objectless contemplation second-hand through Theosophical sources.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Jelavich, *Munich and Theatrical Modernism: Politics, Playwriting, and Performance, 1890-1914*, 222.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> She names as influences Steiner when a Theosophist; the Symbolist writers Andrei Bely, Vyacheslav Ivanov and Dmitry Merezhkovsky and the Russian religious thinkers Sergei Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdiaev. See Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 41.

<sup>60</sup> Ringbom points out that the last decades of the 1800's involved a great rise in popularity of publications on Eastern mysticism. For example, Alfred Percy Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, a Theosophical reading of the subject, went through eight editions between 1883-1903. See Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers," 134.

<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that, though Kandinsky's engagement with spiritual and religious subjects is by now well established, there is not unanimous agreement on this point in Kandinsky scholarship. For example, early biographer and pioneering Kandinsky scholar Will Grohmann regarded the spiritual element as an early preoccupation, in one instance calling it a hobby, not constituent to Kandinsky's aesthetics. See Will Grohmann,

In time Kandinsky came to distance himself from spiritual subjects and an important factor in his decreasing engagement with spiritual subjects was the changing political climate and his greater involvement with the Russian art scene. According to Washton-Long, as Kandinsky became more involved in the Russian avant-garde movement, there was a shift away from Theosophy and an apparent aim to dissociate his notion of the coming spiritual epoch from Steinerian thought.<sup>62</sup> Vergo sheds more light on the cultural-political shift taking place in the years leading up to and immediately following the First World War that made it difficult for Kandinsky to maintain his spiritual outlook. Vergo argues that the basis of this outlook

had derived from a prewar mood that was foreign to the argumentative materialism of Soviet society. [...] In 1913 even Kandinsky's good friend David Burliuk began to denounce "that talk about content and spirituality" as "the

---

*Wassily Kandinsky: Leben und Werk* (Köln: Verlag M DuMont Schauberg, 1958). More recently, Peg Weiss argues Kandinsky's interest in Theosophy was more due to the promptings of his partner Gabriele Münter. More fundamentally, she argues that the English translation "spiritual" of the much broader, more multivalent German word "geistig" has led to an exaggerated emphasis on the supernatural element in Kandinsky's oeuvre. See Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: the Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 141. Rose-Carol Washton-Long, however, provides linguistic evidence that counters the claim by Weiss. She narrates that when Kandinsky sent a version of his essay *Über das Geistige* to Russia to be read at a conference in 1911 he used the Russian word "dukhovnyi" which does not have the valence of "mental" but has a clearer meaning of "spiritual." See Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 156.

<sup>62</sup> Long states that the 1914 English version of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* only mentions Blavatsky and that the Russian translation from the same year makes no mention at all of Theosophy. His autobiography from 1913 references Steiner, but makes more references to Russian writer and religious thinker Dmitri Merezhkovsky who popularized the notion of society being on the brink of the "Third Revelation." This concept involves a coming religious revolution that would parallel that of the early Christians and unite the East with the Christian mystical tradition. *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* makes a number of explicit references to Steiner. See Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 39-40.

greatest crime against genuine art.” And the literary group known as Acmeists “scorned the mystical vagueness of symbolism, its vaunted spirit of music.”<sup>63</sup>

Vergo asserts that simultaneous with Kandinsky’s breakthrough to abstraction, members of a younger generation—including the Cubists and the Futurists—were undergoing a dramatic change in values. By the time Kandinsky reestablished himself in Moscow after the war, the new values, clearly less oriented toward things spiritual, had gained prominence. One should, however, not overstate the shift away from spiritual subjects in Kandinsky’s thought.<sup>64</sup>

Kandinsky’s interest in spiritual subjects did indeed persist into the *Bauhaus* years—specifically in the years between 1920-1928. Reinhard Zimmermann points out that while his lectures during the Bauhaus period do not have an emphasis on spiritual topics, both his library and his paintings reveal a continued, serious engagement with spiritual subjects. His library contained multiple books on astrology, two works by the occult physicist Friedrich Zöllner as well as works on multiple subjects published after the First World War. The book *Jenseitiger Mensch* (1925) by Emil Mattiesen—which covers concepts such as the aura, mediums and telepathy—contains many notes in the margins by Kandinsky. Even his lectures during the Bauhaus years also still hint at subjects previously discussed more in length, including, according to Zimmermann, references to Theosophical ideas and the esoteric dimension of synaesthesia.

---

<sup>63</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), 27.

<sup>64</sup> Rose-Carol Washton-Long argues how Kandinsky increased involvement in the Russian avant-garde represented a shift away from Theosophy and Steiner. She points out that his 1913 autobiography still references Steiner, but that Kandinsky aims to dissociate his concept of the coming spiritual with Steiner and link it more with the concept of the “Third Revelation” as popularized by Russian writer and religious thinker Dmitry Merezhkovsky. See the chapter “Visions of a New Spiritual Realm” in Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 13-41.

Zimmermann says that after this time it appears that these interests waned, though Kandinsky was also then beyond sixty years old, and in letters he expressed a desire to devote the time remaining to painting, in addition to his lecturing responsibilities.<sup>65</sup> As recent scholarship by Zimmermann and others has illuminated, Kandinsky's involvement in spiritual topics was far from a fleeting phenomenon limited to the pre-war period; in fact, it appears that the painter sustained interest in such subjects at least until past his sixties. More generally, the varied spiritual interests of other members of the Bauhaus contributed to a spiritual focus of the Bauhaus in the 1920s. These included the Theosophical beliefs of Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872-1944); the interest of Swiss painter, art historian and Johannes Itten (1888-1967) in Mazdaznan—a mix of Zarathustrianism, Hinduism and Christianity—and the Christianity of painter, writer and dramatist Lothar Schreyer (1886-1966).

### **The Munich Moment: Kandinsky and Steiner**

Kandinsky's early interest in the spiritual cannot be fully understood without reference to Steiner's thought. In the pre-war period, Steiner intersected with Kandinsky and others in his modernist circle in Munich. This city served as the creative incubator for a number of groundbreaking thinkers and movements. It was home to Thomas Mann, the *Blaue Reiter* group, the Thannhauser Galerie, art historian Heinrich Wölfflin and philosopher Oswald Spengler.<sup>66</sup> Rainer Metzger describes Munich as a

---

<sup>65</sup> Zimmermann, "Der Bauhaus-Künstler Kandinsky—ein Esoteriker?," 50-52.

<sup>66</sup> Metzger, *Munich: Its Golden Age of Art and Culture 1890-1920*, 191.

“kind of biotope in which the avant-garde, the precious new generation, could feel at home.”<sup>67</sup>

The bohemian neighborhood of Schwabing was the center of Munich’s artistic scene and home to a great number of artists.<sup>68</sup> Robert Norton points out that the fact that it adjoined the university and offered affordable housing allowed it to take on a role akin to the Latin Quarter in Paris in the way it offered sanctuary for counter-cultural and experimental endeavors in the arts, politics and in untraditional social expressions. Its residents were sometimes playfully referred to as “Schlawiner,” a moniker derived from the word for Slovenians. Norton defines a Schlawiner as “anyone who painted behind the thousand atelier windows in Schwabing, who kneaded clay, wrote poetry in the garrets, sang or wrote music, amassed debts in the little inns and proclaimed Nihilism or Aestheticism in the cafes.”<sup>69</sup> As Kandinsky hailed from Moscow and Steiner from Kraljevec, an area formerly part of Austro-Hungary and currently Croatia, both figures represent this Eastern European heritage.

Rainer Metzger portrays the colorful milieu in Munich as typified by a mix of conflicting qualities—cosmopolitan but provincial and progressivist but also decadent.<sup>70</sup> Another important way that Munich was a city of contrasts was in its religious or spiritual

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> For a map showing the great number of artists, art schools and exhibition spaces located in Schwabing in the year 1913 see the appendix “Wer wohnte wo in Schwabing?” in Armin Zweite and Peter Jelavich, *Kandinsky und München: Begegnungen und Wandlungen, 1896-1914*. (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1982), 444-45.

<sup>69</sup> Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle*, 165.

<sup>70</sup> Metzger states, “the cosmopolitan coexisted with the provincial [...] Progressiveness coincided with the concept of decline and decadence [...]. Claims of uniqueness, or at least of originality, were made against the background of a plethora of reproductions.” See “Decadence and the Avant-Garde: Munich Enters the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” in Metzger, *Munich: Its Golden Age of Art and Culture 1890-1920*, 193.



orientation. It was a city traditionally Catholic that, during this period saw a great increase of artists and thinkers with varied spiritual leanings. Corinna Treitel dates the origin of the link between the spiritual (she most often uses the term “occult”) and the modernist sensibility in Munich to the mid-1880s with the founding of the first psychical research circle the *Psychologische Gesellschaft* in 1886.<sup>71</sup> In terms of the wider context of Munich as a locus for the intersection of spiritual explorations and art, it is important to note that Kandinsky was acquainted with Symbolist poet Stefan George, an esotericist and significant figure in Munich’ s cultural life. The *Blaue Reiter* almanac contains a poem by George set to music by Anton Webern. George was the primary figure to bring to Germany the ideas of Symbolism, especially those of Mallarmé, from France and in 1896 founded the important magazine *Blätter für die Kunst*.<sup>72</sup> He had a cult following and a group formed around him that came to be known as the “Kosmiker” that held poetry readings as well as Dionysian festivals and masques that combined literary, theatrical and sexual expression. Paul Wolfskehl offered his home as a meeting place for this group as well as for numerous intellectuals and artists of the period, including Kandinsky and other artists of the *Phalanx* group.<sup>73</sup>

In different ways, Kandinsky and Steiner each contributed to the avant-garde culture emerging in Munich. The Bavarian city served as Kandinsky’ s home base for

---

<sup>71</sup> See Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*, 31.

<sup>72</sup> For recent works on George, in addition to the aforementioned *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle* by Robert Edward Norton from 2002, see also Ulrich Raulff’ s *Kreis ohne Meister: Stefan Georges Nachleben* (München, Beck, 2009) and *A Poet’ s Reich: Politics and Culture in the George Circle* ed. Melissa S. Lane and Martin Ruehl. (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> Long lists among Wolfskeh’ s friends the following figures: Martin Buber, Thomas Mann, Else Lasker-Schüller, Arnold Böcklin and August Endell. See Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 17.

almost two decades and many of Kandinsky's most significant artistic contributions took place here. He had settled in Munich in 1896, after deciding to leave the profession of law, Kandinsky settled in Munich to devote his time fully to studying painting. He left only when the outbreak of the war in 1914 forced him to flee to Moscow. In this city Kandinsky helped to found the *Neue Künstlervereinigung Vereinigung* in 1909 along with, among others, Gabriele Münter, Alexej Jawlensky and Marianne von Werefkin. When this group proved ultimately too conservative for the radically non-referential nature of the work of some of its members, Kandinsky, along with Münter and Franz Marc, took the refusal of one of Kandinsky's paintings as impetus to resign and create the *Blaue Reiter* group and resulting almanac in 1912.

During this period Munich was also a very important center for Steiner. In general, in this pre-war period Steiner was a prominent figure within modernist artistic circles where interest in Theosophy was often great. Between 1902 and 1913, Steiner was the Secretary General of the German section of the Theosophical Society that was headquartered in Berlin and made frequent trips to the Munich branch of the Theosophical Society. In 1907 in Munich Steiner organized the world conference of the European section of the Theosophical Society. At this event he introduced a number of artistic initiatives. The inner space was hung with bright red cloth, a choice based on Steiner's color theory, and decorated with seven columns, made of painted boards. The capitals of the columns contained signs of the planets and between the columns were seven apocalyptic seals. The conference brochure also included images of five seals, in transformed form. The great attendance of this event shows that Steiner received a lot of exposure as an artist. It was also a highly controversial event, as many Theosophists

found the artwork too untraditional.<sup>74</sup> This is not surprising because, as will emerge later in this chapter, Steiner likewise often took issue with artwork by Theosophists, as he regarded it as tending too much toward allegory, a form he did not admire.

Outside of Vienna, Munich was the city in which Steiner delivered the greatest number of lectures on the spiritual aspects of art. Long argues that Steiner's physical presence in Munich during this period and his idea that artistic activities were the most potent way to develop knowledge of the spiritual were the greatest factors in Kandinsky's interest in Theosophy.<sup>75</sup> One of the most significant lecture series was that held in the Kunsthaus "Das Reich." Steiner's lectures here took place concurrently with a group exhibit containing works by Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Alfred Kubin and Franz Marc.

Kandinsky is known to have attended these lectures.<sup>76</sup> There is also evidence that he attended lectures by Steiner in Berlin in 1907 and 1908.<sup>77</sup> In addition, Kandinsky was

---

<sup>74</sup> See Rudolf Steiner, *Bilder okkultur Siegel und Säulen*, vol. 284, Der Münchner Kongress Pfingsten 1907 und seine Auswirkungen (1907, 1909 and 1911) (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1993), 148. See also the chapter "The Architecture of Rudolf Steiner" in Wolfgang Pehnt's anthology for a short description of this event. Wolfgang Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture* (Stuttgart and London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 137-148.

<sup>75</sup> Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Walter Kugler, "Weltgeist, wo bist Du?!" Rudolf Steiner im Kontext des Aufbruchs in die Moderne" in *Rudolf Steiner. Die Alchemie des Alltags*. ed. Mateo Kries and Julia Althaus. (Ditzingen: Vitra Design Museum, 2010), 34. The lectures were so popular that they were all repeated multiple times.

<sup>77</sup> The lectures were part of the so-called "Architektenhausvorträge," a series of public lectures given between 1903-1918 in the Architektenhaus in Berlin on Wilhelmstraße 92-93 and also in Munich. See Rudolf Steiner, *Die Erkenntnis der Seele und des Geistes*, vol. GA 56, Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe. Fünfzehn öffentliche Vorträge gehalten zwischen dem 10. Oktober 1907 und dem 14. Mai 1908 im Architektenhaus in Berlin, am 3. und 5. Dezember 1907 und 18. März 1908 in München (Dornach, Switzerland: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1985).

The artist couple Maria and Alexander Strakosch repeatedly attended these lectures with Kandinsky this year. The latter was previously a student of Kandinsky's, See Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of*

known to have attended lectures during the Murnau period, 1909 to 1914, when he and Münter lived and worked during the summers in a bucolic town forty miles south of Munich.<sup>78</sup> In general, the span of years between 1902-1913 was a highly prolific time for Steiner, one in which he wrote six books, many articles and gave over 2,000 lectures.<sup>79</sup>

Steiner was also intensively engaged with drama while in Munich. In 1909 he produced the play *Die Kinder des Luzifer* by French writer and Theosophist Edouard Schuré.<sup>80</sup> In 1910 Steiner premiered the first of his own four “mystery dramas”—a form of religious play originating in the medieval period based on Biblical stories. Steiner’s reinterpretations of this form describe the stages of initiation on a spiritual path and take on subjects such as karma and reincarnation. Between 1911 and 1913 in Munich Steiner

---

*Abstract Painting*, 65. Ringbom notes that Kandinsky attended the lectures held in Berlin both in 1907 and in 1908. Ringbom cites only a few select quotes from these lectures and focuses on Steiner’s discussion of the subject of matter in light of the new theory of the atom and the idea that all matter is condensed spirit. See *ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>78</sup> See Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky: Leben und Werk*, 41. Kandinsky and his partner and fellow artist Gabriele Münter spent the summers in an artistic community based in what was called the “Russenhaus” in Murnau. Alexej Jawlensky and fellow Expressionist artist and companion Marianne von Werefkin, two members of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung* who also helped found Der Blaue Reiter, lived with Kandinsky in Murnau in the summers of 1909 and 1910. Jawlensky discussed painting with Steiner, and Werefkin was more deeply involved with Theosophical ideas and transmitted some of Steiner’s concept to Kandinsky. See Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 27.

<sup>79</sup> Ringbom, “Art in ‘The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’: Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” 394.

<sup>80</sup> Schuré is another link between Steiner and Kandinsky. Ringbom states that Grohmann found Schuré’s name in Kandinsky’s sketchbooks and that he appears to have been a favorite reading of various artists around 1900. Schuré’s best-known work *Les Grands Initiés* argues for a shared esoteric background to all world religions. See footnote 58 in Sixten Ringbom’s “Art in the ‘Epoch of the Great Spiritual’: Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting.” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 29 (1966), 395.

wrote and directed the three remaining plays.<sup>81</sup> Kandinsky and Jawlensky attended the first mystery play in 1910. Beat Wyss asserts that Kandinsky's play *Der gelbe Klang* (1909) has distinct echoes with Steiner's works.<sup>82</sup> In addition, Austrian composer and pioneer of atonality Arnold Schönberg was known to have drawn inspiration from Steiner's mystery plays for his oratoria *Jakobsleiter*.<sup>83</sup> In the third chapter I discuss the first *Goetheanum* as an example of *Gesamtkunstwerk* with more information on how Steiner's work fits within this tradition.

Symbolist writers and philosophers of Russian origin often shared an interest in Kandinsky and Steiner. A number of these Russian thinkers lived in Germany and Munich more specifically. Washton-Long explains that during these tumultuous political times in Russia many thinkers were drawn to philosophers and religious thinkers—Steiner among many—who discussed the Book of Revelation as an important document for modern times.<sup>84</sup> In particular many Symbolist writers were adherents of or sympathetic to Russian writer and religious leader Dmitri Merezhkovsky's interpretation of the 'Third Testament.'<sup>85</sup> Beginning in 1907 there was a great interest

---

<sup>81</sup>The four plays in chronological order are: *Die Pforte der Einweihung* (1910); *Die Prüfung der Seele* (1911); *Der Hüter der Schwelle* (1912) and *Der Seelen Erwachen* (1913).

<sup>82</sup> See Beat Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst: zur Ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*. (Köln: DuMont, 1996), 142.

<sup>83</sup> See Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*, 58. Ringbom references Karl Wörner's work *Musik zwischen Theosophie und Weltanschauung; textile Interpretation des Oratoriums "Die Jakobsleiter" von Arnold Schönberg*, lecture in Jyväskylä (Finland), July, 1965 [mimeogr.]

<sup>84</sup> See Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Kandinsky's Abstract Style: The Veiling of Apocalyptic Folk Imagery," *Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (1975). See also Keith and Bernhard Spies Bullivant, ed. *Literarisches Krisenbewußtsein. Ein Perzeptions- und Produktionsmuster im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Iudicium, 2001).

<sup>85</sup> Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: the Formative Jugendstil Years*, 6.

among Russian Symbolists in Steiner. The Symbolist novelist and poet Andrei Bely became a follower of Steiner's and he and his first wife Asya Turgeneva lived in Dornach and participated in the construction of the *Goetheanum*. Emilii Karlovich Medtner (1872-1936) was a member of the Russian Symbolist movement, an Anthroposophist and a friend and patient of Carl Gustav Jung. A number of Anthroposophical Russian expatriates wrote memoirs of their time living in Dornach, including Andrei Bely's work *Verwandeln des Lebens*. By 1909 Steiner began incorporating the theories of Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev and by 1911 the former was emphasizing Russia's role as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures in the creation of a universal brotherhood.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Kandinsky took a lengthy trip back to Russia in 1910 and so experienced first-hand the great flowering of interest in Steiner and Theosophy among Russian compatriots.

### **Leaving the Physical Plane as Response to “Materialism,” Positivism and Naturalism**

Like many of their fellow artists, intellectuals and theorists at the turn of the twentieth century, Kandinsky and Steiner viewed their epoch as having reached a crisis owed to increasing “materialism” in which society had become dominated by industrialism, greatly increased commodification, the specialization and over-rationalization of positivist science and, in the arts, the reign of naturalism. They also regarded this crisis as representing a possibility for a shift toward a re-connection with the spiritual dimension. In *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1911), Kandinsky

---

<sup>86</sup> Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 34.

characterizes his epoch as having reached a turning point. The numbers of those not interested in the materialistic, scientific approach were increasing, he said, but were becoming re-oriented toward the immaterial or supersensible (“endlich mehrt sich die Anzahl der Menschen welche keine Hoffnung setzen auf die Methoden der materialistischen Wissenschaft in Fragen, die mit “Nichtmaterie” oder einer Materie zu tun haben, die unseren Sinnen nicht zugänglich sind”).<sup>87</sup> In a similar manner, in a lecture series entitled “Kunst im Lichte der Mysterienweisheit” held in 1914 and 1915 Steiner represents his era as a time ripe for a departure from materialism and a re-connection with spiritual insight (“Jetzt aber leben wir in der Zeit, wo wir das durch geistige Erkenntnis wiederum finden müssen [...] und jetzt sind wir daran, uns wiederum aus dem materialistischen Sumpf herauszuarbeiten”).<sup>88</sup> As seen in both of the above quotes, both thinkers name “materialism” as one of the prime dangers of the day. This term encompasses all aspects of the culture that are oriented solely or very significantly toward the external and the quantifiable. Into this category Kandinsky and Steiner place positivist science and naturalist art.

For both thinkers a key way to ameliorate the materialistic mode of contemporaneous art and science is to depart from the material plane. In one instance Kandinsky argues that a new spiritual era is rapidly approaching, one that, with the undermining of positivist science and the coming dissolution of matter will allow pure composition:

Wenn wir aber bedenken, daß die geistige Wendung ein direkt stürmisches Tempo angeschlagen hat, daß auch die “festeste” Basis des menschlichen

---

<sup>87</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 41.

<sup>88</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Kunst im Lichte der Mysterienweisheit* (1914-1915), vol. GA 275 (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990), 52.

Geisteslebens, d.h. die positive Wissenschaft, mitgerissen wird und vor der Tür der Auflösung der Materie steht, so kann behauptet werden, daß nur noch wenige “Stunden” uns von dieser reinen Komposition trennen.<sup>89</sup>

It should be emphasized that neither theorist represents the spiritual dimension as completely divorced from sensual experience and Steiner even refers to higher stages of spiritual experience as a form of spiritual sight and spiritual hearing. Each instead describes the nature of the sensual experience there as greatly altered.<sup>90</sup> Steiner, for instance, describes a spiritual world beyond the sense world and meditative instructions for practicing inner visualizations that do not rely on an external referent but are meant to hone the ability to perceive spiritual energies or beings latent but not typically perceptible in the world. Scholars have established that Kandinsky owned and annotated Steiner’s work *Theosophie: Einführung in übersinnliche Welterkenntnis und Menschenbestimmung* (1904); *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten* (1904-05) as well as *Stufen der Höheren Erkenntnis*, which first appeared in Steiner’s periodical *Lucifer-Gnosis* (1905-1908). Kandinsky’s library also contains a copy of Steiner’s *Der Orient im Lichte des Occidents*, delivered in Munich in 1909.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 119.

<sup>90</sup> It is also worth noting that both thinkers report experiences early in life that led to an interest in an inner dimension to life that belies the fixed appearances of given, sense-bound reality. In his memoir Kandinsky describes a synesthetic experience of listening to Richard Wagner’s opera *Lohengrin* and seeing the notes in the form of different colors. See Wassily Kandinsky, *Rückblick* (Baden-Baden: Woldemar Klein Verlag, 1955), 15. Similarly, in his autobiography Steiner recalls heightened perceptual and supersensible experiences from a young age. In one example, he relates the joy he experienced when he discovered that geometry offered the chance to visualize forms inwardly without an external referent (“Dass man seelisch in der Ausbildung rein innerlich angeschauter Formen leben könne ohne Eindrücke der äußeren Sinne [...] Ich fand darin Trost für die Stimmung, die sich mir durch die unbeantworteten Fragen ergeben hatte”). Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang. Eine Autobiographie*.

<sup>91</sup> Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*, 62.



An essential aspect of Steiner's conception of the spiritual world that resonated with Kandinsky's theory of abstraction is that this world is comprised of multiple stages that could be said to be increasingly abstract. It is important to note that Steiner eschewed the word "abstract," a fact important for my later argument on how the aesthetics of the two thinkers differ. This progressively increasing abstraction is seen in the stages of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition, detailed in, among other sources, the work *Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*.<sup>92</sup> In the stage of Imagination the aim is to create inner pictures without a sensory referent present; then, at the next level of Inspiration the pictures fall away to leave only the energy or forces that underlie the pictures; finally, at the level of Intuition one enters a purely spiritual world and encounters the spiritual beings themselves. In one instance this development is described in the following way: "Was durch solche Wesen geschieht, das erkennt man im Bilde durch die Imagination, den Gesetzen und Verhältnissen nach durch die Inspiration; will man den Wesen selbst gegenüber treten, dann braucht man die Intuition."<sup>93</sup> As also seen in this quote, Steiner's three stages also simultaneously entail a progressive movement counter to abstraction and toward unity or immersion with the spiritual source.

This first stage of Imagination in particular bears striking links with Kandinsky's aesthetic thought. One passage about this stage that spoke to the painter, as seen in his summarized notes, describes this stage as one when colors, tones and smells are liberated

---

<sup>92</sup> Regarding Steiner's choice of terminology, Ringbom states that these three terms are "Begriffe der abendländisch-christlichen Mystik entlehnend." See Ringbom, "Kandinsky und das Okkulte," 91. In many other instances, including, as we will see, in the work *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* Steiner uses the Idealist term "Anschauung" and not the Latin term Inspiration. This is one of many examples of the tendency toward fluidity in terminology with Steiner. When discussing these three stages, however, Steiner uses the Latin terminology.

<sup>93</sup> Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, 40-41.

from their referents and float freely in space. The original in *Stufen der höheren*

*Erkenntnis* says the following:

Im gewöhnlichen Leben in der physischen Welt muss man sich ja gerade davor hüten, Vorstellungen zu haben, die nicht von den Dingen herrühren, die sozusagen “ohne Grund und Boden” sind. Zur Hervorrufung der imaginativen Erkenntnis aber kommt es gerade darauf an, zunächst Farben, Töne, Gerüche usw. zu haben, die ganz losgelöst von allen Dingen ‘ frei im Raume schweben.’<sup>94</sup>

In another articulation from the same source Steiner characterizes Imagination as typified by a freedom and dynamism in which the spiritual element finds expression in the pure, unattached elements of sound and color: “Das macht eben die Beweglichkeit und Freiheit der imaginativen Welt aus, dass das Zwischenglied der äusseren Dinge fehlt, dass das Geistige ganz unmittelbar in den freischwebenden Tönen, Farben usw. sich auslebt.”<sup>95</sup> One passage from *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* discusses colors in strikingly similar language. Kandinsky argues that the right use of color grants the painting independent subjectivity as it becomes a being that floats freely in the air: “Ähnliche Möglichkeiten bietet die Farbe, die [...] das Bild zu einem in der Luft schwebenden Wesen machen kann.”<sup>96</sup> The notion of art expressing an inner being or “Wesenhaftigkeit” is very prominent in the thought of both Steiner and Kandinsky.

Central to both thinkers’ critique of naturalism is the notion that the replication of external appearances prevents the latent spiritual aspect of the work from expressing itself. Peter Jelavich argues that Kandinsky’ s promotion of non-mimetic art stemmed from his orientation away from rationalism. He explains that because objects represented realistically “appealed to the rational, educated mind and everyday emotions, Kandinsky

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 22. See Ringbom, “Die Steiner-Annotationen Kandinskys,” 103.

<sup>95</sup> Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, 23.

<sup>96</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 115-16.

came to believe that a truly “spiritual” response at a trans-phenomenal level could be evoked only by “pure” color, line, and shape, used in a non-narrative and nonfigurative manner.”<sup>97</sup> In the essay “Über die Formfrage” (1912) Kandinsky promotes what he calls “great realism” as one pole of non-mimetic art for which the complementary pole is “great abstraction.” This first pole is described as created through a stark reduction of outwardly pleasing elements. In this way the interior dimension of the object—here he calls this dimension the soul—is able to express itself (“Bei diesem Reduzieren des ‘Künstlerischen’ auf das Minimum klingt die Seele des Gegenstandes am stärksten heraus, da die äußere wohlschmeckende Schönheit nicht mehr ablenken kann”).<sup>98</sup>

Towards the end of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* Kandinsky criticizes the tendency of the contemporaneous art spectator to focus on aspects of the work such as verisimilitude and meaning that prevent the ability to tune into the work’s inner message and value:

Der Zuschauer ist auch zu sehr gewöhnt, in solchen Fällen einen “Sinn”, d.h. einen äußerlichen Zusammenhang der Teile des Bildes, zu suchen. [...] Durch die äußeren Mittel geblendet, sucht sein geistiges Auge nicht, was durch diese Mittel lebt.<sup>99</sup>

Steiner considered the two forms of artistic sin to be allegorical art and naturalistic art.

The former form will be illuminated in the section on Steiner’s concept of the symbolic versus the allegorical. The fault in the latter form for Steiner was that it amounts to no more than the mere imitation of the sensual (“die [Erbsünde] der Abbildung, der Nachahmung zu sein, der Wiedergabe des bloß Sinnlichen”).<sup>100</sup> As will be further

---

<sup>97</sup> Jelavich, *Munich and Theatrical Modernism: Politics, Playwriting, and Performance, 1890-1914*, 221.

<sup>98</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, “Über die Formfrage,” in *Der Blaue Reiter*, ed. Klaus Lankheit (München: Piper, 2009), 154.

<sup>99</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 124-25.

<sup>100</sup> Steiner, “Das Sinnlich-Übersinnliche in seiner Verwirklichung durch die Kunst,” 1.

examined in the chapter dealing with Wilhelm Worringer' s history of art, it was also central to Steiner' s concept of organicism that the forms arise not from imitation of nature, but, instead, through a process of tapping into the creative forces involved in organic creation:

Diese organische Form, die ist nicht auf naturalistische Weise empfunden, indem man dieses oder jenes Organische nachgebildet hat, sondern sie beruht auf einem lebendigen Sich-Hingeben an das organische-Schaffen überhaupt.<sup>101</sup>

Underlying both thinkers' critique of naturalism is the notion that there is an *inner* dimension to reality that can be accessed and expressed artistically when one emancipates the object from its typical external appearance.

Another salient aspect of Steiner' s notion of Imagination that relates closely to Kandinsky' s thought is that this is described as the stage in which the elimination of the external object calls for the development of an inner form of sight. Steiner also refers to this stage as “geistiges Schauen” or “okkultes Lesen.”<sup>102</sup> As Will Grohmann explains, Steiner and Kandinsky shared an orientation against positivism and toward the cultivation of a form of spiritual sight.<sup>103</sup> One way that Steiner describes an altered form of sight, in the work *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten* (1909), is in the ability to view an object as if it were without its physical encasement and, thus, appears transparent:

---

<sup>101</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Stilformen des Organisch-Lebendigen* (1921) (Dornach: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag am Goetheanum, 1933), two lectures, 12.

<sup>102</sup> In the lecture series “Okkultes Lesen und okkultes Hören” (1914) Imagination is described as a stage when one learns a form of vision analogous to reading a script and Inspiration is described as a form of hearing.

<sup>103</sup> Grohmann argues that the two thinkers share a feeling for “Katastrophensituationen, “des Versagens der Wissenschaft und der Notwendigkeit eines geistigen Schauens.” Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky: Leben und Werk*, 58.

So wie der Mensch seine Aufmerksamkeit von etwas, das vor ihm ist, ablenken kann, so daß es für ihn nicht da ist, so vermag der Hellseher einen physischen Körper für seine Wahrnehmung ganz auszulöschen, so daß er für ihn physisch ganz durchsichtig wird.<sup>104</sup>

One of the prime tasks of the meditant, as described by Steiner, is the development of the capacity to form vivid, inner pictures whose source is not a given, material object, but instead is said to be spiritual in nature (Steiner here uses the two terms meaning “soul” and “spirit”). What I am calling a meditant, meaning someone who practices these exercises, Steiner in the quote above refers to as a clairvoyant (“der Hellseher”). While it is a jump from speaking of visualizing inner pictures to speaking of clairvoyance, this is how Steiner conceived of this kind of activity, an aspect also of interest to Kandinsky and greater Theosophical thought. Steiner argues that the meditant hones the ability:

Bilder zu formen, auch wo keine Sinnesgegenstände vorhanden sind. [...] An der Stelle der “Sensation” muss etwas anderes treten. Dies ist die Imagination. [...] auf dieser Stufe treten Bilder auf genau so, wie wenn ein Sinnesgegenstand auf ihn einen Eindruck machen würde; sie sind so lebhaft und wahr wie die Sinnesbilder, nur kommen sie nicht vom “Materiellen,” sondern vom “Seelischen” und “Geistigen.” Die Sinne bleiben vollständig untätig.<sup>105</sup>

In this passage Steiner speaks of both the soulful (“das Seelische”) and the spiritual (“das Geistige”). In this case, Steiner did not mean these two terms to be interchangeable, however, as he conceived of the former term as more connected with the emotional side of the human being and the latter term as more linked with the higher self. This description of inner picture formation that is divorced from external, sensual activity has much in common with a comment by Kandinsky in his memoir in which he discusses how the exclusion of the object in painting requires the development of a form of vision

---

<sup>104</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, (2010), <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>. 104-05.

<sup>105</sup> Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, 4.

that allows an *inner* experience of forms: “das Streichen des Gegenstandes in der Malerei [stellt] sehr große Forderungen an das innere Erleben der rein malerischen Form [...], so daß eine Entwicklung des Beschauers in dieser Richtung unbedingt notwendig ist und deshalb in keinem Fall ausbleiben kann.”<sup>106</sup> Kandinsky likewise uses a visual analogy when he characterizes his materialistic era as suffering from blindness to the spiritual dimension (“Die Menschen legen zu diesen stummen und blinden Zeiten einen besonderen ausschließlichen Wert auf äußerliche Erfolge [...] Die rein geistigen Kräfte werden im besten Falle unterschätzt, sonst überhaupt nicht bemerkt”).<sup>107</sup>

Eckart Förster, in an article on the philosophical significance of Goethe’s frequent use of the term “the eye of the mind” (“das Auge des Geistes”), argues that Goethe proposed a transformed mode of perception so that “something is or can be visible to one person but not to another who lacks the organ in question.”<sup>108</sup> By “organ,” as is clear in the course of the article, Förster means that Goethe was arguing for an inner organ of perception. He points out that though the concept can easily be dismissed as a poetic metaphor, Goethe did not use this term metaphorically. Furthermore, Förster demonstrates that this term played a significant role in the thought of German Idealists, including Hegel and Fichte.

Steiner sometimes describes the visual activity at the stage of Imagination *not* as representing a stark departure from the sense world but, instead, as a gradual process toward objectless or non-referential sight. I argue that the gradual process involved in Steiner’s three stages also echoes with Kandinsky’s theory of veiling, as highlighted by

---

<sup>106</sup> Kandinsky, *Rückblick*, 31.

<sup>107</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 35-36.

<sup>108</sup> Eckart Förster, “Goethe on ‘Das Auge des Geistes,’” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 75 (2001): 90.

Washton-Long. As I try to show, the ultimate aim of Steiner' s second version of visual activity still has the same end goal of complete objectlessness. This is because all of the three of Steiner' s spiritual stages are meant to foster innovation and the creation of *new*, not yet seen forms.

In one of Steiner' s foundational works *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*, Steiner clarifies that the goal is to hone one' s observational powers, *not* to dull one' s senses: “Dabei soll man nur ja nicht glauben, dass man weit kommt, wenn man seine Sinne etwa stumpf macht gegen die Welt. Erst schaue man so lebhaft, so genau, als es nur möglich ist, die Dinge an.”<sup>109</sup> In this example the meditative exercises in Imagination are described as involving an intensive engagement—observation and contemplation—of the material world. One meditative technique described in this work for training the powers of Imagination involves the visualization of a seed, an activity fundamental to Goethe' s *Metamorphosenlehre*.<sup>110</sup> In this case the term “Anschauung” is used to describe the imagination of the whole plant that grows out of a seed. The first step is described as the careful observation of the physical characteristics of a seed after which one then re-creates this exact image internally. One begins with the physical referent, but an essential part of the training takes place once one has separated from the physical object and engages in image-creation of a super-sensual nature:

Man baue [die Pflanze] sich in der Phantasie auf. Und dann denke man: Was ich mir jetzt in meiner Phantasie vorstelle, das werden die Kräfte der Erde und des Lichtes später wirklich aus dem Samenkorn hervorlocken [...] dieses Unsichtbare wird sich später in die sichtbare Pflanze verwandeln, die ich in Gestalt und Farbe vor mir haben werde. Man hänge dem Gedanken nach: das Unsichtbare wird

---

<sup>109</sup> Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* 25.

<sup>110</sup> Owen Barfield asserts that “an attempt to use imagination systematically” is fundamental to all of Goethe' s scientific work. See Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 137.

sichtbar werden. [...] Bringt man das in der rechten Weise zustande, dann wird man nach einiger Zeit—vielleicht erst nach vielen Versuchen—eine Kraft in sich verspüren. Und diese Kraft wird eine neue Anschauung erschaffen. [...] Was sinnlich unsichtbar war, die Pflanze, die erst später sichtbar werden wird, das offenbart sich da auf geistig sichtbare Art.<sup>111</sup>

With repeated efforts at making this leap toward abstraction one can acquire the capacity for Anschauung, or Imagination. In another example from *Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* Steiner emphasizes that the internal pictures must originate in the material world and not be purely fantastical imaginations. It is described as one of the great challenges at this stage to learn to distinguish between Imaginations and illusory images: “Es gehört eine sehr sorgfältige Schulung dazu, innerhalb dieser höheren Bilderwelt Täuschung von Wirklichkeit zu unterscheiden.”<sup>112</sup> Steiner describes the images that arise at this stage as not more muted, as one might experience in a spiritual dimension, but as possessing an especially vivid character that makes everyday sensual experience pale in comparison: “die Bilder der Imagination sind von einer Lebhaftigkeit und Inhaltsfülle, mit der sich nicht nur die schattenhaften Erinnerungsbilder der Sinnenwelt nicht vergleichen lassen, sondern sogar nicht einmal die ganze bunte, wechselreiche Sinnenwelt selbst.”<sup>113</sup> This imaginative capacity entails a new form of sight: seeing as visible what is typically invisible, namely the future plant that exists latently in Nature.

It might seem that Steiner had two conflicting views of Imagination as he sometimes describes the activity as a total departure from the sensory world and, at other times, he proposes exercises that rely on inner visualization of a physical object, such as a seed. It is important to clarify that even with the exercises that incorporate a physical

---

<sup>111</sup> Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* 39.

<sup>112</sup> Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, 4.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.



object Steiner’ s goal is to hone the ability to eventually create new forms. Förster provides helpful clarification on the nature of the inner visualization entailed in the plant metamorphosis, exercises upon which Steiner drew heavily for his conception of Imagination. Förster asserts that

The demand [made by Goethe] that I should be able to produce the object in my mind entails more than the ability to generate in intuition a copy of the living plant: To really comprehend it, might say, I must know the law underlying its development, its *typus* or archetype, so that I can generate imaginatively a new plant from it.<sup>114</sup>

It is important that even in the version of Imagination that Steiner describes as first involving the visualization of an object from nature, following Goethe’ s plant metamorphosis, the ultimate aim is the creation of *new* forms. This is what makes innovative art possible, whether in the form of the objectless art of Kandinsky and his fellow abstract artists or in Steiner’ s *Goetheanum*, a structure he viewed as in some ways without historical precedent. Regarding what Förster calls Goethe’ s belief in the underlying “*typus* or archetype,” these ideas link, as will be discussed in this chapter, with how both Steiner and Kandinsky argue for the central importance of lawfulness of nature and art.

I also argue that Kandinsky’ s technique of veiling resonates strongly with how Steiner sometimes describes Imagination as involving a gradual, stage-wise reduction of the physical referent. It should be pointed out that the painterly technique of veiling, creating layers so as to largely obscure the view of objects, is a counter action to the striving for clear and vivid internal visions in Steiner’ s stage of Imagination. I argue that, however, the way that Steiner sometimes describes this stage as a gradual process of

---

<sup>114</sup> Förster, “Goethe on ‘ Das Auge des Geistes,’ “ 95.

decreasing reliance on the external world resonates with Kandinsky's painterly veiling as part of a gradual, stage-by-stage progression away from the material world and toward the objectless dimension. Sixten Ringbom argues for the link between progression toward objectless spiritual experience and abstract art: "perhaps the closest graphic analogy to the mystical ascent to objectless vision is presented by another method that was employed by the abstract pioneers: the step-by-step dissolving of the material objects of the image."<sup>115</sup> Rose-Carol Washton-Long links the importance of Kandinsky's veiling technique to the spectator. She argues that Kandinsky "felt that both the spectator and other artists had to be led into the abstract sphere step by step and had to be helped in finding its meaning."<sup>116</sup> Long argues that Kandinsky was concerned, as were many like-minded artists of the period, that a purely non-representational form of art could confuse viewers and cause the loss of many in his audience.<sup>117</sup> One of the solutions was the incorporation of barely discernable religious imagery, especially images from the Apocalypse. After the viewer recognized rudimentary symbols that were part of accepted religious iconography, the viewer could then move on to a deeper experience of pure form, line and color. Kandinsky saw great potential in a method that incorporated both veiled and apparent elements ("die Verschleierung [ist] eine enorme Macht in der Kunst. Das Kombinieren des Verschleierte[n] und des Bloßgelegten wird eine neue Möglichkeit der Leitmotive einer Formenkomposition bilden)."<sup>118</sup> In another articulation from the same text Kandinsky argues that hidden constructions, as opposed to

---

<sup>115</sup> Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers," 144.

<sup>116</sup> Long, "Kandinsky's Abstract Style: The Veiling of Apocalyptic Folk Imagery," 217.

<sup>117</sup> Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 48.

<sup>118</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 78.

more apparent geometrical ones, contain the greatest potential because they have an affect on the soul rather than the eye, that is at a spiritual and not only physical level.

One striking commonality is how the two thinkers conceive of the non-representational, spiritual dimension as aural or musical in nature. *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* and *Der Almanach "Der Blaue Reiter"* are both replete with musical and sound themes and analogies.<sup>119</sup> Likewise, Steiner describes Inspiration, the second in the triad of stages of super-sensible cognition, as a form of spiritual hearing. The spiritual and aesthetic program of both thinkers shows itself as broader and more polysensual than if the focus was narrowly on vision—though this breadth is often missed in scholarship in modernism. As Juliet Koss claims, “One persistent account of modernism in the visual arts asserts an increasing reliance on opticality. [...] Modernism, as Clement Greenberg explained it, was a matter ‘ of purely optical experience against optical experience as revised or modified by tactile associations.’ ”<sup>120</sup> Scholarship specifically concerning Kandinsky and Steiner also shares the tendency to focus on the optical aspects of their spiritual and aesthetic thought. For example, as already noted, Grohmann highlights that the two thinkers share a feeling for the necessity of spiritual vision (“der Notwendigkeit

---

<sup>119</sup> This work contains discussions of Wagner, Debussy and Schönberg in the context of non-representational, spiritual art. The *Almanac* includes essays by Russian composer Thomas von Hartmann; an essay on the Russian pianist and composer Alexander Scriabin; an essay and multiple paintings by Austrian composer and music theorist Arnold Schönberg; an essay entitled “Die Freie Musik” by Dr. N. Kulbin as well as Kandinsky’s short, Expressionistic play “Der gelbe Klang” that includes music and word play in the Symbolist vein. The final pages of the almanac are comprised of three scores by Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg and Anton v. Webern.

<sup>120</sup> Juliet Koss, “On the Limits of Empathy,” *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 1 (2006): 142. Koss is citing Greenberg from “Modernist Painting” (1960) in *Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O’ Brien, vol. 4. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 89.

eines geistigen Schauens”).<sup>121</sup> Wyss offers critique of Steiner by focusing on his concept of unmediated sight (“das reine Sehen, das Rudolf Steiner im Sinne der Klassischen Moderne propagiert, entsteht im abziehenden Tarnnebel raunender Rede”).<sup>122</sup> Along with critiquing the idea of pure sight, by saying that Steiner murmurs or whispers (“im...raunender Rede”), Wyss is implying that Steiner also does not express himself in a clear, transparent manner. This tendency to focus on visuality at the expense of the other senses also existed in contemporaneous Steiner reception. For example, Austrian author, playwright and critic Hermann Bahr, who gives a prominent mention to Steiner in the work *Expressionismus* (1906), demonstrates the tendency to formulate the turn toward interiority or the spiritual dimension integral to Expressionism as primarily involving a transformation in the nature of *vision*. In *Expressionismus* (1916) Bahr argues that “Die Menschheit hat ja die Gewohnheit, immer wenn sie eine Zeitlang ganz zum Sichtbaren hin [...] nun wieder zum Unsichtbaren umzukehren.”<sup>123</sup> As we will see in the following, for Steiner and Kandinsky, sound and music play a role equal to sight, if not greater.

At the stage of Inspiration Steiner describes this form of auditory experience as a pure, spiritual type of sound that stems from objects expressing their inner being in the form of speech or sound:

Aber nicht mit Tönen wie in der sinnlichen Musik hat man es zu tun, sondern mit einem rein “geistigen Tönen”. Man beginnt zu “hören”, was im Innern der Dinge vorgeht. Der Stein, die Pflanze usw. werden zu “geistigen Worten”. Die Welt beginnt der Seele gegenüber ihr Wesen wirklich selbst auszusprechen. Es klingt grotesk; aber es ist wörtlich wahr; auf dieser Stufe des Erkennens “hört man geistig das Gras wachsen”. Man vernimmt die Form des Kristalles als Klang; die sich öffnende Blüte “spricht” da zum Menschen.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky: Leben und Werk*, 58.

<sup>122</sup> Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst: zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*, 144.

<sup>123</sup> See Bahr, *Expressionismus*, 41.

<sup>124</sup> Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, 6.

Noteworthy is Steiner's synesthetic description of the crystal form sounding forth aurally as it is strongly reminiscent of Kandinsky's synesthetic understanding of aesthetics. Also of importance is how the sound or speaking stems from an *inner* source ("im Innern der Dinge" and "ihr Wesen"). In addition, both of the above formulations by Steiner and a few to be quoted shortly by Kandinsky have strong Romantic echoes, for example the famous poem by Eichendorff: "Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen,/Die da träumen fort und fort,/Und die Welt hebt an zu singen,/Triffst du nur das Zauberwort."<sup>125</sup> In *Rückblick* Kandinsky describes experiencing the world, both natural and man-made, in terms very similar to those of Steiner: "Nicht nur die bedichteten Sterne, Mond, Wälder, Blumen, sondern auch ein im Aschenbecher liegender Stummel [...] alles zeigte mir sein Gesicht, sein innerstes Wesen, die geheime Seele, die öfter schweigt als spricht."<sup>126</sup> In the essay "Über die Formfrage" Kandinsky likewise talks of spirit speaking through forms: "Wenn der Inhalt, der Geist, welcher sich nur durch diese schein tote Form offenbaren kann, reif wird, wenn die Stunde seiner Materialisation geschlagen hat, so tritt er in diese Form und wird durch sie sprechen."<sup>127</sup> Another formulation speaks of the soul in terms of sound: "Der Klang ist also die Seele der Form, die nur durch den Klang lebendig werden kann und von innen nach außen wirkt."<sup>128</sup> In another instance Kandinsky describes the world as an entity that sounds forth and that is comprised of spiritual beings: "Die Welt klingt. Sie ist ein Kosmos der geistig wirkenden Wesen. So

---

<sup>125</sup> Joseph von Eichendorff, *Wünschelrute*, (1835), <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/joseph-von-eichendorff-gedichte-4294/188>.

<sup>126</sup> Kandinsky, *Rückblick*, 13.

<sup>127</sup> Kandinsky, "Über die Formfrage," 174.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

ist die tote Materie lebender Geist.”<sup>129</sup> In this quote there is also the ontological shift back from dead matter to living spirit. The dichotomy between the categories of matter and spirit is also one that is central to Steiner’s thought. Common to all of these articulations is the assertion that the age of materialistic art will be overcome through a mode of art that facilitates spiritual speech, music or sound expressed through form. It is also the case that both thinkers stress sound over music, as seen in Kandinsky’s evocation of “Klang” and as evidenced also in the nature of the auditory production in his play “Der gelbe Klang,” where figures never sing in a traditionally harmonic way but talk and make sound in a highly expressive fashion. Steiner, likewise, focuses on “Tönen” and “Klang.” It would not be accurate, however, to say both theorized sound over music as, to cite only two examples, the *Blaue Reiter* almanac contains multiple song scores and Steiner’s Eurythmy performances were often accompanied by music.

Both thinkers prize music for its non-representational capacities. In the first lecture from a series entitled “Das Wesen des Musikalischen,” held in 1906, Steiner approvingly cites Schopenhauer and the way he privileges music as possessing a special power for unmediated connection with an inner essence. In one instance he uses Schopenhauerian language of the “will.”

Die anderen Künste müssen durch die Vorstellung hindurchgehen, also Bilder des Willens geben. Aber der Ton ist ein unmittelbarer Ausdruck des Willens selbst, ohne Einschubung der Vorstellung. Wenn der Mensch im Ton künstlerisch tätig ist, ist sie gleichsam mit seinem Ohr am Herzen der Natur selbst liegend [...] So sagt Schopenhauer-steht der Mensch in einem vertrauten Verhältnis zu den Dingen an sich, so dringt er ein in das innerste Wesen der Dinge.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>130</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Das Wesen des Musikalischen und das Tonerlebnis im Menschen*, vol. 283 (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989), 12.

Many formulations in this short quote reveal how music is regarded as uniquely able to connect directly with the spiritual dimension—the notion of music’s close relationship to the things themselves, to the inmost nature of things and to the heart of nature. In another formulation from the same lecture Steiner speaks of music in even more explicitly spiritual terms by calling the archetype or source of music the spiritual dimension (“das Geistige”): “Das Urbild der Musik ist im Geistigen, während die Urbilder für die übrigen Künste in der physischen Welt selbst liegen.”<sup>131</sup> In this lecture Steiner asserts that the spiritual world—which one enters when asleep and also between successive lives in his schema based in reincarnation—is experienced as a profoundly musical place, as what he calls a “Welt der Sphärenmusik.”<sup>132</sup>

Similarly, Kandinsky admired the unique ability of music to exercise direct, unmediated influence on the soul: “Der musikalische Ton hat einen direkten Zugang zur Seele. Er findet da sofort einen Widerklang, da der Mensch ‘ die Musik hat in sich selbst.’ ”<sup>133</sup> In a footnote in *Rückblick* Kandinsky discusses two branches of art: what he calls “die virtuose Art” and “die kompositionelle.” The former branch includes any form based on the imitation of the external dimension. The latter branch, in contrast, is described as devoid of referential characteristics and instead as arising from within the artist, a feature common to music:

Die andere Art ist die kompositionelle, bei der das Werk größtenteils oder ausschließlich “aus dem Künstler” entsteht, so wie das in der Musik seit Jahrhunderten der Fall ist. Die Malerei hat in dieser Beziehung die Musik eingeholt, und beide bekommen eine immer wachsende Tendenz, “absolute”

---

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>133</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 66.

Werke zu schaffen, d.h. vollkommen “objektive” Werke, die den Naturwerken gleich rein gesetzmäßig als selbständige *Wesen* “von selbst” erwachsen.<sup>134</sup>

In addition to the way Kandinsky links non-representational visual art and music, this quote is noteworthy for the assertion that artworks can gain the status of independent subjects. As we have already seen in *Imagination*, Steiner postulates that spiritual beings are present in Steiner’s entire scheme of stages of higher spiritual experience. In *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, Kandinsky also discusses color in musical terms as displaying his synesthetic orientation. He views the range of range of nuanced possibilities in one color as akin to the range of sounds one hears on the same instrument when played in different circumstances and by different players (he gives the examples of instruments played outdoors, indoors, by a hunter, a soldier or a virtuoso).<sup>135</sup>

### **How Steiner and Kandinsky Diverge: the Question of Abstraction and Allegory**

Despite a shared conviction that a departure from the physical plane is the appropriate response to the materialism of the day, and the way each conceives of the spiritual dimension in both visual and aural terms, ultimately, they differ greatly on the question of abstraction. As seen in the above articulations on the concept of inner sound, many of Kandinsky’s concepts both spiritual and aesthetic, are formulated in language that equates the spiritual dimension with abstraction. In contrast, Steiner never uses the concept of abstraction as the aim of his aesthetics. As Ringbom clarifies, “the notion of abstract art was foreign to Goethe, and to some extent this applies to his interpreter

---

<sup>134</sup> Kandinsky, *Rückblick*, 50.

<sup>135</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 67.



[Steiner] too.”<sup>136</sup> Long also draws a distinction between the aesthetics of Kandinsky and Steiner regarding the issues of abstraction. Of the former, she says “abstraction provided the basis for the evolution of a universal, transcendent expression.”<sup>137</sup> Of the latter, in contrast, she asserts that he did “not champion the concept of abstraction, even though his anti-materialism led him to favour an anti-naturalistic style. Rather, Steiner insisted that all art should begin with nature.”<sup>138</sup> In the final section of this chapter I aim to show that Steiner’s model ultimately ends in a very different place than Kandinsky’s: he promotes a certain form of symbolism that requires a return to a deep, immersive relationship with the forms of nature under the influence of Goetheanism.

Not only did Steiner not share Kandinsky’s conception of the spiritual as ultimately abstract, in the sense of being disembodied, but a central component of Steiner’s aesthetics is a critique of allegory, a trope Steiner views as overly abstract. A significant target of Steiner’s critique is the tendency he sees within spiritual movements—most especially Theosophy—to resort to allegorical art. In Steiner’s view, such art errs by beginning with a theoretical concept of a spiritual element then trying to convert this concept into artistic form. Steiner’s critique of the allegorical is one of the ways through which he seeks to distance himself from the Theosophical movement. I aim to show that, though Kandinsky was never a member of the movement and by no means a wholly uncritical follower, his theory and practice show more openness to what Steiner views as Theosophy’s abstract, allegorical tendencies. This is seen both in the

---

<sup>136</sup> Ringbom, “Art in ‘The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’: Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” 393. Ringbom goes on to say that Steiner’s early graphic work fits more clearly with *Art nouveau* symbolism than with abstraction.

<sup>137</sup> Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 6.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

painter’ s broader theoretical understanding of the spiritual dimension as abstract and in his paintings inspired by the Theosophical concepts of aura and so-called “thought forms.”

Steiner’ s relationship with the Theosophical movement was for a time very close—he was the Secretary General of the German chapter of the Theosophical Society for a significant period from 1902 to 1913. Two of his works from this time have explicitly Theosophical titles: *Theosophie: Einführung in übersinnliche Welterkenntnis und Menschenbestimmung* (1904) and *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* (1910), which is a counterpart to Blavatsky’ s *Secret Doctrine*. One result of this period of close engagement with Theosophy, is that in a few of his early works Steiner adopts many of the Sanskrit terms used by Theosophists: thus he uses the term “devachan” to describe the period between earthly incarnations whereas in later works he uses different vocabulary that speaks to “being” and “revelation.”<sup>139</sup> The adoption of Theosophical language may give the impression that Steiner aligned himself philosophically with this movement. Yet, in fact, from the outset he made it clear that he would pursue his own spiritual program. This group offered him the venue he failed to find elsewhere, but, as Ringbom clarifies, “right from the beginning [Steiner] regarded the society as a vehicle for his own purposes.”<sup>140</sup> Wolfgang Zumdick argues that from the outset Steiner’ s broad knowledge of contemporaneous thinkers and his independently minded form of philosophy placed

---

<sup>139</sup> In his article marking one hundred fifty years since Steiner’ s birth, Fred Amrine details how Steiner’ s time with the Theosophical movement resulted in the adoption of Theosophical terminology that is often confusing. Amrine explains that “one result of this episode is that the language of basic anthroposophy (before Steiner adopted that name) is suffused with Sanskrit terms for theosophy like ‘ arupa,’ ‘ pralaya,’ and ‘ devachan.’ “Amrine, “Discovering a Genius: Rudolf Steiner at 150,” 8.

<sup>140</sup> Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*, 58.

him in a position of distance from the institutionalized Theosophy. He also points out that after taking the post at the Theosophical Society Steiner still gave lectures to the monistic Giordano-Bruno-Bund until the end of 1904 and to the Marxist-oriented workers school in Berlin.<sup>141</sup> One of the points of divergence between Steiner and the Theosophical Society was the former's emphasis on a *Western* spiritual path.<sup>142</sup> This differed from the increasing emphasis on Eastern wisdom within the society.<sup>143</sup> The headquarters of the society were in Adyar, India. In 1910 a young Hindu man, Jiddu Krishnamurti, was appointed as the main spiritual leader, a decision Steiner opposed. Partly in answer to this decision, Steiner gave a series of lectures that argued for the birth, death and resurrection of Christ as a central event. This lecture series was one of multiple motivations for the Theosophical Society to expel Steiner and his approximately 2,400 members of the German section of the Theosophical society in 1913. In the same year Steiner founded his own movement of Anthroposophy.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Zumdick argues that Steiner's very broad reading background is seen in his library that contained approximately 9,000 volumes, nearly all of which are annotated. He notes that his lectures include references to new developments in the fields of art, philosophy and the natural sciences and included, among others, the names Edmund Husserl, Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Mach, Ernst Cassirer, Franz Brentano, Albert Einstein and Max Planck. See Wolfgang Zumdick, "Der heisse Kern der Anthroposophie: Anmerkungen zu Rudolf Steiners Weltbegriff," in *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags*, ed. Mateo Kries (Ditingen: Vitra Design Museum und Autoren, 2010), 42.

<sup>142</sup> In 1901 Steiner published *Die Mystik im Aufgange des neuzeitlichen Geisteslebens und ihr Verhältnis zu modernen Weltanschauungen* (1901). This work is devoted exclusively to Western mystics including, among others, Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler and Heinrich Suso.

<sup>143</sup> Ringbom also points out that it was in German Theosophical groups that "the Bhagavad Gita, the classical text of Indian transcendentalism, was systematically collated with classics of medieval mysticism as well as with writings by Meister Eckhart, Thomas a Kempis, and such later teachers as Paracelsus and Böhme." Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers," 134.

<sup>144</sup> Zumdick, "Der heisse Kern der Anthroposophie: Anmerkungen zu Rudolf Steiners Weltbegriff," 42.

Another of Steiner's lesser known, but for my purposes very important, points of contention with Theosophy was what he regarded as its tendency toward preferring abstract, allegorical art. In a 1920 lecture "Die den Baugedanken tragenden künstlerischen Impulse" from the lecture series "Der Baugedanke von Dornach," Steiner explicitly faults the Theosophical Society with bringing into the Anthroposophical Society a "false mysticism" that bypasses the genuinely artistic element by seeking to express the spiritual dimension ("Geist") only in an external, abstracted form. In the following formulation Steiner conflates the terms "symbol" and "allegory," a common habit of Steiner's that we will see repeatedly in a number of the coming examples in this section:

in eine solche Bewegung [Anthroposophie] kommen sehr leicht herein allerlei mystizierende Element, die durch ein falsches Mystizieren gerade nach dem Abstrakten hingedrängt werden, und die eigentlich dann, weil ja das Künstlerische in dem Äußeren, in dem Gestalten und Bilden sich darleben muß, an diesem Künstlerischen vorbeigehen und nach dem Symbolischen, nach dem Allegorischen hinstreben; die gewissermaßen den Geist in seiner abstrakten Gestalt behalten möchten und an dem, was äußerlich gestaltet und gebildet wird, nur eine symbolische Veranschaulichung des Geistigen haben möchten. Nach dieser Richtung hat man ja, durch das Hereindringen falscher Mystik *aus der theosophischen in die anthroposophische Bewegung*, alles mögliche erleben müssen.<sup>145</sup>

Steiner then proceeds to give a number of examples from different mediums of those in a spiritual movement, such as Theosophy or Anthroposophy, approaching art works with what he views as a misguided eagerness to allegorize ("Eine Allegorisierung ohne Ende ist vielfach vorhanden unter denen, die sich zu einer Geistesbewegung bekennen möchten").<sup>146</sup> One example is the interpretation of various characters in *Hamlet* as

---

<sup>145</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Der Baugedanke von Dornach* (1920) (Dornach: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, 1942), 16. Emphasis mine.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

representing the different spiritual bodies of man, such as the spirit and the astral body. He also describes frequently seeing allegorical paintings and drawings in buildings that host Anthroposophical events, and describes, for example, dreadful artistic renditions of the Rosicrucian rose-cross, appreciated only because of the overt symbolism; this he regards as insulting to all genuine artistic sensibility (“jedes künstlerische Gefühl [wird] beleidigt durch das Malen eines scheußlichen Rosenkreuzes, wo es nur auf die Allegorie ankommt, in sieben in einer gewissen Weise an ein Kreuz hingemalten Rosen irgend eine Symbolik zu zeigen”).<sup>147</sup> With the word “scheußlich” we sense how strongly Steiner feels against this form of art. Steiner then makes a similar point about a common tendency among those in his movement to try to apply Anthroposophical theory to his plays, thus misconstruing the mystery plays as allegorical in nature (“in meinen Mysteriendramen [ist] es ein Unfug, wenn man hineinallegorisiert, wenn man alles mögliche, was schon eigentlich anthroposophische Theorie ist, nun in diese Mysteriendramen hineinphantisiert”).<sup>148</sup> The fault in this approach lies in approaching an artwork theoretically.

If I now turn to Kandinsky in light of the question of abstraction and allegory, and his relationship to Theosophy, I find that Kandinsky advocates the concept of the spiritual dimension as fundamentally abstract. In terms of his theory of abstraction, we have already seen myriad formulations that equate abstraction with the spiritual dimension. In yet another example, Kandinsky characterizes the imminent, creative spirit of the times as abstract in nature and as able to access the spiritual dimension, here called the soul (“Zur bestimmten Zeit werden die Notwendigkeiten reif. D.h. der schaffende Geist (welchen

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

man als den abstrakten Geist bezeichnen kann) findet einen Zugang zur Seele”).<sup>149</sup> In another example from the same essay Kandinsky defines the spiritual, here called the “absolute” (“das Absolute”) as not existing within the material form: “So sieht man, daß das Absolute nicht in der Form (Materialismus) zu suchen ist.”<sup>150</sup> This formulation thus implies that the spiritual dimension is present in an immaterial, abstract state. More of Kandinsky’s articulations on abstraction will be discussed in the next section on Steiner’s Goethean symbolism and how both thinkers view the relation of art to the forms of nature.

In terms of Kandinsky’s stance toward Theosophy there is no scholarly consensus on the degree of alignment Kandinsky had with Theosophical philosophy.<sup>151</sup> What seems clear is that he had considerable interest in the subject while he also held

---

<sup>149</sup> Kandinsky, “Über die Formfrage,” 140.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>151</sup> For example, according to Will Grohmann, Steiner influenced Kandinsky’s painting only in the years before 1914. Ringbom quotes Grohmann from his work *Kandinsky, Life and Work* (1959) as saying that Kandinsky’s “interest in [spiritual] matters subsided as he became clearer in his own mind about the role of rational elements in his art.” Ringbom, “Art in ‘The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’: Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” 386. Kenneth Lindsay and Peter Vergo argue in the introduction to Kandinsky’s *Complete Writings* that “Although Kandinsky appreciated Steiner’s methodology and the ways in which occult experimentation coincided with his own interests in dematerialization, he maintained a skeptical distance: he was a painter, not a theorist. Kandinsky, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, 123. Note that Lindsay and Vergo use the term “dematerialization” and not “abstraction.” Ringbom, on the other hand, argues that Kandinsky and Theosophy were eventually very closely aligned, though Kandinsky never became an orthodox Theosophist. According to Ringbom, Kandinsky appears early on and throughout his career to have selectively chosen aspects of the Theosophical philosophy that resonated with his own beliefs and ignored some of the key Theosophical tenets. Yet Ringbom concludes, “even such an attitude of picking and choosing is capable of developing into a real commitment.” Ringbom, “Art in ‘The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’: Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” 396-97.

reservations. He clearly had extensive reading knowledge of Theosophical works.<sup>152</sup>

*Über das Geistige in der Kunst* also includes multiple references to Theosophists and their works, to Steiner.

A number of passages in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* address the question of abstraction, in the sense of theoretical thought, and the relationship with Theosophy. In the following two examples, Kandinsky shows his orientation as aligned with Steiner's critique of the theoretical approach. As an introductory remark to a description of Theosophy as a potent agent of spiritual transformation, Kandinsky interjects the critique that the movement is over-eager desire to provide answers to what he calls the eternal, great question mark ("Und jedenfalls, wenn auch die Neigung der Theosophen zur Schaffung einer Theorie und die etwas voreilige Freude, bald Antwort auf die Stelle des ewigen immensen Fragezeichens stellen zu können, leicht den Beobachter etwas skeptisch stimmen kann...").<sup>153</sup> Kandinsky's criticism of the Theosophical tendency to produce theory ("die Neigung der Theosophen zur Schaffung einer Theorie") is highly resonant with Steiner's critique of Theosophy as overly theoretical. There are also other

---

<sup>152</sup> Ringbom demonstrates that a notebook of Kandinsky's from 1908 includes references to a significant number of Theosophical works including, among others, the English original of Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*; Katherine Tingley's *International Theosophical Chronicle*; and to the German translation of Edouard Schuré's *The Great Initiates*. In addition, his library contains a copy of *Gedankenformen* by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater (the German version appeared in 1908). Ringbom also argues it is highly likely that Kandinsky read *Der sichtbare und der unsichtbare Mensch* (translated into German in 1908) as it is the companion book to *Gedankenformen* and both books contain cross-references and was also referred to by Steiner in his articles *Von der Aura des Menschen* to which Kandinsky referred in the same 1908 notebook. Ringbom also adds that Kandinsky owned a number of other occult works that incorporated Theosophical ideas in one form or another. Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*, 61-64.

<sup>153</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 47.

passages in this work that demonstrate Kandinsky as a thinker who does not seek definitive, theoretical answers to large, ontological questions. In one larger footnote, for example, Kandinsky engages in the discussion of the relationship of the material to the immaterial by posing a series of questions that he leaves open-ended:

Es ist hier oft die Rede vom Materiellen und Nichtmateriellen und von den Zwischenzuständen, die “mehr oder weniger” materiell bezeichnet werden. Ist *alles* Materie? Ist *alles* Geist? Können die Unterschiede, die wir zwischen Materie und Geist legen, nicht nur Abstufungen nur der Materie sein oder nur des Geistes? Der als Produkt des “Geistes” in positiver Wissenschaft bezeichnete Gedanke ist auch Materie, die aber nicht groben, sondern feinen Sinnen fühlbar ist. Was die körperliche Hand nicht betasten kann, ist das Geist? In dieser kleinen Schrift kann nicht darüber weiter geredet werden, und es genügt, wenn keine zu scharfen Grenzen gezogen werden.<sup>154</sup>

In the final line of the passage he more clearly shows his anti-theoretical stance by stating that he prefers not to draw sharp boundaries between the categories of spirit (“Geist”) and material.

### **Returning to Goethe to Tease Apart Steiner’ s Understanding of Symbol and Allegory**

Even once we have shed some light on links and divergences between the two thinkers on the subject of abstraction and the theoretical, much more remains to be illuminated regarding what Steiner viewed as erroneous in the abstract, allegorical approach. To do this, however, requires an explication of Steiner’ s understanding of the terms “allegory” and “symbol,” as they are often used synonymously. To help clear this confusion, I return to Goethe’ s pioneering decoupling of the two terms and his promotion of the symbolic and critique of the allegorical. For this I draw on the work of Hazard Adams.

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 38.



Strangely and surprisingly, though an avowed follower of Goethe, Steiner makes no reference to his works when discussing allegory or symbolism and so appears to be unaware of the pioneering work Goethe's distinctions. Thus, Steiner's critique of the allegorical and promotion of the symbolic runs parallel to but appears to be not directly derived from Goethe. Steiner's muddling of the terms "symbol" and "allegory" poses a significant and unfortunate hindrance to a clear understanding of his aesthetics. No less surprising than Steiner's overlooking of Goethe's work is the way that his passionate disavowal of symbolism ignores affinities with important Symbolists, including, among others, Edouard Schuré and Andrei Bely.

Nearly any text or lecture by Steiner on aesthetics contains adamant claims to an artistic practice devoid of both symbolism and allegory. As we have already seen repeatedly, Steiner often uses the two terms synonymously as modes that rely too heavily on mental abstraction. In one example Steiner characterizes the spiritual aim of his *Goetheanum* building as a revelation of the spiritual ("Geistesleben"). He states that both the symbolic and allegorical rely erroneously on abstraction: "ohne in das Abstrakt-Symbolische oder in das Strohm-Allegorische zu verfallen, eine Offenbarung des besonderen Geisteslebens ist, das hier sich verwirklichen will."<sup>155</sup> From this quote one can see that Steiner associates the abstract and the allegorical with a lack of vitality. In contrast, for Steiner the mark of good art is that it serves as a revelation ("Offenbarung") of the spiritual life.

To illuminate where Steiner stands regarding allegory and symbol, we turn now to how Goethe distinguished between the two terms. Interlaced in this examination, I

---

<sup>155</sup> Steiner, *Stilformen des Organisch-Lebendigen* (1921), 10.

analyze how Steiner is in agreement with the conceptual distinction made by Goethe, though Steiner does *not* explicitly engage in the linguistic decoupling Goethe seeks. Hazard Adams argues that Goethe's challenge and quest—one that spanned his entire career—was to try to illuminate how the concepts differed when sufficient terminology was wholly lacking and the two terms were commonly used interchangeably during his time.<sup>156</sup>

Goethe ultimately deems allegory the lowest form and symbol the highest form, a judgment that Steiner echoes. Adams explicates how in the essay “Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst” (1798), Goethe distinguishes between three kinds of art: the first, naturalist art that he terms “mechanical”; the second, what he calls “idealistic,” where the subjects do not simply appear as they do in nature; and third, the allegorical which he describes as abstract. The allegorical is deemed as the lowest form, worse even than the first form of naturalism.<sup>157</sup> It is worth noting that Steiner also discusses naturalist art not in scathing, critical terms as the lowest form but instead as a tool, but a limited one.<sup>158</sup>

Adams finds that central to Goethe's distinction between the concepts is the relationship of the particular to the universal. Adams guides us to maxim 751 in which Goethe asserts that the approach that begins with the universal and moves to the

---

<sup>156</sup> Hazard Adams, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983), 47.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>158</sup> For example, in a lecture from the series “Der Dornacher Bau” (1914) Steiner conceives of painting as comprised of the two poles of drawing and painting. The former is characterized as unable to transcend the naturalistic. Yet, the naturalistic mode is not vilified, instead it is articulated as a limited tool. In one short section of the lecture Steiner uses the following terms to describe this idea: a surrogate for nature, a tool, and a scaffolding to be eventually dismantled. See Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 50-52.

particular is the allegorical. The converse approach—from the particular to the universal—is what typifies Goethe’s definition of the symbolic.

Es ist ein großer Unterschied, ob der Dichter zum Allgemeinen das Besondere sucht oder im Besondern das Allgemeine schaut. Aus jener Art entsteht Allegorie, wo das Besondere nur als Beispiel, als Exempel des Allgemeinen gilt; die letztere aber ist eigentlich die Natur der Poesie, sie spricht ein Besonderes aus, ohne ans Allgemeine zu denken oder darauf hinzuweisen.<sup>159</sup>

For Goethe only the symbolic has true poetic potential.<sup>160</sup> Adams points out that translation issues from German into English have sometimes caused a misconstrual of the term universal to mean a kind of abstraction. He cites René Wellek who translates “allgemein” as “general” which suggests the notion of forming generalizations from sense data, that is, a mental action of abstraction. Adams argues that the better translation is “universal,” but not in the sense of the Platonic idea or the general archetype but, instead, “something more like the immanent spirit in nature.”<sup>161</sup> Additionally, it is interesting to note that the English verb which Adams uses to explain how the symbolic operates is “speaks forth”: it “speaks forth” the particularity—a formulation highly reminiscent of the way both Steiner and Kandinsky discuss artworks or spiritual essences as expressing themselves in sound through a particular form or color.

In a number of striking examples, without ever mentioning Goethe, Steiner specifically promotes his forefather’s symbolic approach to the symbolic: starting from the particular in order to arrive at the universal, as the former intrinsically contains within

---

<sup>159</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Werke. Schriften zur Kunst. Schriften zur Literatur. Maximen und Reflexionen.*, ed. Erich Trunz, vol. 12, Werke Kommentare und Register Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), 471.

<sup>160</sup> Adams makes the important point that with the reference to “poetry,” Goethe meant this in a broader sense, as in the nineteenth century the term “poet” was connected more broadly with “poetic mental activity” and not necessarily the actual production of poems. See Adams, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 55.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

it the latter. The critique of proceeding from the universal is seen in the way Steiner criticizes the artistic tendency within Theosophical and Anthroposophical circles to begin with a theory or concept—intrinsically more general or universal in nature—and tries to then give it artistic expression. In another example, Steiner advocates colored drawing for its potential to operate this way. In the fifth lecture in the series “Der Dornacher Bau” (1914), where Steiner discusses the poles of drawing and painting, the latter is regarded as having non-mimetic potential that allows it to express the deeper reality of its aesthetic object. Steiner gives the example of rendering one, particular cloud and thereby expressing the whole world that was present in that moment:

Das, was man festhält, ist also etwas, was vorübergeht, was aber in den Verhältnissen der ganzen Umgebung, des Kosmos, soweit er in Betracht kommt, begründet ist. Wenn wir eine richtig beleuchtete Wolke zu einer bestimmten Tageszeit malen, malen wir im Grunde genommen die ganze Welt mit, die zu der Tageszeit da ist.<sup>162</sup>

As seen in the above quote, a key to this symbolism is *temporal* specificity. In another example Steiner describes what he considers an authentic painterly rendering of a person at a particular moment. This description begins with a counter-example: a painting that errs by not remaining with the particular but attempting to universalize, that is to encapsulate the entire inner psyche of a person (“Wenn wir einen Menschen malen und die ganze Konstitution seines Innern wiedergeben wollen, dann stehen wir, wie gesagt, nicht in dem eigentlich Künstlerischen darinnen”).<sup>163</sup> In contrast, Steiner argues that a painting that shows a person with a physical attribute, here a reddened face, due to a particular experience can transmit to the viewer the universality of that experience

---

<sup>162</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 63.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

(“etwas, was nicht in dem einzelnen Wesen ist, sondern in der ganzen Umgebung, im ganzen Kosmos”).<sup>164</sup>

Goethe’s notion of symbolism is typified by a temporality that is dynamic and fleeting. In another characterization of his symbolic, found in Maxim 314, Goethe describes it as a lively and momentary revelation: “Das ist die wahre Symbolik, wo das Besondere das Allgemeine repräsentiert, nicht als Traum und Schatten, sondern als lebendig- Augenblickliche Offenbarung des Unerforschlichen”.<sup>165</sup> The importance of manifesting the fleeting nature of life is shown in Goethe’s neologism “lebendig- Augenblickliche.”

Regarding this quote from Goethe on his view of the nature of true symbolism, Adams speaks not directly to the theme of temporality, but to the question of how the Goethean symbolic stands in relation to the sensible world and to abstraction. Adams’ definition of Goethe’s symbolic as representing an “immanent universality,” however, does indeed touch on temporality. Adams argues that by “inscrutable” (“unerforschlich”) Goethe does not mean an unapproachable entity beyond the sensible, the “Platonic” or the “religious.” Goethe’s symbolism is rather an artistic process that relies on abstract thought construction: “Instead [Goethe] regards [the inscrutable] as approachable by the process of art he advocates, which process he equates with the symbolic. The ‘inscrutable’ is only that which is unapproachable by the understanding in the Kantian sense. ‘Scrutability’ is a word referring to the powers of the understanding.”<sup>166</sup>

Adams furthermore cites Karl Vietor as arguing that Goethe does not subscribe to the

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe Werke*, 14 vols., vol. 12, Hamburger Ausgabe (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2005), 471.

<sup>166</sup> Adams, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 56.

idea of a theoretical absolute and believes in “no special essence or spiritual principle apart from the phenomenon and capable of being abstracted from it.”<sup>167</sup> Adams adds that Goethe aimed “to distinguish his sense of immanent universality from abstract generalization” but he lacked the appropriate terminology to impart this difference with full clarity.<sup>168</sup> By describing Goethe’s universality as “immanent,” this links to our discussion of Goethe’s symbolism as taking place *within* the particular and immediate moment.

Likewise, in Steiner’s case a key aspect of the temporality that he seeks in his aesthetics is that the artist works in such a way as to reveal the world as fluid and fleeting, not fixed and stationary. In only a two-page section of the fifth lecture cited above from 1914 Steiner repeatedly uses the verb to arrest or capture (“festhalten”) to describe what is awry in mimetic art. Steiner asserts that even coloring, which he promotes, involves a kind of artificial act of trying to arrest nature when nature is intrinsically always in flux: “Da muss man bedenken, dass das Koloristische ein Festhalten dessen ist, was im Grunde genommen in der Natur gar nicht da ist oder wenigstens nur für den Augenblick festgehalten werden kann.”<sup>169</sup> Steiner asserts that the physical world is based in impermanence while the spiritual world is the more permanent sphere. In one example Steiner makes this distinction when discussing an encounter with an older gentleman on the banks of the Rhein river who uses the expression “the old Rhein” (“der alte Rhein”). He remarks that this old saying has sentimental value but is

---

<sup>167</sup> Karl Vietor, *Goethe the Thinker* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), 63.

<sup>168</sup> Adams, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 56.

<sup>169</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 63.

not based in any physical reality. Sounding much like the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, Steiner elaborates that the water is constantly flowing and the water you witness in one moment is already gone the next. He then asserts more generally that nothing in the physical world is permanent and gives as example the human body: “Ihr eigener Organismus ist fortwährend im Fluß; was Sie heute in sich haben als Fleisch und Blut, das hatten Sie vor acht Jahren noch nicht. Nichts Reales ist bleibend im Physischen, alles ist fließend.”<sup>170</sup> Steiner then returns to the discussion of the saying “der alte Rhein” and asserts that if anything about the Rhein can be said to be permanent it is the elemental beings that live in the river (“Es hat nur einen Sinn, vom ‘alten Rhein’ zu sprechen, wenn wir das Bleibende, das die Elementarwesen, die wirklich in dem Rhein leben”).<sup>171</sup> These images are quite Goethean in the way that they are involved in constant metamorphosis.

Steiner understands the spiritual dimension not as more permanent than its physical counterpart but as a set of archetypes that is manifested in a variety of continually changing forms. As we recall, the imaginative pictures, spiritual in nature, were described as possessing a vitality (“Lebhaftigkeit”) beyond that of the physical world.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, in order to perceive the spiritual dimension requires that one develop a highly dynamic, fluid mode. In a discussion of color theory, for example, Steiner characterizes the process of creating out of the colors as requiring a lively

---

<sup>170</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Okkultes Lesen und okkultes Hören*, vol. GA 156 (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987), 29.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Steiner characterizes the pictures in Imagination in the following way: “die Bilder der Imagination sind von einer Lebhaftigkeit und Inhaltsfülle, mit der sich nicht nur die schattenhaften Erinnerungsbilder der Sinnenwelt nicht vergleichen lassen, sondern sogar nicht einmal die ganze bunte, wechselreiche Sinnenwelt selbst.” See Steiner, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, 5-6.

immersive engagement with the colors (“wenn man ganz lebendig sich hineinfühlt in das Farbige, dann sprechen, ich möchte sagen, Rot und Blau und Gelb untereinander”).<sup>173</sup> Goethe’s color theory was also an important influence on Kandinsky’s color theory, a large subject worthy of its own study. Additionally, one of the fundamental exercises Steiner suggests for the development of spiritual organs of perception is one in which one observes and contemplates this kind of fluidly and constant state of flux within the natural world as seen in its two, ever-present phases: growing and dying. Steiner says that through this exercise a new form of thoughts and feelings arises that builds the spiritual organs:

Je öfter man in einer solchen Weise die Aufmerksamkeit auf etwas Wachsendes, Blühendes und Gedeihendes und damit abwechselnd auf etwas Welkendes, Absterbendes lenkt, desto lebhafter werden diese Gefühle werden. Und aus den Gefühlen und Gedanken, die so entstehen, bauen sich die Hellseherorgane ebenso auf.<sup>174</sup>

Noteworthy is the way that engagement with the natural world provides the material for spiritual training. This resonates with one of the fundamental points I make in this chapter regarding the aesthetics of both Steiner and Kandinsky: though they involve a departure from the physical plane, the departure is gradual in nature and at first is often based in the physical world. To recall, Steiner’s imaginative pictures are based in, though not entirely, in copying, physical objects and, as Washton-Long has emphasized, Kandinsky includes some recognizable images in his increasingly objectless veiled paintings.

---

<sup>173</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Der Baugedanke des Goetheanum. Einleitender Vortrag mit Erklärungen zu den Bildern des Baus* (1921), (Freie Verwaltung des Nachlasses Rudolf Steiners, 1958), 95.

<sup>174</sup> Steiner, *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* 25.



If we return to analyze Goethe we find that he distinguishes the allegorical from the symbolic—and Steiner thinks along similar lines—is that the former is understood as a direct approach and the latter an indirect approach. In an article that examines the art theory of Goethe in relation to that of Hegel, Luke Fischer speaks to the rationale for Goethe’s privileging of an indirect mode: “the indirect symbolic approach of art and religion is here regarded as better suited to communicate profound truths than the more direct conceptual approach of philosophy.”<sup>175</sup> In the first lecture from the 1918 series “Kunst und Kunsterkenntnis,” Steiner remarks that a philosophical or academic approach (what he calls “die ästhetisch-wissenschaftliche Betrachtung”), is the least suited to art: “Wem die Kunst ihr Geheimnis zu enthüllen beginnt, der empfindet eine fast unüberwindliche Abneigung gegen ihre unwürdigst Auslegerin, die ästhetisch-wissenschaftliche Betrachtung.”<sup>176</sup> Fischer additionally argues that Goethe’s critique of a direct approach stems not only from his distinction between a philosophical and an artistic approach, but also has roots in iconoclasm. Fischer asserts that Goethe’s argument against a direct approach in representing the divine in artistic form is based in “the logic of iconoclasm—to present the divine in art is to present it in imperfect and inferior form [...] for Goethe the work of art is an elevation or *Steigerung* of the sensible.”<sup>177</sup> With the word “Steigerung” Fischer points to Goethe’s *Metamorphosenlehre*, a subject that will be taken up in the final section of the chapter.

---

<sup>175</sup> Luke Fischer, “Goethe contra Hegel: The Question of the End of Art,” *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011): 138.

<sup>176</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Kunst und Kunsterkenntnis. Grundlagen einer neuen Ästhetik*, vol. GA 271 (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1985), 81. This remark is an alternation of one from Goethe: “Wem die Natur ihr offenbares Geheimnis zu enthüllen anfängt, der empfindet eine unwiderstehliche Sehnsucht nach ihrer würdigsten Auslegerin, der Kunst.”

<sup>177</sup> Fischer, “Goethe contra Hegel: The Question of the End of Art,” 156.

We see also that Fischer differs from Vietor in that the former has a religious reading while the latter, as already seen, views Goethe as more of a secularist.

For Goethe true symbolic art cannot manifest the spiritual or divine element through the direct transfer of this element into an artistic form. This is because there is not a direct link from one sphere to the other. Instead, as the word “Steigerung” suggests, a process of transformation is required. Fischer then leads us to a passage from Steiner’s 1889 lecture in which, without using the term “allegory,” he argues against a direct, allegorical approach. Steiner argues that art—in this case Steiner speaks of beauty (“das Schöne”)—is not created by simply putting the godly into sensual form, but, conversely, it entails a process whereby the sensual is transformed into a divine form.<sup>178</sup>

Das Schöne ist nicht das Göttliche in einem sinnlich-wirklichen Gewande; nein, es ist das Sinnlich-Wirkliche in einem göttlichen Gewande. Der Künstler bringt das Göttliche nicht dadurch auf die Erde, daß er es in die Welt einfließen läßt, sondern dadurch, daß er die Welt in die Sphäre der Göttlichkeit erhebt.<sup>179</sup>

The verbs Steiner chooses in the above formulation suggest that another important difference between symbol and allegory is whether the action is active or passive in nature. The first approach, which Steiner critiques, looks to have the divine enter or flow into (“einfließen”) the material plane. This verb has a passive connotation and the formulation suggests that this approach—the unnamed allegorical—assumes that one can move from the material to the spiritual realm without any change of mode. In contrast, the opposite approach—the unnamed symbolic—involves the active action of raising

---

<sup>178</sup> It should be noted that in this formulation Steiner chooses the term divine or godly (“das Göttliche”) and does not use the term spiritual (“das Geistige”). This is yet another example of how Steiner’s terminology is generally fluid and it is not possible for this writer to illuminate the subject of Steiner’s aesthetics while trying to limit myself to one term.

<sup>179</sup> Steiner, “Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik,” 471.

(“erhebt”) the material world into a divine form. Also, in this second formulation Steiner clearly discusses the divine and the material as two separate, though related, spheres. This is seen in the wording of bringing the material world (“die Welt”) into the divine sphere (“die Sphäre der Göttlichkeit”).

Adams finds that the dichotomy of active and passive likewise plays a central role in Goethe’s attempts to differentiate the allegorical from the symbolic. He portrays Goethe as struggling to figure himself as an artist who does not resort to allegory. Goethe asserts that Faust has no allegorical elements, for example, though he admits to allegorical elements in shorter poems as well as in his novel *Wahlverwandtschaften*.<sup>180</sup> Adams finds, however, that in arguing for an approach that is not allegorical or abstract, Goethe in some instances inadvertently promotes a passive concept of the artist.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, Adams argues that the struggle to promote an active approach is a fundamental challenge in the nineteenth century. More specifically, Adams finds that the advocacy of an active approach can easily slip into the unwitting promotion of abstraction, while the emphasis on particularity (thus the non-allegorical) can fall into the promotion of passivity:

Goethe is on the horns of a dilemma by no means unique to him, for it keeps reappearing in various forms throughout the nineteenth century. If in order to preserve the particularity of experience he characterizes the artist’s actions as passive reception, he is in danger of giving such acts no creative power. If he emphasizes the artist’s activity as constitutive he begins to make the artist’s activity sound like that of a Kantian understanding, which produces abstract ideas,

---

<sup>180</sup> As seen already in adamant statements from Steiner that his approach as in no way abstract (though he often conflates the terms “symbol” and “allegory”), it was likewise certainly important for Steiner to promote himself as one who operates with no trace of the allegorical. It seems that Steiner tried to drive this point even harder than Goethe did, as seen in the passionate tone of many of his assertions, a move that may not help his case in the eyes of scholars.

<sup>181</sup> Adams, *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 52.

thereby losing the particularity of art and creating something like romantic allegory.<sup>182</sup>

Since I am not offering a detailed explication of Goethe's thought, but instead, showing how the way Goethe looked to differentiate symbol from allegory resonates strongly with Steiner's thought, I cannot offer a thorough analysis of this claim. The one aspect of the above formulation by Adams, however, that I would take issue with is that in Goethe's model, the artist's activity is akin to the (Kantian) production of abstract ideas. As already introduced, and further elaborated upon in the next section, Goethe's concept of mental activity—from which Steiner draws heavily—is certainly active, but aims to be the opposite of abstract thought formation.

### **The Relationship of Art and Nature: Steiner's Goethean Symbolism in Contrast to Kandinsky's Notion of Abstraction**

To review all of the salient elements of Goethe's symbolic, which resonate so well with the ideas of Steiner, we found that the Goethean symbol operates from the particular to the universal; it requires temporal specificity and expresses a dynamic and fleeting, not ossified or arrested, temporality; and it proceeds in an indirect and not a direct manner, that is, it entails a *process* of transformation and not a simple, direct transfer from one state to another. While the last section considered Goethe's aesthetic writings in his distinction between symbol and allegory, all of these elements are highly pertinent to Goethe's understanding of nature, where the symbol ultimately originates. In this final section I consider Steiner's aesthetic model as based in a Goethean symbolic that arises from the interaction between art and nature, seen especially in Goethe's *Metamorphosenlehre*. This return to a nature-based approach shows that

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 53.

Steiner's aesthetic-spiritual model begins by departing from the physical plane, akin to Kandinsky; however, it ultimately ends by returning to a deep, immersive engagement with the forms of nature. I draw from the work of Eckart Förster and Frederick Amrine for insight into the form of mental activity developed by Goethe in the interaction with the living plant. In the course of my illumination of Steiner's Goethean symbolic, I also seek to show how in Kandinsky's model of abstract art, which was developed gradually over time, nature is often conceived as the antithesis of and not the inspiration for art.

The prime focus of this section will be on Steiner's form of Goethean symbolism that engages with nature in an immersive mode, but I begin by examining how Kandinsky contrasts starkly in the way his notion of abstraction relies on the departure from nature. Washton-Long explains that the painter's theory of abstraction developed in a slow and gradual manner. It was a pace guided in part by the initial resistance, and then gradual acceptance, of the public and fellow artists.<sup>183</sup> As already discussed, one of his primary aims early on was to retain his audience while experimenting with increasingly abstract forms, and so the inclusion of veiled imagery, or the simplification of images, was one technique that served both purposes. In one of her discussions of veiled imagery, Washton-Long asserts that one of Kandinsky's goals was "the separation of form and colour from nature."<sup>184</sup> She also points out that by 1913, when writing in his autobiography, Kandinsky uses the term "gegenstandlos" (without object) in reference to some of his works and meant this in the sense of "forms deriving mostly

---

<sup>183</sup> Washton-Long also notes that Kandinsky's understanding of abstraction transformed between 1913 and 1919 partly due to the great interest in the subject of abstraction in Russia. See Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 3.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

or exclusively ‘ from within the artist’ as contrasted to forms originating in nature.’<sup>185</sup> Writing in his memoir *Rückblick*, Kandinsky states that the aims and methods of art and nature are described as equally important, but fundamentally different (“wesentlich, organisch und weltgeschichtlich verschieden [...] und gleich groß und auch gleich stark”).<sup>186</sup> We also find a number of statements in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* that define abstraction as a departure from nature.<sup>187</sup> In one example the development and eventual dominance of abstraction is conceived as coinciding with the retreat of organic form: “Und dieses Wachsen und schließlich Überwiegen des Abstrakten ist natürlich [...] da, je mehr die organische Form zurückgetrieben wird, desto mehr dieses Abstrakte von selbst in den Vordergrund tritt und an Klang gewinnt.”<sup>188</sup> In a section from the chapter “Theorie,” Kandinsky argues that both in music and painting, the goal is never the simple replication of nature’s outward appearance. He argues that the creation of forms, movement and colors should not be dictated by trying to stay true to natural appearances. Then he says that the departure from nature is the easiest way to provide expression for inner, spiritual meaning:

Deswegen muß eine Form gefunden werden [...] die reine Farbenwirkung in keiner Weise hemmt. Zu diesem Zweck müssen Form, Bewegung, Farbe, die aus der Natur (realen oder nicht realen) geliehenen Gegenstände keine äußerliche und äußerlich verbundene erzählerische Wirkung hervorrufen. Und je äußerlich

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>186</sup> Kandinsky, *Rückblick*, 12.

<sup>187</sup> It is important to note that in the original version of this work, Kandinsky was not proposing a complete or pure form of abstraction, as he argued that the times were not ready for this art form. This assertion was modified in a later 1914 version, however, to say that a few artists could produce pure abstraction, however, this change was not made in the German or Russian editions prior to the First World War. See Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 7.

<sup>188</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 77.

unmotivierter z.B. die Bewegung ist, desto reiner, tiefer und innerlicher wirkt sie.<sup>189</sup>

Also, in one long footnote from the same source, Kandinsky cites Goethe, Eugène Delacroix and Oscar Wilde to substantiate his claim that art and nature are separate realms and that the former is higher in the hierarchy than the latter. All three of these thinkers talk explicitly about nature as the antithesis of art.<sup>190</sup>

In two examples from the essay “Über die Formfrage,” Kandinsky talks not about nature, but about materiality as what he is seeking to overcome; in both cases he specifies that the spiritual element does not manifest in material form. In the first example, previously introduced, the term “the absolute” is used for the spiritual element: So sieht man, daß das Absolute nicht in der Form (Materialismus) zu suchen ist.”<sup>191</sup> In the second example, the inner content—which is equated with spirit (“Geist”)—is privileged over form: “nicht die Form (Materie) im allgemeinen ist das wichtigste, sondern der Inhalt (Geist).”<sup>192</sup> Some scholars have construed Kandinsky’s conception of abstraction as evidence of a clear orientation toward transcendence. Richard Sheppard argues, for instance, that Kandinsky positions matter as distinctly apart from “transcendent *Geist*”: “Kandinsky countered what he perceived as the despiritualization of the modern world by driving, in a classically Gnostic manner, a wedge between matter and transcendent *Geist*. He relegated the activity of that *Geist* to a realm behind the real world, and privileged

---

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>190</sup> Part of the quote from Goethe includes the following sentences: “Der Künstler will zur Welt durch ein Ganzes sprechen: Dieses Ganze findet er aber nicht in der Natur, sondern es ist die Frucht seines eigenen Geistes oder, wenn man will, des Anwehens eines befruchtenden göttlichen Odems.” (Karl Heinemann, Goethe, 1899, S. 684).

<sup>191</sup> Kandinsky, “Über die Formfrage,” 137.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 140.

abstract art [...] as a means of access to that realm.”<sup>193</sup> As explained below, I consider this an overly simplistic reading of Kandinsky’s aesthetics as he clearly was a thinker concerned with medium specificity and in this way showed an attention to materiality.

That Kandinsky’s evolving concept of abstraction relied heavily on the notion of a departure from nature and materiality is perhaps not surprising. It is also not the whole story. As Ringbom, among others, has pointed out, over time and later than the writing of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, Kandinsky began discussing the idea of art as guided by the inner laws of nature, statements that are highly resonant with those of Steiner.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, as previously discussed, with Kandinsky’s notion of “inner sounds,” he certainly espouses the idea of a spiritual reality immanent in the materiality of color, form and line.

My point, however, in highlighting how Kandinsky’s earlier theorization of the relationship of art and nature contrasts with Steiner’s understanding of this relationship is to emphasize that Kandinsky’s early concept of abstraction was inspired by only the first phase of Steiner’s aesthetic model that asked the meditator to depart from the physical plane. Kandinsky remained engaged with theorizing what it means to express a de-materialized state. He did not follow Steiner further in his spiritual-aesthetic model that, in the end, returns to the material form to engage with the forces of nature and to adopt the dynamic, living mode of nature for the purposes of art. Therefore, I see

---

<sup>193</sup> Richard Sheppard, “Kandinsky’s Oeuvre 1900-14: The Avant-Garde as Rear Guard,” *Word & Image* 6 (1990): 44.

<sup>194</sup> Ringbom says that, like Goethe, Kandinsky “believed that he was on the track of the invariable laws of art. In the course of time he explicitly equated the inner necessity with the ‘laws of nature’, an identity which is only tacitly assumed in *Über das Geistige*.” Ringbom, “Art in ‘The Epoch of the Great Spiritual’: Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting,” 392.



Kandinsky and Steiner as fundamentally divergent in their understanding of the relationship between matter and spirit or between nature and art. Though not the topic of this chapter, it is certainly striking that though Steiner so intensively engaged with mental and spiritual exercises his oeuvre contains a number of highly practical initiatives, and these are often better known to the greater public than his aesthetic thought. These include, among others, a form of organic farming called Biodynamics, a branch of medicine and Waldorf education along with a form of education for special-needs children. I would argue that these initiatives are manifestations of the way Steiner's thought is ultimately not de-materialized but of an embodied nature in the manner of the Goethean symbolic, the topic that follows. In the very last section of this chapter, I consider Steiner's theory that Eurythmy is a manifestation of the Goethean symbolic.

### **Steiner's Goethean Symbolic**

In this section I argue that Steiner's spiritual and aesthetic model ends ultimately in a deep, immersive engagement with form, including those that originate in nature. I examine what Steiner held to be the primary contribution of Goethe's *Metamorphosenlehre*: not the discovery of new natural phenomena, but a new form of *seeing* the phenomena. This form of seeing Steiner regarded as a form of science. Steiner highlighted the holism of Goethe's philosophy regarding plant metamorphosis in the claim that all varied physical forms of the plant are manifestations of one, single organism. The basis of this unifying organism is not a physical plant but an ideal, an archetype, what Goethe calls the *Urpflanze*. This insight, Steiner emphasizes, is one that can be reached only through mental exercise. Through the reiteration of the stages of

plant development in an inward, mental way, one develops new organs of perception that are typically only dormant. For this discussion, I incorporate notes by Steiner in the introduction and annotations he wrote to an edition of Goethe's *Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, as well as excerpts from his article entitled "Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik," that was originally published in 1889.

In this important article, Steiner argues for a revival of interest in Goethe's thought as essential to understanding contemporary culture and as a needed intervention to contemporary scientific method. Steiner asserts that many of his contemporaries consider Goethe's thought as outdated because they fail to understand the import of his thought. Steiner views Goethe's greatest contribution as being the comprehensive nature of his principles and his manner of seeing: "seine umfassenden Prinzipien, seine großartige Art, die Dinge anzuschauen."<sup>195</sup> Steiner argues that Goethe promoted an approach with which one could penetrate the external dimension to access the depth of nature: "in die Tiefen der Natur zu bücken vermag [...] mehr zu sehen als die bloßen äußeren Tatsachen."<sup>196</sup> Thus we see how Steiner works with the binaries of the external facts in contrast to the inner depth of nature. In other instances, Steiner speaks against an artistic or scientific approach that relies only on observation or what he describes as slavish imitation: "der wahre Fortschritt in den Wissenschaften wie in der Kunst ist niemals durch solches Beobachten oder sklavisches Nachahmen der Natur bewirkt worden."<sup>197</sup> Steiner argues that his contemporaries regard Goethe as outdated due to the

---

<sup>195</sup> Steiner, "Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik," 2.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

dominance of positivistic scientific paradigms. In his era, the role of the genius and his productive spiritual mental powers is regarded as dispensable:

Aber unsere Zeit hat das Eigentümliche, dass ihr die produktive Geisteskraft des Genies fast bedeutungslos erscheint. Wie sollte es auch anders sein in einer Zeit, in der jedes Hinausgehen über die physische Erfahrung in der Wissenschaft wie in der Kunst verpönt ist. Zum bloßen sinnlichen Beobachten braucht man weiter nichts als gesunde Sinne, und Genie ist dazu ein recht entbehrliches Ding.<sup>198</sup>

While the word “Geisteskraft” is easy to translate as mental or intellectual powers, the concept of genius (“Genie”) goes back to 18th century discourse of genius. Steiner regards Goethe, as a figure purported to be able to see the whole, as one such genius figure.

One Goethean concept that Steiner highlights as centrally important is that all of the myriad plant elements are different manifestations of the same organ, namely the leaf. In section 115 of *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* Goethe articulates this important concept: “Es mag nun die Pflanze sprossen, blühen oder Früchte bringen, so sind es doch nur immer *dieselbigen Organe*, welche in vielfältigen Bestimmungen und unter oft veränderten Gestalten die Vorschrift der Natur erfüllen.”<sup>199</sup> In another formulation, Goethe explicitly names the leaf: “So wie wir nun die verschieden scheinenden Organe der sprossenden und blühenden Pflanze alle aus einem einzigen, nämlich dem *Blatte*.”<sup>200</sup> As we will see, this concept of a single organ that underlies all other diversity of formal expression is a key idea in Steiner’s theory of Eurythmy.

A second essential idea, according to Steiner, is the way that the *Metamorphosenlehre* asks a person to *mentally* engage with the physical plant. Goethe

---

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> J.W. Goethe, *Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, ed. Rudolf Steiner (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1980), 78.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 79.

suggests an exercise in which the subject pictures the process of plant growth, including the transition from one to another plant stage, both forwards and backwards (here he calls them the appearances, “die Erscheinungen”). Goethe states: “gegenwärtig müssen wir uns damit begnügen, daß wir uns gewöhnen, die Erscheinungen vorwärts und rückwärts gegeneinander zu halten.”<sup>201</sup> If we recall, in the discussion of Steiner’s stage of Imagination, he describes the activity of mentally visualizing the progression of a seed becoming a plant as a central, basic exercise. Under the section from which the above quote by Goethe was excerpted, Steiner attached a note.<sup>202</sup> In this note, he contends that what Goethe was emphasizing should not be understood as one, physical organ that underlies all others. Instead, the driving force is the *idea* of the plant. Steiner asserts:

Hier verwarft sich Goethe gegen die Meinung, als ob er einem äußerlichen Organe wie dem Laubblatte eine größere prinzipielle Ursprünglichkeit beilege als anderen Organen. Ihm galt als das Ursprüngliche die Idee der Pflanze, von der jedes äußere Organ, also auch das Blatt, schon eine besondere Gestaltung ist.<sup>203</sup>

As is so often the case, Steiner emphasizes that it is *not* the outer appearances (“äußerlich”) that are essential; instead, all physical manifestations of the plant arise from the original source of the “Idee.” Because this is the case, Steiner argues that one cannot comprehend the magnitude of what Goethe is proposing without actually practicing these mental exercises oneself. Thus, Steiner emphasizes the need for a shift from theory to practice. Steiner contents, “Die Größe dieses Gedankens [...] geht einem nur dann auf,

---

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> In the version of *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* I use in this section, the introduction and annotations are by Steiner, excerpted from writings by Steiner from his scholarly study of Goethe in the works *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*. In Weimar between 1884 and 1897, Steiner published five volumes of *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* for the Kürschner edition of “Deutsche National-Literatur.”

<sup>203</sup> Rudolf Steiner, “Aus Rudolf Steiner’s Einleitung in Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften,” in *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1980), 79.

wenn man es unternimmt, ihn nachzudenken.”<sup>204</sup> Steiner elaborates further in the same passage that what is important is the mental construction of a vivid whole from which the laws of growth and the individual stages of plant development arise:

Das Bedeutsame der Pflanzenmetamorphose liegt [...] in dem großartigen gedanklichen Aufbau eines lebendigen Ganzen drueinander wirkender Bildungsgesetze, welcher daraus hervorgeht und der die Einzelheiten, die einzelnen Stufen der Entwicklung, aus sich heraus bestimmt.<sup>205</sup>

Implicit in this concept from Goethe is the notion, thus, that the perceiver is actively engaged in the construction of the appearances. Eckart Förster and Frederick Amrine have both written about the active role of the perceiver in Goethe’s *Metamorphosenlehre*. In the article “Goethe on ‘Das Auge des Geistes,’” Förster argues that it is necessary to be able to inwardly visualize the plant and, in so doing, to see what he calls, the “law,” “typus” or “archetype” of the plant. Previously, I quoted Steiner calling this underlying agent the “Idee.” Förster states:

The demand [made by Goethe] that I should be able to produce the object in my mind entails more than the ability to generate in intuition a copy of the living plant: To really comprehend it, one might say, I must know the law underlying its development, its *typus* or archetype, so that I can generate imaginatively a new plant from it.<sup>206</sup>

In similar terms, Steiner describes the process of inner visualization as one that accesses unchanging laws and what he calls the “Urbild,” a concept very similar to the archetype:

er [Goethe] vertieft sich in dieselbe [die Wirklichkeit], um in ihrem ewigen Wandel, in ihrem Werden und Bewegen, ihre unwandelbaren Gesetze zu finden, er stellt sich dem Individuum gegenüber, um in ihm das Urbild zu erschauen [...] Das sind keine leeren Allgemeinbegriffe, die einer grauen Theorie angehören, das sind die wesentlichen Grundlagen der Organismen mit einem reichen, konkreten Inhalt, lebensvoll und anschaulich. Anschaulich freilich nicht für die äußeren

---

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Förster, “Goethe on ‘Das Auge des Geistes,’” 95.

Sinne, sondern nur für jenes höhere Anschauungsvermögen, das Goethe in dem Aufsätze über Anschauende Urteilskraft bespricht.<sup>207</sup>

Steiner talks of Goethe's thought as not consisting of empty general concepts and grey theories and instead chooses adjectives that impart the notion of aliveness and tangibility ("reich", "konkret" and "lebensvoll"). Steiner's interpretation of Goethe's approach has a clearly spiritual slant as seen when he talks of the metamorphosis of the plants as involving an ability for higher intuition ("höhere Anschauungsvermögen"). Amrine emphasizes the transformational nature of this mental activity proposed by Goethe. Not only is the plant undergoing transformation, but Amrine contends that the subject also undergoes transformation in observing the changing plant: "Goethe's scientific ideal is to allow oneself to be transformed in following the transformations of the phenomena [...]. For Goethe, the hypothesis is not something abstracted from the phenomena, but rather the pattern of the phenomena themselves."<sup>208</sup> Amrine goes on to clarify that when Goethe used the term "theory," he meant it in etymological terms, as a "way of seeing." In another related article, Amrine asserts that "Goethe has given us a kind of primer in which we can learn to read forms."<sup>209</sup> In the following section, I will show how Steiner attempted to make visible such forms through the art form of Eurythmy.

### **Visible Speech: Steiner's Theory of Eurythmy as an Expression of the Goethean *Metamorphosenlehre***

In this final section of the chapter, I analyze how Steiner conceived of Eurythmy, the dance form he created, as an expression, in movement form, of Goethe's

---

<sup>207</sup> Steiner, "Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik," 9.

<sup>208</sup> Amrine, "The Metamorphosis of the Scientist," 194.

<sup>209</sup> Amrine, "Goethean Intuitions," 47.

*Metamorphosenlehre*. I will show how Steiner meant Eurythmy to be a participatory and transformative art form that made visible inner phenomena. Steiner also highlighted the concept of the transformation of a single organ; with Eurythmy, however, it was not the *Urpflanze*, but the organ of the larynx (“Kehlkopf”) that is centrally at play. For this discussion, I incorporate excerpts from the lecture series entitled “Eurythmie—die Offenbarung der sprechenden Seele.” Most of this last section of the chapter has emphasized important ways in which the thought of Steiner and Kandinsky differ. In my consideration of Eurythmy, however, I show that the way Steiner emphasized the potential of sound and recited speech to express an inner, spiritual dimension resonates with Kandinsky’s theorization of “innerer Klang” and his experimental use of speech and sound.

Before I illuminate this theory by Steiner I will provide a little background on this dance form. Eurythmy was created, between 1911 and 1925. Steiner’s colleague and later wife Marie von Sivers, who would take his name, worked intensively on the development of this art form. It is an expressive, gestural dance form in which movements are meant to express the sounds and rhythms of speech and music, and are also meant to demonstrate mood or soul qualities. Eurythmy still exists today, though it is not well known outside of Steinerian circles. It is taught in Waldorf schools, performed very largely for Steinerian audiences and there is also a therapeutic form of Eurythmy part of Anthroposophical medicine for both children and adults.

In the lecture series introduced above, Steiner distinguishes Eurythmy from the contemporaneous movements of gymnastics (“Turnen”) and from what he calls “Bühnentanzkunst,” meaning a dance form geared solely toward outward entertainment.

He argues that both forms lack a spiritual basis. *Turnen* follows external, physical laws but is, “ohne eigentlich seelisch-geistiges Element.”<sup>210</sup> Similarly, “Bühnentanzkunst” Steiner characterizes as a dance form that is oriented solely for performance (“zum Anschauen”).<sup>211</sup> Implicit in this criticism that this dance form is only created to be watched is the assumption that the viewer should do more than passively watch and that dance should not only be an external phenomenon. While rejecting linkages with *Turnen* or “Bühnentanzkunst,” Steiner places Eurythmy in the tradition of temple dance. In the third chapter, as we will see, Steiner likewise inscribes the first *Goetheanum* building into the tradition of temple architecture. In both instances, however, Steiner asserts that his artistic creations represent a renewal but also a *modernization* of the older ritual and architectural forms associated with the temple. Regarding Eurythmy, Steiner argues that it is “eine Erneuerung, aber in durchaus moderner Form, der alten Tempel-Tanzkunst.”<sup>212</sup> What exactly Steiner meant by Eurythmy representing a more “modern” art form is not clear from the assertion above. In the course of this whole lecture series, however, it becomes more apparent that Steiner understands Eurythmy as “modern” in the sense that it is meant to foster *conscious* awareness of spiritual realities—as opposed to what he viewed as an ancient, unconscious spiritual experience. I elaborate further upon Steiner’s concept of the development of self-conscious subject in my discussion in Chapter Two of Steiner’s “evolution of consciousness.” In Steiner’s articulation of how Eurythmy helps foster conscious awareness, he often speaks of this dance form as making spiritual phenomena visible (“sichtbar”).

---

<sup>210</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Eurythmie. Die Offenbarung der sprechenden Seele*. (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1980), 58.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.



In the lecture series “Eurythmie—die Offenbarung der sprechenden Seele,” Steiner details how he envisions this dance form to be a manifestation of Goethe’s *Metamorphosenlehre* and a reworking of this theory so as to apply to human movement. Steiner adopts Goethe’s concept that each plant is a transformation of other plant organs. Steiner argues that Eurythmy dancers become expressions of the organ of speech, the larynx, “Der ganze Mensch soll zu einer Metamorphose eines einzelnen Organes, eines allerdings hervorragenden, bedeutungsvollen Organes, des Kehlkopfes, werden.”<sup>213</sup> The dancer dances to speech or music. The reason for the particular focus on the larynx is that Steiner regarded speech as possessing especially spiritual qualities. In particular, he theorized speech as expressing the soul (“die Seele”). Thus, Eurythmy is meant as a means to make visible the “seelische” qualities of speech. In one formulation, Steiner argues that what is expressed by speech is not only of sounds but the whole human soul (“Seele):

Nun ist aber in der menschlichen Sprache nicht bloß das enthalten, was sonst in Lauten und Lautfolgen zum Ausdrucke kommt, sondern es spricht sich das Ganze der menschlichen Seele aus: Gefühl, innere Wärme, Empfindung, Stimmung und so weiter.<sup>214</sup>

Steiner elaborates on what he means by “Seele,” including feeling, inner warmth, sensation or perception (“Empfindung”) and mood (“Stimmung”). Eurythmy dancers characteristically dance to recited speech—often poetry but also sometimes prose—or live music.

An important aspect of Eurythmy is the theory and practice of recitation arts. In a number of lectures given on Eurythmy, sometimes given as introductions to the

---

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 54.

performances, Steiner argues for the revival of a form of spoken arts meant to facilitate a deeper experience of the spiritual nature of language. In one such lecture, entitled “Eurythmie, Was sie ist und wie sie entstanden ist” (1923), Steiner argues that in his era a feeling for the recitation arts has been lost. He attributes the weakening of this art form to loss of spiritual feeling for language. He laments that there are few who still know how to flow into language with their souls: “wir reden, ohne daß wir eigentlich noch mit unserer Seele in die Sprache selber hineinströmen.”<sup>215</sup> In his theory of language, vowels and consonants are conceived as derived from distinct sources—the former inner and the latter outer—and as serving different functions. Vowels are theorized as originating from an inner dimension and their aim is to express the soul. Consonants, contrastingly, are understood as arising from interaction with external objects and are described, in a very artistic mode, as drawing or painting the physical surroundings.<sup>216</sup> When one does still possess the ability to experience the inner qualities of language—or acquires such an ability through meditative preparation—Steiner characterizes the experience in enthusiastic terms as a nuanced and poly-sensual experience:

Wer fühlt denn noch diese Verwundern, dieses Erstaunen, dieses Perplexwerden, dieses Sich-Aufbäumen bei den Vokalen! Wer fühlt das sanfte rundliche Umwegen eines Dinges, das Gestoßenwerden eines Dinges, das Nachahmen des Eckigen, das Ausgeschweifte, das Samtartige, das Stachelige bei den einzelnen Konsonanten!<sup>217</sup>

---

<sup>215</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Eurythmie als sichtbare Sprache* (1922-1924) (Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, 1968), 30.

<sup>216</sup> Steiner says: “Der Vokal stammt aus dem Inneren, will das Innere, gewissermaßen die volle Seele nach außen ergießen. Der Konsonant stammt aus dem Erfassen der Dinge [...] [Er] malt, zeichnet die äußere Form der Dinge.” *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

While the experience of hearing vowels is associated with an emotional, that is a soulful response (“seelisch”), the experience of consonants is described, synesthetically, in physical, specifically tactile terms.

It is important to recall that Kandinsky also privileged sound (“Klang”) for its potential to express an inner, spiritual dimension. The approach of Kandinsky and Steiner to spoken language in their arts, however, was quite different. While Steiner emphasized the revival of an older tradition of recitative arts, Kandinsky worked with sound in a much more experimental fashion. The latter was interested in the departure from meaning-bound language to reach a purely emotional, and spiritual, experience of sound. For instance, in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* Kandinsky describes a certain poetic and emotional style of linguistic delivery in which a word is repeated multiple times such that the “inner sound” is developed:

Geschickte Anwendung (nach dichterischem *Gefühl*) eines Wortes, eine innerlich nötige Wiederholung desselben zweimal, dreimal, mehrere Male nacheinander kann nicht nur zum Wachsen des inneren Klanges führen, sondern noch andere nicht geahnte geistige Eigenschaften des Wortes zutage bringen.<sup>218</sup>

In his play *Der Gelbe Klang*, much of the “dialogue” is made up of sounds and words that together do not form a clear meaning but succeed in adding to the mood that Kandinsky also fosters with use of color, instrumentalization and movement. In the above formulation Kandinsky speaks of the “geistige” qualities, while Steiner often talks of Eurythmy as expressing “seelische” characteristics. Nevertheless, both theorists are united in the way they impart speech and sound with the potential for expressing some form of inner, spiritual dimension.

---

<sup>218</sup> Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*, 45.

Steiner held that Eurythmy could make speech visible. He asserts, “daher ist unsere eurythmische Kunst auch bestrebt, dieses alles, was durch das Medium der Sprache zur Anschaulichkeit kommt, zum Ausdruck kommt, auch sichtbarlich darzustellen.”<sup>219</sup> What Steiner meant to make visible (“sichtbarlich”), however, was not the workings of the physical organ of the larynx itself. Instead, Steiner held that when a person speaks the whole organism is active, not only the physical aspect: “Wenn der Mensch spricht, ist die Tendenz vorhanden, daß der ganze Organismus des Menschen, nicht nur der physische in Bewegung ist.”<sup>220</sup> Steiner intended Eurythmy to give visible expression to the movements of the whole human being, especially the movements of the etheric body.<sup>221</sup> As Steiner explains, “der ganze Ätherleib, Bildekräfteleib des Menschen ist in Bewegung. [...] Die Kehlkopfbewegung ist eine organische Bewegung unseres ganzen Ätherleibes.”<sup>222</sup> Thus, Steiner meant for Eurythmy to be a moving display of the formal language of the etheric dimension. This is a language, according to Steiner, that typically remains unseen unless the viewer has developed the inner organ of perception, what Steiner in one instance previously introduced called the “höhere Anschauungsvermögen.” An important aspect of how Steiner understood Eurythmy as able to make speech visible, was in the way it could demonstrate the *lawfulness* of human speech and music. Steiner conceived of Eurythmy as possessing the same kind of lawfulness as Goethe’s *Metamorphosenlehre*. In one instance, Steiner describes the

---

<sup>219</sup> Steiner, *Eurythmie. Die Offenbarung der sprechenden Seele*, 54.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.* Steiner speaks of the human being as comprised of a four-part nature: the physical, the life or etheric body, the astral or emotional body, and the “I” or the Ego. Regarding the etheric, Steiner posited that all living things have a life force that distinguishes them from dead or inanimate things. Steiner often discusses the plant as the embodiment of the etheric body.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

way that the lawfulness of language can be made visible by, equally lawful, movement in space:

wir [finden] die Möglichkeit, dasjenige, was in der Sprache liegt, ganz so gesetzmäßig, wie es sich in der Sprache selber verhält, durch wirkliche sichtbare Raumbewegungen der einzelnen menschlichen Glieder oder des ganzen Menschen im Raume zum Ausdruck zu bringen<sup>223</sup>

Also noteworthy is the way that Steiner so often speaks of Eurythmy as an art form that unites perceptual modes or art medias. Eurythmy he describes as able to make music or speech, aural phenomena, visually readable. Moreover, Steiner refers to Eurythmy as moving sculpture, as seen, for instance, in the title of one lecture “Eurythmie als bewegte Plastik,” given in December of 1923. Steiner’s synesthetic and also multi-medial understandings of Eurythmy certainly resonate with elements of the Expressionist movement.

A lot more could be said about Eurythmy, but in the confines of this chapter I want to end with a few more open questions about the medium. I wonder what the role of the collective is meant to have as many Eurythmy performances involved groups of dancers. It is also worth noting that most or all of the people most involved, along with Steiner, in developing Eurythmy were women. I would be interested to know if Steiner spoke about why he thought this was so. I also wonder how Steiner understood the Eurythmic version of “making visible” of spiritual realities, or the expression of the “etheric” body, differs from the way other art forms are meant to “make visible.” For example, the carved motifs of the columns that I discuss in Chapter Three differ from Eurythmy in that they are static. I wonder if Steiner understood the movement aspect of Eurythmy as providing a more vivid and accessible way to understand spiritual forms.

---

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 26.

The flowing, silk costumes the dancers wear, for example, are meant to help emphasize the forms of the physical movement and choreography. It also seems to have the potential for an active engagement of the viewer as she follows the dancers' movements not only with her eyes, but also with her whole body. For all of his art forms, Steiner meant the viewer to actively and inwardly follow the forms as a participant in the process.

## **Conclusion**

As I demonstrate in this chapter, during the prewar years and largely in Munich, Kandinsky's theory of abstraction was formatively shaped by ideas of dematerialization resonant with Steiner's aesthetic theory and the greater Theosophical movement. I argue that despite important points of agreement between Kandinsky and Steiner, Steiner's aesthetics is not oriented toward abstraction. Steiner was highly critical of abstraction in the sense of a theoretical or allegorical art form, and was also not interested, as Kandinsky was, in theorizing and artistically expressing a dematerialized state. Though he was surprisingly muddled about the distinction between 'symbol' and 'allegory' and often dismissed both vehemently, I contend that Steiner actually promoted a form of symbolism similar to that of Goethe. In his version of Goethean symbolism, Steiner calls for a return to nature in a deep and immersive way. In the final section, I analyze how Steiner interpreted Goethe's *Metamorphosenlehre*. I find that he emphasized the way Goethe talked of all plant forms as springing from the idea of a single organ, or the *Urpflanze*. He also highlighted the centrality of an inner form of visualization of the

stages of plant growth; an exercise that Steiner contended helped develop an organ for supersensory sight. I close the chapter by considering how Steiner conceived of Eurythmy as an expression, in space and movement, of these key ideas of Goethe's *Metamorphosenlehre*. In the following chapter, I continue the theme of Steiner's theory in relation to abstraction. In this case, however, I analyze how Steiner, along with the two other art historians Wilhelm Worringer and Alois Riegl, wrote grand art historical narratives in which they located the origins of abstraction as far before their contemporaneous, modernist period.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Against Mimesis: Steiner's Theory of the Evolution of the Arts in Dialogue with Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraktion und Empathie* and Alois Riegl's *Kunstwollen***

Während der Einfühlungsdrang ein glückliches pantheistisches Vertraulichkeitsverhältnis zwischen dem Menschen und den Aussenwelterscheinungen zur Bedingung hat, ist der Abstraktionsdrang die Folge einer grossen inneren Beunruhigung des Menschen durch die Erscheinungen der Aussenwelt und korrespondiert in religiöser Beziehung mit einer starken transzendenten Färbung aller Vorstellungen. Diesen Zustand möchten wir eine ungeheure geistige Raumscheu nennen.

--Wilhelm Worringer<sup>224</sup>

Diese Zeit musste kommen. [...] Mit dem Augenblicke, da er sein eigenes Selbst in voller Klarheit erkannte, mit dem Augenblicke, als er einsah, dass in seinem Innern ein jener Außenwelt mindestens ebenbürtiges Reich lebt, da musste er sich losmachen von den Fesseln der Natur.

--Rudolf Steiner<sup>225</sup>

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I examine Steiner's theory of the history of art as part of what Owen Barfield termed Steiner's "evolution of consciousness." In this model artistic developments echo the spiritual stage of each epoch and are manifestations of an evolving "consciousness" and subjectivity. I read Steiner's theory alongside art historian Wilhelm Worringer's treatise *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1907). Both argue

---

<sup>224</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, (München: R. Piper 1919), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3151128>.

<sup>225</sup> Steiner, "Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik," 6.



that abstraction predates the modern, though their ideas as to when and how abstraction appears differ greatly. I also highlight that both thinkers regard the evolution of art as having a pronounced *spatial* manifestation. Worringer posited that the earliest, “primitive” artworks were abstract and arose out of a need to control the fearful, unpredictable external world by creating static, two-dimensional, often geometric images. Temporally, his history of art advances in a binary manner by fluctuations between the two poles of abstraction and empathy: in the former case space is collapsed to assuage fears and art is created out of a sense of confident belonging within the greater world. Contrastingly, Steiner’s history of art is dialectical in nature and can be summarized, as Owen Barfield did, as being comprised of three phases: “original participation,” “onlooker consciousness” and “final participation.” Steiner held that ancients experienced themselves as united with an outside world and, moreover, that they “participated” in the world’s existence, including a greater cosmos. Abstraction, which connotes distancing in the models of Worringer and Steiner, in the latter’s case develops in a very long, gradual process. It was not in antiquity but during the Renaissance that Steiner locates a high degree of abstraction in the “onlooker consciousness.” At this stage the development of rational thought and a more independent subjectivity led to the subject/object split and an experience of being a distanced “onlooker” to phenomena. Steiner’s aesthetics strives toward the third stage when, dialectically, the subject will retain its stronger sense of self and clear thought, but regain the experience of

“participation.” For this argument I rely not only on Owen Barfield but also on recent work by Frederick Amrine.

In the second section of the chapter I consider Steiner’s aesthetic theory in dialogue with Austrian art historian Alois Riegl and early work *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*. I compare the theories of the two on the origin of the acanthus motif, a vegetal ornament commonly adorning Corinthian columns. I highlight this small example in order to illuminate larger questions: how the critique of the standard interpretation of the motif is a critique of artistic naturalism and how in Steiner’s work there is an underlying notion of a force similar to Riegl’s *Kunstwollen*, a collective artistic will that helps shape the artistic production of a given cultural period. I argue that while in Riegl’s case the artistic will is divorced from the subject and resides in the formal motifs, for Steiner the artistic will is inextricably linked to the development of the subject. For Riegl a key moment in the genesis of the acanthus motif was when the Hellenistic Greeks transcended mimesis and created the wholly ornamental acanthus tendril. Contrastingly, Steiner understands the ancient Greeks as “participating” their world, as Barfield would say, such that they did not experience themselves as separate subjects or recognize the existence of an outside world to be mimicked.

It is worth noting that my move of placing Steiner into dialogue with Worringer and Riegl is one that neither Steiner nor his two interlocutors would likely endorse. Riegl was a key influence on Worringer as seen in the ubiquitous references to the former in Worringer’s *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. As we will see, in a lecture on antiquity and

the development of the acanthus leaf motif, Steiner explicitly references Alois Riegl's work *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (1893), but there is no written evidence of intellectual exchange between Steiner and the other two figures.<sup>226</sup> Part of my task in this chapter is to bring Steiner's aesthetic theory into dialogue with better-known contemporaneous art historians in order to demonstrate the significant conceptual resonances among them.

This chapter is thus concerned with three thinkers for whom an encounter with a contemporary, often Expressionist, art that countered naturalism led each to look backward and to trace the long history of art. In differing ways, they subverted the radical break that modernism was supposed to represent by tracing much earlier roots to artistic abstraction, whether in the "primitive" period, antiquity or the Renaissance. A deep engagement with the question of temporality is a key factor in the way each rewrites the history of art. In all cases, a strictly progressive or teleological temporal model is rejected in favor of other temporal configurations. Both Worringer and Riegl destabilize the idea widely held in art history that classical antiquity or the high Renaissance represent the pinnacle of art. Intimately related to this view, both assert that in the history of art naturalism has been over emphasized at the expense of abstraction. Also, common to the theories of all of these thinkers is the concept of a fundamental, internal and immanent artistic force or will—what Riegl terms the *Kunstwollen*—that underlies artistic production. In differing ways and to differing degrees all conceive of this will, as well as the history of art and of abstraction more generally, as phenomena that stem from or respond against a spiritual outlook. The aesthetic will is a force more fundamental to

---

<sup>226</sup> Apart from referencing Riegl in the lecture on the acanthus motif, I could not find other instances, such as book reviews, of Steiner writing about Riegl.

the way artistic epochs progress than subjectivity. In differing ways each thinker argues that the subject is not stable and for Steiner there was a long period of cultural history in which the individual subject with her own, private mental life as we know her today, had not yet developed. For all thinkers the subject is in a continuous state of transformation that is substantially shaped by the aesthetic will. Depending on which of the three thinkers one examines, the aesthetic will is sometimes associated and in other cases not linked, or only indirectly, with the spiritual.

I begin by examining Worringer's account of the history of art by making three interrelated points. First, Worringer reads abstraction and empathy as *spatial* categories underlying the progression of artistic epochs. Second, these spatial categories are linked with a development in rationality. Abstraction first arises out of the "primitive" experience of fear due to a lack of rational categories to understand the greater world. Then it reappears at different moments in the course of art history, including in Worringer's own "modern" epoch when people experience despondence in the face of the limits of reason. For Worringer, empathy could only first arise in later classical antiquity when people had a greater rational grasp of their world. Third, I show that temporally this history of art largely operates in a binary fashion—back and forth between empathy and abstraction—which is another way that Worringer refuted a dominant narrative of a progressive, teleological art history that culminated in Greece or the Renaissance.

## Worringer' s Abstraction and Empathy as Spatial Categories

Upon its publication in 1907, German art historian Wilhelm Worringer' s dissertation, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, immediately became the subject of intense debate by artists and critics, including members of the *Blaue Reiter* group.<sup>227</sup> The work was appealing to scholars from a wide range of fields as well as to laypeople.<sup>228</sup> The publication of *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, as Geoffrey Waite points out, was timely in terms of joining the burgeoning modernist and anti-naturalist discourse. In the same year of 1907 two important works also appeared on the art scene—Picasso' s *Les Femmes d' Al* and Schönberg' s *Second Quartet*—and less than four years later the Sonderbund Exhibition took place in Cologne, the first significant European-wide exhibition of “antinaturalist” art.<sup>229</sup> Hilton Kramer argues that, though the content of Worringer' s treatise did not focus on modern art, the work “proved to be modernist in its assumptions.”<sup>230</sup> Many artists and scholars, especially those within Expressionist circles, applied Worringer' s argument about past art epochs

---

<sup>227</sup> Rose-Carol Washton-Long asserts that Kandinsky considered asking Worringer to write an essay in the proposed second edition of *Der Almanach der Blauen Reiter*. See Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*, 10.

<sup>228</sup> Norberto Gramaccini and Johannes Rößler argue that the work attracted “Literaten, Künstler und Wissenschaftler quer durch die Ideologien [...]. Der antithetische Aufbau der Argumentation wirkte auch für philosophisch oder kunsthistorisch ungeschulte Leser eingängig und überzeugend.” These editors also point out that the work was likely the most successful art historical dissertation in history and that to date there have been twenty new editions and translation into nine languages. See Norberto and Johannes Rößler Gramaccini, ed. *Hundert Jahre “Abstraktion und Einfühlung”: Konstellationen um Wilhelm Worringer* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012), 10-11.

<sup>229</sup> Neil H. Donahue, ed. *Invisible Cathedrals: the Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer* (University Park: Pennsylvania State, 1995), 16.

<sup>230</sup> Hilton Kramer, “Introduction,” in *Abstraction and Empathy: a Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), xiii. He then highlights the way Worringer called into question the Classical prejudice of the traditional European art history.

to contemporary debates surrounding the definition of abstraction and used it to bolster an antinaturalist program. One further reason why *Abstraktion und Empathie* has had such an impact in art theory lies in the fact that it countered a long-held notion that the arts enjoyed their pinnacle in Greek antiquity or the Renaissance.

The central assertion of *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1907) is that all artistic movements arise out of one of two underlying psychic drives: the drive toward empathy (“Einfühlungsdrang”) or toward abstraction (“Abstraktionsdrang”).<sup>231</sup> Worringer employs a number of terms to characterize the drive: it is variously referred to as the “Wille zur Form,” the “*Kunstwollen*,” “Drang,” “Disposition” and “Bedürfnis.” The drive toward empathy is associated with enjoyment in the organic and the feeling of satisfaction derived in the identification with and immersion in an object. The latter, conversely, is associated with the drive toward the inorganic, crystalline and measurable. Early on Worringer draws the distinction between the drives in the following way:

Wie der Einfühlungsdrang als Voraussetzung des ästhetischen Erlebens seine Befriedigung in der Schönheit des Organischen findet, so findet der Abstraktionsdrang seine Schönheit im lebensverneinenden Anorganischen, im Kristallnischen oder allgemein gesprochen in aller abstrakten Gesetzmässigkeit und Notwendigkeit.<sup>232</sup>

Worringer argues that art historians have had a strong tendency to neglect the important role of abstraction because of a historical overemphasis on *Einfühlung*. Early in the text Worringer contends that all of art history has been under the spell of classical antiquity and the Renaissance, both of which are eras of empathy (“Denn unter dem

---

<sup>231</sup> Worringer’s schema follows in the German academic tradition of dual-pronged systems from Schiller’s concepts of naïve and sentimental, Nietzsche’s concepts of the Dionysian and Apollonian forces to the notions of objective versus subjective culture from Worringer’s contemporary Georg Simmel.

<sup>232</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 4.

Banne dieser beiden Epochen stehen wir vollständig“).<sup>233</sup> He makes the point early on in the text. Worringer argues:

man [geht] von der naiven festeingewurzelten Voraussetzung [aus], dass das *Kunstwollen*, d. h. der zweckbewusste Trieb, der der Entstehung des Kunstwerkes vorangeht, zu allen Zeiten mit Vorbehalt gewisser Variationen, die man stilistische Eigentümlichkeiten nennt, derselbe gewesen sei und soweit die bildenden Künste in Betracht kommen, die Annäherung an das Naturvorbild zum Ziel gehabt habe.<sup>234</sup>

Instead of regarding empathy as the dominant, ubiquitous force, Worringer held that only the art of classic antiquity and the Renaissance were periods of empathy. Importantly, abstraction is understood as the originary artistic style of the “primitives” and ancients and a style that recurs in later periods also: “Der Abstraktionsdrang steht also am Anfange jeder Kunst und bleibt bei gewissen auf hoher Kulturstufe stehenden Völkern der herrschende.”<sup>235</sup> Claudia Öhlschläger argues that Worringer thereby distinguishes himself from many of his contemporaries, including Kandinsky, Marx and Simmel, because he does not equate the experience of alienation (or abstraction) as arising first with the onset of modern civilization.<sup>236</sup>

A key aspect of the concepts of abstraction and empathy is the way that each entails a kind of collective attitude toward space. Early in the text Worringer defines the will to abstraction as a fear of space (“eine ungeheure geistige Raumscheu”):

Welches sind nun die psychischen Voraussetzungen des Abstraktionsdranges?  
Wir haben sie im Weltgefühl jener Völker, in ihrem psychischen Verhalten dem

---

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>234</sup> See *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>236</sup> Öhlschläger argues: “Die Entfremdungserfahrung ist für Worringer damit nicht, wie noch bei Marx oder bei Simmel, Folge erst moderner Zivilisation.” Claudia Öhlschläger, *Abstraktionsdrang Wilhelm Worringer und der Geist der Moderne* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005), 17. As I show, Steiner also locates a form of abstraction or alienation far before the twentieth century, namely in the Renaissance.

Kosmos gegenüber zu suchen. Während der Einfühlungsdrang ein glückliches pantheistisches Vertraulichkeitsverhältnis zwischen dem Menschen und den Aussenwelterscheinungen zur Bedingung hat, ist der Abstraktionsdrang die Folge einer grossen inneren Beunruhigung des Menschen durch die Erscheinungen der Aussenwelt und korrespondiert in religiöser Beziehung mit einer starken transzendentalen Färbung aller Vorstellungen. Diesen Zustand möchten wir eine ungeheure geistige Raumscheu nennen.<sup>237</sup>

The empathetic person feels a happy and trusting relationship between self and the outer appearances. She feels comfortable and at home in space while the abstract type feels overwhelmed, unsettled and fearful of greater space. The whole passage is written in spatial terms. The psychic conditions of the will to abstraction are to be found in the relationship to the greater cosmos (“Kosmos”) and both empathy and abstraction are defined in terms of their attitude toward the outer events (“Aussenwelterscheinungen” and “Aussenwelt”). Worringer also succinctly summarizes the two types, empathetic and abstract, with a pair of spatial terms: “Diesseitsmenschen” and “Jenseitsmenschen,” respectively.<sup>238</sup> The former, empathetic type, which is linked with the ancient Greeks, Pantheism and Naturalism, feels a great interest to merge with the given world as it is a place where she feels a sense of belonging. In contrast, the latter type, represented by the “Oriental” cultures, seeks an escape through religious transcendence or artistic abstraction from the unsettling world.

The artist who creates abstract art responds to its fear of the world by removing forms from the unifying, spatial context.<sup>239</sup> In one example, Worringer says that the

---

<sup>237</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 19-20.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>239</sup> Hannes Böhringer argues that Worringer’s emphasis on the role of abstraction in quelling fear has resonance with the thought of Aby Warburg. Böhringer asserts that “Beide schreiben eine Geschichte der Entängstigung. Bei Warburg sind es die Bildeindrücke, welche die Menschen verfolgen und nicht loslassen. Warburg ist Ikonologe, Worringer Graphologe, ein Psycholog der Linie.” See Hannes Böhringer,



abstract artist seeks to remove the object from its connection with and dependence upon other things:

Wie verhielt sich der Abstraktionsdrang den Dingen der Aussenwelt gegenüber? [...]nicht der Nachahmungstrieb... Vielmehr sehen wir darin das Bestreben, das einzelne Objekt der Aussenwelt, soweit es besonders das Interesse erweckte, aus seiner Verbindung und Abhängigkeit von den anderen Dingen zu erlösen, es dem Lauf des Geschehens zu entreissen, es absolut zu machen.<sup>240</sup>

Space is the condition that makes objects unpredictable, contingent and capricious. Thus, repressing space and de-contextualizing objects makes them more manageable and less fear-inducing. The will to abstraction is associated with the desire to create moments of calm and certainty in a world experienced as overwhelming and arbitrary (“das Bestreben, Ruhepunkte zu schaffen innerhalb der Flucht der Erscheinungen. Notwendigkeiten innerhalb des Willkürlichen. Erlösung von der Qual der Relativen?”).<sup>241</sup> The way the world is rendered benign and ordered is to create static, often crystalline and geometric forms. Worringer also sometimes discusses abstraction in a second way, namely as the act of demarcating the borders of an object in order that it becomes an autonomous entity that is independent from both surrounding objects and from the error-prone perceiving subject.<sup>242</sup>

---

“Was zum Teufel war abstrakt? Ein Erinnerungsversuch nach hundert Jahren Abstraktion und Einfühlung,” in *Hundert Jahre “Abstraktion und Einfühlung”*: *Konstellationen um Wilhelm Worringer*, ed. Norberto and Johannes Rössler Gramaccini (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012), 41.

<sup>240</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 27.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>242</sup> Worringer states: “Die Dinge künstlerisch zu fixieren, konnte für sie nur heissen, die Dinge bis auf ein Mindestmass von der Bedingtheit ihrer Erscheinungsweise und von der Verquickung mit dem äusseren unentwirrbaren Lebenszusammenhang zu entkleiden und sie auf diese Weise von allen Täuschungen sinnlicher Wahrnehmung zu erlösen.” *Ibid.*, 177.

Ancient Egyptian art and architecture is regarded as the preeminent example of abstraction. In one example, Worringer details how he considers Egyptian pyramids the exemplar par excellence for the abstract tendency, naming, among other things, a strict adherence to geometric rules and the conversion of the cubic into the one-dimensional surface. Worringer describes Egyptian pyramids in the following way:

Es leuchtet ein, warum wir die Pyramide als Musterbeispiel für alle abstrakten Tendenzen nannten. An ihr kommen sie am reinsten zum Ausdruck. Soweit man Kubisches in Abstraktion umwandeln kann, ist es hier geschehen. Klare Wiedergabe der stofflichen Individualität, streng geometrische Gesetzmässigkeit, Umsetzung des Kubischen in Flächeneindrücke: all die Forderungen eines extremen Abstraktionsdranges sind hier erfüllt.<sup>243</sup>

Worringer characterizes the Egyptian abstract tendency as manifesting in the purest form (“am reinsten”) and as representing an extreme drive toward abstraction (“die Forderungen eines extremen Abstraktionsdranges”). Worringer also quotes Alois Riegl, from the first chapter of *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, arguing that the primary impetus for Egyptian architecture is the elimination of “Raumscheu” and that the myriad columns are constructed in such a way as to obliterate the view of space. Worringer quotes Riegl arguing the following:

Es sei in diesem Zusammenhang an die Raumscheu erinnert, die sich in der ägyptischen Architektur deutlich manifestiert. Durch unzählige Säulen, denen keine konstruktive Funktion zukommt, suchte man den Eindruck des freien Raumes zu zerstören und dem hilflosen Blick durch die Säulen Stützversicherungen zu geben.<sup>244</sup>

In Riegl’s wording one can see that he understands the Egyptian’s particular propensity toward abstraction as stemming from an emotional state that is especially fearful. He theorizes it as operating out of “Raumscheu” and, consequently, as needing to alleviate

---

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 20.

feelings of helplessness (“hilflos”) through not a lessening, but a destruction of the appearance of free space (“den Eindruck des freien Raumes zu zerstören”).

Conversely, the artist creating out of empathy (*Einfühlung*) does not experience the world as a threatening, unpredictable external space, but instead has a trusting attitude toward it.<sup>245</sup> In other words, while the abstract mentality approaches the outer world as a fearsome unknown, the empathetic one feels at home in the world. As such, the subject experiences no distance between the self and the external world. Instead of working to extract objects from their spatial context, the empathetic act is one in which the subject strives to unite with the object. This act is described as a complete liberation of the self: “Indem wir aber diesen Tätigkeitswillen in ein anderes Objekt einfühlen, sind wir in dem anderen Objekt. Wir sind von unserem individuellen Sein erlöst, solange wir mit unserem inneren Erlebensdrange in ein äusseres Objekt, in einer äusseren Form aufgehen.”<sup>246</sup> In another instance, in describing classic antiquity as an empathetic epoch, empathy is defined as a state in which the human being and the greater world were merged into one unity (“wo Mensch und Welt in eins verschmolzen”).<sup>247</sup>

Another aspect of the way that space operates in Worringer’s model is a topographical dimension. This is seen in the way that Worringer constructs a duality

---

<sup>245</sup> Juliet Koss explains that the concept of *Einfühlung* originated from late nineteenth century Germany from the interrelated fields of philosophical aesthetics, perceptual psychology optics, and art and architectural history. She argues that the early twentieth century saw a dwindling of interest in aesthetic empathy coincident with the establishment of the theory of psychological empathy. She asserts that a significant factor in this shift was the laboratory research that undermined notions of universal experience in favor of the recognition of perceptual difference. See Koss, “On the Limits of Empathy.” In this area Steiner is more aligned with the older aesthetic form and Worringer with the newer, psychological form of “*Einfühlung*.”

<sup>246</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 32.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

between East and West, namely between Egyptian and Greek art. I find that the binary inherent in this topographical model is less flexible, and thus more essentialist, than the temporal binary that will be discussed in the following. As we will see shortly, his temporal model is not, ultimately, strictly binary in nature; Worringer theorizes a way that the two opposing poles unite. In contrast, he does not talk about commonalities or a shared, unifying drive as existing between ancient Greeks and ancient Egyptians.

### **Worringer' s Binary Temporal Model and the Role of Rationalism in its Progression**

Worringer views the entire history of art as following a binary movement back and forth between the poles of abstraction and empathy, and thus a movement between two very different spatial outlooks. A significant aspect of what made his contribution groundbreaking for art history was the claim that these underlying drives cut across art history to unite temporally disparate epochs.<sup>248</sup> Worringer champions abstraction as neglected force in the history of art and posits that it is the reigning style in more epochs than those that are dominated by empathy. Despite this fact however, Worringer' s art history operates in a binary system in which each pole can exist only if countered by the opposing pole (“Zu einem umfassenden ästhetischen System wird [dieEinfühlungsästhetik] sich erst dann gestalten, wenn sie sich mit den Linien, die

---

<sup>248</sup> Oskar Bätschmann argues that Worringer was not unique in this atemporal approach. He points out that the consideration of disparate epochs in parallel (what he calls “Parallelisierung”) was also a strategy of the *Blaue Reiter* group and characteristic more broadly for this time. See Oskar Bätschmann, “Worringer über zeitgenössische Kunst und Künstler,” in *Hundert Jahre “Abstraktion und Einfühlung” : Konstellationen um Wilhelm Worringer*, ed. Norberto and Johannes Rössler Gramaccini (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012), 123.

vomentgegengesetzten Pol herkommen, vereinigt hat.”).<sup>249</sup> Worringer’ s art historical model is ultimately one in which opposing poles unite, as indicated by his verb choice of “vereinigen.”

It should be noted, however, that there is a more fundamental manner in which the poles of abstraction and empathy are theorized as united in their aim for the same aesthetic experience, namely self-relinquishment (“Selbstentäußerung”). Worringer theorizes:

Dieser Dualismus des ästhetischen Erlebens, wie ihn die genannten beiden Pole kennzeichnen, ist [...] kein endgültiger. Jene beiden Pole sind nur Gradabstufungen eines gemeinsamen Bedürfnisses, das sich uns als das tiefste und letzte Wesen alles ästhetischen Erlebens offenbart: das ist das Bedürfnis nach Selbstentäußerung.<sup>250</sup>

In other articulations Worringer describes empathy and abstraction as shaped by a collective, spiritual outlook, a happy pantheism or a fearful existential and spatial dread, respectively. In the formulation above, however, Worringer argues that the ultimate motivation for both empathy and abstraction is not a collective spiritual perspective. Instead, the driving force is feelings about the self and the desire to escape its confines. In empathetic art the subject strives to transcend its own boundaries to unite with the object. In abstract art, by contrast, the subject seeks to create static and clearly demarcated boundaries between self and other as a way to render the world less fearful. Thus, Worringer’ s binary model is not fully rigid so and simultaneously contains a dialectical aspect in the way both poles ultimately have the same aim.

---

<sup>249</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 3.

<sup>250</sup> See *ibid.*, 31. It should be noted that Worringer uses the term “Dualismus” for what I am calling a binary and in other cases speaks of two opposing poles.

According to Worringer's view of the history of art, in only the period of classical antiquity and the Renaissance does empathy predominate. He argues that the *Kunstwollen* of the empathetic art of both periods is concerned with organic form. Instead of aiming for a verisimilar replication of nature's outer forms, however, empathetic artists are described as paying attention to how the inner being of the organic form expresses itself—its lines, forms, sounds and rhythms—in order to create a place for a free experience of one's own vitality or feeling for life (“Lebensgefühl”) in the interaction with the organic:

Das absolute *Kunstwollen* [...] z.B. zur Zeit der Renaissance [besteht] darin, die Linien und Formen des Organisch-Lebensvollen, den Wohlklang seiner Rhythmik und sein ganzes innerliches Sein nach aussen in idealer Unabhängigkeit und Vollkommenheit zu projizieren um in jeder Schöpfung gleichsam einen Schauplatz zu schaffen für eine freie ungehemmte Betätigung des eignen Lebensgefühles.<sup>251</sup>

It is important to note that Worringer uses the term “Naturalismus” in describing empathetic art and its orientation toward the organic, but he takes pains to clarify that he does not use the term to mean the artistic mimesis of the outer forms of nature.

Worringer discusses what he means by “Naturalismus” in classical antiquity and in the Renaissance:

die Annäherung an das Organisch-Lebenswahre, aber nicht, weil man ein Naturobjekt lebensstreu in seiner Körperlichkeit darstellen wollte, nicht weil man die Illusion des Lebendigen geben wollte, sondern weil das Gefühl für die Schönheit organisch-lebenswahrer Form wach geworden war.<sup>252</sup>

Instead of an artistic interest in the faithful replication of external appearances, Worringer asserts that it is an inner, emotional experience (“das Gefühl”) that inspires the subject toward organicism at certain periods. The discussion of artistic naturalism and the

---

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

critique of its strong influence on contemporaneous art is a topic I take up in the second section on Alois Riegl and Steiner. As Riegl was one of the most important theorists for Worringer, and his works are cited heavily in *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, it follows that Worringer takes this stance against the more common valence of “naturalism.” While only classic antiquity and the Renaissance are included in the category of empathetic or “naturalist” art, under the rubric of abstraction, Worringer includes a wealth of groups spanning the entirety of art history: what he calls the “Naturvölker,” the “primitives,” “oriental” art, including especially Egyptian and Byzantine art, and modern art.

An important element that drives the progression of Worringer’s history of art, including the transforming perception of space, is his account of the evolution of rationalism.<sup>253</sup> I highlight this aspect as Steiner has a starkly different view of the nature of rationalism and its place in his dialectical art historical model. I demonstrate that the narratives of Worringer and Steiner regarding space and rationalism stand in *inverse* relationship to one another. Put schematically, Worringer views the “primitives” and then “modern” people as seeking abstraction owing to their inability to rationally make sense of the overwhelming outer world and form a comfortable relationship to it. In contrast, Steiner views the ancient people of the classic period as possessing a fundamentally different, pre-rational, more intuitive wisdom about their place in the greater world and cosmos. Ultimately, he views it as the task of “modern” people to regain this ancient wisdom, though while still retaining the important rational abilities that were hard won and acquired at the expense of the original, intuitive understanding.

---

<sup>253</sup> Worringer uses a number of terms to discuss rationalism, including “Verstand,” “Wissen” and “Geist.”

Worringer conceives of the history of art as a history of the struggle between reason and instinct. The earliest, so-called “primitive” peoples are considered pre-rational and their orientation toward abstraction is formulated as a kind of desperate attempt to make an incomprehensible world manageable. In Worringer’s view empathy could only arise later in the course of world history, first in classical antiquity, when people had acquired sufficient rational categories. It is a result of the requisite rational abilities to make sense of, and to make friends with the world:

Je weniger sich die Menschheit kraft ihres geistigen Erkenntnis mit der Erscheinung der Aussenwelt befreundet und zu ihr ein Vertraulichkeitsverhältnis gewonnen hat, desto gewaltiger ist die Dynamik, aus der heraus jene höchste abstrakte Schönheit erstrebt wird.<sup>254</sup>

It should also be noted that Worringer regards certain of the earliest cultures as well as the Asian cultures as not fully registering in the history of art due to their lack of reason. The “Naturvölker” are conceived of as only partially possessing a *Kunstwollen* of their own (“das *Kunstwollen* der Naturvölker, soweit ein solches überhaupt bei ihnen vorhanden ist”).<sup>255</sup> Additionally, the early Asian cultures are regarded as supra-rational.

Worringer also defines “primitive” peoples in a way that strongly contrasts with Steiner’s view of ancient peoples as experiencing the world as imbued with spiritual meaning. In a passage in which Worringer argues strongly against the Rousseauian concept of an ideal state of nature, he argues that before sufficient reason developed, people had to rely on the limited guidance of their bodies. In addition, it is feelings, or Worringer speaks of an instinct, of fear and not of piety that moved the “primitive” peoples.

---

<sup>254</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 23.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



Dieser Idealzustand hat jedoch mit dem Urzustand nichts zu tun. [...] Der Instinkt des Menschen aber ist nicht Weltfrömmigkeit, sondern Furcht. [...] Erst die wachsende Sicherheit und Beweglichkeit des Verstandes, der die vagen Eindrücke verknüpft und zu Erfahrungstatsachen verarbeitet, geben dem Menschen ein Weltbild; vordem besitzt er nur ein ewig wechselndes und ungewisses Augenbild, das kein pantheistisches Vertraulichkeitsverhältnis zur Natur aufkommen lässt. Scheu und verloren steht er im Weltall.<sup>256</sup>

In Worringer's history of art it is reason, and not any kind of spiritual sensibility, that allows the subject to link vague impressions and fashion them into a coherent (Schopenhauerian) "Weltbild."<sup>257</sup> As we will see, in Steiner's history of art the ancient cultures are regarded as experiencing the world as coherent and spiritually unified. Steiner would not talk of a split between mind and body at this early juncture. Importantly, however, Steiner describes the ancient mentality as not simply an anti- or pre-rationality, but as of a fundamentally different nature.

The development of rationalism in Worringer's account is not progressive in nature. Instead, just as abstraction is the originary and then, finally, the "modern" orientation, Worringer argues that beginning and ending the history of art, like bookends, are feelings of helplessness in the face of an ultimately incomprehensible world. "Primitive" peoples felt overwhelmed and helpless as a result of their reliance on instinct owing to the lack of ability to make rational sense of the dizzying world. In contrast, modern people, full of acquired knowledge, return to a feeling of helplessness after confronting what appear to be the limits of reason:

Erst nachdem der menschliche Geist in jahrtausendelanger Entwicklung die ganze Bahn rationalistischer Erkenntnis durchlaufen hat, wird in ihm als letzte

---

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 170-71.

<sup>257</sup> Just as Worringer was intimately familiar with Schopenhauer's work, Steiner had likewise thoroughly read it. Between 1894-1896 Steiner published a twelve-volume series on Schopenhauer's works in the Cotta'schen Bibliothek der Weltliteratur. See Kries, *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags*, 321.

Resignation des Wissens das Gefühl für das “Ding an sich” wieder wach. Was vorher Instinkt war, ist nun letztes Erkenntnisprodukt. Vom Hochmut des Wissens herabgeschleudert steht der Mensch nun wieder ebenso verloren und hilflos dem Weltbild gegenüber wie der primitive Mensch.<sup>258</sup>

Worringer argues that the reasons differ for the feelings of helplessness felt in “primitive” versus “modern” times: at the beginning there is a lack of rationalism and, eventually, a highly sophisticated rationalism develops that still confronts limits. Yet, the dominant feeling, that of helplessness is essentially the same in two temporally very disparate periods. As we will see, Steiner’ s theory of the development of rationalism starkly contrasts with that of Worringer not least because Steiner regards the ancient Greek people as having a fundamentally different experience of the world than modern people.

### **Dialectical not Binary: Steiner’ s History of Art as an “Evolution of Consciousness” in Conversation with Worringer**

In contrast to Worringer’ s dual-pronged model that unifies temporally disparate epochs, Steiner’ s temporal model is dialectical in nature while also having some progressive elements.<sup>259</sup> It starts with an original state of unified experience, a concept of

---

<sup>258</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 23-24.

<sup>259</sup> In my chapter I focus on the dialectical nature of Steiner’ s temporal model and not on the progressivist nature as I consider the former more significant. As many of his contemporaries in the German-speaking arena, Steiner privileges Greek antiquity and refers the most frequently to this period in discussions of art and architecture. Steiner had a broader theory, however, that undercuts a judgment of his thought as narrowly Greek- or Euro-centric. His theory was that certain cultures, including non-Europeans like Persians and Egyptians, were the leaders during specific past epochs. Steiner calls the time of Greek antiquity the “Fourth Post-Atlantean Epoch.” Frederick Amrine explains that Steiner borrowed this term from Theosophy and Steiner alternately uses the terms “Greco-Roman Epoch” and the “Intellectual Soul Epoch.” Steiner regarded this period as beginning in approximately 747 BCE and ending in approximately 1413 CE. According to Amrine, “the name implies that Greece and Rome were the ‘vanguard’ cultures during the period, i.e. the loci of innovation and progress. He sees other cultures such as those of ancient India, Persia, and Egypt having been the leaders during even earlier

prelapsarian unity essential to Judeo-Christian belief and incorporated into much of early art history. The next phase consists of a long, gradual move towards abstraction, in the sense of separation or alienation. Finally, Steiner's model implies a future state of re-unified but more self-conscious experience.<sup>260</sup> In the second of a total of ten lectures given in Munich in 1911 under the title "Weltenwunder, Seelenprüfungen und Geistesoffenbarungen" Steiner argues that the loss of original clairvoyant capacities, seen in the ancient Greek culture, was necessary for the development of intellectualism. He argues that what he is striving toward with Anthroposophy (here called "Geisteswissenschaft") is the re-awakening of a spiritual awareness that has been lost: "wir [können] eine Empfindung davon erhalten, wie im alten Griechentum noch durchaus die Überlieferung rege war und teilweise das unmittelbare Wissen von dem, was wir jetzt wiederum anstreben durch unsere Geisteswissenschaft."<sup>261</sup> Thus, Steiner sees himself and all in his era as at the beginning of this third stage in his dialectical model.

I argue that not only do the two histories of art differ in temporal terms, but that spatially the two models have diametrically opposite views of when abstraction and

---

periods. Steiner's terminology is idiosyncratic here, but the underlying thoughts are commonplaces of intellectual history." See Amrine in Steiner, *The First Goetheanum. Architecture as Peacework*, GA 287, 2.

<sup>260</sup> Steiner's theory involves five main evolutionary epochs that map to some degree onto standard geological epochs. They are called, chronologically, the Polarian, Hyperborean, Lemurian, Atlantean and Post-Atlantean epochs. Steiner posits that humans arose during the Atlantean epoch and that we are currently living in the Post-Atlantean epoch, which itself is comprised of seven cultural ages. These ages, each lasting approximately 2,160 years, are the following: Indian [7227-5067 BC]; Persian [5067-2907 BC]; Egypto-Chaldean-Babylonian [2907 BC-747 AD]; Greco-Roman [747 AD-1413 AD]; Anglo-Saxon and Germanic [1413-3573 AD]; Russian-Slavic [3573-5733] and American Age [5733-7893]. See Chapter Four in Rudolf Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* (1910), 4 ed., vol. GA 13 (Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2010).

<sup>261</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Weltenwunder, Seelenprüfungen und Geistesoffenbarungen* (1911). (Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, 2010), <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>. 24.

empathy—the moves of distancing and uniting—arise. Viewed schematically, each period that for Worringer is abstract is for Steiner empathetic.<sup>262</sup> In this section I will demonstrate how, in terms of space, Steiner’s history of art is the inverse of Worringer’s and how this contrast has significance in terms of both thinkers’ outlooks on the evolution of rationalism and of spirituality. In discussing Steiner’s history of art I draw significantly from the work of Owen Barfield who, in his book *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry*, posited that underlying Steiner’s version of history is an “evolution of consciousness.”<sup>263</sup> I refer to Barfield’s work for the succinctness with which he is able to summarize the most salient aspects of Steiner’s theory. Steiner’s theory of the “evolution of consciousness” is so central to his oeuvre that it is spread over dozens and dozens of books and lecture series making it a very challenging and unwieldy task to work solely with Steiner’s works.

To provide a clear schema of the dialectical nature of Steiner’s history of art I refer to Barfield’s description of Steiner’s “evolution of consciousness” as unfolding in three parts. In a book review entitled “Listening to Steiner,” Barfield discusses what he means by this concept. He argues for the central role in Steiner’s thought of an evolving spatial relationship, what he calls “the relation between the inner and outer world”:

---

<sup>262</sup> I am indebted to Frederick Amrine for first pointing out to me this inverse relationship between the art histories of Worringer and Steiner. See Amrine, “Idea, Theory, Emotion, Desire.”

<sup>263</sup> I should clarify that I am placing his history in conversation with the same from Worringer because I find that Worringer’s concepts of abstraction and empathy, and especially their fundamentally spatial nature, are resonant with Steiner’s theory. It should be noted, however, that while Steiner speaks of empathy (and often uses the term “Einfühlung”), he expressly does *not* use the term abstraction, a key argument made in my first chapter. Moreover, the term abstraction has certain connotations of insubstantiality and subjectivity that do not apply to Steiner’s aesthetic and spiritual model wherein he aims for the substantial and objective.

The evolution of the world is, and always has been, essentially an evolution of consciousness [...] In the course of that evolution matter has emerged from mind, not mind from matter [...] In its later stages evolution is coterminous with the evolution of human perceiving and thinking. That does not mean a “history of ideas” refracted from particular heads, but a progressive development of the whole relation between the inner and outer world.<sup>264</sup>

The three phases Barfield identifies are “original participation,” which begins in ancient times, “onlooker consciousness,” which begins roughly around the Renaissance and, then, “final participation” which is only starting to emerge and began around the time of Romanticism. The term “onlooker consciousness” is borrowed directly from Steiner, but for the rest he is drawing on hints in Steiner’s writings. For example, in a quite early lecture from 1889 called “Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik,” where Steiner argues that the fine arts or the science of art (“die Kunstwissenschaft”) could only arise in a third stage. In Barfield’s first stage mind or spirit (“der Geist”) was intimately linked with nature; in the second then the two entities operated like irreconcilable opposites; and, finally, in the third stage the subject reconnected with nature and could begin to see “den Geist” with clarity:

In der Zeit, in der Geist und Natur so innig verbunden waren konnte die Kunstwissenschaft nicht entstehen, sie konnte es aber auch nicht in jener, in der sie sich als unversöhnte Gegensätze gegenüberstanden. Zur Entstehung der Ästhetik war eine Zeit notwendig in der der Mensch frei und unabhängig von den Fesseln der Natur den Geist in seiner ungetrübten Klarheit erblickte, in der aber auch schon wieder ein Zusammenfließen mit der Natur möglich ist.<sup>265</sup>

### **Steiner’s First Stage of “Original Participation”**

Steiner’s “original participation” Barfield describes as typified by a feeling that one is intimately linked with, and moreover, constitutive to the way the world manifests.

In his book *Saving the Appearances*, Barfield reads the past 3,000 years of Western

---

<sup>264</sup> Owen Barfield, “Listening to Steiner,” *Parabola* 9.4 (1984): 98.

<sup>265</sup> Steiner, “Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik,” 7.

history as an era that entailed the progressive decline in “participation.” He characterizes the “primitive” consciousness of “original participation” as one in which the subject believed (her)self and the external phenomena to be the same, the thought process being: “there stands behind the phenomena, and on the other side of them from me, a represented which is of the same nature as me.”<sup>266</sup> In a recent article entitled “Idea, Theory, Emotion, Desire,” in which Frederick Amrine implements Barfield’s analysis, he argues that the difference between the ancient and modern consciousness hinges on whether the subject experiences what we might call the mental life as a phenomenon that is part of the larger world or as internal, private experiences:

nearly all denizens of the modern world will experience ideas, theories, emotions, and desires—thinking, feeling, and willing—as something individual, private, and interior. We moderns draw a vertical line separating subject and object to the left of our four words [...] on the “subject” side of the divide. But the older consciousness [...] experiences [them] not as private, individualized, subjective events but as events unfolding within the larger world [...] as *macrocosmic*.<sup>267</sup>

Barfield cites many examples from etymology to argue that language contains traces of the ancient “macrocosmic” experience of “original participation.” He asserts specifically that the Greek language has indications of a participation in nature and in particular in the processes of the physical body. In *History in English Words* Barfield asserts that the earlier one traces language generally

the more poetical and animated do its sources appear, until it seems at last to dissolve into a kind of mist of myth. The beneficence or malignance—which might be called soul qualities—of natural phenomena, such as clouds, plants or animals make a more vivid impression at this time than their outer shapes and appearances.<sup>268</sup>

---

<sup>266</sup> Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry*, 122-23.

<sup>267</sup> Amrine, “Idea, Theory, Emotion, Desire,” 31.

<sup>268</sup> Owen Barfield, *History in English Words* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1967), 77.

Barfield also argues that in the Middle Ages there was a tendency to experience “mind” and “space” as linked and that traces of this connection are seen in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.<sup>269</sup> With the disappearance of “participation” he asserts that the link between words connoting thinking and perceiving and words connected with movement and space had been severed.<sup>270</sup> For Barfield as for Steiner, the former’s inspiration on the subject, the underlying premise is that language contains traces of the *felt experience* of “participation,” between humans and the outer world. Referring to Barfield’s work, Amrine discusses how the roots of the term “participation” trace back to Plato and later to the anthropologists Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim.<sup>271</sup>

In lectures in the series “Weltenwunder, Seelenprüfungen und Geistesoffenbarungen” Steiner discusses modern language as containing traces of a much earlier experience of the world as created out of a collaboration between humans and spiritual beings. In one example, he describes this collaboration as between humans and the “Sprachgenius, also einer höheren Wesenheit, als der Mensch ist, die mitschöpferisch war.”<sup>272</sup> He argues that the phrase meaning “to be born”, “jung geworden,” that originated in medieval German and is used in the second part of *Faust*, stemmed from a now lost awareness that between death and a new life a person carries forces with them that help shape the new, young person. In this same passage Steiner argues that the

---

<sup>269</sup> See Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry*, 101. For a greater treatment of the subject read Chapter XV “The Greco-Roman Age (Mind and Motion).”

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. Barfield provides myriad linguistic examples.

<sup>271</sup> Amrine explains that “participation” has a venerable pedigree, within both ancient and modern thought. Participation (*methexis*) is Plato’s way of explaining predication and all other mental relations, and it is also the term used by the founders of modern anthropology, Lévy-Bruhl and Durkheim, to explain “primitive” structures such as those of shamanism and totemism.” Amrine, “Idea, Theory, Emotion, Desire,” 31.

<sup>272</sup> Steiner, *Weltenwunder, Seelenprüfungen und Geistesoffenbarungen* (1911). 145.

phrase “Nebelland,” used to denote Germany in the Middle Ages, also used in *Faust*, as well as the better-known word “Dichtung,” reveal how the demarcations between inner and outer world were formerly much more porous. In an eloquent passage, Steiner describes the word “Dichtung” as resting on an underlying, older awareness of the world as suffused with meaning, but in a diffuse way spread in the outer world. It was the role of the “Dichter” to condense and “zusammendichten” this meaning into language:

Dass man von Dichtung in der deutschen Sprache spricht, dem liegt das Bewusstsein zugrunde, dass der Dichter der Sinn, der sonst ausgebreitet liegt in der Welt, zusammendichtet, dass er dasjenige, was sonst draußen in der Welt verbreitet ist, kondensiert.<sup>273</sup>

Barfield also credits two key modern anthropologists, Emil Durkheim and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, for recognizing that, contrary to a dominant older view in Anthropology, so-called primitive peoples perceived the world not as we do but in a fundamentally different way that is described as prelogical and synthetic. This older mentality was marked by what Lévy-Bruhl called “participation.” Lévy-Bruhl, according to Barfield’s reading, characterized the primitive mindset as one in which “they are not detached, as we are, from the representations.”<sup>274</sup> As an example of this earlier mentality, Barfield cites Durkheim’s research into Totemism and explains that the identifications made in this tradition, for example, the lack of class distinctions between animate or inanimate objects, seem nonsensical to the modern mind because we are so removed from a mindset of “original participation.” Barfield says that Durkheim’s model is divided into the three following stages: the first stage of symbiosis or active participation is where the subject experiences oneself *as* the totem; the second stage is where one believes in

---

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry*, 31.



collective representation, meaning in this case the ancestors were the totem; and, finally, the subject experiences the world as a duality of ideas on one side and “numinous religion” on the other. The last stage, clearly, is the contemporaneous, modern stage.<sup>275</sup> When we compare how Steiner and Worringer characterize the first, ancient stage, we see how starkly the two pictures differ. In fact, their respective accounts stand in inverse relationship to one another. As noted above, Worringer argued that the earliest cultures were drawn to abstraction as a way to assuage their great fear of an incomprehensible and uncontrollable world. In other words, due to a lack of rational powers, ancient cultures felt estranged from and threatened by the greater world and sought to increase and make permanent this estrangement. Spatially speaking, the act of rendering abstract forms entails creating greater distance between self and other. Steiner, in contrast, describes ancient peoples not as anti- or pre-rational. Instead, Steiner describes ancient peoples as possessing a sense, albeit murky or unconscious in nature, that they were intimately connected with the greater world as an integral participant, to borrow the term from Barfield. As the following passage shows, Steiner’s theory of spatial evolution is quite radical. For he theorized that the experience of the world as separate from and external to the subject, and the existence of subjectivity at all, are altogether more modern phenomena. In one passage about the people of ancient Greece that speaks in spatial terms, Steiner argues that people of this period did not experience themselves as individuals with isolated, demarcated boundaries separating them from an outer world.

---

<sup>275</sup> See *ibid.*, 32. These three stages of totemism resonate strongly with Steiner’s account of the origin and genealogy of the acanthus leaf motif, a central topic in this chapter’s section on Wilhelm Worringer in conversation with Steiner.

Thoughts, however, were experienced as external phenomena in the way that modern people experience sensory impressions like color or sound:

Der Mensch ist eben in unserem heutigen Zeitalter mehr auf Verinnerlichung angewiesen, als dies in früheren Zeitaltern der Fall war. Der Mensch hatte z.B. noch in Griechenland ein Leben, das die Gedanken in der äußeren Welt so wahrnahm, wie wir heute nur die Farben oder die Töne, überhaupt die Sinneseindrücke wahrnehmen. So wie wir heute etwa rot sehen, so sah der Grieche noch einen Gedanken sich äußern. Er hatte nicht das Gefühl, daß der Gedanke etwas ist, das er in seinem Innern ausgestaltet, das er in seinem Innern abgesondert von der äußeren Wirklichkeit erlebt.<sup>276</sup>

As we see, many of the terms are spatially inflected in their reference to an outer versus an inner dimension, as when Steiner talks of internalization (“Verinnerlichung”), in the outer world (“in der äußeren Welt”) and in his interior (“in seinem Innern”).

The psychologist Julian Jaynes, not a Steinerian, makes a surprisingly similar argument about the nature of the psyche in ancient Greece in his book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976). Amrine points out that Jaynes advances the theory that what we know as modern, subjective consciousness is only 3,000 years old; before then, a split (“bicameral”) consciousness akin to schizophrenia was dominant. Just as Steiner says there was no distinction between inner and outer realm for the ancient Greek, Jaynes argues that the characters of the *Iliad* “have no conscious minds such as we say we have, and certainly no introspection. It is impossible for us with our subjectivity to appreciate what it was like. [...] In fact, the gods take the place of consciousness.”<sup>277</sup> Despite this strong resonance, the ultimate conclusions of Jaynes on the nature and progression of human consciousness differ greatly from Steiner. While Steiner held that ancient myths stemmed from a clairvoyant

---

<sup>276</sup> Steiner, *Stilformen des Organisch-Lebendigen* (1921), 10.

<sup>277</sup> Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 72.

consciousness still unified with the greater world and cosmos, Jaynes asserted that these myths were a form of mass hallucination, a sickness that afflicted all humans during this period.

Another important aspect of the difference in how Steiner and Worringer consider ancient cultures is their view of an ancient religious or spiritual outlook. As introduced, Worringer held that those cultures, ancient or more modern, that were oriented toward artistic abstraction tended toward religious transcendence (“der Abstraktionsdrang [...] korrespondiert in religiöser Beziehung mit einer starken transzendentalen Färbung aller Vorstellungen”).<sup>278</sup> What Worringer describes as a happy, trusting, pantheistic religious attitude could only arrive later in the course of art history, for example in the Renaissance, when developed reasoning powers allowed people to make more sense of and feel a comfortable part of their world. In contrast, Steiner held that ancient cultures were not driven by a desire to escape their existential fear through religious transcendence, but by a confidence in their central place in a spiritually infused world. In fact, Steiner held that in ancient Greece many people still had lingering clairvoyant powers, powers that would fade entirely in later epochs:

Ein gewisses Bewußtsein, das vor den Pforten dieser historischen Entwicklung im Menschen tätig war, und das noch ein Überbleibsel des alten Hellsehertums der Menschheit war, das war etwas, was ebenso dem vierten nachatlantischen Zeiträume angehörte.<sup>279</sup>

In another instance Steiner asserts that Homer is a transitional figure that bridges the ancient, ways of seeing with the modern one that is totally devoid of clairvoyance. He argues that in the character Agamemnon Homer aimed to portray someone who was still

---

<sup>278</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 19-20.

<sup>279</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*. (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1982), 50.

guided by clairvoyance.<sup>280</sup> Steiner's more general narrative of the evolution of religion or spirituality fits the dialectical schema of his history of art and should not be mistaken for a simple decline narrative. Steiner held that ancient peoples experienced a direct, though less conscious, link to the spiritual world. By his era, however, Steiner held that it was a requirement for the development of individual freedom that this automatic tie be severed. Modern people could find (re)connection with the spiritual dimension but only through individual desire and effort.<sup>281</sup> In a different example Steiner defines art as that which should express the experience of the soul as a unified part of the greater world, as a microcosm of the macrocosm.

Kunst soll das ausdrücken, was der Künstler in seine Gestalten hineinzulegen nur dadurch imstande ist, dass seine Seele es im Zusammenhang mit der Welt erlebt, dass sein Sein ein mikrokosmisches Abbild ist des ganzen Makrokosmos.<sup>282</sup>

As we will discuss in the final section on Steiner and Worringer's view of the modern era, Steiner holds that a unified consciousness is not only the ancient nature, but, in a transformed way, it is the goal of the modern era, including modern art. Worringer and

---

<sup>280</sup> Steiner states: "Homer, der in einer Zeit sprach, als das alte atavistische Hellsehen gerade verloren ging, wollte in Agamemnon einen Menschen schildern, der noch in, ich möchte sagen «Lebensepisoden» das alte atavistische Hellsehen erleben konnte, der selbst zu seinen Entschlüssen als Feldherr noch durch das alte Hellsehen, durch den Traum geführt werden konnte." See the first lecture in Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 16. As we will see in the chapter's second main chapter on Steiner in conversation with Riegl, Steiner viewed the origin of the acanthus leaf motif as stemming from an ancient clairvoyant experience.

<sup>281</sup> As one example, Steiner characterizes this shift from an ancient to a more modern relationship with the spiritual world: "Diese Menschen der Vorzeit hatten noch andere Hilfen als unser Zeitenzyklus sie hat; ihnen halfen die Götter, die, diesen Menschen unbewußt, in deren Unterß oder Unbewußtsein ihre eigenen Kräfte einströmen ließen [...] Unsere Zeit ist, nachdem die vierte nachatlantische Kulturperiode vorübergegangen ist, der erste Zeitenzyklus, in welchem die Götter die Menschen auf ihre Freiheit hin prüfen," See Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 19.

<sup>282</sup> Steiner, *Kunst und Kunsterkenntnis. Grundlagen einer neuen Ästhetik*, GA 271, 141.

Steiner do not only have greatly opposing views on ancient Greece but also regarding ancient Egypt. As may be recalled, Worringer deemed the ancient Egyptians the preeminent example of abstraction. Steiner, in contrast, regards this culture as oriented toward connection and interaction with the outer world, and in particular with the greater astronomical cosmos. In one instance Steiner characterizes the ancient Egyptians as typified by a dedication to the stars and as holding the belief that through observing the stars, one can obtain wisdom or secrets (“Geheimnis”) about the human. He argues that the ancient Egyptians are characterized by

Ein Hingebensein an die äußere Welt, wie es dem Charakter der Empfindungsseele entspricht, ein Hingebensein an die Sterne. [...] Man schaute hinaus in das Weltengebäude und fand in dem, was die Sterne ausdrückten, dasjenige, was Geheimnis des seelisch-geistigen Geschehens war.<sup>283</sup>

Steiner characterizes the age of the Egyptian pyramids as the time of the development of the “Empfindungsseele,” one of whose hallmarks is the ability to experience the outer world internally as one’s inner life. Steiner argues that before the invention of modern instruments, Egyptians had an innate, felt experience of the quantifiable nature of the relationship between great astronomical entities and smaller, enclosed pyramid buildings. The pyramid itself is described as a large, sensing organ (an “Empfindungsorgan”) that picks up the relationship of the earth culture as a whole to the cosmos: “Wie die äußere Wirklichkeit durch die Empfindungsseele im Innern des Menschen eine Art Repräsentanz findet, so nimmt sich die Pyramide aus wie ein großes Empfindungsorgan der gesamten

---

<sup>283</sup> See the second lecture of Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandlungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 23.

Erdenkultur gegenüber dem Kosmos.”<sup>284</sup> Steiner’ s notion of pyramids as great sensing organs in touch with the cosmos stands in sharp contrast to Worringer’ s idea that Egyptians focused above all on the geometric regularity of artistic abstraction to order their world.

### **Steiner’ s Second Stage of “Onlooker Consciousness”**

The second of the three phases of Steiner’ s dialectical art historical schema is called, both by Barfield and Steiner, the time of “onlooker consciousness.” Spatially the shift from “original participation” to the second stage of “onlooker consciousness” involves movement from feeling as if one is united with or inside the phenomena to a feeling that one is, as a subject, a wholly separate entity from the phenomena. Barfield describes this progression as one of moving from experiencing the phenomena as representations to experiencing them as totally separate entities: “The earlier awareness involved experiencing the phenomena as representations; the latter preoccupation involves experiencing them, non-representationally, as objects in their own right, existing independently of human consciousness.”<sup>285</sup> This independent subject, according to Steiner, evolves in tandem with the increase in reasoning powers. Steiner describes this process as necessary and positive in some aspects, only that it necessitates the loss of a previously given clairvoyant link with the spiritual dimension. In the second lecture of the 1914 series “Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Umwandlungsimpulse” Steiner describes people of the fifth post-Atlantean

---

<sup>284</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 33.

<sup>285</sup> Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry*, 142.

culture as typified by a perspective toward the world as that of an onlooker

(“Zuschauer”):

Wie muß sich diese Kultur der Außenwelt gegenüber verhalten? Der Mensch, der auf sich selbst gestellt ist, wird Zuschauer [...] Eine Zuschauerkultur, eine Kultur des scharfsinnigen Zuschauens und Untertauchens in die Wesenheiten finden wir da, so daß man schildert, wie wenn man den Zuschauerstandpunkt hat.<sup>286</sup>

A full twenty-five years earlier Steiner wrote about the necessity for separation, or we can say alienation, of the subject from her surrounding world. In this work Steiner describes the dichotomy as one between humans and nature:

Diese Zeit musste kommen. Sie war eine Notwendigkeit für die sich zu immer höheren Stufen der Vollkommenheit fortentwickelnde Menschheit. Der Mensch konnte sich nur so lange ganz innerhalb der Natur halten, solange er sich dessen nicht bewusst war. Mit dem Augenblicke, da er sein eigenes Selbst in voller Klarheit erkannte, mit dem Augenblicke, als er einsah, dass in seinem Innern ein jener Außenwelt mindestens ebenbürtiges Reich lebt, da musste er sich losmachen von den Fesseln der Natur [...] Jetzt musste er [der Natur] gegenüberreten, und damit hatte er sich faktisch von ihr losgelöst, hatte sich in seinem Innern eine neue Welt erschaffen.<sup>287</sup>

Again, we see in this passage that Steiner thinks in spatial terms. The development of the subject and its reasoning powers involves a growing awareness of a separate, *interior* dimension that stands in opposition to an *outer* world. For Worringer the will to create separate spaces, to bifurcate the world into subject and object is the originary impetus at the outset of art history while for Steiner this act comes only much later in the second of his three-stage dialectic.

It is striking how differently Steiner and Worringer regard the role of space in the development of the subject. For Steiner the increase of spatial distance coincided with, or better said, was propelled by the development of the modern, reasoning subject. In

---

<sup>286</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 28-29.

<sup>287</sup> Steiner, “Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik,” 6.

Worringer's theory, by contrast, the nature of space is so compelled to link phenomena and disallow insularity that individuation is not possible in a three-dimensional spatial context. Worringer formulates this idea in the following way:

Der die Dinge verbindende und ihre individuelle Abgeschlossenheit vernichtende, mit atmosphärischer Luft gefüllte Raum [...] zieht [die Dingen] in das kosmische Wechselspiel der Erscheinungen hinein und vor allen Dingen kommt die Tatsache in Betracht, dass sich der Raum als solcher nicht individualisieren lässt.<sup>288</sup>

Thus, it follows that while Worringer defines agoraphobia (“geistige Raumscheu”) as a formative and originary force, Steiner considers the fear of space as a much more modern phenomenon. In an eight-part lecture series from 1920 entitled “Grenzen der Naturerkenntnis,” Steiner argues that agoraphobia, among other phobias, is a quintessentially modern malady:

da aus dem ganzen Chaos des gegenwärtigen Menschenlebens heraustreten die andern Erscheinungen, die pathologisch uns ebenso entgegentreten [...] die nicht durch Zufall erst in den neueren Dezennien beschrieben werden. Es treten uns auf der andern Seite, gegen die Bewußtseinsgrenze hin, ebenso die Erscheinungen der Klaustrophobie, der Astraphobie, der Agoraphobie entgegen.<sup>289</sup>

In this lecture Steiner goes on to argue that “Imagination” is the way to remedy the tendency toward agoraphobia and other modern ills.

Steiner describes the Renaissance as a period in which the abstracted perspective of “onlooker consciousness” had reached a very significant level. In the first book of the work *Die Rätsel der Philosophie* in a chapter entitled “Das Weltanschauung des jüngsten Zeitalters der Gedankenentwicklung,” Steiner argues that the experience of distance between subject and object arose out of a centuries-long process that began in the eighth

---

<sup>288</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 51.

<sup>289</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Grenzen der Naturerkenntnis*, (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1981), <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/vortraege/322.pdf>. 68.



and culminated in the fifteenth century. Thoughts changed from being experienced as linked with nature to being experienced as stemming solely from the subject: “vom achten bis zum fünfzehnten Jahrhundert kommt [der Gedanke] aus den Tiefen der Seele herauf; der Mensch fühlt: In mir erzeugt sich der Gedanke. Bei den griechischen Denkern erzeugt sich noch unmittelbar ein Verhältnis des Gedankens zu den Naturvorgängen.”<sup>290</sup> Steiner characterizes the state as one of an ever-widening *abyss* between creations of the mind and observations of the natural world: “So stehen sich die Schöpfungen des Selbstbewusstseins und die Naturbeobachtung immer schroffer, immer mehr durch einen Abgrund getrennt gegenüber.”<sup>291</sup> It is a great contrast indeed that Steiner sees the spatial distance reaching the level of an abyss only in the Renaissance while Worringer understood it the aim of the ancient, primitive people to create a chasm between self and other.

### **Steiner’ s Third Stage of “Final Participation” in Conversation with Worringer**

If we move to how both thinkers conceive of the modern era we see again the two art historical visions standing in inverse relationship to one another. Steiner regards his era as representing the beginning of the time when people can, in a conscious and active manner befitting the modern subject, reclaim their connection to the spiritual world. Conversely, Worringer views his era as the one in which the subject experiences despondence and alienation at the recognition of the limits of reason for gaining metaphysical insight. Ultimately, she feels equally as lost as primitive peoples in the

---

<sup>290</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Die Rätsel der Philosophie* (1914), (Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, 2010), <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>. 86-87.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

quest for greater understanding.<sup>292</sup> Seen in terms of our guiding spatial concepts of abstraction and empathy, Worringer views the modern subject as resorting to abstraction again whereas Steiner views the modern subject as aiming for a modern form of renewed empathy.

In the following I first address Worringer and his view of the modern subject. In a key quote from Worringer already introduced, he argues that the modern man recognizes the limits of rationalism and this leads to a renewed interest in spiritual matters (Worringer uses the Kantian term “Ding an sich”). Since there is no possibility for penetrating metaphysical subjects, however, one feels as helpless as primitive peoples did. Worringer says that it

wird in [dem modernen Mann] als letzte Resignation des Wissens das Gefühl für das “Ding an sich” wieder wach. Was vorher Instinkt war, ist nun letztes Erkenntnisprodukt. Vom Hochmut des Wissens herabgeschleudert steht der Mensch nun wieder ebenso verloren und hilflos dem Weltbild gegenüber wie der primitive Mensch.<sup>293</sup>

Thus, the advent of the modern age is for Worringer actually in some significant ways a *return* to an original state.

It is worth noting that in a later lecture from 1921 on the subject of Expressionism Worringer argues that there was an earlier time in art history when spiritual art could flourish, an argument surprising when we look at his quite consistent rejection of spiritual possibilities in *Abstraktion und Empathie*. In this lecture, however, he argues strongly that this possibility closed during his era. Similar to Max Weber’s concept of disenchantment, Worringer regards his era as utterly without spiritual possibility. In his essay of 1921, he argues that the parallels previously drawn between Expressionism and

---

<sup>292</sup> Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 24.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

Gothic, Baroque or primitive art are no longer valid as Expressionism in its current form no longer stems from or expresses metaphysical needs. In a basic way, Steiner also shares the view that Expressionism is lacking spiritually. As noted in a quote in the introduction, Steiner argued that this movement was oriented in the right direction, but that it did not penetrate deeply enough into spiritual realities and a spiritual form of vision.<sup>294</sup> The work is replete with language highly critical of Expressionism's claims to metaphysical content. For example, in one section of only two pages Worringer calls the notion of a spiritual Expressionism a "gespentsche(s) Spiel mit leeren Gesten,"<sup>295</sup> "eine traurige Philosophie Als Ob"<sup>296</sup> and the "kühnste Fiktion der Kunstgeschichte."<sup>297</sup> Despite such language, this lecture is ultimately, surprisingly, not a categorical rejection of the possibility of spiritual art. Worringer argues that in the past there was indeed a metaphysical strain of Expressionism (what he calls the "echte(r), metaphysich legitimierter Expressionismus der Vergangenheit").<sup>298</sup> He argues that modern Expressionism does not have spiritual potential and advocates instead for modern philosophy, history and science as the paths toward insight in the modern world. As we will shortly see, if for Worringer the opening for spiritually-infused art closes shut during the modern era, Steiner understands the same era as representing the very beginning of the re-opening toward spiritual connection and spiritually-inspired art, what Kandinsky in the *Blaue Reiter* almanac famously called the "Epoche der Grossen Geistigen."<sup>299</sup>

---

<sup>294</sup> See the quote from Steiner on page thirty-two.

<sup>295</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Künstlerische Zeitfragen* (München: H. Bruckmann, 1921), 9.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> Wassily Kandinsky. *Der blaue Reiter im Lenbachhaus München: Katalog der Sammlung in der Städtischen Galerie*. Eds. Rosel Gollek. München: Prestel, 1982, 313.

Before discussing Steiner I will briefly explain how Barfield has theorized the third stage of Steiner's dialectic as one of "final participation." His characterization of the third stage of the "evolution of consciousness" offer insights that prove useful in the comparison of Steiner's and Worringer's views. Barfield argues that the modern, rational subject's habit of what he terms "beta thinking," that is, the self-conscious act of contemplating our own thinking is a necessary and productive skill that has also led to the elimination of "original participation." He takes pains to emphasize that the goal of Steiner's evolutionary schema is *not* to return to "original participation."<sup>300</sup> Instead, Barfield argues that Steiner is calling for Imagination to lead us to a new stage of "final participation." Barfield summarizes what he means by "Imagination" in one sentence that needs interpretation: "To be *able* to experience the representations as idols, and then to be able also to perform the act of figuration consciously, so as to experience them as participated that is imagination."<sup>301</sup> This means that in the stage of "final participation" one grows aware that representations are idols, meaning representations are collectively regarded as ultimate truths. Additionally, to consciously perform figuration means to be aware that there is no given reality, but that the perceiver is a crucial participant in the act of creating reality as we know it by actively combining and constructing perceptions.

---

<sup>300</sup> Barfield asserts that the systematic use of imagination need not "involve any relinquishment of the ability which we have won to experience and love nature as objective and independent of ourselves. Indeed, it cannot involve that. For any such relinquishment would mean that what was taking place was not an approach towards final participation (which is the proper goal of imagination) but an attempt to revert to original participation (which is the goal of pantheism, of mediumism and of much so-called occultism)." See Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry*, 147.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

Examples Barfield gives of nascent “final participation” are Romanticism, German Idealism, psychoanalysis and quantum mechanics.<sup>302</sup>

Whereas the modern era in Worringer’s art historical model entails resigning to the very set limitations in her/his ability to understand the world, Steiner, as Barfield has demonstrated, sees the modern era as the dawning of new possibilities in knowledge, especially of the spiritual nature. In the second lecture from a series on architecture from 1913 and 1914 entitled “Wege zu einem neuen Baustil” Steiner theorizes the history of temple architecture that starts with ancient Persian structures, moves through Egyptian, Greek and Gothic buildings and ends with Steiner’s concept of the architecture of the future. This architectural vision, which he would seek to materialize in his *Goetheanum*, is very much in line with the way the third stage of “final participation” is meant as a time for re-connection with the spiritual world. In this lecture Steiner describes his architectural aim as creating a building in which the walls have a permeable quality, partly enabled by multiple windows that allow in sunlight and offer many views of the surroundings. This effect is also described as facilitated by what he calls as an artistic manner that gives the walls the feeling as if they were transparent. In this lecture he describes a coming spiritual shift in which one will move from an emphasis on the soul to the spirit.<sup>303</sup>

---

<sup>302</sup> See the chapter entitled “Final Participation” *ibid.*, 133-42.

<sup>303</sup> This shift is described as manifested in a structural openness of the building: “[...] unser neuer Bau [öffnet] sich wie nach allen Seiten [...], daß seine Wände nach allen Seiten offen sind, allerdings nicht nach dem Materiellen, sondern offen sind hin nach dem Geistigen.” Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 35. I return to Steiner’s focus on the dramatic openness of the building in the third chapter when comparing theories of the virtues of transparent glass by the architect Bruno Taut and the writer Paul Scheerbart in conversation with Steiner’s notion of aesthetic transparency.

## The anti-naturalistic Theories of Steiner and Riegl in the Example of the Acanthus Leaf Motif and in Light of Riegl's Concept of *Kunstwollen*

Now I will turn to an examination of Steiner in dialogue with one of Worringer's most important influences, Austrian art historian Alois Riegl and his work *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (1893).<sup>304</sup> In an instance from a 1914 Steiner lecture on architecture and the *Goetheanum* Steiner refers to Riegl. It is in the context of discussing the derivation of the ancient Greek acanthus motif, a motif that often adorns Corinthian columns. While ultimately critical of Riegl's failure to include a spiritual dimension in his interpretation, Steiner finds common ground with his contemporary. He refers to Riegl not because he is deeply invested in the subject of the acanthus motif or the broader history of ornament, the subject of Riegl's early treatise *Stilfragen*.<sup>305</sup> Instead, he recruits Riegl because he views him as at least partially cognizant that the traditional account of art is an erroneous projection of a modern consciousness onto a categorically different experience. Both thinkers argue that the mimesis of nature and the external world—the impetus behind contemporaneous naturalistic art—was not the original inspiration for the acanthus motif. More broadly, they hold the view that naturalism is only a recent phenomenon.<sup>306</sup> As part of the critique of naturalist art both fault the influence of a reductionist positivism seen in an

---

<sup>304</sup> Riegl [1858-1905] was an important art theorist of his day and, as seen in the extensive citations, one of the major influences on Worringer's *Abstraktion und Empathie*. Now known as one of the founders of the Vienna school of art history, Riegl wrote *Stilfragen* after serving as a curator of textiles at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry and pursued an academic career at the University of Vienna.

<sup>305</sup> In his entire oeuvre I could not find any other instances of Steiner writing on Riegl.

<sup>306</sup> As seen in the discussion of Worringer, he echoed Riegl's assertion that naturalism is not an originary impetus for art. In Worringer's model of art history "Abstraktion," an anti-naturalist mode, is the originary style at the inception of art history.

oversimplified understanding of the theories of German architect and art historian Gottfried Semper and those of the naturalist Charles Darwin.

The two theorists share some important similarities in their diagnosis of what is awry in the modern aesthetic mentality, but in a broad sense I argue that Steiner's theory of the evolution of the arts is shaped by forces that resonate with what Riegl calls the "*Kunstwollen*." In *Stilfragen* Riegl asserts that the "*Kunstwollen*," an underlying, collective artistic will that is prevalent in a given epoch, is instrumental in shaping the artistic production of that epoch. In his 1914 lecture Steiner gives a clear nod to this theory by using language strikingly similar to Riegl's "*Kunstwollen*." I assert that the concept of an underlying, collectively experienced, supra-individual force that guides art history is a concept that links the two art theories. Additionally, both give a special status to the artistic will they view as prevalent in ancient Greece.<sup>307</sup>

Despite the resonances between these two thinkers—the critique of naturalism and positivism, the keen interest in the relationship of the aesthetic form and artistic will and of the modern to the ancient and especially ancient Greek—I ultimately argue that the two conceptualize this underlying, aesthetic will in fundamentally different ways. This difference is tied to diverging theories of human subjectivity, its evolution and its

---

<sup>307</sup> In the introduction to a translation of *Stilfragen* David Castriota evaluates Riegl's preference for Greek antiquity and his concept of *Kunstwollen* as shaped by his times and as anachronistic to a more modern sensibility. I think many scholars would deem this judgment also applicable to Steiner. Castriota argues: "Riegl's frequent assertions regarding the unparalleled aesthetic achievement of the Greeks, as opposed to those of earlier cultures, are no less a product of his time as [...] his notion of *Kunstwollen*, a pervasive spirit or impulse motivating and shaping the art of certain ethnic groups or periods. Nowadays, one is prone to be a good deal more circumspect in attempting to understand or explain the root causes of major stylistic trends and developments." Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, ed. David Castriota, trans. Evelyn Kain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 56.

relationship to art. I argue that Riegl's *Kunstwollen* is largely disconnected from human subjectivity and agency and resides instead within the aesthetic motif and its complex evolution. Riegl emphasizes how the artistic will propels epochs to have greater or lesser degrees of liberation from the *external* constraints of materials and technique and mimesis of nature. Riegl gives a highly detailed account of the evolution of stylistic elements, but he does not speak directly to the *internal* character of, for example, the Hellenistic Greek people as a factor in their artistic creations. What Riegl prizes about Hellenistic artists was their ability to create a *purely aesthetic* motif, the acanthus tendril. In contrast, Steiner's theory of the evolution of art is one in which artistic creations are reflections of the human being and its spiritual stage. Steiner understands the origin and evolution of the acanthus leaf motif as reflective of a "consciousness" or psyche particular to the ancient Greeks. If Riegl's theory is largely disconnected from subjectivity, Steiner's history of art is at its core a history of the gradual development of human subjectivity, a subject that for Steiner is simultaneously one of spiritual evolution. Riegl views the ancient Greeks as transcending mimesis to create a purely aesthetic ornament. Contrastingly, Steiner held that people during this period did not yet experience a fixed boundary between subject and object but, instead, experienced themselves as in unison with the "outer" world, including the cosmic world. Therefore, there was no external world to imitate or overcome or out of which to abstract an ornament.



## Countering the Dominant Narrative of the Origin of the Acanthus Motif

This section begins with an examination of how Steiner and Riegl critiqued the dominant account of the derivation of the acanthus from Vitruvius as an example of the wider dominance during their period of “materialism,” positivism and artistic naturalism. In Steiner’s lecture about the first *Goetheanum* building entitled “Der gemeinsame Ursprung der Dornacher Bauformen und des griechischen Akanthusornamentes” (1914), he offers critique of what he regards as the “materialism” dominating contemporary art. He faults this tendency for both the frequent misunderstanding of the *Goetheanum* building as well as the uncritical acceptance by many scholars of the famous story from ancient Roman architect Vitruvius [1<sup>st</sup> century BCE] of the derivation of the acanthus leaf motif, the plant ornament that frequently adorns the Greek Corinthian column.<sup>308</sup> Naturalistic mimesis is at the heart of this famous story: a chance sighting by the sculptor Kallimachos of a basket surrounded by acanthus leaves led to the sculptured rendition of the form. Steiner is highly critical of this interpretation, calling it the height of materialism (“Das ist der reinste Materialismus, den man sich denken kann”).<sup>309</sup>

Riegl and Steiner after him, decries the dominance in art of “materialism” and the privileging of a technical approach at the expense of the inner impetus, factors they link with the influence of followers of Gottfried Semper.<sup>310</sup> Riegl argues that a key factor in

---

<sup>308</sup> The interest of Steiner and Riegl in the acanthus motif, a feature of Hellenistic art, was part of the wider renewal of attention toward this period beginning in the 1880’s. This phenomenon was partly inspired by the arrival from Pergamom to Berlin of the recently excavated Altar of Zeus and Athena.

<sup>309</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 49.

<sup>310</sup> Gottfried Semper (1803-1879) was a German architect and art historian and a representative of historicism. Some of his largest projects were built in Vienna including the imperial *Baurat* and the museum complex and *Burgtheater* co-created with Karl Hasenauer. He also designed the *Richard-Wagner-Festspielhaus* in Munich. He was a

the widespread neglect by art historians of ornamental art and the failure to recognize its long history is the over-emphasis on the role of the materials and these Semperians. He argues the students have taken Semper's emphasis on the role of materials and technique and reduced them to the two sole factors in art: "Wenn Semper sagte: beim Werden einer Kunstform kämen auch Stoff und Technik in Betracht, so meinten die Semperianer sofort schlechtweg: die Kunstform wäre ein Produkt aus Stoff und Technik."<sup>311</sup> In the same passage Riegl states what for him has precedence over the materials and the technique in art, namely the creative artistic will (*Kunstwollen*), a factor Riegl says Semper himself recognizes.<sup>312</sup> Riegl argues that not only do art historians transfer an oversimplified version of Semper's theories, but also a misapplication of Darwin's hypotheses, into art history. Riegl asserts that the "*materialistische* Strömung in der Auffassung der Kunstanfänge [ist] nichts Anderes als so zu sagen die Uebertragung des Darwinismus auf ein Gebiet des Geisteslebens."<sup>313</sup> Steiner agrees with Riegl's judgment that art history has become, as Riegl put it, "versempert."<sup>314</sup> Steiner

---

professor of architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden until he went into exile following participation in the failed republican uprising of 1849. He wrote the theoretical text *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Ästhetik: ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde* (1860/1863).

<sup>311</sup> Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: Georg Siemens, 1893), VI.

<sup>312</sup> Riegl argues that the equation of art with materials and technique is an unfair simplification of Semper's theory. He says it is "nicht im Geiste Gottfried Sempers, der wohl der Letzte gewesen wäre, an der Stelle des frei schöpferischen Kunstwollens einen wesentlich mechanisch-materiellen Nachahmungstrieb hätte gesetzt wissen wollen." Ibid., VII.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., VI-VII. Emphasis mine

<sup>314</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 56. It should be noted that in Steiner's lecture on the acanthus motif, he briefly mentions how during his student days in Vienna—where he attended courses at both the University of Vienna, like Riegl, and the Technische Hochschule between 1879-1883—one of his teachers at the latter institution was Joseph Bayer, a follower of Semper. Ibid., 46. On the same page

posits that in a materialistic age there is a trend to trace all artistic creations to the techniques of craftsmanship. He gives the examples of weaving and wickerwork, saying that students study fabric weaving and the plaiting of fences and, from this study alone, look to deduce the origins of architectural forms. In this discussion Steiner likewise speaks of “materialism” and “Darwinism,” as when he argues that a materialism akin to materialistic Darwinism is seen in imitative art: “Dasjenige, was im materialistischen Darwinismus nachwirkt als materialistische Auffassung das tritt auch im künstlerischen Schaffen uns entgegen, indem man die Kunst immer mehr zur bloßen Nachahmung des Natürlichen machen will.”<sup>315</sup>

It should be noted that, though both thinkers disavowed the influence of an oversimplified, positivist interpretation of Semper and Darwin, each underwent intensive scientific schooling and, in fact, respected and were indebted to Semper and Darwin.<sup>316</sup> Margaret Iversen argues that Riegl and Semper both addressed the issues of style in the nineteenth century and the apparent arbitrariness of style in architecture and design.<sup>317</sup>

---

Steiner describes how he was steeped in the Viennese architectural milieu during a time when many of great architects were still living. He names (Theophil) Hansen, (Friedrich von) Schmidt and Heinrich von Ferstel. Architectural historian Wolfgang Pehnt says that Semper was an influence on generations of architects with his studies of the “architectonischen Grundformen und Symbolen.” Pehnt notes that Steiner also listened to lectures by Ferstel who taught at the Wiener Polytechnikum. See Wolfgang Pehnt, “Etwas wie Morgenröte: Die Architektur von Rudolf Steiner,” in *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags* (Ditzingen: Vitra Design Museum, 2010), 109.

<sup>315</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 55.

<sup>316</sup> Steiner worked intensively with Goethe’s scientific work, including acting as editor of his work. Beginning in 1882 until 1897 Steiner worked as the editor of Goethe’s natural scientific writings. He first worked under the auspices of *Joseph Kürschners Deutscher National-Literatur* and then, from 1890 onward, he worked in the newly founded Goethe and Schiller Archive. Additionally, Steiner was also an acquaintance of the biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) and thoroughly familiar with Haeckel’s work.

<sup>317</sup> Iversen draws the parallel in the following way: “[Riegl’s method was] to formulate an aesthetic appropriate to the age within the context of a systematically elaborated

Claire Zimmerman also finds linkages between the methodology of Semper and Riegl and asserts that the methods of both “required intensive examination and close historical analysis, and both were based on acute observation and deductive method.”<sup>318</sup> Margaret Olin emphasizes the empiricist training Riegl received at the Institute for Austrian Historical Research and shows that he had a significant amount in common with Semper.<sup>319</sup> As a final example, in the preface to an English translation of *Stilfragen*, Henri Zerner argues that Riegl’s method in *Stilfragen* is reminiscent of Darwin’s.<sup>320</sup>

I now turn to examine how Steiner’s and Riegl’s account of the origin of the acanthus motif, and their broader histories of art, pivot around the rejection of naturalist art. This will serve as a basis for examining how each thinker argues for the central importance of an internal, immanent kind of aesthetic will. I compare the similarities but emphasize the greater number of important disparities between the two conceptions of the *Kunstwollen*. I begin with Riegl’s account in *Stilfragen zu einer Geschichte der*

---

historical schema. Semper’s solution was to refer to early prototypes and their evolution, in the same way that one would evaluate the appropriateness of a particular usage of a word by referring to its etymology.” Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), 23.

<sup>318</sup> Claire Zimmerman, “Siegfried Kracauer’s Architectures,” in *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden & Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2012), 157.

<sup>319</sup> In Margaret Olin’s book *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Art* she aims to counter the dominant view of Riegl as a precursor to 20<sup>th</sup>-century formalism. She deems Riegl a “radical conservative” who did not wish to depart from the concept of representation. By drawing heavily on a wide range of published and unpublished materials, she tells a narrative of the gradual change in Riegl’s understanding of representation. Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

<sup>320</sup> Zerner asserts: “In the hands of a creative artist, traditional forms could also be mutated to produce innovations as they were handed down or diffused transculturally. In the spirit of Darwin, Riegl sought to trace, map, and classify this evolutionary process and the phenomenal range of forms or styles that it could engender.” Henri Zerner, “Preface,” in *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, ed. David Castriota (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), xxvii.

*Ornamentik*. This work advocates for more attention toward the neglected subject of the history of ornament. It is comprised of an introduction and four chapters and I focus on the third chapter for my analysis.<sup>321</sup> The third chapter addresses the subject of plant ornament and the development of the ornamental tendril. Through close observation of the transformation of formal elements, Riegl makes the case for a continuous history of plant ornamentation from ancient Egypt through late Roman art. One key part of his narrative is the evolution of the Egyptian lotus motif in ancient cultures until it culminates in the Greek acanthus motif and eventually changes into the arabesque.

In Riegl's theoretical work, cultural epochs move from one to the next by a swing between anti-naturalism and naturalism. As Riegl was one of the primary thinkers cited in Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* one can see that Riegl's binary temporal model helped to shape the likewise binary character of Worringer's model. Importantly, in Riegl's history of art naturalism is conceived of as a less abiding and influential force. For example, Riegl asserts that in the history of plant ornamentation stylization has always been the dominant tendency interrupted by brief periods in which forms become naturalized. Even in periods where artists devoted attention to realistic

---

<sup>321</sup> The first two chapters are based in the refutation of the notion that style arose out of technical factors. In the first chapter he focuses attention on the geometric ornament of Stone Age art—inspired by the recent discoveries in Dordogne—to argue that geometric ornament arose *not* from the processes of wickerwork and weaving but from an imminent artistic drive. In the second chapter he discusses the subject of “the Heraldic Style,” a motif of pairs of animals divided in the middle by a central piece. He argues that this ornament preceded the invention of mechanical weaving and arose out of a desire for symmetry and not out of the technical operation of weaving. Skipping to the final chapter, it highlights the arabesque, theorized as a geometrized version of the tendril motif, that begins in late antiquity, moves into early Byzantine and then finally into Islamic art.

depictions of nature Riegl argues that the art of antiquity and the Middle Ages never resorted to the sole mimesis of nature:

Zu wiederholten Malen begegnen wir in der Geschichte des Pflanzenornaments einer Neigung zur Naturalisierung, zur Annäherung der Pflanzenornamente an die reale perspektivische Erscheinung einer Pflanze und ihrer Theile. Ja, es hat in der Antike ohne Zweifel sogar eine Zeit gegeben, wo man in der beregten Annäherung bereits ziemlich weit vorgeschritten war; doch dies war nur eine vorübergehende Episode, woneben und wonach die stilisierten traditionellen Formen dauernd in Geltung geblieben sind. Im Allgemeinen lässt sich sagen, dass die Naturalisierung des Pflanzenornaments im Alterthum und fast das ganze Mittelalter hindurch niemals bis zur unmittelbaren Abschreibung der Natur gegangen ist.<sup>322</sup>

As examples of the brief dominance of naturalism during antiquity, Riegl points to the Monument of Lysikrates and the acroteria of grave stelai in the early decades of the fourth century.<sup>323</sup> Later Islamic art is conceived as dominated by anti-naturalistic, abstract form. As the rationale for the preponderance of anti-naturalism, that is style, in plant ornamentation, Riegl argues that art depicting plants, as opposed to humans or animals, adhered much longer to rules of symmetry, because plants were considered subordinate subject matter. He posits that for this reason, realistic depictions of flowers, such are in fashion in his period, are a recent phenomenon.<sup>324</sup>

Thus it is precisely the acceptance of the naturalism at the heart of the Vitruvian account of the derivation of the acanthus motif that Riegl finds so unacceptable.

Using language that shows Riegl's passion about the subject, he calls it incomparable ("ohne Gleichen") and absurd that many scholars have accepted uncritically the notion that the acanthus motif was spontaneously generated when Kallimachos took the first plant he saw and elevated it to an aesthetic motif ("An dem Unwahrscheinlichen des

---

<sup>322</sup> Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, xiv-xv.

<sup>323</sup> See *ibid.*, xiv-xv215.

<sup>324</sup> See the introduction, XIV.

Vorgangs, dass man ploetzlich das erste beste Unkraut zum kuenstlerischen Motiv erhoben haben sollte [...] erschien mir ein solcher Vorgang völlig neu, ohne Gleichen und absurd”).<sup>325</sup> Riegl critiques scholars who have concluded that differing renditions of the acanthus motif are due to regional differences in the physical plant; they argue there are sharp points in Athens and rounded edges in Italy. In one case he compares the acanthus motifs on a Corinthian capital from the Choregic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens to the acanthus motif on the stucco relief frieze on the Temple of Isis in Pompeii, saying the latter ornament has a much softer and more rounded quality. Riegl argues that the softer renditions of the Roman period are not due to differences in the plant, but rather to a change in style that extended beyond Italy to other regions of the Roman Empire, such as shown by the monuments in Asia Minor. Riegl finds theories that focus on mimesis simplistic and wholly inartistic in nature (“Auch hiefür hat man eine Erklärung gefunden, die an Einfachheit nichts zu wünschen übrig liesse, wenn sie sur nicht so ganz und gar unkünstlerisch wäre”).<sup>326</sup>

A key piece of evidence for Riegl in his counter argument to the Vitruvian interpretation and his argument for the centrality of an aesthetic process is his claim that the Hellenistic ornamental connecting tendrils (“Rankenverbindung”) is a feature without a counterpart in the physical world. He argues that the persistent power of the Vitruvian story is such that people still believe that the acanthus motif stemmed from mimesis of the plant model despite the recognition that the acanthus tendril does not exist in the plant:

---

<sup>325</sup> Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, XV.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

Nichts ist bezeichnender für die Art und Weise wie man, beeinflusst durch Vitruv' s Erzählung jede bessere Einsicht in das wahre Wesen des Akanthusornaments gewaltsam in sich niedergekämpft hat, als der Umstand dass man längst ganz klar erkannt hat, dass die Akanthusranke in Wirklichkeit nicht existiert und eine bloße Erfindung des ornamentalen Schaffensgeistes der Griechen gewesen ist, und dass man trotzdem an der Vorbildlichkeit der Akanthuspflanze keine Zweifel hat aufkommen lassen wollen.<sup>327</sup>

Riegl argues that the oldest renditions of the acanthus motif are missing salient elements of what later became known as the acanthus motif (“Der entwickelte Akanthus mit fortgeschrittener Blattgliederung lässt sich also gerade auf den ältesten Denkmälern, die hier in Betracht kommen, nirgends nachweisen”).<sup>328</sup> Riegl conducts an analysis of how plant motifs including the buds, leaves and blossoms, evolve from one cultural period to another. He asserts that during the Hellenistic period the forms were brought to their culmination.

Riegl posits that the acanthus motif went through stages of alternating more and less naturalistic appearance throughout the centuries and continents to eventually evolve into the form recognized today. In a very broad way Riegl argues that ancient Greece was dominated, largely, by naturalism and the “Orient” by anti-naturalism.<sup>329</sup> As we will see, however, Riegl views the period of Hellenistic antiquity as significant for the way it was able to break free of the naturalism that dominated greater antiquity. Within Greek antiquity, however, Riegl argued that the Hellenistic period stood out for its ability to transcend mimesis. Riegl, in brief, asserts that the flower motifs of early Greece were more realistic in appearance, but, importantly, the connecting tendril is without a natural model. The Egyptians Riegl regarded as second only to the Hellenistic Greeks in their

---

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 248-49.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>329</sup> See the introduction of *Stilfragen*.



ability to reach a high degree of freedom from naturalism. They created palmettos with stiff petals and used a geometric curved line to connect motifs in a row and to represent a stem motif.<sup>330</sup> Then the Mycenaeans took the geometric scroll pattern with lotus blossom used to fill gaps and developed into a more plant-like form. By the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. these stiff petals fall to the right and left. Hellenistic artists then added branching tendrils in order to allow the connection of motifs over an entire surface. Riegl argues that because in nature typically it is stems and not leaf tendrils that serve this function, the ornamental tendril represents a clearly antinaturalistic tendency of the Hellenist period.

Importantly, the impetus for Hellenistic artists in their creation of the acanthus tendril was to fulfill an aesthetic need, namely a *design* problem, and not a desire to better faithfully portray the plant. The acanthus motif was born out of a need to connect motifs over a whole surface and also out of the transfer of this motif from painting to sculpture. When it began to be rendered sculpturally on capitals of Corinthian columns, a three-dimensional structure without corners, artists changed the form of the corner-filling half-palmetto to serve the function of a hull or pod. In this case the deep division between petals could not remain and the newer acanthus motif arose.<sup>331</sup> Margaret Olin argues

---

<sup>330</sup> In the third chapter discussing plant motifs Riegl says that the motifs of the ancient Egyptians created stylized forms needed for the transfer onto a two-dimensional surface and that symmetry was a guiding principle: “Dafür, dass die bezüglichen Pflanzenmotive wenigstens zum überwiegenden Theile schon von Hausa us die Befähigung zu einer künstlerischen Asgestaltung an sich trugen, war von der altegyptischen Kunst selbst genügend vorgesort. Schon von Seiten dieser ersten pflanzenbildenden Kunst erhielten die pflanzlichen Vorbilder bei der Übertragung auf die Fläche (mittels des Relief en creux wie mittels der Malerei) die nothwendige Stilisierung.” Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, 44.

<sup>331</sup> Thus Riegl’s well-known summary of the origin of the acanthus motif: “Das Akanthusornament ist meines Erachtens ursprünglich nichts anderes als eine in’ s

that, in Riegl's view, both artistic and natural laws shaped the genesis of the acanthus motif. She says it arose out of "artistic development independent of nature and [...] a close study of natural laws [...] by adaptation of the two-dimensional laws of art to the three-dimensional laws of nature."<sup>332</sup> Riegl makes the case that the acanthus arose out of what he considered purely aesthetic motivations and describes the Hellenist period as preeminent for its powerful ability to transcend nature and be guided by wholly aesthetic concerns.<sup>333</sup>

### **The Central Role of a Collective Will or *Kunstwollen* in the Art Histories of Riegl and Steiner**

Though Riegl only uses the term *Kunstwollen* a few times in this early work, a key claim is that an underlying, immanent aesthetic will is the key force that allows artists to transcend mimesis of nature.<sup>334</sup> Using examples from greatly disparate time periods, Riegl carries through the entire work the thesis of the *Kunstwollen* as a force immanent to each cultural period that propels art to transcend the limitations of materials, technique and reliance on nature as a model. Scholars have translated this term in a variety of ways. In the preface to a translation of *Stilfragen* Henri Zerner states that *Kunstwollen* has been translated as "artistic intention," "intentionality," and "will."<sup>335</sup> Claire Zimmerman uses the formulation "artistic desire" and characterizes it as a term that "roughly subtends the idea of a core of artistic ideas of abiding communal interest

---

plastische Rundwerk übertragene Palmette, beziehungsweise Halbpalmette." Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, 218.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>333</sup> It should be noted that for Riegl the nature of the aesthetic is transcending mimesis while for other art theorists the concept of "aesthetic" includes a mimetic aspect.

<sup>334</sup> Riegl elaborates upon this term further in *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn dargestellt* (1901/1923).

<sup>335</sup> See Zerner, "Preface," xxii.

that coalesce at a given historical conjuncture.”<sup>336</sup> Other scholars have used still other translations and definitions.<sup>337</sup>

Quite early in the work the *Kunstwollen* is characterized as a force that can break through technical barriers (“das menschliche *Kunstwollen* erscheint eben von Anbeginn unablässig darauf gerichtet die technischen Schranken zu brechen”).<sup>338</sup> In another example from the first chapter “Der geometrische Stil” Riegl discusses a hilt made out of bone and fashioned in the shape of a reindeer. He posits that above all it was the immanent artistic will that led to these artistic choices (below he calls it both “ein immanenter künstlerischer Trieb” and the *Kunstwollen*).

Das technische Moment spielt gewiss auch innerhalb des geschilderten Processes eine Rolle, aber bei weitem nicht jene führende Rolle [...] Der Anstoss ging vielmehr nicht von der Technik, sondern von dem bestimmten *Kunstwollen* aus. Man wollte das Abbild eines Naturwesens in totem Material schaffen, und erfand sich hierzu die nöthige Technik. Zum Zwecke des handsameren Greifens war die Rundfigur eines Dolchgriff gewiss nicht nothwendig. Ein immanenter künstlerischer Trieb, der im Menschen rege und nach Durchbruch ringend vorhanden war [...] musste ihn dazu geführt haben den beinernen Griff in Form eines Rennthieres zu bilden.<sup>339</sup>

Though Riegl describes an artifact that imitates the natural form of an animal, he argues that, because this formal choice serves no direct utilitarian purpose, the primary, underlying factor that inspired the choice of the reindeer form was the *Kunstwollen*.

---

<sup>336</sup> See Zimmerman, “Siegfried Kracauer’s Architectures,” 156.

<sup>337</sup> Margaret Olin argues that the term “*Kunstwollen*,” while it was used to counter the “mechanical-materialist” view, was not his invention but a condensed form of “*künstlerisches Wollen*,” a term that dates back to at least the time of Rumohr’s *Italienische Forschungen*. This assertion is part of her book’s larger claim that Riegl was a “radical conservative” who resisted giving up the concept of representation and used this term as the promotion of a return to a former view of art that was under attack from contemporaneous mechanistic theory. See Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Art*.

<sup>338</sup> Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, 29.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

In short, the *Kunstwollen* is the primary factor, and technique, or materials, always secondary in nature. In the same chapter Riegl discusses weaving and asserts that it is the *Kunstwollen* that allows artists to transcend the difficulties inherent to the mechanics of weaving to allow the creation of rounded shapes.

Not only does Riegl conceive of the *Kunstwollen* as transcending the technique, the materials and the need for mimesis of nature, but he sees it as divorced even from subjectivity. I want to highlight this point as it contrasts starkly with Steiner's theory of art and of the development of subjectivity. Scholars have noted this fact. For example, Olin argues that certain aspects of *Stilfragen* are challenging for the modern reader to accept, namely the autonomous nature of ornamental development:

Not only do ornamental motifs appear to develop on their own, with little relation to other artistic forms (let alone to external cultural influences), they also appear to develop independently of artists.[...] the motifs themselves seem to pursue their own, predetermined goals.<sup>340</sup>

Margaret Iversen describes style for Riegl as “unmotivated”: “Riegl's insistence on the “unmotivated” (as Saussure would say) character of the geometric style is another stick with which to beat the hypothesis that geometric design is derived from techniques of basketry and weaving.”<sup>341</sup> Furthermore, in defining *Kunstwollen* Iversen argues that it was created to counter “causal explanation” and “retrieve agency.” Notably, however, Iversen does not say agency was given to artists. She defines this term as

an artistic will or urge or intent informing different period styles, [*Kunstwollen*] was designed primarily to counter narrowly empiricist, determinist, functionalist, materialist tendencies in art history and theory. Its emphasis on will was meant to retrieve agency in artistic production from the domain of causal explanation.<sup>342</sup>

---

<sup>340</sup> Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*, 67.

<sup>341</sup> Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory*, 56.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

In freeing artistic creation from the sphere of causal explanation this liberating move applies also to the artist. Thus, instead of residing within the artist the agency resides within the ornamental process itself. Michael Gubser describes ornamental development in *Stilfragen* as propelled by “an inner formal logic”: “a single, universal development encompassed seemingly distinct motivic forms, and creative innovation was driven by an inner formal logic.”<sup>343</sup>

When we examine Riegl’s language in describing the *Kunstwollen* we find he chooses words to emphasize its independent, free nature. In the introduction, as may be recalled, he argues that Semper has been largely misunderstood and would not, in fact, favor a mechanical-materialistic imitative drive in place of the “frei schöpferischen *Kunstwollens*.”<sup>344</sup> In two instances in his discussion of the acanthus motif, he emphasizes that the process is entirely, or very largely, artistic in nature, which to him is equated with a lack of mimesis. Riegl explains that he aims to convince at least a portion of his colleagues that the acanthus motif arose through a purely artistic process that is wholly independent of the imitation of nature (“infolge eines völlig künstlerischen, ornamentgeschichtlichen Entwicklungsprozesses entstanden ist”).<sup>345</sup> In a second example soon after he tempers his claim somewhat by saying that the acanthus motif arose out of a process of ornamental transformation that was, however, influenced to some degree by naturalistic tendencies (“wie das Akanthusornament—weitab von jeglicher unmittelbarer Naturnachahmung—aus rein ornamentalen Motiven heraus, wenn

---

<sup>343</sup> Michael Gubser, “Time and History in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Perception,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 3 (2005): 452.

<sup>344</sup> Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, VII.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-15.

auch unter dem Einflusse naturalisierender Tendenz—entstanden sein dürfte”).<sup>346</sup> With the formulations “frei schöpferisch[.]”, “völlig künstlerisch[.]” and “aus rein ornamentalen Motiven,” we see Riegl making the case for the autonomous nature of the ornamental process and its underlying “*Kunstwollen*.” In addition, when talking about a particular culture, for instance the Hellenistic Greeks, there is no discussion of the particular psychological characteristics of people of this period. Instead, the Hellenistic *Kunstwollen* is described as manifesting within their ornamental creations, especially the tendril. In one passage the Hellenistic acanthus is described as the culmination of the acanthus form in terms of formal beauty, its ability to connect motifs and the tendril.<sup>347</sup>

If we turn now to Steiner’ s theory of the derivation of the acanthus motif it is very different in regards to subjectivity. The *Kunstwollen* for Riegl manifests outside of the bounds of the subject and within the motifs and their transformations. In contrast, Steiner’ s theory of the derivation of the acanthus motif, and his entire history of art, is a history of the development of the subject, itself spiritual in nature. Thus, Steiner understands the origin of the acanthus motif as intimately bound up with the particular spiritual stage and “consciousness” of the ancient Greeks. Steiner is not opposed to naturalism because he regards Greek artists as able to transcend mimesis but instead holds that the period of Greek antiquity was part of the stage of “original participation,” as Barfield called it. Steiner views artistic naturalism and ornament as artifacts of the

---

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>347</sup> Riegl states: “die [hellenistische] Griechen [haben] die Entwicklung zur Reife gebracht: indem sie einerseits den einzelnen Theilmotiven den Charakter vollkommener formaler Schönheit zu verleihen gewusst, anderseits—und das ist ihr besonderes Verdienst—die gefälligste Art der Verbindung zwischen den einzelnen Motiven geschaffen haben, nämlich die line of beauty, die rhythmisch bewegte *Ranke*. Ibid., 47. Emphasis in original.

“onlooker consciousness.” The premise is that in Greek antiquity mimesis did not yet exist at all as people in this period didn’t experience themselves as separate from the “outer” world.

In a few noteworthy formulations in the 1914 lecture “Der gemeinsame Ursprung der Dornacher Bauformen und des griechischen Akanthusornamentes” Steiner uses language strikingly similar to Riegl’s “*Kunstwollen*.” He asserts that the *Goetheanum* building aims to manifest forces that approximate the original forces of the artistic will, something not present in most contemporaneous works:

Und das wird uns allmählich das Verständnis kommen, daß wir mit dem, was wir hier wollen mit diesem Bau, den, ich möchte sagen, “Urkräften künstlerischen Wollens” [...] wenn man auf die Entstehung der Künste einmal das geistige Auge lenkt—viel näher kommen als ihm dasjenige nahekommt, was so vielfach als künstlerische Auffassung in der Gegenwart sich geltend macht.<sup>348</sup>

This and two other formulations on this first page alone contain terms very similar to Riegl’s *Kunstwollen*. In the other instance Steiner talks of his building as being in unison with the genesis of the arts and with the original will (“wie unser Bau [...] im Einklang sein will mit dem *Urwollen*, mit der Entstehung der Künste”).<sup>349</sup> In another instance slightly later in the lecture Steiner argues that to understand each period a correct understanding of the respective artistic will takes precedence over the attention toward outward features of the plant like the flower or tendril (“für jene Zeiten [...] war] einer, ich möchte sagen, richtigen Auffassung des künstlerischen Wollens, viel wichtiger als die Anschauung einer Blume oder einer Ranke”).<sup>350</sup> As the lecture title reveals, Steiner regards the *Goetheanum* and the acanthus motif as springing from the same aesthetic

---

<sup>348</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 47.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 50.

origins, namely what could be called the ancient Greek artistic will. Notably, both Riegl and Steiner conceive of the ancient Greek *Kunstwollen* as *supraindividual* in nature. In Riegl's case this is because the catalyst behind aesthetic evolution is the inner, formal logic of the ornamental motif and not the subject. In Steiner's case, by contrast, it is because in ancient Greece a clearly demarcated individual subject did not yet exist.

In contrast to Riegl, Steiner does not examine the acanthus motif as a series of detailed formal shifts, but instead considers the issue of the origin and evolution of the acanthus motif as inextricably linked with and arising from the distinct psychic outlook and spiritual stage of the ancient Greeks. In this theory Steiner emphasizes three elements of the ancient Greek soul experience or *Kunstwollen*. First, the acanthus motif is said to stem from a lingering ancient, clairvoyant awareness, still present in ancient Greece and Rome, of humans' interconnectedness with the greater cosmos, a theory already discussed in the Worringer section. Steiner regards the sculptor Kallimachos of the Vitruvian story as possessing clairvoyant capacities. Second, the genesis of the acanthus motif is linked with architectural developments, namely the invention of the Corinthian column and the rendering of the palmetto motif in sculptural form, transformations Riegl also describes. What distinguishes Steiner's theory, however, is his argument that the changes in architecture came about through changes in the Greco-Roman soul life when the so-called "Verstandesseele" or "Gemütsseele" came to fruition. Third, Steiner asserts that ancient Greek art stemmed from an awareness of the etheric body.<sup>351</sup>

---

<sup>351</sup> Steiner speaks of the human being as comprised of a four-part nature: the physical, the life or etheric body, the astral or emotional body and the "I" or the Ego. Regarding the etheric, Steiner posited that all living things have a life force that distinguishes them from



According to Steiner the original creative act that generated the eventual acanthus form was a collective dance in an amphitheater in which the dancers used two leaves, the lotus and the palm, as props to show the forces of the earth and the sun and their interconnectedness with these greater cosmic forces.<sup>352</sup> The dancers reached for leaves *not* because they were interested in naturalistically depicting the leaves, but as an aid to help manifest these greater forces (“diese Personen [stellen] etwas Wichtiges [dar] etwas, was es [...] nicht ausgebildet gibt auf der Erde, sondern wovon es auf der Erde nur Analogien gibt”).<sup>353</sup> The two leaf forms were chosen as their shapes echoed the shape of the two respective forces: the palm, with its outward-reaching leaves, was analogous to the sun’s outward gesture and the lotus, rounded at the base and forming a point at the top, stood for the earth forces. The dancers were arranged so that the leaf forms alternated—lotus, palm, lotus and palm. This arrangement Steiner posits as the progenitor of the “palm motif,” the motif of Mesopotamian and Greek art, which is the precursor to the final acanthus motif form.

---

dead or inanimate things. Steiner often discusses the plant as the embodiment of the etheric body.

<sup>352</sup> Art historian Beat Wyss provides some historical context for Steiner’s theory of macrocosm and microcosm: “Der Mensch als mikrokosmisches Ebenbild der Himmelsphären ist ein Topos der antiken Naturphilosophie, der in gnostischen Lehren überliefert wurde, deren moderne Ausprägungen Theosophie und Anthroposophie sind.” See Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst: zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*, 146. In his book Wyss discusses Steiner’s first *Goetheanum* in a chapter in which he also examines Wölfflin, Panofsky, Riegl, and the *Blaue Reiter* and Kandinsky. Wyss is generally quite critical of Steiner’s thought, deeming it obscurantist and part of a branch of anti-modernist thinking within modernism.

<sup>353</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 51. It is worth pointing out that in this formulation with the verb “darstellen” we again encounter the question of what Steiner means by representation and symbolism, a topic discussed in depth in the first chapter. In this lecture Steiner takes pains to make the point that representation of the leaves was never the aim.

Steiner summarizes the process of transformation from the original dance to the final ornamental acanthus form as a process of simplifying what was originally a direct and lively experience.

Dasjenige, was sich nun damals den Menschen darbot, und was alles für die Zuschauer ringherum dargestellt wurde und durchaus die Darstellung von lebendigen kosmischen Kräften war, das wurde später vereinfacht zu jenem Ornamente, in dessen Linie man zusammenfaßte dasjenige, was damals der Mensch indem er diese Dinge darstellte, lebendig erfüllte.<sup>354</sup>

As seen in the repeated use of word lively (“lebendig”), also present in one of the quotes above, Steiner emphasizes in his account that the origins were *lived* experience in contrast to the final, fixed ornamental form. The shift from the medium of dance to the later acanthus form in sculpture also shows the transition.<sup>355</sup>

Steiner posits that a key creation in the development of the acanthus motif was the Corinthian column. This column is regarded as emblematic of the ancient Greek emphasis on weight-bearing action and its spiritual counterpart of the bringing of the ego into the physical body. More generally, Steiner conceives of the medium of architecture in particular as linked with the soul (“Seele,” “Seelische”). In the lecture of 5 February 1913 in the same lecture cycle Steiner outlined the history of architecture as one of soul

---

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>355</sup> In the above quote Steiner’s spiritual wording of cosmic forces (“kosmische Kräfte”) is worth noting for its link with similar language from Worringer. As introduced early in this chapter, Worringer also spoke of art as derived from a certain relationship with the “cosmos.” He argues, for example, that empathy and abstraction differ “in ihrem psychischen Verhalten dem Kosmos gegenüber.” Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. 19-20. Steiner is clear that he believes that art was produced in ancient times out of a direct experience of the workings of the “cosmos.” With Worringer, in contrast, it is unclear to what extent he may be using this term as a common turn of phrase, describing an older mentality he does personally espouse or, in fact, describing a past stage of spiritual art that he argues was closed during the modern period.

development.<sup>356</sup> As opposed to ancient Egyptian architecture that reflects a reciprocal relationship between self and world, Greek and Roman architecture is seen as a manifestation of the “Verstandes-” or “Gemütsseele.”<sup>357</sup> The attention at this stage turns much toward a preoccupation with the rich, inner world and there is less interest in expanding outward. People at this stage are understood as developing their independent egos and their intellectual capacities. The architecture is described as reflecting this inward-turning orientation in the way that buildings represent a totality unto themselves and the strengthening, independent subject is manifested in the ancient Greek’ s ability to bear weight.

Steiner describes this theory in the following way:

in Griechenland [kam] zunächst die Erfassung des Ich im menschlichen Leibe in vollkommener Weise zum Ausdruck []. Und deshalb war es in Griechenland, wo ein solches Motiv zum Ausdruck kommen konnte: daß das Ich, wenn es im Leibe ist, sich verstärken muß, wenn es eine Last trägt.<sup>358</sup>

Steiner argues that the volute is the element of the column that most expresses this strengthening of the ego. During the process of the volute becoming a weight-bearing feature Steiner argues that the Doric becomes an Ionic column. Then, when the volute is lengthened further and the weight bearing character is fully expressed, the Corinthian column arises. Along with the downward extension of the volute, there is a key change in medium from painting to sculpture. When the “palm motif” is rendered in sculpture and also made part of the weight-bearing character of the Corinthian column, this motif is

---

<sup>356</sup> Steiner titles this lecture “Der Ursprung der Architektur aus dem Seelischen des Menschen und im Zusammenhang mit dem Gang der Menschheitsentwicklung.”

<sup>357</sup> Steiner has a complex theory of different “bodies” or “mentalities” and how the development of certain ones is the focus of certain cultural periods. A detailed account of this theory is not necessary for my project. For my purposes the term “mentalities” will suffice.

<sup>358</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 54.

now worked out in relief and palm leaves are likewise extended downward and depicted as turned downward. Steiner argues moreover that ancient Greeks had a heightened experience of their physicality and especially of bearing weight, which found its expression in architectural developments. Steiner describes the Greek artistic will as linked with the experience of weight bearing, and more specifically with an awareness of the forces (“Kräften”) necessary to bear weight. In the following formulation Steiner uses a term very close to *Kunstwollen*:

für jene Zeiten [ist] mit einer, ich möchte sagen, richtigen Auffassung des künstlerischen Wollens, viel wichtiger als die Anschauung einer Blume oder einer Ranke das Gefühl war: ich muß etwas tragen, schwer tragen; ich beuge den Rücken und mache mit meiner menschlichen Figur die Kraftentwicklung, die mich Menschen nötigt, mich so zu bilden, um die Last zu tragen.<sup>359</sup>

Not only is the ancient Greek subject described as especially aware of its newly acquired weight-bearing powers due to its strengthening modern ego, but, at the same time, it is described as retaining an awareness from ancient clairvoyance of the etheric body. Steiner argues that an awareness of the etheric allowed Greek artists to directly experience the archetype and thus avoid the need for external mimesis. In the lecture on the acanthus leaf Steiner argues that, though Vitruvius prudently refrained from saying so explicitly, the sculptor Kallimachos was a clairvoyant who saw not physical leaves in a basket atop the grave but the movements of the etheric body of the girl below that was a kind of struggle between the sun and the earth forces.<sup>360</sup> In another passage from the same lecture, Steiner argues that people during the ancient Greek period developed an awareness of how their movements and gestures developed out of the etheric into the physical dimension (“wie die Bewegung des Menschen, wie Haltung und Geste die

---

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 56.

menschliche Form und die menschliche Figur herausentwickeln aus dem Ätherischen ins Physische”).<sup>361</sup> In the work *Philosophie Kosmologie und Religion* Steiner argues that ancient Greeks did not think with their brains but with their bodies and therefore Platonic philosophy is so qualitatively different from modern philosophy.

Clearly Riegl’ s reading of the origin of the acanthus motif has no such esoteric dimension.<sup>362</sup> For him the key moment in the evolution of the acanthus motif is the Hellenistic invention of the purely ornamental tendril as a feat of non-mimetic formal creativity. It is an accomplishment because of the way artists *depart* completely from the physical model. In contrast, with Steiner’ s theory of the role of an awareness of the etheric body he argues that non-mimetic art departs from physical nature as the source of artistic inspiration. This happens, however, when ancient Greeks, with their developing, modern subjectivity, draw on ancient, not modern, clairvoyant knowledge.

After hearing Steiner’ s theory of the role of the etheric body it can be easy to forget the important resonances that I argue are there between the art theory of Riegl and Steiner. To summarize, I argue that both thinkers take issue with the dominant, naturalistic reading of the acanthus leaf because they see this reading as an instance of a greater tendency in their era to project a modern consciousness unto fundamentally different, older consciousness. Riegl posited that artistic styles of a given period are shaped most crucially by a collective artistic will, the *Kunstwollen*, rather than by the external factors of materials, technique and the mimesis of nature. I contend that Steiner

---

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>362</sup> In the introduction of *Stilfragen* Riegl critiques a religious-based argument made by American art historian W.G. Goodyear. In his work *Grammar of the Lotus* Goodyear asserts that the origins of the lotus motif were in a sun cult. Judging by Riegl’ s strong criticism of this argument, we can infer what he would think of Steiner’ s reading of the acanthus motif.

also thinks of art history as progressing through a transformation in “consciousness” or *Kunstwollen*, but that, while Riegl’s notion of artistic will is separate from subjectivity, for Steiner the *Kunstwollen* is a reflection of the cultural and spiritual stage of the subject.

## **Conclusion**

At the heart of this chapter are three, contemporaneous art historians who, at a particular modernist moment in which both artistic naturalism and abstraction were prominent, felt compelled to cast their gaze far back into history to rewrite the entire history of art. While each respective history is unique on many counts, all three are grand, fairly schematic art historical narratives that theorize a pre-modernist origin to abstraction.

In this chapter I argue for specific links, and divergences, between Steiner and the other two contemporaries. Regarding resonances between Steiner and Worringer, I contend that in both histories of art spatial, temporal and spiritual categories formatively shape the way that art progresses from one epoch to another. Spatially, Worringer’s model can be seen as an inverse of Steiner’s such that an epoch that the former thinker views as dominated by abstraction, the latter thinker understands as primarily oriented toward empathy. Temporally, I show that Worringer’s schema operates largely, though not entirely, through a binary model between the poles of empathy and abstraction. Steiner’s schema, in contrast, works dialectically in the three-stage “evolution of consciousness.” I also argue that both Steiner and Worringer view a spiritual outlook as shaping spatial experience. For Steiner, the spatial experience undergoes a dialectical, three-part progression. First, ancient people feel wholly united with the spiritual

dimension and experience no spatial distinction between inside or outside; then, as people gain awareness of their own subjectivity, and its inner dimension, they feel alienated, or spatially distanced; finally, in an age only starting to dawn, Steiner envisions people re-connecting with the spiritual dimension while also retaining their self-aware subjectivity, that is, their ability to experience an inside and an outside or a self and other. In Worringer' s case, though he personally voices skepticism or even disdain toward the potential of spiritual art in the modernist period, he understands empathy and abstraction as psychic dispositions that are integrally shaped by spiritual or religious outlook.

In my analysis of Steiner in dialogue with Riegl, I show the way that both thinkers take on what seems a detail of art history—the origins of the Corinthian acanthus leaf motif—as a way to establish larger claims about the history of abstraction and a refutation of artistic naturalism. I assert that both thinkers conceive of the history of art as shaped by what Riegl calls the *Kunstwollen*, a collective, internal, immanent artistic will that shapes the artistic production of a given period. In Steiner' s case I find the *Kunstwollen* intimately linked with the “evolution of consciousness,” an evolution that involves the development of subjectivity. In Riegl' s case, by contrast, I argue that the artistic motifs take center stage and there is little to no discussion of an evolving subject.

## CHAPTER 3

### The first Goetheanum Building and Steiner's Vision of Peace and Internationalism

#### Introduction

In 1913 enthusiastic volunteers from seventeen countries helped to construct and decorate the first *Goetheanum* building. When the war broke out in July of 1914, many workers continued to work harmoniously beside people who had suddenly become war enemies. Nevertheless, the nationalistic passions that ignited at the war's outbreak also began to manifest themselves amongst the ranks of the community in Dornach. Andrei Bely (1880-1934), Anthroposophist and author best known for the novel *Petersburg*, was present during this time and describes a mood of fear when soldiers would loiter around immediately outside the *Goetheanum*. At the beginning of the war it seemed very possible that German cannons in Baden could be pointed toward nearby Dornach. Bely describes the eruption of national partisanship at the *Goetheanum* throughout September and October of 1914 in the following way:

the British and the Russians gathered together in little groups, the Germans often insisted very tactlessly that the war had been instigated by the provocative attitude of England; the Russians countered with the statement that a breach of neutrality amounts to barbarism. Soon, theoretical debates changed to concrete incidents and endangered the whole life of Dornach.<sup>363</sup>

---

<sup>363</sup> Andrei Belyi, Aasya Turgenieff, Margarita Woloschin, *Reminiscences of Rudolf Steiner* (Ghent, NY: Adonis Press, 1987), 55.



In response to the outburst of nationalism both within and far beyond Dornach Steiner gave a number of lectures in which he spoke about the need for peace and intercultural harmony. For example, two weeks after the outbreak of the war Steiner held a seven-part lecture series in the *Goetheanum* that included hands-on first aid instruction entitled “Das Geheimnis der Wunde” or sometimes referred to as the “Samariterkurs.” In the first lecture Steiner calls on his fellow Anthroposophists to strive to be a cohort that brings peace and harmony in the devastating times: “In diesen Zeiten, wo alles erschüttert zu sein scheint, wollen wir uns doch bestreben, eine Schar zu sein, die Frieden und Harmonie in eines jeden Herzen hegt und pflegt.”<sup>364</sup> Steiner also delivered five lectures over three weekends in October of 1914, ten to twelve weeks after the war’s outbreak with the title “Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens.” In this series Steiner speaks repeatedly of the great need for cultural collaboration. For instance, Steiner calls on his fellow Anthroposophists to help foster what he terms an “energetic culture of peace” (“energische Friedenskultur”).<sup>365</sup> In one key analogy he exhorts those from different cultural groups to collaborate and sound together as in a single, great chorus.

During the time just preceding and during the early days of the First World War many German-speaking artists and thinkers were swept up, at least initially, in the collective mood of nationalistic fervor that inspired young men across Europe to

---

<sup>364</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Das Geheimnis der Wunde. Aufzeichnungen zum sogenannten Samariterkurs gehalten von Rudolf Steiner in Dornach vom 13-16 August 1914*, ed. Walter Kugler, vol. Hft Nr. 108, Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe. Veröffentlichungen aus dem Archiv der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung (1992), 7.

<sup>365</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandlungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 31.

volunteer for military service.<sup>366</sup> At a time when nationalism was the rule, Rudolf Steiner was part of the small minority of artists and intellectuals who spoke out against the war from its inception. Examples of other artists and writers notable for their early stance against the war include the following artists, all of whom are German: Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), the novelist Heinrich Mann (1871-1950), writer and publicist Kurt Hiller (1885-1972), and artist and prominent member of the Berlin *Dada* and *Neue Sachlichkeit* groups George Grosz (1893-1959).

In this chapter, I focus attention on how during the First World War Steiner conceived of the first *Goetheanum* as promoting peace and internationalism. By highlighting how Steiner conceived of the *Goetheanum* as an aesthetic response to the war, I show that his spiritually-inspired aesthetics were far from divorced from contemporary political issues. I demonstrate that Steiner's spiritual thought was very much grounded in both aesthetics and politics, a dual interest he shared with other contemporary Expressionists. Indeed, the *Goetheanum* building, both the first and second version, has been recognized by many scholars as part of the canon of Expressionist architecture. I also show that the way Steiner's architectural theory is informed by spiritual ideas resonates with a number of Expressionists and "spiritual

---

<sup>366</sup> Famous examples of artists include the German writer Thomas Mann (1875-1955) with his nationalistic and jingoistic work "Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen" (1915-1918); in later editions Mann edited and tempered the most extreme passages. Franz Marc (1880-1916), German artist and co-founder with Kandinsky of the *Blaue Reiter* group, saw the war as a way to renew Europe; he died in the war in 1916. The German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) argued that the war was creating a new sense of community in the 1914 essay "Deutschlands innere Wandlung." The German architect Adolf Behne, who contributed to Taut's work *Die Stadtkrone* (1919) wrote in an article in 1915 of the German war effort as a new, revolutionary force in Europe.

modernists” in whose circles Steiner more and less directly moved. This focus on the spiritual, but also the “worldly” nature of Steiner’s thought, harks back to a key argument made in Chapter One where I discussed the aesthetic programs of Steiner and Kandinsky. I argue that though Steiner influenced Kandinsky’s theory of abstraction, he was not ultimately oriented toward abstraction but, instead, aimed for a symbolism reminiscent of Goethe that immerses deeply into the material and formal dimension.

In this chapter I place particular focus upon Steiner as an architectural historian and, for the first time, as a practitioner, that is, as an architect, artist and designer and not only a theorist, thinker and lecturer.<sup>367</sup> In addition, for the first time one sees Steiner as someone who took a political stance in his promotion of pacifism and internationalism in the face of the ubiquitous fervent nationalism of the time. As part of his cultural and political theory, he thinks in geopolitical categories by highlighting the special role of Central Europe (“Mitteleuropa”) in overcoming nationalism.

I conclude the chapter with a consideration of how two artistic aspects of the *Goetheanum* were meant to both express and facilitate intercultural understanding. First is the series of carved columns each with a different motif meant to express one of seven cultures that Steiner identified in the history of cultural evolution. Second are the painted motifs adorning the smaller cupola, which contain archetypal figures from different

---

<sup>367</sup> Steiner was not a trained architect and was largely self-taught, though he considered Austrian architect Josef Bayer (1889-1979), a student of Gottfried Semper, as his teacher. Wolfgang Pehnt argues that Steiner was influenced by *Wiener Historismus*. Steiner studied at the Technische Hochschule Wien (1879-1883). For more information on Semper, see footnote 83 in the second chapter. Steiner was acquainted with Otto Wagner and Heinrich von Ferstel, famous for his *Votivkirche* in Vienna, lectured at the Technische Hochschule. In addition, Pehnt argues that Steiner must have been influenced by the palatial structures of Alois Bastl and Otto Schönthal. Pehnt, “Etwas wie Morgenröte: Die Architektur von Rudolf Steiner,” 109.

cultures. Steiner held that aesthetic contemplation of forms that express the evolution of culture would ignite recognition of this shared cultural and spiritual history.

While Steiner has received significant attention within scholarship on the history of architecture, a consideration of Steiner's architectural theory as a project for peace and internationalism and the linkages with contemporaneous architects and thinkers has been almost entirely neglected.<sup>368</sup> Among other sources, I focus especially on the analysis of the lectures given only weeks after the outbreak of war in 1914. I bring these theories by Steiner into conversation with those of a number of his contemporaries who, like Steiner, engaged with aspects of both Expressionism and what I call "spiritual modernism" and who were dismayed at the war. I first read Steiner's wartime thought alongside Sigmund Freud's set of essays entitled "Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod" of 1915. While both figures reject the nationalistic fervor of the time, they differ on what they think of the viability of internationalism and the potential for transforming human nature through art. In addition, I show that particularly resonant with Steiner's wartime architectural theory are the highly imaginative, and at times fantastical, theoretical writings and drawings of two Expressionists who identified as pacifist: the architect Bruno Taut (1880-1938) and his close friend and colleague the science fiction writer,

---

<sup>368</sup> There is a forthcoming new English translation and annotated edition of this lecture cycle by Frederick Amrine and John Kettle. They give the cycle the title "The First Goetheanum. Architecture as Peacework." The original title was "Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse." I am indebted to Amrine and Kettle for alerting me to the topic of Steiner's architecture as aiming to foster peace.

poet and illustrator Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915).<sup>369</sup> As part of the 1914 Werkbund exhibit in Cologne Taut created the *Glashaus*, a prismatic glass pavilion. On the frieze of this structure were written aphorisms from Scheerbart on the virtues of colored glass and the pacifying potential of the medium, including one aphorism that declared “Das bunte Glas/ Zerstört den Haß.” Taut drew much inspiration for this structure from Scheerbart’s treatise *Glasmarchitektur* (1914) in which he envisioned a world adorned with structures of colored glass that facilitate cultural harmony.<sup>370</sup> The manner in which Scheerbart discusses the nature of colored, transparent glass, as able to transcend the boundaries between architecture and nature, and between humans and the greater cosmos, reminiscent of the ways in which Steiner conceived of the painted walls of the *Goetheanum* as spiritually and aesthetically transparent to wider nature. Another link I show between Steiner and Taut, and his greater circle, including other members of the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, an association of artists and architects in existence between 1918 and 1921, is that they were not solely architects and theorists but made attempts to affect political change. Sadly, the *Glashaus* did not survive the war and Taut was forced to suspend his architectural work until after the war. Scheerbart died of a sudden heart attack in the fall of 1915, bringing a too early death for this author and architectural theorist. The period of creative and visionary architectural ideas by Scheerbart and Taut was quite brief indeed.

---

<sup>369</sup> As will be discussed, Scheerbart was an admirer and student of Steiner. Two members of the *Gläserne Kette* (1919), a group started by Taut to foster the exchange of architectural ideas, were Anthroposophists: Paul Goesch and Hermann Finsterlin.

<sup>370</sup> As indication of the close partnership between the two friends, Scheerbart dedicates this work to Taut.

## **Steiner' s Wartime Thought in Conversation with Sigmund Freud' s “Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod”**

As a foray into my discussion of Steiner' s cultural and architectural theory and how these informed his response to the First World War, I would like to bring Steiner' s thought briefly into conversation with his contemporary Sigmund Freud and Freud' s set of essays “Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod.” They were written in 1915 six months after the outbreak of war and are a critical reaction to the patriotism and nationalism that erupted at this time. Steiner shares with Freud the fundamental denunciation of nationalism during this time. In other ways, however, the two responses to the war are quite different.

In his essay, Freud argues that the war revealed a crisis of civilization in that the brutal killing, aided by modern, advanced technology, was equally if not more barbaric as past “primitive” wars. From Freud' s perspective, the war exposed the concepts of internationalism, cosmopolitanism and civilization to be illusions. In the first section entitled “Die Enttäuschung des Krieges,” Freud argues that while the assumption remained that wars between “primitive” and more “civilized” peoples would continue, many had placed hope in the idea that the dominant European nations who led the world in their artistic and scientific innovations could overcome the need for war.<sup>371</sup> He advances the idea that the painful disappointment felt by many about the war was a sign

---

<sup>371</sup> Freud argues: “Von den großen weltbeherrschenden Nationen weißer Rasse, denen die Führung des Menschengeschlechtes zugefallen ist, die man mit der Pflege weltumspannender Interessen beschäftigt wußte, deren Schöpfungen die technischen Fortschritte in der Beherrschung der Natur wie die künstlerischen und wissenschaftlichen Kulturwerte sind, von diesen Völkern hatte man erwartet, daß sie es verstehen würden, Mißhelligkeiten und Interessenkonflikte auf anderem Wege zum Austrag zu bringen.” Sigmund Freud, *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod* (1915), (Projekt Gutenberg, 2009), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29941/29941-h/29941-h.htm>.

of how captive all were to this illusion: “unsere Kränkung und schmerzliche Enttäuschung [...] beruhten auf einer Illusion, der wir uns gefangen gaben.” Freud characterizes the fundamental nature of human beings, in psychological terms, as compelled by impulses and primitive needs: “Die psychologische [...] Untersuchung zeigt vielmehr, daß das tiefste Wesen des Menschen in Triebregungen besteht, die elementarer Natur, bei allen Menschen gleichartig sind und auf die Befriedigung gewisser ursprünglicher Bedürfnisse zielen.”<sup>372</sup> He argues further that the high standard of good conduct required by “civilized” society compels a person to try to suppress or renounce these primitive impulses. The outbreak of the war, however, with its great cruelty and lawlessness proved to Freud that such attempts at suppression are ultimately futile. The war was a significant factor in Freud’s devotion in his following work to the theme of the destructive drive within humans.

In great contrast to Freud’s appraisal of the war as revealing the illusory nature of concepts of internationalism and civilization, Steiner ardently believes in these concepts as still attainable despite the devastation of the war. Freud concludes in this set of essays that war cannot be abolished for the foreseeable future: “Der Krieg ist aber nicht abzuschaffen; solange die Existenzbedingungen der Völker so verschieden und die Abstoßungen unter ihnen so heftig sind, wird es Kriege geben müssen.”<sup>373</sup> Steiner, on the other hand, believes that a certain kind of spiritual art can help unite clashing cultures to bring about a harmony between all cultural groups (“Harmonie aller Kulturgemeinschaften”). He argues that if people recognize how all diverse cultures have in common a single, shared cultural history, then hatred between groups will

---

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

disappear. Steiner asks, rhetorically, if everyone learns what he views as these truths, then, “Wie könnte der Angehörige der einen Kulturgemeinschaft den Angehörigen einer anderen Kulturgemeinschaft einfach hassen und über ihn schimpfen?”<sup>374</sup>

As discussed later in the chapter, in “Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges” Steiner bases his claim that Germany is inherently less bellicose than many of its European peers by portraying Germany as a *Kulturnation*, that is, a society that reached a great level of civilization. Also, while Freud thinks of human nature in terms of underlying drives Steiner conceives of human nature as including a spiritual dimension with a set of higher, spiritual sheaths. Art, for Steiner, contains the potential to transform human nature by helping people recognize the universally shared spiritual make-up. As will be discussed in the final section of the chapter, a number of Steiner’s art works in the first Goetheum portray or express the history of cultural evolution and the seven main cultural groups that comprise Steiner’s schema. An aesthetic encounter with these forms is meant to awaken the knowledge of this shared evolutionary history, a process meant to help people overcome difference and achieve inter-cultural unity.

### **The First Goetheum in the Context of Contemporaneous Movements**

Before I critically engage with Steiner’s architectural theory, I will describe the first *Goetheum* and provide a history of its inception. As it is still a relatively little known building, I also touch on the major building types with which it intersects, including: ancient temple architecture and the Gothic cathedral, and movements to which it participated, notably Organicism. I also note the link with *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a form of

---

<sup>374</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 55.



artwork that seeks to incorporate many media into a single work and thereby transcends the traditional boundaries between genres. All of these are elements in the greater Expressionism movement into which the *Goetheanum* fits.

Two important events, both of them in Munich, which predated and inspired the ultimate erection of the *Goetheanum* building in Dornach. As noted in the first chapter, Munich was a vital center in the pre-war years when Steiner and for Kandinsky and the *Blaue Reiter* were active there. One of the earliest events that sparked desire to erect the *Goetheanum* was the world conference of the European section of the Theosophical Society that was held in the Tonhalle in Türkenstrasse in Munich in 1907, discussed in the introduction and also in Chapter One. A mystery play was performed here, but the audience noticed that the venue did not provide the necessary space for the full aesthetic effect; and, after this event, participants felt a need for their own architectural space.<sup>375</sup> In 1911 and 1912, Steiner had plans drawn up for a large building in the Schwabing district of Munich near Münchener Freiheit and land was even purchased. At this time the proposed structure was not yet called the *Goetheanum* but the *Johannesbau*.<sup>376</sup> The building had a pentagonal ground plan, and the second plan, produced in 1912, had the outer buildings positioned closely around the central building, as well as a foyer, that shielded it from plain view. This was done in part as an effort to not offend local planning authorities and the local community, including the Catholic church next door, the Erlöserkirche. The effort proved unsuccessful, however, as a negative report by an

---

<sup>375</sup> See the section entitled “The Munich Moment” in Chapter One for more details on this conference.

<sup>376</sup> The name stems from Johannes Thomasius, the central protagonist of Steiner’s four Mystery Dramas, performed in Munich from 1910-1913.

advisor for the Erlöserkirche led to the rejection of planning permission for the *Johannesbau*.<sup>377</sup> When the plan for building in Munich failed, a dentist named Emil Grosheintz offered a building plot in Dornach, a small city located near Basel. Dornach, unlike Munich, did not yet have a development plan and, as a result, the plan was approved rather quickly.<sup>378</sup> Construction began in September of 1913 and the official opening celebration was held in 1920 though the adornment was not fully finished.<sup>379</sup> The first *Goetheanum* did not exist very long at all as it burned down during the night of New Year' s 1922/1923 due to suspected arson. The second *Goetheanum* was opened in 1928, three years after Steiner' s death.<sup>380</sup>

---

<sup>377</sup> Wolfgang Pehnt quotes this advisor, Theodor Fischer, as being perturbed by the building and finding all of its parts “so sonderbar vergriffene Formen, daß der Betrachter von einem Staunen ins andere fällt.” Pehnt, *Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach*, 40.

<sup>378</sup> The site location in Dornach caused great controversy locally. This was because the hill slope, also called the “Bluthügel” and the Burgruine Dorneck were national memorials where in 1499 the *Schwäbische Bund* and the *Eidgenossenschaft* had their battles. See Pehnt, “Etwas wie Morgenröte: Die Architektur von Rudolf Steiner,” 108. It is noteworthy in light of the topic of this chapter that disturbing a war memorial site was of no concern to Steiner.

<sup>379</sup> Another link with the Munich area is the founding of the first Waldorf school, built not far from Munich in Stuttgart in 1919. Emil Molt, the director of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory, invited Steiner and provided financial backing to start the school. This school served the children of the workers at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory along with other local children. Now there is a worldwide Waldorf school movement with over 1,000 independent Waldorf schools in thirty countries.

<sup>380</sup> Steiner was the leading architect of the major buildings of the *Goetheanum* before his death in 1925. Before his death, Steiner had provided the general direction for this second structure with a set of working drawings, sketches and a 1/100<sup>th</sup> scale plasticine model of the building' s exterior. See Sharp, *Modern Architecture and Expressionism*, 156. The second *Goetheanum* is much larger (110,000 instead of 66,000 cubic meters of enclosed space) and constructed of reinforced concrete to avoid a future catastrophic fire. Inside, and under one roof, are lecture rooms, editorial offices, a 1,000-seat auditorium, a stage and a library. A very significant difference is that in this second version it was not possible to re-enlist the same kind of voluntary craftsmanship and artistic help that went into the creation of the first *Goetheanum*. Thus, in the second building there is not the level of detail in elements like hand carvings and there was also less attention given

The first *Goetheanum* was an enormous building that measured 272 feet in length, 243 feet in width. The floor plan was axial, running east-west, and the building was comprised of two large domes covered in slate; the height to the top of the largest of the two domes was 111 feet. It was constructed entirely of timber with the exception of the foundation made of reinforced concrete. Built on a ridge of one of the smaller foothills of the Jura mountain range, it overlooked the city of Basel. The domes stood high and could be seen for miles, in stark contrast to the hidden nature of the original plans for the Munich building.

---

toward complex measurements and proportions. Though one would assume much was lost in terms of the sculptural quality with the shift from wood to stone and the loss of individual craftsmanship Wolfgang Pehnt has very high praise for this later building and asserts that its merit lies in the feat of creating the impression of movement and sculpture out of reinforced concrete. Pehnt calls the second *Goetheanum* “in actual fact one of the most magnificent pieces of sculptural architecture of the twentieth century.” See Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture*, 148. The architect Hans Scharoun, designer of the Berlin Philharmonic, visited the second *Goetheanum* in 1962 and declared it “the most important building of the first half of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century.” See Rex Raab, *Eloquent Concrete: How Rudolf Steiner Employed Reinforced Concrete* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1979), 18. For information on how Steiner’s architectural theory and particularly how his organicist style was among important influences on Frank Lloyd Wright, see the introduction by John Kettle in Rudolf Steiner, *The First Goetheanum: Towards a New Theory of Architecture*, ed. Frederick Amrine and John Kettle, vol. GA 289-290 (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, forthcoming).



**Figure 1: The first Goetheanum**

The domed shape of first *Goetheanum* gave it a temple-like appearance and it has been understood by some scholars as part of the renewal of a secular form of temple within modernism.<sup>381</sup> Steiner rejected the characterization by some contemporaries of the *Goetheanum* as a temple as he conceived of it as a structure that did not adhere to any historical model. In a lecture from 1920, Steiner argues that people call the *Goetheanum* a temple because they lack the vocabulary to describe such a new kind of building: “Man sagt vielfach, nur weil man, ich möchte sagen, zu arm ist, um Worte für das Neue zu

---

<sup>381</sup> Wolfgang Pehnt inscribes Steiner’s *Goetheanum* into the greater modernist interest in creating new temples (“Das Verlangen nach neuen Tempeln”). In this movement he includes the glass temples of the Romantics; the work of Peter Behrens; Hendrik Petrus Berlage; the crystal houses and city crowns of the Expressionist generation; the *Bayreuth Festspielhaus*; the *Ernst-Ludwig-Haus* on the Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt and the *Festspielhaus* in Hellerau near Dresden. Pehnt also notes that Hugo Höppener (1868-1948), known as Fidus, was a temple artist and *Lebensreformer* who designed temples as early as 1892. He read Steiner’s work and heard him lecture and was apparently upset that he was never summoned by Steiner to help work on the *Goetheanum*. Pehnt, *Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach*, 30.

finden, das sei ein Tempelbau. Aber der ganze Charakter widerspricht dem alten Tempelbau-Charakter.”<sup>382</sup> In other lectures he did, however, describe his building as arising after a long line of temple structures. In a different lecture series he discusses the *Goetheanum* as part of a long history of temple structures that includes, chronologically, the Persian, Egyptian, Greek temples, Christian churches and then the Gothic cathedral.<sup>383</sup>

The first *Goetheanum* clearly takes inspiration from the Gothic cathedral, an architectural form that was of interest to myriad modernist architects and artists during the era of “spiritual modernism.”<sup>384</sup> In Paul Scheerbart’s treatise *Glasarchitektur* (1914) he argues that glass architecture would be inconceivable without Gothic architecture (“Die Glasarchitektur ist nicht ohne die Gotik zu denken”).<sup>385</sup> In the final section of *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1907) and in *Formprobleme der Gothik* (1911), Wilhelm Worringer had already written about the Gothic style. These theories were influential on the reception of the Gothic style within modernism. In *Formprobleme der Gothik*, Worringer contrasted the urge toward stylization of the Gothic with the Mediterranean interest in verisimilitude.<sup>386</sup> As I will briefly explain below, Steiner does not speak about

---

<sup>382</sup> Steiner, *Der Baugedanke von Dornach* (1920), 148.

<sup>383</sup> See the first lecture in Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 19-29.

<sup>384</sup> Iain Boyd Whyte argues that in the *Arbeitsrat für kunst* and in the Gläserne Kette group that followed, “the cathedral, temple or cult building symbolized both the infinite totality of humankind and the benevolent domination of architecture over the new world of social harmony and equality.” Iain Boyd Whyte, “The Expressionist Sublime,” in *Expressionist Utopias. Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy*, ed. Timothy O. Benson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 132.

<sup>385</sup> Paul Scheerbart, *Glasarchitektur* (Berlin: Verlag der Sturm, 1914), 30.

<sup>386</sup> In a famous later example, Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956) chose a Gothic cathedral to symbolize the unity of the arts in a woodcut for the founding manifesto of Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus in 1919 to mark the opening of the new school in Weimar.

the Gothic style in the same terms as Worringer, but both esteem this period highly and, broadly speaking, both regard its strength as lying in its ability to transcend form. For Worringer, Gothic architecture transcends the need for naturalistic imitation; for Steiner, Gothic forms overcome the need for spatial enclosure. In the same lecture in which Steiner outlines a history of temple architecture, he is especially effusive in his praise of the Gothic cathedral. He praises its physical openness and outward-oriented nature. He argues that this openness marks a great departure from earlier temples whose structure was meant to keep enclosed within its walls the spiritual dimension, which in this instance Steiner calls God (“Der Gott”). In theorizing the ancient Greek temples—Steiner specifically names those to Athena, Apollo or Zeus—he argues that no congregation is needed within as God (him)self lives within these buildings: “Der Gott wohnt in ihm, und dieses Wohnen des Gottes in ihm bildet seine in sich abgeschlossene Unendlichkeit.”<sup>387</sup> In contrast, Steiner understands the Gothic cathedral as aiming to transcend all barriers: “Überall strebt die gotische Form über sich selbst hinaus, überall strebt sie darnach [*sic*], etwas auszudrücken, was sich in dem Räume [*sic*], in dem man ist, wie etwas Suchendes ausnimmt, wie etwas, das die Grenzen durchdringen und ins All sich verweben will.”<sup>388</sup> His description of the cathedral as seeking to penetrate the physical boundaries and to reach into outer space resonates with Steiner’s concept of the permeability of matter and immateriality that influenced Kandinsky’s artistic theories, as discussed in the first chapter. Steiner’s discussion of reaching beyond the confines of physical space also resonates with how Taut and Scheerbart envisioned translucent buildings on mountaintops or even on distant planets.

---

<sup>387</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 21.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

The first *Goetheanum* was conceived as a performance space for Eurythmy, Anthroposophic mystery plays and other performances. The space beneath the larger dome held spectators and the small dome held the stage. Already present in the Munich building plan was a key idea that materialized in the first *Goetheanum*: two domes fused together.<sup>389</sup> There was additionally a more esoteric concept underlying the double-domes: the larger dome suspended over the audience was meant to express the “physical” and the smaller dome the “spiritual-supersensory.” The main area was linked to three smaller roofs that covered the accommodation and the entrance hall. The other buildings on the site were grouped in a loose circle around the main building. The main façade of each building faces toward the main building. The subsidiary buildings include, among a few others, the *Glashaus*, a workshop with two independent semicircular domes and windows similar to those of the *Goetheanum*; the boilerhouse (*Heizhaus*) with a large chimney adorned by protruding forms meant to echo the shape of rising smoke and Haus Duldeck, a concrete private home.

Considering the fusion of influences and functions noted above, the *Goetheanum* should also be regarded as an example of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>390</sup> While the idea of the

---

<sup>389</sup> Wolfgang Pehnt explains that at the turn of the century centrally planned buildings on a circular ground plan with a dome were built. Aside from Steiner, however, there is no contemporaneous example of a larger and smaller dome combined and it was not until the architecture of the Russian Revolution when cylindrical and sometimes domed spaces were combined. Pehnt, *Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach*, 10.

<sup>390</sup> Thomas Anz cites the *Reallexicon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft* for a definition of the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a phenomenon “based on the principle of crossing boundaries between different media, thereby revoking the autonomy of individual art forms and seeking to reintegrate the representational means of poetry, music, theater, dance, and visual art into a complex whole.” Also, the societal factors that Anz describes the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as countering are also those that inspired many what I call “spiritual modernists.” Anz characterizes these factors as “processes of social and cultural modernization marked by specialization, differentiation and competition.”

*Gesamtkunstwerk* goes back to Richard Wagner, Kandinsky's and Taut's writings about the topic may have been more potent to Steiner at the time. Central to Kandinsky's concept of "stage composition" was the idea of a synthesis of the arts; instead of a simple fusion of art forms Kandinsky argues that the power of their interaction lay in the tension between their "concordance" and "discordance." In the so-called "color tone dramas," his four abstract, Expressionist plays written between 1909 and 1914, the formal plot gives way to an experimental interplay of color, form and sound. The plays are entitled "Der gelbe Klang," "Grüner Klang oder Stimme," "Schwarz und Weiß" and "Schwarze Figur." *Der gelbe Klang* was the only one of the four plays to be performed in Kandinsky's lifetime and appeared in the *Blaue Reiter* almanac, itself a form of total artwork with its mixture of images, literary texts, song scores and theoretical writing. In his essay "Eine Notwendigkeit" (1914), Bruno Taut argues for a new form of architecture that entails a unity of different art forms: "Es liegt eine Notwendigkeit in der neuen Kunst, daß sich dieser Zusammenschluß von Architektur, Malerei und Plastik vollziehen soll").<sup>391</sup> In 1914, Kandinsky and Hugo Ball (1886-1927), German author and one of the

---

Thomas Anz, "Setting the Soul in Vibration! Expressionist Concepts of the Total Artwork," in *The Total Artwork in Expressionism: Art, Film, Literature, Theater, Dance, and Architecture, 1905-25*, ed. Ralf and Claudia Dillmann Beil (Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt: Hatje Cantz), 52. This anthology from 2011 misses the opportunity to substantively discuss Steiner in the context of *Gesamtkunstwerk* and only briefly mentions his influence on Arnold Schönberg and Johannes Itten. In the one brief discussion the second *Goetheanum* is called "one of the most curious architectural sculptures of the time" and it is argued that Steiner loved the "odd novels" of the science fiction writer Paul Scheerbart. To say that Steiner "loved" any of Scheerbart's writings is inaccurate. As I mention later, it is well documented that Steiner felt sympathetic toward Scheerbart but also found his science fiction odd and his spirituality superficial. Ralf and Claudia Dillmann Beil, ed. *The Total Artwork in Expressionism: Art, Film, Literature, Theater, Dance, and Architecture 1905-1925* (Berlin, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 379. See my footnote on page 20 and 21.

<sup>391</sup> Bruno Taut, "Eine Notwendigkeit," *Der Sturm* 4, no. 196-197 (1914): 174-75.



founders of the *Dada* movement and pioneer of the genre *Lautgedicht*, had drawn up plans and publicized a festival theatre based on, among other things, Steiner's first *Goetheanum*.<sup>392</sup> In 1919, in his famous *Theatermanifest* Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), the painter, poet and member of the *Dada* movement, called for a unification of the arts: "Ich fordere die restlose Zusammenfassung aller künstlerischen Kräfte zur Erlangung des *Gesamtkunstwerks*. Ich fordere die prinzipielle Gleichberechtigung aller Materialien."<sup>393</sup>

Wolfgang Pehnt argues that in the first *Goetheanum* Steiner realized the dream of the unity of the arts that was longed for by the revolutionary circle of architects in Berlin:

Die in den Entstehungsjahren der *Goetheanum*-Bauten oft beschworene Gemeinde aller Bauenden, im Kreise um die Berliner Revolutionsarchitekten oder im frühen Weimarer Bauhaus herbeigesehnt—auf dem Dornacher Hügel war sie ebenso Wirklichkeit geworden wie die Vereinigung der Künste.<sup>394</sup>

---

In this article Taut also cites Kandinsky as a model for an artist who combined all pictorial forms and says architects must likewise use all available architectural forms. Scheerbart and Taut first became acquainted in 1912 through the circle of artists and intellectuals around Herwarth Walden's journal *Der Sturm*.

<sup>392</sup> Andreas Kramer, "Goethe and the Cultural Project of German Modernism: Steiner, Kandinsky, Friedlaender, Schwitters and Benjamin," *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 71 (2001): 27.

<sup>393</sup> From Schwitters' work "An alle Bühnen der Welt" quoted in Christoph Kleinschmidt, *Intermaterialität: zum Verhältnis von Schrift, Bild, Film und Bühne im Expressionismus*, Lettre (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 121.

<sup>394</sup> Pehnt, *Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach*, 26. Immediately following this quote, Pehnt refers to Peter Behrens' writing about a project for an ideal theatre that sounds similar to Steiner's *Goetheanum*. This work includes many photographs and architectural sketches and models of both *Goetheanum* buildings and also discusses the building plans that preceded the first *Goetheanum*. Pehnt considers both versions of the building, including the smaller surrounding buildings, in the context of Organicism, *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the revival of temple architecture. He finds parallels between the Haus Duldeck, a concrete private house, and Antoni Gaudí's Casa Mila and echoes with Erich Mendelsohn's *Einsteinturm* (1917-1921). The last section considers the influence of Steiner's architecture on future structures. It is noteworthy that an architectural historian of Pehnt's stature devoted an entire book to the *Goetheanum* buildings. Pehnt's assessment of the importance of Steiner's contribution within architecture, however, changed significantly over time. In the *Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture* (1964), edited by Pehnt, there is no entry on Steiner. In *Expressionist Architecture* (1973), there

In an earlier essay, Pehnt also argued that Steiner realized a dream of many Expressionist architects in setting the stage for a drama festival with a residential community that resided in a complex with a building at its center that was in some respects a religious building.<sup>395</sup> Andrew Beard also considered Steiner's architecture an example of a modern *Gesamtkunstwerk* and linked the design of the two *Goetheanum* buildings with the work of well-known Expressionist architects — Antonio Gaudi, Saint Elia, Herman Finsterlin, Hans Scharoun, Eero Saarinen, and Erich Mendelsohn.<sup>396</sup>

The first *Goetheanum* exhibited a variety of artistic forms. In the auditorium there were fourteen columns and each was made from a different kind of wood. There were carved bases, capitals and architraves on the inner ring of columns; the forms were meant to express the seven “Post-Atlantean” epochs of cultural evolution. There were ceiling paintings in the domes that depicted archetypal figures across Steiner's cultural epochs. There were also stained-glass windows. The large wooden sculpture carved by Steiner, called “Die Gruppe” and measuring ten meters or over thirty-two feet, was

---

is a chapter devoted to Steiner in which Pehnt emphasizes the spiritual background of Steiner's theories and the link with a number of contemporary architects.

<sup>395</sup> Pehnt argues that the *Goetheanum* brought to reality “the idea of a hilltop drama festival combined with that of a residential and social community lying in the shadow of the dominant theatre, which would have almost the character of a religious building. The ideal of the Expressionist architects—the abode of man surmounted by the sacred—never came so close to realization as here in this swiss village.” Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture*, 141. Beat Wyss links Steiner with Richard Wagner due to their aim to build a stage for their *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Wyss notes that the two projects were temporally close: the *Richtfest* was celebrated in 1914 and in 1916 the first *Goetheanum* was finished. Both also initially planned their stages to be located in Munich and both ultimately ended up in the more provincial locations of Dornach and Bayreuth, respectively. Wyss has a generally critical view of Steiner as seen, as one example, in the derogatory and inaccurate description of him as an “unermüdlicher Prediger.” Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst: zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*, 142.

<sup>396</sup> Andrew Beard, ed. *Steiner, Architecture: An Introductory Reader* (Forest Row: Sophia Books, 2003), 2.

located where the symmetrical axis met the back circle of pillars. The central figure in this sculpture is the Representative of Humanity, a kind of Christ figure that maintains balance. In the lecture series “Der Baugedanke des *Goetheanums*,” Steiner described the various arts that were performed in that space and the active interaction meant to transpire between the various arts and the viewer:

Alles dasjenige, was man in Worten vorführt, was man eurythmisch aufgeführt sieht, was man in den Mysterienspielen aufgeführt sehen wird und was sonst vorgeführt wird, das muß so durch den Saal klingen und gesehen werden, daß die Wände mit ihren Formen, daß die Malereien, die da sind, wie selbstverständlich dazu Ja sagen; daß die Augen gewissermaßen sie aufnehmen wie etwas, woran sie unmittelbar teilhaben.<sup>397</sup>

Steiner talks anthropomorphically and spiritually when he speaks of the adorned walls and paintings speaking and affirming the collective aesthetic experience. This vision also echoes with the way Kandinsky theorized spirit (“der Geist”) speaking through form in the essay “Über die Formfrage”: “Wenn der Inhalt, der Geist, welcher sich nur durch diese schein tote Form offenbaren kann, reif wird, wenn die Stunde seiner Materialisation geschlagen hat, so tritt er in diese Form und wird durch sie sprechen.”<sup>398</sup>

Within Steiner’s artistic program there is often a close integration of different media. For example, Steiner often described the aim of Eurythmy dance in synaesthetic terms as a form of visible speech (“Das Sichtbarwerden der Sprache”).<sup>399</sup> Also, one of the architectural features of the *Goetheanum* highlighted by scholars is the sculptural quality of the buildings surfaces—that is, the integrating of the media of sculpture and architecture. Dennis Sharp argues that Steiner “married his sense of movement to the

---

<sup>397</sup> Steiner, *Der Baugedanke des Goetheanum. Einleitender Vortrag mit Erklärungen zu den Bildern des Baus* (1921), 23-24.

<sup>398</sup> Kandinsky, “Über die Formfrage,” 174.

<sup>399</sup> Steiner, *Eurythmie. Die Offenbarung der sprechenden Seele*, 66.

[...] characteristic of sculptural form, so that the buildings are molded *en masse* and made to appear almost pliable.”<sup>400</sup>

Another modernist movement with which the first *Goetheanum* strongly resonated is Organicism. Contemporaries in this tradition include the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi (1852-1926), whose best known work is the cathedral Sagrada Familia whose forms evoke plants and trees. A later member of the tradition is Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). Dennis Sharp finds a parallel between the architecture of both *Goetheanum* buildings and the Berlin Utopians regarding the concept “that a building should be a living organism.”<sup>401</sup> He names in particular Hermann Finsterlin’s many drawings and articles of architectural form. Sharp argues, however, that in Finsterlin’s art the organic quality exists in the architectural space while Steiner emphasized organic surface areas.<sup>402</sup> In one instance Steiner talks of the *Goetheanum* as a living organism with living walls: “...hier wurde die Wand lebendig, ließ wie ein lebendiger Organismus Erhöhungen und Vertiefungen gegliedert aus sich herauswachsen.”<sup>403</sup> In Christa

---

<sup>400</sup> Sharp, *Modern Architecture and Expressionism*, 148. This now classic study of Expressionism does devote attention to Steiner, including many excellent photos and a discussion of the *Goetheanum* in the Expressionist context, and the influence of Goethe’s scientific work on Steiner. Despite Sharp’s insight into Steiner’s architectural program, however, he also makes a number of odd and critical associations. For example, he deems the building’s forms “powerfully erotic” and “perhaps unconscious fertility symbols.” Ibid., 147. Sharp also asserts that the roof of the first *Goetheanum* “bore an uncanny resemblance to German military headgear,” a particularly inappropriate appraisal considering how Steiner conceived of the *Goetheanum* as fostering peace. Ibid., 152. Also, worth noting is the more recent anthology *Expressionism Reassessed*, edited by Shulamith Behr, David Fanning and Douglas Jarman, ed. *Expressionism Reassessed* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993). The architecture of Swedish Anthroposophist Erik Asmussen is considered and Steiner’s second *Goetheanum* is linked to Mendelsohn’s *Einstein Tower* (1919).

<sup>401</sup> Sharp, *Modern Architecture and Expressionism*, 151.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 14.

Lichtenstern’ s book on the influence of Goethe’ s theory of metamorphosis on contemporaneous and later artists, she devotes a chapter to the first *Goetheanum*.<sup>404</sup> Caroline van Eck in her book on Organicism in the nineteenth century includes Steiner as one exemplar of organic architecture of the twentieth century. Van Eck argues that, “‘organic architecture’ in the twentieth century became the name of particular styles of building, such as those of Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto or Rudolf Steiner.”<sup>405</sup> While she acknowledges Steiner in this later temporal context, she marginalizes Steiner’ s contribution by arguing for a sharp distinction between nineteenth-century organicism and “it’ s very distant relative, twentieth-century organic architecture, which was often inspired by pseudo-philosophies such as theosophy or Rudolf Steiner’ s anthroposophy.” As I demonstrated in my first chapter, Steiner’ s aesthetics are deeply linked with a form of nineteenth century organicism via Goethean metamorphosis. Van Eck’ s need to downplay and dismiss Steiner’ s thought as a “pseudo-philosoph[y]”—despite how his thought is so significantly shaped by the nineteenth century thinker Goethe—is another instance of a strong tendency by mainstream scholars to marginalize Steiner.

In the lecture series “Stilformen des Organisch-Lebendigen” (1921), Steiner discusses his architecture in organicist terms. As already noted in the first chapter regarding his argument against naturalist art, Steiner repeatedly articulates that his aim is

---

<sup>404</sup> Lichtenstern argues that—unlike, for example, with the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841) where the concept of metamorphosis remains at the level of decoration—in Steiner’ s case, the concept is part of the very structure of the building and helps determine its sculptural quality. See chapter six of Christa Lichtenstern, *Die Wirkungsgeschichte der Metamorphosenlehre Goethes: von Philipp Otto Runge bis Joseph Beuys*, vol. 1, *Metamorphose in der Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Weinheim: VCH, 1990).

<sup>405</sup> Caroline van Eck, *Organicism in Nineteenth-Century Architecture: an Inquiry into its Theoretical and Philosophical Background* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 1994), 28.

not to imitate the external forms of nature but to access the organic creative principle. In one example, he contrasts his approach with a naturalistic one and argues that:

Man kann nicht, wie bloße Naturalisten tun, eine Stilform dadurch herausbekommen, daß man Blattartiges oder Blütenartiges oder Hornartiges oder Augenartiges nachahmt, sondern dadurch, daß man mit seinem eigenen Seelenleben in eine solche innere Bewegung sich versetzt, wie es dem Schaffen des Organischen entspricht.<sup>406</sup>

While Steiner rejects a simple imitation of outward appearances, he promotes a kind of inner mimicry in which the soul (“Seelenleben”) follows, through a form of inward movement, the organic creative forces. In another example, Steiner describes the style of the boiler room (“Heizhaus”), which has protruding forms on the chimney that liken smoke or perhaps leaf forms, as not expressing a plant or animal but the force of organic growth.<sup>407</sup> In the lecture series “Der Baugedanke von Dornach” (1920), Steiner uses organic analogies to describe the building’s walls as integrated into the building like fingers on a hand and, more generally, argues that the way that the parts relate to the whole building is analogous to the earlobe on the head.<sup>408</sup> Steiner’s organicist theory, like that of a number of his contemporaries, has spiritual underpinnings as it fits within

---

<sup>406</sup> Steiner, *Stilformen des Organisch-Lebendigen* (1921), 12. Van Eck argues that “Organicism is based on the conviction, generally held in artistic theory from antiquity to the end of the nineteenth century, that art should imitate nature, not with the aim of producing perfectly faithful copies but [...] conferring the qualities of living nature upon the products of man.” Eck, *Organicism in Nineteenth-Century Architecture: an Inquiry into its Theoretical and Philosophical Background*, 18. In the above quote from Steiner he expresses this same idea though in the overtly spiritual terms of accessing the creative, organic force through the soul.

<sup>407</sup> Steiner, *Stilformen des Organisch-Lebendigen* (1921), 12.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

his broader concept of the human being and nature as echoing of one another and as microcosms of the greater, spiritual macrocosm.<sup>409</sup>

### **Theories of Social Transformation through Architecture by Rudolf Steiner, Bruno Taut and Paul Scheerbart in the Context of Their Times**

In 1914, as part of the Werkbund exhibit in Cologne, Taut created the *Glashaus*, a polygonal prismatic glass pavilion, sometimes also called a temple.<sup>410</sup> It is Taut's best-known work and caused a sensation at the time. The structure had fourteen sides filled with glass bricks. On top of a concrete plinth was prismatic dome with a double

---

<sup>409</sup> Beat Wyss argues that the notion of man as a microcosmic version of the heavenly realm is a topos from ancient *Naturphilosophie* that was carried over by Gnostic teachings and taken up Steiner: "Der Mensch als mikrokosmisches Ebenbild der Himmelsphären ist ein Topos der antiken Naturphilosophie, der in gnostischen Lehren überliefert wurde, deren moderne Ausprägungen Theosophie und Anthroposophie sind." Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst: zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*, 146.

Iain Boyd argues that there is an inherent spirituality to many Organicist theories of the time. Hermann Finsterlin, a member of the *Gläserne Kette* group, drew myriad organic forms as prototypes for the new glass architecture. Boyd explains "the monist belief in the single, irreducible law uniting all matter, all faith and all belief" was part of Taut's inspiration. Whyte, "The Expressionist Sublime," 134.

<sup>410</sup> The *Deutscher Werkbund* was an association of architects, artists and industrialists founded in 1907 in Munich by the German architect Hermann Muthesius (1861-1927), the Belgian painter, architect and interior designer Henry van de Velde (1863-1957) and the politician Friedrich Naumann. Its goal was to bring together traditional crafts with the art of mass industry and develop Germany's status among its European peers. It was important in the history of Modernist architecture and a precursor to the Bauhaus.

skin of glass supported by a lattice of concrete ribs. On the lower level was a water cascade, and the upper level showed prisms and colored glass. The natural effects of the light on glass were accentuated by the use of a mechanical kaleidoscope. On the frieze of this structure were written aphorisms from Scheerbart on the virtues of glass. Sadly, this building was the first and last example of glass architecture as the war prevented further projects from manifesting.<sup>411</sup> As the war forced Taut into inactivity as an architect, he devoted his attention to creating theoretical and highly imaginative architectural drawings.<sup>412</sup> In 1917, Taut wrote *Alpine Architektur* (published in 1919) that includes thirty illustrations. In this work Taut combined his interests in pacifism, urban planning, communal ideals and spiritual interests to envision utopian images of glass cathedrals high in the Alps and structures made of colored glass. Notably, in this work Taut envisioned a city built by the community, an aim that was realized in Steiner's first *Goetheanum* as it was built by the volunteers and the help of many Anthroposophists, some of who took up residence there. Iain Boyd Whyte argues that the images in *Alpine Architektur* were "conceived both as a protest against the insanity of the war and as a pointer to a better society, which would devote its energies to peace and understanding

---

<sup>411</sup> Another noteworthy building constructed for this exhibition was the theatre constructed by Belgian architect Henry van de Velde. It was made of reinforced concrete and was well received by the public. Because of the war, van de Velde required special allowance by Konrad Adenauer, the mayor of Cologne, to take part in the exhibition. There is link with Steiner's second *Goetheanum* in the creation of a theater from reinforced concrete. Van de Velde's theater was closed permanently only three months after it's opening with the start of the war and he had to leave Germany.

<sup>412</sup> Whyte narrates that while there is little known about Taut's thoughts and activities during the war as most of Taut's private and business papers were destroyed in 1933. One can read from his letters that, after briefly being caught up in the feelings of elation in Germany at the war's outbreak, Taut became increasingly against the war. In letters he greatly lamented the death of talented artists from all countries. Whyte states that Taut starved himself so as to avoid conscription. Iain Boyd Whyte, *Bruno Taut and the Architecture of Activism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 44.



rather than self destruction.”<sup>413</sup> In *Die Stadtkrone* (1919), an anthology including contributions by Scheerbart, Erich Baron and Adolf Behne, Taut re-envisioned the European city by emphasizing a communal center modeled after the medieval cathedral or temple that was meant to transcend national and social differences. The work is dedicated to people of peace (“Den Friedfertigen”). A later important architectural initiative by Taut was the so-called Glass Chain (“Gläserne Kette”) group.<sup>414</sup>

Steiner shares with Taut and Scheerbart a conception of architecture as the prime medium able to facilitate the coming of a new era in which humans will find peace and harmony through a larger act of re-connection between humans, nature and the greater cosmos. It is important to note that there is a direct link between Steiner and Scheerbart

---

<sup>413</sup> Whyte, “The Expressionist Sublime,” 118. This folio of drawings was also created as a homage to Scheerbart who had died of a sudden stroke in the fall of 1915.

<sup>414</sup> The *Gläserne Kette* (1919-1920), sometimes called the “Utopian Correspondence,” was a chain-letter style correspondence initiated by Bruno Taut to circulate architectural ideas. The impetus for this correspondence was the German revolution of November 1918 and the hopes for political and cultural change that arose out of this event. In the early days of the revolution, Taut founded the *Arbeitsrat für kunst* with the aim that a group comprised of workers’ and soldiers’ councils could take power in the decentralized government. When this plan failed, Taut resigned as chairman of this group and was replaced by Walter Gropius. This group then merged with the larger *Novembergruppe*. Taut became later more critical of the potential of his art for societal change. Taut’s shift in attitude is seen in the fact that, in 1920, Taut added to the title page *Die Auflösung der Städte*: “Nur eine Utopie und eine kleine Unterhaltung.” When the Spartacist Revolt in 1919 was suppressed the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* ended its overtly political activities and turned instead to writing a series of letters. It involved fourteen people all of whom used pseudonyms to keep the correspondence out of the spotlight. For example, Taut called himself *Glas* and Gropius *Mass*. In addition to these two figures, other notable members included Bruno Taut’s brother Max, the brothers Hans and Wassili Luckhardt, Hans Scharoun, Hermann Finsterlin and Paul Goesch. The latter two are Anthroposophists. The activities of this group culminated in a 1920 exhibition called *Neues Bauen* under the auspices of the *Arbeitsrat* at Neumann’s Graphisches Kabinett. Many of the drawings that originated with this group were later published by Taut in his magazine *Frühlicht* (1920-1922). The attempts by Taut to have a more direct political impact have parallels with Steiner’s attempts to influence political efforts to bring a speedier end to the war and the Versailles Treaty negotiations. These will be discussed in the final section of the chapter.

as the latter was an admirer and student of Steiner's work and the two had met. It appears that the admiration was significantly more in the direction from Scheerbart toward Steiner. Steiner met with Scheerbart in 1899.<sup>415</sup> In his autobiography *Mein Lebensgang* (1925), Steiner describes Scheerbart as someone toward whom he felt affection but who was also a highly unusual person ("eine der eigenartigsten Persönlichkeiten").<sup>416</sup> Steiner deems Scheerbart's literary work as too focused on the grotesque and the fantastical and his spiritual understanding as caricaturing instead of penetrating spiritual realities. In one succinct formulation Steiner argues that Scheerbart did not develop "Phantasie" (or Imagination in the Steinerian sense of *Anschauung*) as Scheerbart "tat auch keinen Schritt von der Phantastik zur Phantasie."<sup>417</sup> Nevertheless, Scheerbart drew inspiration from Steiner's thought.

In Scheerbart's fiction *Glasarchitektur* (1914), a text from which Taut drew heavily for inspiration for the *Glashaus*, a world full of crystal cities and floating continents of colored glass is inhabited by peaceful people. In the very first aphorism entitled "Das Milieu und sein Einfluß auf die Entwicklung der Kultur," Scheerbart argues that cultural transformation requires architecture to change as well: "Wollen wir unsre [*sic*] Kultur auf ein höheres Niveau bringen, so sind wir wohl oder übel gezwungen,

---

<sup>415</sup> In the same year, he also met with Else Lasker-Schüler, Stefan Zweig, Käthe Kollwitz and Frank Wedekind, as well as members of the *Friedrichshagener Dichterkreis*, including Bruno Wille and Wilhelm Bölsche. See Kries, *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags*, 322.

<sup>416</sup> Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang. Eine Autobiographie*. 348. Steiner's autobiography was left unfinished and published by Marie von Sivers in 1925.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 349. Steiner does mention Scheerbart's novel *Tarub, Bagdads berühmte Köchin*, so presumably Steiner read at least part of this work. There are no reviews of other works by Scheerbart among the many literary reviews in Steiner's early *Magazin für Literatur* though contemporaneous writers such as Hermann Bahr are included.

unsre [*sic*] Architektur umzuwandeln.”<sup>418</sup> In a similar way to how Kandinsky ambitiously understood his art as helping to usher in a new, spiritual age, Steiner held the belief that architectural innovations, including his own, furthered the development of human evolution.<sup>419</sup> Steiner argues that the groundbreaking nature of his architecture lies in the way it draws from the spiritual dimension, yet in a manner fit for modern times, that is in a more conscious and active manner. In the following quote, the spiritual is formulated as that which comes from the soul (“aus den menschlichen Seelen”). Steiner argues that:

Etwas Neues haben wir auch zu schaffen in dem Sinne, daß wir in ganz anderem Stile noch als es in den verflossenen Zeiten der Fall war, in freier Selbsttätigkeit aus den menschlichen Seelen heraus schaffen müssen. Bewußtsein, das geboren ist mit der Bewußtseinsseele, welche das Charakteristikon unseres Zeitenkyklus ist, das ist die Signatur unserer Zeit.<sup>420</sup>

With this somewhat abstruse formulation of creating out of the soul and “in freier Selbsttätigkeit” Steiner alludes to a key idea of his theory of modern culture. As already touched upon in the discussion of Steiner’s dialectical theory of the “evolution of consciousness” in the second chapter, Steiner asserted that in ancient times people had a direct, and more immediate but also less conscious link with the spiritual dimension. Steiner held that in modern times, the third stage of the dialectic, people are divorced from this dimension but can learn to access it through active, self-motivated initiative. This idea is expressed in the following quote about the task of Anthroposophy: “wir [können] eine Empfindung davon erhalten, wie im alten Griechenland noch durchaus die

---

<sup>418</sup> Scheerbart, *Glasarchitektur*, 11.

<sup>419</sup> Steiner asserts: “Würde man so etwas nicht zu verschiedenen Zeitpunkten gewagt haben, so gäbe es keinen Fortschritt in der Entwicklung der Menschheit.” Steiner, *Der Baugedanke von Dornach* (1920), 149.

<sup>420</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 19.

Überlieferung rege war und teilweise das unmittelbare Wissen von dem, was wir jetzt wiederum anstreben durch unsere Geisteswissenschaft.”<sup>421</sup> Steiner held that architecture was one of the best media for this kind of modern, active re-uniting with the spiritual dimension.

In the lecture series held twelve weeks after the outbreak of the war, Steiner argues, in a highly idealistic way, that the contemplation of artistic forms, such as the series of columns, will facilitate recognition of shared humanity and hate will turn into mutual understanding: “die Menschen aller Kulturgemeinschaften [werden] sich gegenseitig verstehen, sich gegenseitig liebevoll umschließen.”<sup>422</sup> In his short story “Das Neue Leben. Architektonische Apokalypse” found in Taut’s anthology *Die Stadtkrone* Scheerbart tells of a new, colorful and classless world that arises from a dark, frozen Earth when angels take glistening, bejeweled palaces from their backpacks and place them all over its surface. The palaces emit colorful light all over the snowy earth. The transformation is described in religious terms, as when Scheerbart talks of those buried in the ground coming back to eternal life, an allusion to resurrection: “durch die nagende Schwermut des kalten Erdballs ringt sich ein neues Leben durch—das ewige Leben! Die Toten stehen auf.”<sup>423</sup> The transformation also entails a leveling of all class differences: “Die Bettler gehen neben den Königen, die Priester neben den Kriegern, die Handwerker neben den Gelehrten.”<sup>424</sup> In *Alpine Architektur*, Taut expresses an equally dramatic architectural fantasy with a clear pacifist message when he proposes the construction of a

---

<sup>421</sup> Steiner, *Weltenwunder, Seelenprüfungen und Geistesoffenbarungen* (1911). 24.

<sup>422</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelimpulse* (1914), 287, 56.

<sup>423</sup> Bruno Taut, *Die Stadtkrone* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2002), 11.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*

building on top of Montblanc, the highest of the Alpine peaks. He argues that its impracticality is its key virtue as a focus on utility has led to technological advancement but also war: “Ja, unpraktisch u./ ohne Nutzen!Aber/sind wir vom Nütz-/lichen glücklich ge-/worden?-Immer/Nutzen und Nutzen:/Comfort, Bequemlich-/keit, gutes Essen,/Building-Messer,/Gabel, Eisenbah-/nen, Closets und/ doch auch—/Kanonen, Bomben/ Mordgeräte!”<sup>425</sup>

Scheerbart conceived of colored, transparent glass as a medium especially conducive to creating a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. In the first aphorism from this work, Scheerbart argues that transparent glass allows the overcoming of the enclosed quality so that the building is open and can interact with nature:

Und dieses wird uns nur dann möglich sein, wenn wir den Räumen, in denen wir leben, das Geschlossene nehmen. Das aber können wir nur durch Einführung der Glasarchitektur, die das Sonnenlicht und das Licht des Mondes and der Sterne nicht nur durch ein paar Fenster in die Räume läßt—sondern gleich durch möglichst viele Wände, die ganz aus Glas sind—aus farbigen Gläsern.<sup>426</sup>

Steiner did not have a theory of glass, and the first *Goetheanum* was noteworthy for its nearly complete reliance on wood.<sup>427</sup> Steiner did, however, argue for a form of transparency. Instead of transparency derived through medium, he argues for a form of artistic and spiritual transparency that was enacted through the painted motifs on the walls and also through the colored stained glass windows. The effect allowed the

---

<sup>425</sup> This is an excerpt from an aphorism by Taut entitled “Aufruf an die Europäer.” See Matthias Schirren, *Alpine Architektur. Eine Utopie* (Munich: Prestel, 2004), 72.

<sup>426</sup> Scheerbart, *Glasarchitektur*, 11.

<sup>427</sup> In the twenty-first aphorism of *Glasarchitektur* Scheerbart argues that all materials are justified if they are durable but deems wood and brick as not justified as the former can be destroyed by fire and the latter by an explosive device, a consideration clearly incited by wartimes. *Ibid.*, 32.

building to transcend its physical boundaries and feel open to the greater world. The quote below bears striking resemblance to the previous one from Taut:

die Wände sind in Dornach so gestaltet, daß sie gewissermaßen künstlerisch durchsichtig sind, daß man also, indem man in dem Bau drinnen ist, sich nicht abgeschlossen fühlt. Es öffnen sich gewissermaßen alle Wände durch die künstlerischen Motive nach der ganzen großen Welt, und man tritt in diesen Bau mit dem Bewußtsein ein, daß man nicht in einem Bau, sondern in der Welt ist: die Wände sind durchsichtig. Und das ist in diesen Glasfenstern bis zum Physischen hinein durchgeführt: sie sind erst ein Kunstwerk, wenn die Sonne hindurchscheint. Mit dem Sonnenstrahl zusammen gibt das, was der Künstler geschaffen hat, erst das Künstlerische.<sup>428</sup>

With the description of the interplay of the artist and the sun, we see Steiner's greater vision of the unity between microcosm and macrocosm, and between the human realm and nature, expressed artistically. It is also notable that twice in the above quote Steiner mentions the necessity of the presence of the human being in the building in order to realize the aesthetic effect. This suggests a difference in how Steiner conceptualizes the relationship of human to nature to the views Taut and Scheerbart put forward in their writings. For the latter two artists, it seems the media alone—glass and color—are seen as possessing artistically and culturally transformative power. This is why palaces and other structures of colored, translucent glass can be envisioned on mountain peaks or in locations that would be difficult or impossible for humans to access. In Steiner's theory, in contrast, the transparency of the walls and windows is an aesthetic and spiritual experience that transpires when a person enters the building with a certain aesthetic consciousness (“mit dem Bewußtsein”).

A final link between Steiner and Taut I would like to illuminate before I discuss Steiner's theory of cultural harmony, what he sometimes called the “Harmonie aller

---

<sup>428</sup> Steiner, *Der Baugedanke von Dornach* (1920), 101.

Kulturgemeinschaften,” is the emphasis on residential communities. As already mentioned above, Wolfgang Pehnt pointed out that the first *Goetheanum* realized the vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* dreamed of by the group of revolutionary architects in Berlin, which included Scheerbarth and Taut. Furthermore, Pehnt also asserted that the first *Goetheanum* manifested the Expressionist vision of combining a drama festival with a residential community and religious building. I would like to show a further link in the way that both Steiner and Taut envisioned their buildings as serving those wounded or killed in the war and in housing the disabled, a focus that shows deep concern for the consequences of war and, more generally, for those less able.

In the early weeks of the war, Steiner gave a series of lectures that included first aid training to prepare the *Goetheanum* inhabitants to tend to the war wounded. Cots were set up in the *Goetheanum*.<sup>429</sup> In an article entitled “Die Vererdung” (1917), Taut proposed eschewing traditional coffins or cremation and instead allowing bodies to decompose in the earth. This earth would then be used for special gardens, without names, in which exotic flowers would take the place of plaques, headstones or monuments. In an article “Krieger-Ehrung” (1915), Taut proposed homes for the wounded that would be in a public park and called the complex “Gartenstadt Falkenberg.”<sup>430</sup> Taut imagined it surrounded by museums and theaters and containing workshops, libraries and common rooms so that the inhabitants would be connected with greater society and also have productive activities. This housing complex for the

---

<sup>429</sup> See the following lecture series for more information. Steiner, *Das Geheimnis der Wunde. Aufzeichnungen zum sogenannten Samariterkurs gehalten von Rudolf Steiner in Dornach vom 13-16 August 1914*, Hft Nr. 108.

<sup>430</sup> For further discussion of these initiatives by Taut and a drawing of the Gartenstadt Falkenberg see the chapter “Regeneration” in Whyte, *Bruno Taut and the Architecture of Activism*, 49-51.

wounded and disabled showed resonances with the Camphill community, a residential program for the mentally handicapped and others with special needs, begun in 1939 in Aberdeen, Scotland by the Austrian pediatrician and Anthroposophist Karl König. It is now a worldwide movement with over 100 communities in over twenty countries, including Europe, North America, southern Africa and India.

Steiner's architectural theory also resonates with that of Scheerbart and Taut because of the way all three understood the medium of architecture as able to foster peace and due to Scheerbart's strong interest in Steiner. I would argue, however, that in another fundamental way Steiner's architectural oeuvre is quite different from that of the others: he does not emphasize the transcendent aspect nearly as much. Scheerbart, Taut and their circle created myriad architectural visions that were not realized and often times unrealizable, as in the case of visions of cathedrals transcending physical boundaries to sit atop mountain peaks. Without the ability to create habitable spaces, due to the stark restrictions on building during the war in Germany, Taut and Scheerbart created architectural fantasies that allowed them to transcend all limits to express their visions of a world made peaceful again through dramatic aesthetic interventions.

In Switzerland, by contrast, Steiner had the freedom to bring his building to fruition, though the war did compel him to greatly reduce his lecturing. Steiner's theory of evolution has aspects that seem similar the fantastical ideas of Scheerbart. These include the way Steiner's theory of the evolution of human history entails a dramatically long understanding of time and space—in far earlier epochs Steiner envisioned world development transpiring on other planets. Also, as we saw, Steiner greatly admired the Gothic cathedral for the way it was able to move dramatically outward and he understood



the painted walls of the *Goetheanum* as artistically transparent and open to nature and the cosmos. Steiner did not, however, create such architectural visions of buildings atop mountains and it also fits that he found Scheerbart's work too fantastical.

Transcendence was not the ultimate goal of Steiner's architecture. A small structural detail of the first *Goetheanum* is indicative of his point: the two domes of the first *Goetheanum*—one expressing the earthly and the other the spiritual—are interpenetrating.<sup>431</sup> As I argue in my first chapter, it was important in Steiner's vision that the spiritual finds its way back to the earthly.

### **Steiner's Theory of his Architecture as Promoting Peace and the Special Role of Central Europe**

Steiner envisioned the first *Goetheanum* as promoting peace and intercultural understanding. A central aspect of this theory is the notion that intercultural understanding is reached through recognition of both the distinct nature and task of each cultural group, but also how each group is interwoven to create a shared history. Clearly, the notion that each culture has a distinct nature and task can be read as normative in nature. Key to this sense of shared history for Steiner is an understanding of the "evolution of consciousness," and the way that each culture led a specific epoch and helped the development of one of the spiritual sheaths that together comprise the spiritual

---

<sup>431</sup> See Pehnt's description of the importance Steiner expressed on having the two domes penetrate one another: "A greater distance between the two domes would have meant their isolation from one another and hence of the 'physical' from the 'spiritual'; any closer and they would have lost their identity: the 'physical' would have been swallowed up in the 'spiritual.'" Pehnt, *Expressionist Architecture*, 139.

makeup of each human being.<sup>432</sup> I argue that the framework of Steiner’ s theory involves a process of layering of different forms of history—cultural history, art and architectural history and spiritual or psychic history.

A central part of Steiner’ s theory is the argument that Central Europe had a special role in helping to overcome nationalism. This theory is not fully fleshed out and contains inner contradictions; however, it shows Steiner’ s attempts to reconcile his belief in internationalism coupled with his advocacy of Central Europe as part of the vanguard of the modern period. I also touch upon the practical, political attempts Steiner made to hasten a swifter end to the war and to influence peace negotiations at Versailles. The last section of the chapter concerns how Steiner as an artist created forms that were meant to express, and even help facilitate his vision of internationalism and cultural harmony. I introduce two art forms: the series of carved columns each with a different motif meant to represent one of the seven cultures important in Steiner’ s history of cultural evolution and the painted motifs adorning the smaller cupola that contain archetypal figures from different cultures. Steiner held that aesthetic contemplation of forms that express the evolution of culture would ignite recognition of this shared cultural and spiritual history.

---

<sup>432</sup> Steiner speaks of the human being as composed of many sheaths. In addition to the tripartite division of body, soul and spirit that Steiner borrows from early Christianity, he conceived of further subcomponents. These include three sheaths more linked with the earth and three higher principles that are only in their nascent state. The “I” is in the center. The “I” eventually disappears and is substituted by the three soul types known as the sentient soul, the intellectual soul and the consciousness soul. Particular cultures are understood as more connected with these sheaths. The Spanish and Italian culture is linked with the sentient soul, the French culture with the intellectual soul and the British culture with the consciousness soul. For more details on Steiner’ s complex schema of the spiritual makeup of the human being see the first chapter of Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophie: Einführung in übersinnliche Welterkenntnis und Menschenbestimmung.*, vol. GA 09 (2010) (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 1904), 7-36.

In my analysis, I note that there is an abiding tension, especially for the twenty-first century reader, in Steiner's cultural outlook. This is due to the fact that he is oriented toward peace and internationalism and yet still thinks in certain essentializing ways. On the one hand, Steiner is part of a small minority in the early years of the war to speak against nationalism and to conceive of his architecture as promoting this goal. Also, he often had a very inclusive definition of what comprises the central European culture. In his later attempts to influence political decisions for peace, we see how earnestly invested he was in this aim. In addition, Steiner's history of culture cannot be deemed Euro-centric as the cultures of ancient Persia, India and Egypt comprise three of the seven main "post-Atlantean" epochs. Also, the trajectory of Steiner's cultural evolution does not simply move from East to West as it advances over time because Steiner envisions a coming epoch after the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic period in which the Slavic peoples will be the vanguard culture.<sup>433</sup>

On the other hand, especially from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, Steiner's approach has essentializing and elitist qualities. Similar to other contemporaneous theories of cultural evolution by German philosopher of history Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) and Karl August Wittfogel (1896-1988), Steiner's understanding of the history of culture rests on the assumption that there is universal consensus that each culture has one, distinct nature and that cultures rise and fall as part of a process

---

<sup>433</sup> See the first chapter for a discussion of the interest of many Russian symbolists in Theosophy and in Steiner in particular as one of multiple thinkers who discussed the Apocalypse in the Revelation to John as an important document in modern times. Steiner gave lectures to a group of Russian expats, a number of whom lived in Germany and in Munich in particular and many of whom also intersected with Kandinsky. A number of Russians, including the author Andrei Bely, wrote memoirs of their time in Dornach.

akin to the human stages of youth, maturity and old age. In addition, while he does include non-Western cultures into his far-reaching history of culture, the three non-Western cultures of Persia, India and Egypt all are seen as representing *leading civilizations* in the distant past.<sup>434</sup> Steiner ignores the rest of Africa and any area of Asia, though as he only chooses seven cultural groups one can argue much of the Western world is also ignored. The way Steiner uses quite broad strokes to create a schematic and very long history of art and culture has echoes with the art historical approach of Wilhelm Worringer. The latter, for example, constructed the following expansive categories of people who relied on “abstract” art: “Naturvölker,” “primitive,” and “Oriental” people. Also, as was often the case with German-speaking thinkers of his time, Steiner holds classical antiquity and Gothic architecture in especially high esteem and there is an implicit appraisal that these periods represent the pinnacle of aesthetic achievement.<sup>435</sup>

In response to nationalistic outbursts from outside of and within Dornach, Steiner held the lecture cycle entitled “Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens” in which he speaks of the great need for cultural collaboration. He draws the

---

<sup>434</sup> In one instance from the 1914 lecture series called the “Samariterkurs,” Steiner speaks of folk spirits (“Volksgeister”) and argues that some are more mature than others. He gives the analogy of a family for the way the cultures interrelate. To speak of one culture as the father and another as the child, and to identify the German folk spirit as older than the Russian, will certainly have a patronizing ring to many twenty-first century ears. Steiner asserts that “[g]ewisse Volksgeister sind älter als andere, die jünger sind (zum Beispiel der russische Volksgeist ist der jüngste, der deutsche älter und so weiter). Aber wir wissen, daß zum Beispiel in einer Familie der Vater, die Mutter und die Kinder verschiedenen Alters sind, und doch herrscht in der Familie Harmonie und Frieden.” See Steiner, *Das Geheimnis der Wunde. Aufzeichnungen zum sogenannten Samariterkurs gehalten von Rudolf Steiner in Dornach vom 13-16 August 1914*, Hft Nr. 108, 23.

<sup>435</sup> See the second chapter for Steiner’s especially glowing formulations about classical antiquity.

analogy between the different European cultures relating to one another as members of a great chorus: “das Zusammenklingen der nachatlantischen Kulturen wie in einem Chore.”<sup>436</sup> Instead of exhorting countries to unify by forgetting their differences, however, Steiner argues that each culture has a distinct role in the larger evolution of humankind. He holds that it is the recognition of the nature of one’s own cultural group and its place within the greater progression of cultural history that helps to overcome nationalism. Thus, Steiner argues that intercultural unity happens through the perception of the singularity of each culture.

Steiner’s cultural history is linked to his concept of the “evolution of consciousness.” According to this theory, during each of the large historical epochs a certain part of the soul is developed. Each of the soul bodies Steiner conceived of as an individual entity within each person; at the same time, all of the bodies are understood as universally, or collectively, shared among all of humanity. In each epoch a certain culture represents the vanguard of this soul stage.<sup>437</sup> Thus, in the lecture series “Wege zu einem neuen Baustil ‘ Und der der Bau wird Mensch, ’ ” given between 1911 and 1914,

---

<sup>436</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 30-31.

<sup>437</sup> The second lecture of “*Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*” contains a helpful summary of Steiner’s “evolution of consciousness,” as Owen Barfield called it. See Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*. As already introduced in chapter two, Steiner’s cultural theory is based on the idea that there were five main evolutionary epochs that map to some degree onto standard geological epochs. They are called, chronologically, the Polarian, Hyperborean, Lemurian, Atlantean and Post-Atlantean epochs. Steiner asserted that we are currently living in the Post-Atlantean epoch, which itself is comprised of seven cultural ages. These ages, each lasting approximately 2,160 years, are the following: Indian [7227-5067 BC]; Persian [5067-2907 BC]; Egypto-Chaldean-Babylonian [2907 BC-747 AD]; Greco-Roman [747 AD-1413 AD]; Anglo-Saxon and Germanic [1413-3573 AD]; Russian-Slavic [3573-5733] and American Age [5733-7893]. See Chapter Four, “Die Weltentwicklung und der Mensch” in Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* (1910), GA 13.

Steiner argues that the history of architecture expresses the soul's evolution. In the second lecture great architectural structures are conceived as manifestations of their spiritual epoch. To cite two examples, the Egyptian pyramids are regarded as an outward expression of the Egyptian culture of the sentient soul (“Ausdruck der ägyptischen Empfindungsseelenkultur”) and the Gothic dome is called a representation of the culture of the consciousness soul (“Der gotische Dom als Repräsentant der Bewußtseinsseelenkultur”).<sup>438</sup> To summarize the difference between the “Empfindungsseele” and the “Bewußtseinsseele,” one can say that in the former case consciousness is more open to the world and actually experiences the ideal more externally in a perceptual manner while, in contrast, in the latter case consciousness is more internalized and the ideal is experienced as an idea.

Steiner speaks in analogous way about well-known literary figures embodying the culmination, the example *par excellence*, of the soul stage of that epoch. In the second lecture from the series held only weeks after the outbreak of war, Molière, Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and Dante are discussed. By lauding the French playwright Molière, to cite one example, Steiner argues that Molière is *sui generis* and attributes his unique contribution to the fact that it is a manifestation of the intellectual or “mind” soul that reached maturity during this period (“Da ist der Gipfel des Wesens derjenigen

---

<sup>438</sup> Steiner, *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*, 7. For a helpful summary of Steiner's theory of soul evolution, see especially the first and second lectures in this cycle. Steiner says that the “Empfindungsleib ganz besonders seine Entwicklung erfahren hat in der urpersischen Kultur, die Empfindungsseele in der ägyptisch-chaldäischen Kultur, die Verstandes- oder Gemütsseele in der griechisch-römischen Zeit, die Bewußtseinsseele in der Zeit, in der wir selbst leben, und daß wir den nächsten Zeitraum sozusagen als in seiner Entstehung schon jetzt herankommen sehen, ja, daß wir selber mit dem, was wir als Anthroposophie, Theosophie wollen, an dem Herankommen dieses nächsten Zeitraumes arbeiten, der uns in einer gewissen Weise den Zusammenhang von Bewußtseinsseele und Geistselbst oder Manas zeigen soll. Ibid., 31.

Kultur, die aus der Verstandes- oder Gemütsseele herausquillt”).<sup>439</sup> In the first lecture of this same cycle, Steiner discusses Homer as representing, in the character of Agamemnon, the soul transition in ancient Greece between knowledge gained through atavistic clairvoyance to the epoch where people draw on their own human intelligence, using the “Verstandesseele” or Gemütsseele.”<sup>440</sup> Considering the timing soon after the war’ s outbreak, it was a bold move by Steiner to extoll great authors who hailed from then enemy countries.<sup>441</sup>

Thus the underlying framework of Steiner’ s theory involves a process of bringing together a number of layers of history such that they map onto one another. These separate but highly interconnected layers include cultural history, art and architectural history, and spiritual or psychic history with the development of the different stages of the soul. Often Steiner’ s art is meant to express the evolution of organic growth. As we will see in the last section with the discussion of the carved motifs adorning the series of columns, Steiner also conceives of each column as representing one of the seven main cultural epochs and, simultaneously, each column also is meant to manifest a stage in the Goethean process of the metamorphosis of the plant. Depending on the subject he is addressing in a given instance, Steiner may argue from the perspective of an art historian, an architectural historian or historian of the psyche, as when discussing the stages of the soul. Yet, within Steiner’ s theoretical apparatus, it is

---

<sup>439</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 30-31.

<sup>440</sup> See the first lecture *ibid.*, 9-19.

<sup>441</sup> It should also be noted that there is a certain elitism inherent in the way Steiner’ s version of history chooses a few, best-known and male figures stand as the representatives of a whole cultural at a certain time period. This is part of the tension within Steiner’ s outlook that can take this historical approach and, at the same time, argue for intercultural understanding at a time when few were doing so.

not accurate to say these layers are ever separate. Ultimately, all of these layers co-exist and develop simultaneously. If one layer stands in the foreground that is human consciousness. For Steiner, as discussed at some length in Chapter Two, human consciousness and its development is never separate from but, in fact, drives all other forms of history, whether cultural or artistic. Thus, I do not understand Steiner as exhibiting a combinatory logic, as that would mean that the layers are at some point separate and then later combined. It can also be said that there is a way in which Steiner's layering approach involves a conflation of the different forms of history. That is, because spiritual development or the "evolution of consciousness" is the guiding principle underlying how all other forms of history progress, disparate forms of history—whether art history, architectural history or cultural history—Steiner looks at all of these forms as reflections of the "evolution of consciousness" and not as separate disciplines in their own right. Steiner is, at his core, a synthetic thinker. When he speaks in terms of art history or cultural history, for example, he has to tease apart these layers of history that for him ultimately belong together. We can picture his theory as involving multiple, translucent layers that are mapped on to one another such that all can be seen at the same time, and yet each layer is also perceptible individually.

### **Steiner's Concept of the Modern Central European Cultural Mission as both Distinct and Inherently Internationalist**

In the lecture series from 1914 "Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Umwandlungsimpulse," Steiner talks of Germany as part of a much greater Central European culture. He argues that, due to its



inherently culturally heterogeneous and changing nature, Central Europeans cannot be nationalistic. In the third lecture of this series, Steiner speaks of a central European culture (“mitteleuropäische Kultur”) that encompasses many more cultures beyond the geographical confines of Germany, including Czech, Slovenian and Polish, as seen in a quote on the following page:

In dieser mitteleuropäischen nachatlantischen Kulturepoche schließen sich ja seit vielen Jahrhunderten die verschiedensten nationalen Elemente zusammen, und [...] macht es unmöglich, bei dieser mitteleuropäischen Kultur in demselben Sinne von einer “nationalen” Kultur zu sprechen, wie gesprochen werden muß von einer nationalen Kultur bei den südlichen und westlichen Völkern Europas.<sup>442</sup>

In another example from the third lecture, Steiner speaks of a central European culture (“die mitteleuropäische Kultur”) that replaces a single nationality to include a whole host of different people who Steiner all views as typified by a striving for individuality:

Wenn wir für die mitteleuropäische Kultur nach einem Worte suchen, das wir an die Stelle des Wortes ‘ Nationalität’ setzen müssen, so finden wir, schon rein angesichts der geographischen Notwendigkeit, das Wort ‘ Streben nach Individualität’ . Und mit diesem Wort ‘ Streben nach Individualität’ können wir nicht etwa bloß die Deutschen charakterisieren, sondern da müssen wir noch eine ganze Anzahl von anderen Völkern zu Mitteleuropa rechnen. Dieses Streben nach Individualität haben sie alle in allerhöchstem Maße. Wir finden es - trotz allem, was diese Völker äußerlich verschiedenes haben - bei den Tschechen, bei den Ruthenen, bei den Slowaken, bei den Magyaren, und wir finden es endlich in dem anderen Pole des Deutschtums, bei den Polen.<sup>443</sup>

The argument that a cultural orientation toward individuality acts as a buffer against

---

<sup>442</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 9-19.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 38. Note that Frederick Amrine helps illuminate the puzzling comment in this quote arguing that Poland represents the opposite pole of Germany. Amrine says that this comment is a “confusing aside, given that this paragraph otherwise argues for a shared Central European identity. Steiner may be referring obliquely here to the Polish Messianism discussed in the following paragraph.” Steiner, *The First Goetheanum. Architecture as Peacework*, GA 287, 10.

nationalism is not a case that all would make. One could argue, for example, that contemporary United States politics emphasizes both individuality and a love of country, a sentiment clearly tinged with nationalism. Steiner's claim, however, rests on the idea that the geographical closeness of all of the central European countries and the way cultures are so robustly intermixed means the identification with an individual nation is not possible. Though not stated explicitly in this passage, another reason beyond geography that caused Steiner to view Central Europeans as inherently oriented toward individuality is that he understands this as a central aim of the current, modern epoch with the development of the "Ego." In addition, the notion of striving ("Streben"), which recurs repeatedly in this lecture as an inherently central European trait, implies an existential state that is always in process and never reaches its goal, a form of perpetual becoming. Steiner chooses to argue for a striving nature instead of positing that other more fixed traits distinguish and separate Central Europe from its neighbors. The following is another example of how Steiner emphasizes the act of *striving* itself as particularly Central European. Steiner characterizes this culture as being particularly fluid and resistant to classification and any fixed concepts. Clearly, in these examples Steiner is arguing strongly against the power of nationalism:

Es liegt in dem Streben der Bewohner Mitteleuropas etwas, was eben durchaus als "Streben etwas zu werden" bezeichnet werden muß, und nicht schon als ein "Streben etwas zu sein." [...]in diesem Mitteleuropa der Mensch, der sich selbst versteht, sich eigentlich auflehnen müßte dagegen, jemals unter irgendeinen Begriff notifiziert zu werden.<sup>444</sup>

Immediately following the above quote, Steiner argues that Goethe's *Faust* is the quintessential Central European figure. Steiner quotes multiple passages from *Faust* that

---

<sup>444</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287.

talk about the virtue of constant striving.<sup>445</sup> He argues that *Faust* is the embodiment of the fluid and ever-striving nature of the Central European, but that it would be incorrect to call Faust “German” (“Daher wäre es auch lächerlich, den “Faust” einen “Deutschen” zu nennen, obwohl er nur in Mitteleuropa entstehen konnte”).<sup>446</sup> This is an important assertion not only for the focus on the unfinished, fluid nature of “striving” but also because it is an example of Steiner reading the Faustian figure, often thought of as quintessentially German, as not German(ic) but as Central European.

Steiner not only evokes literary associations in characterizing the Central European character, but also details the historical emigration of different German-speaking exile communities who moved from west to east within the large geographic area that is Central Europe. Steiner shows deep historical knowledge of the many ethnic groups.<sup>447</sup> He argues that many groups that moved to other regions brought their German language and thought but were willing to give up a tight hold on their German identity. In one example, Steiner talks of the Carpathians in northern Hungary who have largely been assimilated by Magyar culture, though their culture still lives on significantly within the Magyar culture. What Steiner holds as important is that such cultures did not resist giving up their “Germanness” (“Deutschtum”): “ Sie haben keine Anspruch erhoben,

---

<sup>445</sup> One of multiple quotes Steiner cites is from *Faust*, Part II. These are lines said by the Angels after Faust’s death: “Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, den können wir erlösen.”

<sup>446</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 36-37.

<sup>447</sup> Steiner’s work *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen. Das Karma der Unwahrhaftigkeit. Teil I* (1916), also shows Steiner’s deep historical understanding of the region. See especially Lecture Three where he discusses the complex ethnic makeup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the myriad types of Slavic groups that co-existed in this region. See Rudolf Steiner, *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen. Das Karma der Unwahrhaftigkeit. Teil I* (1916), vol. 173, *Kosmische und Menschliche Geschichte* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1978).

etwas Besonderes zu sein neben den umwohnenden Völkerschaften, sie haben sich im Grunde genommen nicht gewehrt gegen die Hinopferung des Deutschtums.”<sup>448</sup> Steiner interprets this cultural assimilation as a move that transcends nationalism and accesses a more fundamental human state: “Es ist in Mitteleuropa durchaus alles darauf angelegt, den Menschen aus dem Nationalen herauszuholen, den “Menschen an sich” geltend zu machen.”<sup>449</sup> The argument for an underlying universal experience, here formulated as the recognition of the “Menschen an sich” is key to Steiner’s cultural theory.

The concept that the Central European culture is inherently anti-nationalist is not one that Steiner suddenly developed at the start of the war but instead has much older roots. For example, in a piece written in 1888 in *Die Deutsche Wochenschrift* Steiner argues that Germans have a cultural task that is the antithesis of national chauvinism: “Die Deutschen kämpfen für eine Kulturaufgabe, die ihnen durch ihre nationale Entwicklung aufgegeben wurde, und was ihnen in diesem Kampfe gegenübersteht, ist nationaler Chauvinismus.”<sup>450</sup> More broadly, in early writings before 1900, one also finds Steiner concerned with international issues and showing strong support of non-Germanic issues. For example, in an article in an issue of the *Magazin für Literatur* from 1898, Steiner praises journalist Émile Zola for his work to defend Alfred Dreyfus. Steiner has high praise for what he calls, “die Seele des großen Schriftstellers, des tapferen, bewundernswerten Kämpfers für Wahrheit und Rechtlichkeit.”<sup>451</sup> As another link

---

<sup>448</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandlungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 36.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Zeitgeschichte 1887-1901*, vol. 31 (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989), 116.

<sup>451</sup> See Rudolf Steiner, “Zolas Schwur und die Wahrheit über Dreyfus (1898),” in *Magazin für Literatur* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989), 230.

between Steiner and his anti-war contemporaries, Heinrich Mann wrote the famous essay “Zola” (1915) in which he praised Zola for the defense of Dreyfus. Mann also argues for the superiority of French over German values and that the forces of capitalism and industrialism helped to create the conditions for the First World War.<sup>452</sup>

In a different example from Steiner, he makes the case that based on his personal biography he is naturally oriented away from nationalism and toward what he calls homelessness (“Heimatlosigkeit”). Steiner argues that his childhood experience of living in Austria and experiencing first-hand the hostility toward non-native Austrians afforded him a measure of objectivity regarding this topic.

Geboren bin ich ja in demjenigen Reiche, von dem man sagt, daß es so viel beigetragen habe zu dem Völkerrkriege; aber herangewachsen, sehe ich, daß ich schon in der Kindheit zur Heimatlosigkeit bestimmt war. Ich hatte keine Gelegenheit, die eigentümlichen Gefühle des Zusammenhangs mit den Land- und Volksgenossen selbst zu erleben. Außerdem fiel meine Kindheit in die Zeit, wo ich in Österreich selbst den Deutschenhaß kennenlernte, wo Deutsch-Österreich noch stand unter dem Eindruck der Siege Preußens, wo auch die Deutschen in Österreich die Reichsdeutschen haßten. Eine Voreingenommenheit für Deutschland in mir zu erzeugen, war keine Gelegenheit. Diese Heimatlosigkeit, die mir durch mein Karma gegeben worden ist, berechtigt mich, objektiv zu sprechen[...].<sup>453</sup>

---

<sup>452</sup> Heinrich Mann, *Zola* (1915) (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1962).

<sup>453</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Die geistigen Hintergründe des Ersten Weltkrieges (1914-1921)*, vol. 174b (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1992), 16. Also, in the introduction to the new English translation of Steiner’s GA 287, John Kettle provides more detail into Steiner’s childhood in ethnically diverse areas of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his experience being regarded as a foreigner by Hungarian-speaking classmates. Kettle describes, “Steiner was born in Kraljevec and raised until age eight there and in other villages in the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia, a nominally autonomous, ethnically Croatian and Serbian kingdom within the empire. When he was eight, his father’s promotion to stationmaster took the family to Neudörfel in Hungary, where as a German-speaking Austrian he was again regarded as a foreigner, this time by his Hungarian-speaking school fellows. Treated as an outsider, he knew at first-hand the resentment that citizens who didn’t speak German felt for the co-governing Austrians.” Steiner, *The First Goetheanum. Architecture as Peacework*, GA 287, 4.

Also related to the topic of “Heimatlosigkeit,” Steiner made the argument that in many occult traditions there is a stage of the homeless man in which the person rids herself of all national associations in order to connect with universal laws.<sup>454</sup>

Beginning in 1915, Steiner held another series of lectures in which he continues to argue for internationalism, but in this case, suddenly speaks of the German, and not Central European culture as central to this mission. In some ways, this is a surprising and problematic lecture series, not least because Steiner repeatedly references Fichte’s “Reden an die deutsche Nation” (1808) to proffer his idea on transcending national boundaries, without ever acknowledging that Fichte’s essay has been widely read as a nationalistic tract. Some of the formulations are also jarring in the way that Steiner speaks in essentializing ways of a quintessentially German spirit, but at the same time understands this spirit as facilitating internationalism. These lectures to give a fuller picture of Steiner’s thought during the time of war. Despite its inner contradictions, Steiner never spoke in a jingoistic manner of some of his contemporaries, such as Thomas Mann with his early work “Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen” (1915-1918). Steiner’s lectures also show that his dedication to theorizing a concept of internationalism continued beyond the earliest days of the war. A central argument advanced in this lecture series is that Germany is a *Kulturnation*, a category that Steiner places in direct opposition to a militaristic country. Steiner is far from unique in calling Germany a *Kulturnation* and there are some clear shortcomings in the way he makes this

---

<sup>454</sup> See the first lecture, “Die Mission einzelner Volksseelen im Zusammenhange mit der Germanisch-Nordischen Mythologie” in the 1910 lecture cycle held in present-day Oslo, Norway Rudolf Steiner, *Die Mission einzelner Volksseelen im Zusammenhange mit der germanisch-nordisch Mythologie* (Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, 2010), <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>.

case. For example, in characterizing the *Kulturnation* we see Steiner again choose a few select male great writers as the examples *par excellence* of their cultural group, as he did in the 1914 lectures soon after the war's outbreak.<sup>455</sup> In this case Steiner highlights only a few, male philosophical thinkers as representing an essential German identity. It is important to point out, however, that a central, greater aim of this chapter is to show Steiner as a thinker who did *not* seek to divorce culture and politics. This is seen clearly in the multiple attempts Steiner made to help bring a swifter end to the war, detailed later in the chapter. More generally, though beyond the scope of this project, Steiner was actively involved in the creation of a new political and cultural model called the three-fold social order. This was a concept Steiner developed as a response to the politically chaotic situation in Europe after the end of the First World War. At its core, this theory is based on the premise of a society organized around three basic, autonomous spheres: economic, political and cultural. Part of his motivation to try to restructure society was to curtail the power of the military and to give more strength to culturally based initiatives. Thus, I would argue that, though Steiner makes a case for the importance of Germany's artistic and cultural contribution, it would be unfair and inaccurate to deem him as belonging among a group of German-speaking thinkers who argued for the importance of culture above or even to the exclusion of politics.<sup>456</sup>

---

<sup>455</sup> As discussed in this same lecture series, Steiner bases his praise of neighboring countries, including France, England and Russia, also on its cultural achievements by highlighting some of the most famous writers. Thus Steiner's notion of *Kulturnation* is not one he applies only to Germany.

<sup>456</sup> See, for example, Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). In this work, Lepenies argues that it is a particularly German habit to value cultural achievement first and foremost and to see it as a substitute for politics. Lepenies argues that the privileging of art over politics has been

A key reason for Steiner's sudden switch to focusing on Germany is due to his perception that as the war progressed, Germans were being increasingly vilified. In wartime lectures, Steiner repeatedly criticizes the press, the governments and authors of other European countries for their eagerness to deride German culture. For instance, Steiner describes working on a section of the second volume of *Rätsel der Philosophie* in which he was trying to do justice to the French philosophers Henri Bergson and Émile Boutroux. Simultaneous to this effort, Steiner reads derision and name-calling of German culture by the French: “damals kamen verschiedene Stimmen von jenseits des Rheins. [...] Da sprach man von deutscher Barbarei und dergleichen und warf die gehässigsten Beschuldigungen und Verleumdungen gegen uns auf.”<sup>457</sup> This perspective is seen clearly in the work's subtitle: “Für Deutsche und diejenigen, die nicht glauben, sie hassen zu müssen.” Steiner paints thinkers of other European nations as aggressively anti-German.<sup>458</sup> Steiner quotes Ernest Renan (1823-1892) in 1870 during the German-French war speaking of a war to obliterate the Germans and draws parallels between this bellicose thinker and French politicians during the First World War. Steiner also argues that Germany, counter to the prevailing thought of the time, unlike France and Russia, did not incite the start of the First World War. Steiner asserts: “Man wird bei den Deutschen vergeblich nach solchen Triebfedern suchen, die zum gegenwärtigen Kriege in

---

a notable tendency from the late eighteenth century to today and is key to understanding the Nazi ideology.

<sup>457</sup> Steiner, *Die geistigen Hintergründe des Ersten Weltkrieges* (1914-1921), 174b, 14.

<sup>458</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges. Für Deutsche und diejenigen, die nicht glauben, sie hassen zu müssen.*, vol. GA 24, Aufsätze über die Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus und zur Zeitlage 1915-1921 (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1982), 304. Also discussed are Russians Chomiakow, Danilweski and Solowieff who talked of Russia's global mission and whom Steiner characterizes as representing a will to war. *Ibid.*, 310 ff.



ähnlicher Art führen mußten wie die von Solowieff bei den Russen [...] von Renan für die Franzosen vorausverkündeten.”<sup>459</sup> To paint Germany as the one non-aggressive country from amongst its European peers is certainly a case of Steiner over-reaching and glossing over Germany’ s complicity in the war. Steiner is even willing to view the war as a necessary step that enables the development of humankind. In addressing the family members of the military, Steiner asserts that all must learn to see the personal sacrifice as part of the greater development of humanity: “[Sie] müssen aus dem persönlichen Leide heraus sich finden in der Idee, daß aus Blut und Tod die Entwicklung der Menschheit sich erheben werde zu Zielen, denen die Opfer notwendig waren und die sie rechtfertigen werden.”<sup>460</sup> The concept that the development of humankind could arise from blood and death is a surprising one to hear from Steiner. This is especially so when we compare it to his exhortations to peace and international brotherhood made only a year earlier and the attempts to bring a speedy end to the war we see again starting only a year after this work in 1916. To some degree, though not entirely, the above quoted sentiment from Steiner can be seen as an attempt to comfort family members by telling them the death of their sons is toward a higher purpose. Seen in the context of the times, it is also worth remembering that people of many nationalities expected a much shorter and far less

---

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 320-21. For more of Steiner’ s arguments that Germany was not the primary aggressor see also Steiner, *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen. Das Karma der Unwahrhaftigkeit. Teil I* (1916), 173. This work is an example of the great mix of subjects that Steiner covered in many of his wartime works. In this work Steiner quotes international newspapers, British parliamentary proceedings and authors of multiple nationalities. He covers topics such as free trade, the Paris economic conference and European colonies. At the same time that Steiner was clearly reading very widely to follow international events, Steiner also claims to have obtained other insight in this work through clairvoyance.

<sup>460</sup> Steiner, *Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges. Für Deutsche und diejenigen, die nicht glauben, sie lassen zu müssen.*, GA 24, 279.

brutal war than the First World War ultimately was. Yet, even with the context of the time taken into consideration, it is fair to conclude that Steiner in the historical moment of 1915 let his great concern for the role of the German culture and its task, as he saw it, in world evolution overshadow his ideal of internationalism.<sup>461</sup>

In this lecture series, Steiner makes the case that Hermann Grimm and Johann Fichte, among others, are representatives of a quintessential German intellectual spirit that is both oriented toward the development of the “Ich,” one of the spiritual sheaths, and toward facilitating international understanding. Steiner quotes Grimm calling for a spirit of community (“Gemeinschaft”) that is ethically linked and that transcends national boundaries. He ends the quote with the assertion that peace is the highest aim:

Im deutschen Geiste ruht Europas Ich. [...] [Grimm] lebte im deutschen Geiste um zu charakterisieren, wozu die Gesinnung des Ich es gebracht hatte. Ich weiß, daß dies nicht die Gesinnung eines einzelnen Menschen ist. Es ist die Herman Grimms der noch im geistigen Sinne Goetheblut in seinen Adern hatte. Er spricht die wunderbaren Worte: “Die Solidarität der sittlichen Überzeugungen aller Menschen ist heute die uns alle verbindende Kirche. Wir suchen leidenschaftlicher als jemals nach einem sichtbaren Ausdrucke dieser Gemeinschaft. Alle wirklich ernsten Bestrebungen der Massen kennen nur dies eine Ziel. Die Trennung der Nationen existiert hier bereits nicht mehr. Wir fühlen, daß der ethischen Weltanschauung gegenüber kein nationaler Unterschied walte. [...] Die Versicherung, daß Friede zu halten unser aller heiligster Wunsch sei, ist keine Lüge.”<sup>462</sup>

In this passage, we see the call for transcending national boundaries. This language also includes the notion that Grimm is connected to Goethe by blood, “Goetheblut,” though

---

<sup>461</sup> As a reminder, Steiner understood the Germanic or Central European cultures as the vanguard of cultural revolution during the current fifth epoch out of a total of seven “post-Atlantean” epochs. Following the Germanic epoch comes a Russian and then an American epoch.

<sup>462</sup> Steiner, *Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges. Für Deutsche und diejenigen, die nicht glauben, sie haben zu müssen.*, GA 24, 281.

Steiner qualifies this by saying he means this in a spiritual sense (“im geistigen Sinne”).

Of all the figures discussed in this work, Johann Fichte receives the most attention. Steiner understands Fichte as a philosopher who was able to access supersensory experience through the power of his thinking and who was also oriented toward internationalism. Steiner relates the biography and key ideas from Fichte and argues that he experienced life as stemming from the supersensory world. As part of his esoteric reading of Fichte, Steiner argues that Fichte discusses the soul as separate from the body and also the notion of life after death. Furthermore, Steiner asserts excitedly that Fichte was able to access the inner, spiritual dimension of life: “Wie steht doch dieser Mann mit seiner ganzen Seele in dem Anschauen des geistigen Wesens der Welt darinnen! Wie ist für ihn dieses Drinnenstehen in der geistigen Welt mit seiner Seele eine so unmittelbare Wirklichkeit wie für den äußeren Menschen das Drinnenstehen in der stofflichen Welt durch die Sinne!”<sup>463</sup> In another instance, here referencing “Reden an die deutsche Nation,” Steiner argues that it is the especially energetic nature of Fichte’s thinking combined with the warmth of his personality, that makes him the embodiment of Germanness (below he speaks of a German “Wesen”):

Die Wärme in Fichtes “Reden an die deutsche Nation” ist eins mit dem Lichte, das ihm in seiner energischen arbeit leuchtete. Und die Verbindung dieses Lichtes mit dieser Wärme erscheint in Fichtes Persönlichkeit als das, wodurch er eine der echtsten Verkörperungen deutschen Wesens ist.<sup>464</sup>

Certainly, Steiner’s characterization of Fichte as an especially warm personality is a surprising reading of this figure. Steiner emphasizes the “warmth” of Fichte’s speech but never qualifies his praise with the acknowledgment that, in this text, Fichte was

---

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 291.

aiming to inspire a German national feeling that would help establish the German state. As when discussing Grimm, Steiner characterizes the essence of Germanness as inherently internationalist. In the following example, Steiner argues further that it is in the nature of the “true German” to gain an understanding of all greater humanity. He further asserts that running through Fichte’s “Reden an die deutsche Nation” is one message like a keynote (“Grundton”): “So jemand nur ein wahrer Deutscher ist, wird er aus seiner Deutschheit heraus den Weg finden, auf dem ein Verständnis aller menschlichen Wirklichkeit reifen kann.”<sup>465</sup> Here we see one example of a concept Steiner repeatedly espouses in this work: the German spirit or nature is at once *distinct* from other cultures and simultaneously united with the greater world by an inherently internationalist orientation. That is, because of their specific gift for gaining a large and deep perspective through its power of thinking, Steiner argues that the “true” Germans can see beyond the boundaries of themselves and develop understanding for all humanity. Even though Steiner argues for the importance of internationalism, there is a certain ring of superiority to Steiner’s wording when he speaks of the “true German” (“ein wahrer Deutscher”) and his ability to understand all of humanity.

Before I discuss scholarly critique of Steiner regarding the work “Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges,” it is illuminating to return briefly to Freud’s essays “Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod.” Both texts were written in 1915. I do this in order to note similarities and divergences in how Freud talked about the vilification of Germany and its status as a “*Kulturnation*,” a term Freud uses in the following quote. Freud argues against the construal of Germany as “barbaric” and gives as justification that this country

---

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 300-01.

has proven its place in civilized society by its great cultural achievements. He also says that he hopes that Germany demonstrates itself to be the most civilized, implying the least violent. Freud asserts:

Ja daß eine der großen Kulturnationen so allgemein mißliebig ist, daß der Versuch gewagt werden kann, sie als “barbarisch” von der Kulturgemeinschaft auszuschließen, obwohl sie ihre Eignung durch die großartigsten Beitragsleistungen längst erwiesen hat. Wir leben der Hoffnung, [*sic*] eine unparteiische Geschichtsschreibung werde den Nachweis erbringen, daß gerade diese Nation, die, in deren Sprache wir schreiben, für deren Sieg unsere Lieben kämpfen, sich am wenigsten gegen die Gesetze der menschlichen Gesittung vergangen habe, aber wer darf in solcher Zeit als Richter auftreten in eigener Sache?<sup>466</sup>

Like Steiner, Freud speaks of Germany as one of the great “Kulturnationen.” As opposed to Steiner who claimed to know the truth that Germans were less jingoistic than their European counterparts, however, Freud talks of possessing hope that Germany is more civilized in the war (“wir leben der Hoffnung”). Also, by leaving the ultimate judgment to others (“wer darf [...] als Richter auftreten in eigener Sache?”) Freud takes a considerably more restrained tone than the strident-sounding Steiner in “Gedanken” who over-reaches in his strong desire to portray Germany as untainted by jingoism.

Steiner was deemed a nationalist by certain contemporaries and has been so characterized by scholars as well due to passages in “Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges.” French Theosophical writer Edouard Schuré (1841-1929), who up until the First World War was close to Steiner, denounced Steiner as a German chauvinist after the publication of this text.<sup>467</sup> In recent times, Peter Staudenmaier deems Steiner a “pro-war”

---

<sup>466</sup> Freud, *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod* (1915).

<sup>467</sup> See the introduction by Robert Friedenthal in *Das Karma der Unwahrhaftigkeit*. Steiner, *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*. *Das Karma der Unwahrhaftigkeit*. Teil I (1916), 173. Steiner produced Schuré’s mystery play *Die Kinder des Luzifer* in Munich

thinker, and cites solely the title as evidence in a footnote without citing a single passage. He thereby completely ignores the fact that Steiner was advancing a theory that Germans should be leaders in internationalism.<sup>468</sup> Criticism of the problematic elements of Steiner's writings during the war is certainly justified. I argue, however, that Steiner's wartime thought, taken as a whole, combined with his later political efforts shows a thinker strongly committed to internationalism, albeit in a form that has essentializing traits. As I tried to show, even in this flawed text, Steiner promotes internationalism. In contrast to Staudenmaier, Christoph Lindenberg supports my own reading as he asserts that Steiner distinguished himself from other contemporaries in the early years of the war by *not* inscribing his thought as part of the German military tradition.<sup>469</sup>

The essay "Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges" represents Steiner likely at his most antagonistic and, in certain instances, most partisan toward Germany for reasons discussed. If Steiner's thoughts about the war had not evolved from his perspective in

---

in 1909, one year before the premiere of Steiner's first mystery play. Steiner and Schuré reconciled after the war.

<sup>468</sup> Staudenmaier asserts that "among German theosophists and anthroposophists, from Hübbe-Schleiden to Steiner, Blavatsky's message of a 'universal brotherhood' degenerated into a pro-war stance based on a program of cultural imperialism." Staudenmaier, "Esoteric Alternatives in Imperial Germany: Science, Spirit, and the Modern Occult Revival," 232. I find Staudenmaier's arguments an example of the laziness of some scholars critical of Steiner. Staudenmaier paints with very broad strokes when he puts multiple figures and movements all in one sentence and deems them all "pro-war." Also, in deciding simply to name this work without discussion in any detail and while also ignoring all other articulations on internationalism within this text and others during wartimes is a highly superficial approach that assumes many readers will not question the assumption that Steiner's thought is pro-war without looking into any details.

<sup>469</sup> Lindenberg argues: "Die Vorträge Steiners in den ersten Jahren des Krieges unterschieden sich von anderen Vorträgen deutscher Gelehrte dadurch, daß er an eine bestimmte Tradition des Deutschtums, die man durch die Namen Friedrich der Große, Blücher, Scharnhort oder Clausewitz umreißen kann, *nicht* anknüpfte." Christoph Lindenberg, "Rudolf Steiner und die geistige Aufgabe Deutschlands," *Die Drei: Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst, und soziales Leben*, no. 12 (1989): 890.

this text from 1915, then scholars like Staudenmaier could be taken more seriously. In his biography of Steiner, however, Christoph Lindenberg demonstrates that between 1915 and 1916 Steiner's tone changes such that he no longer defends Germany or speaks of a specifically German spirit.<sup>470</sup> To cite a few examples of Steiner's changed perspective, just one year after this work, in 1916, in the work "Das Karma der Unwahrhaftigkeit," Steiner is discussing British intellectuals and argues that everyone should turn their attention away from the question of culpability for the war to the question of how to get out of the horrific war.<sup>471</sup>

Much more telling than citing disparate comments Steiner made in the later years of the war, however, is to introduce the initiatives Steiner took to affect political decision-making and bring a swifter end to the war.<sup>472</sup>

Though none of these initiatives had the degree of influence Steiner had ardently hoped for, they reveal Steiner as a thinker deeply invested in developing an alternative to Germany's reliance on militaristic solutions and concerned about a peaceful and flourishing Europe, far beyond Germany's borders. In the case of the document "An das deutsche Volk und an die Kulturwelt" (1919), Steiner's thoughts were endorsed by

---

<sup>470</sup> See Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner. A Biography*, 437. For a detailed account of the development of Steiner's political awareness and self-identify see also: Lindenberg, C. (1989). "Rudolf Steiner und die geistige Aufgabe Deutschlands." *Die Drei: Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst, und soziales Leben*(12): 880-905.

<sup>471</sup> Steiner argues one should: "sich lieber der einzig wichtigen und entscheidenden Frage zuwenden, nämlich, wie man den Ausweg aus dieser Hölle finde, von der man in Wahrheit sagen kann, wie es in Macbeth heißt: O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart Cannot conceive nor name thee...[...] So soll den die Tollheit nie ein End nehmen?" Steiner, *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen. Das Karma der Unwahrhaftigkeit. Teil I* (1916), 173, 41. From his wording one can detect just how passionately Steiner wished for an end to the war.

<sup>472</sup> I only summarize these important efforts by Steiner, as an in-depth analysis of these political actions oversteps the bounds of this chapter and my greater project, both of which are focused more toward Steiner's cultural and aesthetic thought. I cite important titles for readers who want to delve more deeply into this subject.

some very well-known figures of the day such as the Austrian Expressionist playwright, essayist and critic Hermann Bahr (1863-1934), the German author of Jewish descent Jakob Wassermann (1873-1934) and German author Hermann Hesse (1877-1962).

In the summer of 1917, Steiner wrote two memoranda on the subject of a possible end to the war, an option that looked viable at this juncture. In Germany, in response to a request from the Count Otto von Lerchenfeld, he began working on his ideas about the three-fold social order. Steiner held that the only path toward peace was to create a political system based on a three-branch government in which the political, economic and cultural arenas are balanced in terms of power and largely autonomous. He wrote a memorandum that reached the German Staatssekretär Kühlmann. The second memorandum was given to Count Ludwig von Poltzer-Hoditz in order to reach the Austrian government. The document actually reached Kaiser Karl I via the count's brother. According to Hans Kühn, Karl I read the document and first sent it to the Staatsarchiv. He requested to see it again, however, right when a revolution in Austria seemed imminent. The timing was too late though as the following day Karl I was deposed. Kühn also describes that Prinz Max von Baden wanted to meet Steiner. At the end of January 1918, Baden received the Memorandum and the lecture cycle "Die Mission einzelner Volksseelen." In October 1918 when Baden became Reichskanzler there was the possibility of a truce. Steiner was expecting that Baden would express the ideas of three-fold social order as part of his message that Germany was ready for peace. Steiner was therefore very disappointed when Baden's speech contained no mention of



his societal model, and it was later revealed that Baden was given a second version of the speech that edited out this message.<sup>473</sup>

On February 2, 1919, Steiner wrote a text entitled “An das deutsche Volk und an die Kulturwelt.” He deems the war a tragic mistake (“die kriegerische Katastrophe”)<sup>474</sup> that demands critical self-reflection from the German people on how to progress differently: “Selbstbesinnung muß nach solchem Erlebnis eintreten. Denn dieses Erlebnis hat die Meinung eines halben Jahrhunderts, hat insbesondere die herrschenden Gedanken der Kriegsjahre als einen tragisch wirkenden Irrtum erwiesen.”<sup>475</sup> Steiner argues that the way to prevent such future catastrophes is to change the governmental structure into a three-fold social order. With such a system, Steiner asserts, Germany can live harmoniously with its neighbors: “Mit einer solchen Politik hätte das deutsche Volk mit den außerdeutschen Völkern zusammenleben können.”<sup>476</sup> This document was signed by people from all walks of life including academics, artists, writers, architects, pastors, medical doctors, businessmen and government officials hailing from Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

---

<sup>473</sup> As reported by Kühn: “So tief erschüttert sah ich Rudolf Steiner niemals wieder als bei dieser Enttäuschung. [...]Der Prinz hatte sich noch zu sehr an die parlamentarischen Gebräuche gehalten und nicht erkannt, dass es auf die Tat des Augenblicks angekommen war, den er jetzt verpasste.” Hans Kühn, *Dreigliederungs Zeit. Rudolf Steiners Kampf für die Gesellschaftsordnung der Zukunft* (Dornach, Switzerland: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, 1978), 20.

Steiner gave the text of the speech *An das deutsche Volk und an die Kulturwelt* to Hans Kühn, along with German businessman Emil Molt (1876-1936) and Swiss lawyer and Anthroposophist Roman Boos (1889-1952). Kühn’s description of Steiner’s reaction here is an eye-witness account.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 163.

It is important to note that also in this time period, in 1921, Steiner encountered nearly disastrous consequences for his political work: the *Alldeutsch Alliance*, the same group that backed Hitler's putsch attempt in Munich, attempted to assassinate Steiner in 1921 while he was lecturing in Munich.<sup>477</sup> The attempted Hitler-Ludendorff putsch two years later in 1923 convinced Steiner to close his Berlin apartment and to move the Anthroposophical press out of Germany to Dornach, Switzerland.<sup>478</sup> Moreover, the Nazis closed all of his institutions, including the Waldorf schools, when they came to power.<sup>479</sup>

### **Steiner's Theories of Art as Fostering Cross-Cultural Understanding**

In this last section, the topic changes substantially from a focus on Steiner's political engagement to his artistic works created during the time of the First World War. In this section, Steiner sought to make visual and tangible his aesthetic and cultural theory with artistic works in that adorned the *Goetheanum*. In particular I look at two of the artistic works created by Steiner, the painted motifs on the cupola and the series of carved wooden columns. In addition to describing these works and providing images I present Steiner's theory on how an aesthetic and spiritual encounter with artistic

---

<sup>477</sup> The deemed Steiner a traitor against his country due to his efforts to support the people of Upper Silesia in northeastern Germany who, through the new doctrine of "self-determination of nations," would decide through a referendum whether they belonged to Poland or Germany. In collaboration with members of the local section of the Association for the Threefold Organism in Breslau, Steiner worked to offer an alternative to the either/or situation in which cultural groups would have the freedom to form their own spiritual and cultural associations. They held meetings and gave speeches amid a mood of dangerous tension and mounting threat of violence. As Helmuth Weitinas, a member, recalls: "Often, by the skin of our teeth, we escaped having the speaker arrested and a shoot-out." See Henry Barnes, *A Life for the Spirit. Rudolf Steiner in the Crosscurrent of Our Time*. (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1997), 141-143.

<sup>478</sup> See Mateo Kries and Julia Althaus, eds. *Rudolf Steiner. Die Alchemie des Alltags*. GZD. (Ditzingen: Vitra Design Museum, 2010), 329.

<sup>479</sup> See the chronology at the back of the book: Mateo Kries and Julia Althaus, eds. *Rudolf Steiner. Die Alchemie des Alltags*. (GZD Ditzingen: Vitra Design Museum, 2010), 320-329.

elements is meant to foster cross-cultural understanding. As previously discussed, the concept that all cultures together contribute to the evolution of the world is central to Steiner's theory of cultural history and his aesthetic theory. Steiner's artistic works are meant to express the collectively shared history of cultural evolution, which develops in tandem with the "evolution of consciousness."

I will first describe briefly the painted motifs that adorned the smaller of the two cupolas as they appear in photographs and drawings still remaining after the first *Goetheanum* burned down. It was located above the sculpture of the Representative of Humanity, a carved wooden human figure that measured over thirty-one feet and Steiner referred to it sometimes as a Christ figure meant as a kind of balancing force. The figures, all painted in vibrant color, included, among other figures, a Faust figure, an Egyptian initiate, a Persian initiate, an Athena figure, a Germanic initiate and a Slavic figure described as representing a coming age.<sup>480</sup> All figures were facing forward or seen in profile. They were surrounded by colorful, rounded shading whose many, translucent layers suggest that these spiritual figures are in motion. The nature of the colorful shading that surrounds the figures separates one figure from the next. At the same time, as all the colors mix one into the next to create one, multicolored panel, the shading also seems to reinforce the idea of a unified cultural history. Apart from the painting of the Representative of Humanity that is larger than the rest, all the figures are also united in their similar size. It is worth noting that Steiner displayed his view of the significance of

---

<sup>480</sup> Steiner posited that a Russian-Slavic epoch [3573-5733] would be the vanguard of the coming epoch following the present Anglo-Saxon and Germanic age [1413-3573 AD]. Of this former epoch Steiner said, "es liegt tatsächlich in dem Russischen der Keim für etwas Zukünftiges [...] Aber auf dem Grunde des russischen Volkstums liegt etwas Zukunftssicheres." Steiner, *Der Baugedanke des Goetheanum. Einleitender Vortrag mit Erklärungen zu den Bildern des Baus* (1921), 114.

the Central European culture in this painting by choosing to paint two figures from this culture: first, the Faust figure, that he describes as a person of the sixteenth century and, second, a “Germanic” initiate (“der germanische Eingeweihte, der germanische Erkennende”).<sup>481</sup>

---

<sup>481</sup> Ibid. This series of lectures was held in 1921 and we see that Steiner’s tendency to vacillate between terms remains. As discussed, in the 1915 lecture series given weeks after the outbreak of the war Steiner often used the term “Mitteleuropäisch.” Then he switched to speaking of “Deutsch” in the 1915 essay “Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges.” In this 1921 lecture series Steiner talks of “Germanisch.”



**Figure 2: Steiner’ s painted motifs of the archetypal figures of the seven post-Atlantean cultures with a series of columns and the large carved wooden sculpture *Der Menschheitsrepräsentant* below. Colored drawing by van Bemmelen.**

As with the column motifs, these painted motifs were meant to depict simultaneously the history of culture as well as the interplay of the different soul bodies within the human body. Steiner asserts that a dome should be build on which forms are painted “die aus dem Verfolgen der Menschheitsevolution an unsere Seele herantreten, die uns zeigt, wie die Menschen, wie die Völker zusammenwirken, und wie das ein Bild

ist wieder des Zusammenwirkens der Seelenkräfte im Menschen selber.”<sup>482</sup> Steiner says that the evolution of humanity should approach our soul (“an unsere Seele herantreten”). These paintings are meant to provide a picture of the interworkings of the cultural groups and the spiritual bodies not through an intellectual approach but through a spiritual or “soulful” one. Also, relatedly, implicit in this formulation is the assertion that in order to gain cross-cultural understanding, what Steiner refers to above as the cooperation of the cultures, one must gain supersensible abilities to see the interworkings of the various spiritual bodies.

It would seem that these painted motifs represent a clear demonstration of Steiner’s desire to artistically portray his vision of the unified history of culture. In fact, however, Steiner did not talk at any length about these painted motifs and thus I cannot analyze his theory in this regard. Instead, he sought to deflect any assumption by the viewer that his primary aim with these painted images was the figures themselves. He argued that his primary focus with this set of motifs was *not* the depiction of cultural evolution but the creation of forms out of engagement with color:

man täusche sich nicht, weil Motive, weil da allerlei Figuren darauf sind, sogar kulturhistorische Figuren. Mir kam es beim Ausmalen dieser kleinen Kuppel nicht darauf an, diese oder jene Motive zu zeichnen [...] mir kam es darauf an, daß zum Beispiel hier ein Orangefleck in verschiedenen Nuancen des Orange ist: aus diesen Farbnuancen ergab sich die Gestalt.<sup>483</sup>

The concept of artistic creation out of an engagement with the (inner) qualities of a medium, instead of a focus on realistic imitation of external appearances, also has clear echoes with much of Expressionist thought, including Kandinsky’s concept of “innerer

---

<sup>482</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 31.

<sup>483</sup> Steiner, *Der Baugedanke des Goetheanum. Einleitender Vortrag mit Erklärungen zu den Bildern des Baus* (1921), 95.

Klang” and its relation to color. The claim is also consistent with Steiner’ s stance, discussed in Chapter One, against allegory and his rejection of an overly literalist approach. Regardless of Steiner’ s protestations, of course, he did set out to portray the evolution of culture because he created a whole series of archetypal figures meant to represent each epoch. Implicit, however, in his insistence that the interaction with color is primary and that the figures arose in an organic way out of this interaction is the way Steiner privileges practice over theory. In addition, an important part of the argument is that these figures should not be understood as overly literal or limiting encapsulations of each culture. This argument, only stated implicitly here, is one articulated more explicitly in the essay “Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges” regarding Steiner’ s case that the central European culture is typified by a heterogeneous and constantly “striving” nature that cannot be accurately categorized with the limiting qualified “Deutsch.” Steiner does not theorize in any extensive way about these motifs, and thus I will move on to how he theorized the carved motifs of the columns, a subject Steiner addresses in greater depth.

As introduced, Steiner’ s theoretical apparatus operates via a layering process. Thus, in addition to how the forms express the evolution of cultural history they are also meant to express other forms of evolution, including that of the different spiritual sheaths, as during each historical epoch the development of a particular sheath is emphasized.<sup>484</sup>

In the case of the series of columns, they are also meant to echo the stages of

---

<sup>484</sup> As a reminder, in Steiner’ s theory of cultural evolution different cultural groups have the task of developing the different spiritual sheaths, a task that is the focus of each cultural epoch. For example, the Italian and Spanish peoples developed the Sentient Soul, the French the Intellectual Soul, the English speaking peoples the Consciousness Soul. But each human being is understood as containing all of these sheaths.

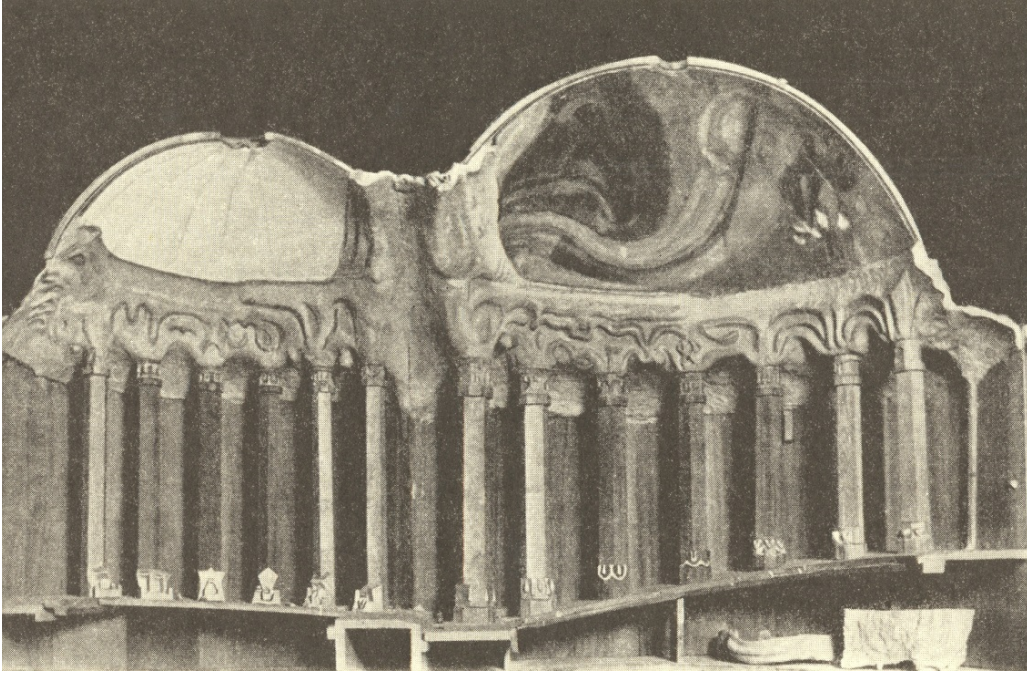
transformation in the sense of the Goethean plant metamorphosis. Thus, we see the way that the link between the human being and nature, an outlook that Steiner had in common with Scheerbart and Taut, is at play in the artistic forms. Regarding the columns, Steiner asserts that when one enters the building from the west side the view of the motifs adorning the columns, both of their capitals and architraves, gives one a feeling of unity with all of humanity: “Wir haben gesehen, daß für denjenigen, der von Westen aus den Bau betritt, die Möglichkeit besteht, sich in diesem Bau ganz innerhalb der Menschheit zu fühlen.”<sup>485</sup> Steiner depicted “humanity” in the series of carved motifs on the column capitals and architraves. He asserted that the capitals expressed the individual cultural groups and the architraves expressed the mutual relationships between the different cultural groups: “die Kräfte der einzelnen Kulturgemeinschaften [werden] gewissermaßen ausgedrückt [...] durch die Kapitellzeichen, und die gegenseitigen Beziehungen der einzelnen europäischen Kulturen durch dasjenige, was in den

---

<sup>485</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 50.



Architraven dargestellt ist.”<sup>486</sup> The way that the relationships



**Figure 3: Cross-section of domes from a model.**

between individual cultures are meant to be expressed by the motifs on the architraves is seen in the placement of the motifs *between* each pair of columns as opposed to directly above a single column.

---

<sup>486</sup> Ibid. Steiner also discusses each culture as linked with particular planets, a subject I do not address in this chapter.



**Figure 4: The main hall with the audience area below and three of the columns with their capitals.**

In lectures given in 1921 Steiner describes the forms more in organic rather than cultural terms and repeatedly emphasizes that the series of columns must be considered not in isolation but taken as a whole. In other instances, Steiner talks about the relationship of the smaller buildings to the central *Goetheanum* building also as all part of one, organic whole. Steiner argues that “[es] wird hier ganz besonders darauf

hingewiesen, daß im Grunde genommen die einzelne Säule für sich gar nicht beurteilt werden kann, sondern nur die ganze Folge der Säulen in ihrer aufeinanderfolgenden Form.<sup>487</sup> The reason for the insistence on the interconnectedness of all of the elements is that the artistic forms are meant to echo what Steiner understands as the unified nature of organic evolution. Steiner describes the progression of the columns from one to the next as echoing metamorphosis such that no two columns are the same. Instead, each column represents a stage in the continuous process of growth:

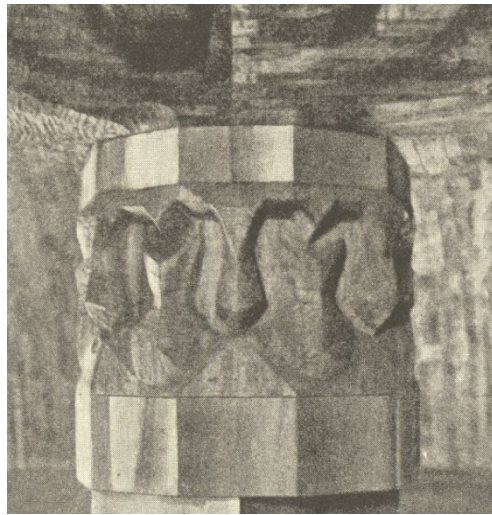
tatsächlich alle diese sieben Säulenkapitäre aus einander hervorgeholt sind, metamorphosisch aus einander hervorwachsen, wie die Formen der Blätter, die auf einander sich bilden im Werden der Pflanze, metamorphosisch sich bilden. Es ist dadurch ein wirkliches Nachschaffen dem organischen Naturschaffen in diesen nicht einfach dasselbe wiederholenden Kapitären, sondern es sind die Kapitäre in fortdauerndem Wachstum, vom ersten bis zum siebenten.<sup>488</sup>

---

<sup>487</sup> Steiner, *Der Baugedanke des Goetheanum. Einleitender Vortrag mit Erklärungen zu den Bildern des Baus* (1921), 60.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

It should also be noted that Steiner's choice of the number seven, as with his broader theory of the meaning of numbers, is a large subject. Steiner contended that certain numbers were especially potent for the way they reappear in myriad areas of life, including botany, astronomy, the human body and music, among other areas. The motifs



**Figure 5: A close-up of the second column**

themselves are comprised of organic-looking forms some of which echo leaves or perhaps water droplets, and some of which are more angular and geometric. The forms on column four look as if they could be depicting a moment during the process of cell division. Other forms are reminiscent of non-organic entities, such as one in the architrave above the third and fourth column that looks similar to a caduceus. In line with how Steiner remained adamant in his claim that his art avoided symbolism of any kind, he argues that the caduceus-like form happened organically, and not through mimesis.



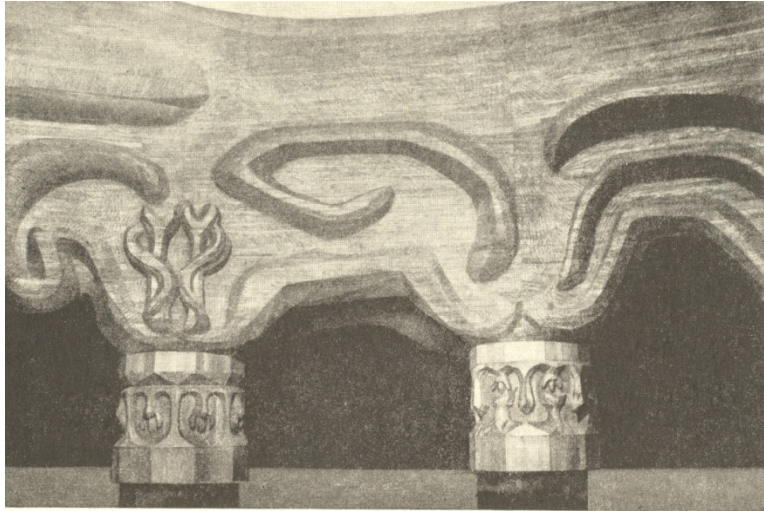
**Figure 6: A close-up of the third column**

The aesthetic process required to experience the evolutionary or metamorphic nature of the progression from one column to the next Steiner describes, in one instance, as a merging process in which the viewer unites with the forces involved in plant metamorphosis: “Man muß gewissermaßen sich hineinversetzt empfinden in die Kräfte, die tätig sind, wenn ein oberes Pflanzenblatt, in seiner Form metamorphosiert, gegenüber dem unteren entsteht.”<sup>489</sup> This form of aesthetic process sounds very much akin to *Einfühlung*. In another formulation from the same lecture, Steiner describes the process as entering into the evolutionary impulse with an artistic sensibility (“Wenn man sich nun recht in die Entwicklungsimpulse hineinversetzt mit der künstlerischen Empfindung”).<sup>490</sup> Thus we see implicit in the aesthetic process proposed by Steiner a melding of nature and art in the assertion that the processes of evolution—understood as simultaneously cultural and organic phenomena—should be approached artistically.

---

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.



**Figure 7: The third and fourth columns**

This process of empathetic immersion applies also, importantly, to how the viewer is meant to identify with the disparate cultures such that each culture, typically seen as distinct from each other, is experienced as a part of oneself. Steiner describes this aesthetic process as facilitating cross-cultural understanding. In one succinct formulation he summarizes the idea that one should experience the individual cultural groups as one experiences the different parts of one's own soul: "Und die einzelnen Kulturgemeinschaften empfinden wir wie unsere eigenen Seelenglieder in unserem eigenen Inneren."<sup>491</sup> In both examples, we see an intentional mapping of the cultural layers onto the spiritual layers. Thus, Steiner's proposed remedy—to cure the feelings of animosity toward those from other nations—is a form of aesthetic engagement, both artistic and contemplative, that asks the viewer to treat the other as part of the self. There is a clear impediment to understanding precisely how this is meant to work: the carved motifs of the columns are quite esoteric and what some would call abstract. Indeed,

---

<sup>491</sup> Steiner, *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse* (1914), 287, 56.

Steiner held that, in order to see how the motifs expressed particular stages of cultural and organic evolution one needed a developed form of spiritual sight or clairvoyance. The fact that full comprehension of the motifs is only possible for the viewer capable of supersensible sight also means that Steiner's wish to help effect peace on a society-side basis would have a modest potential for success—that is, until and unless people developed the spiritual capacities that Steiner claimed to be possible. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that it *is* possible for any careful viewer of the carved motifs to ascertain that Steiner had an attention to detail. He likewise understood each cultural stage as distinct from another. While Steiner did not seek to conflate cultures, however, his artistic creations ultimately seek cross-cultural unity. This is seen in the way that the painted figures stand together as a unified group and in the manner in which the carved motifs together comprise a long, single evolutionary process. Equally clear is that underlying Steiner's often esoteric aesthetic theory and artistic creations, and despite the essentializing strain already discussed, is a simple and earnest—even utopian—desire to help European society overcome nationalistic hatred and gain cross-cultural understanding and sympathy:

Wie könnte der Angehörige der einen Kulturgemeinschaft den Angehörigen einer anderen Kulturgemeinschaft einfach hassen und über ihn schimpfen [...] Man denke nur, wie unendlich vieles beigetragen werden könnte, daß die Menschen aller Kulturgemeinschaften sich gegenseitig verstehen, sich gegenseitig liebevoll umschließen [...].<sup>492</sup>

Steiner argues that the insights he tries to impart about how all people share one, long cultural history can transcend hatred and bring about mutual understanding and love.

---

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 55.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, the multifaceted nature of Steiner's response to the outbreak of the First World War reveals him as a thinker for whom aesthetic, cultural and political issues were integrally intertwined. Steiner's theoretical response to the war was to articulate a concept of how the recognition of a single, shared cultural history would help people overcome nationalistic tendencies. In addition to a shared history, Steiner asserted that each culture had a distinct task, and he highlighted a special role for the central European culture in facilitating internationalism. I argued that inherent in Steiner's thought is a tension between, on the one hand, his earnest aim for internationalism and peace and, on the other, a tendency toward essentialism and elitism regarding the concept of culture. In addition to further illumination of Steiner's aesthetic and cultural theory, this chapter focused on how Steiner put his theory into practice as an architect, painter and sculptor. I also showed Steiner as part of a small group of European contemporaries who took a stance against the war from its inception. I demonstrated how the *Goetheanum* building has links with many contemporaneous architectural innovations and, above all, with the Expressionist movement. In particular, I revealed resonances between Steiner's architectural theory and the pacifist, Expressionist and spiritually-inspired architectural thought of architect Bruno Taut and writer Paul Scheerbarth.



## CONCLUSION

My project comes more than a century after Kandinsky optimistically predicted the imminent arrival of the epoch of the great spiritual (“die Epoche des großen Geistigen”).<sup>493</sup> At that time, Rudolf Steiner enjoyed a level of prominence that led hundreds and even thousands of people to attend public lectures. I begin my conclusion by raising the question of what has happened in the intervening years to the status, and viability, of spiritual art, of “spiritual modernism” and of Rudolf Steiner in particular? Does their greatest contribution lie behind us, at the turn of the twentieth century? Or can I—like Kandinsky before me—predict a coming age when spiritual art, and spiritual thought, in particular Rudolf Steiner’s might gain renewed prominence? I find mixed answers to such questions. In some ways, western culture in the 2010s seems more “materialistic” than ever: everyday life has been hyper commodified and the sciences and the academy seem in many ways ever oriented toward specialization. On the other hand, the emphasis upon interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and transnationalism is now the norm within the academic humanities in ways that would seem to have appealed to the Expressionist interests in the intermixing of media, in *Gesamtkunstwerk*, even in synesthesia.

---

<sup>493</sup> Wassily Kandinsky. *Der blaue Reiter im Lenbachhaus München: Katalog der Sammlung in der Städtischen Galerie*. Eds. Rosel Gollek. München: Prestel, 1982, 313.

There are also certain, more recent developments that link with key ideas of my project. For instance, the field of network theory and speculative poetics both are based on the contention that there is no stark demarcation between subject and object. As I sought to show in my dissertation, a key concept on which Steiner's "evolution of consciousness" is based is that the very nature of human consciousness—the relationship of subject to object and the experience of an "inner" and an "outer" dimension—has evolved greatly and continuously over the course of human history. In addition, as illuminated by Mike King in the article "Concerning the Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art and Science" (1998), there have been a number of relatively recent publications on spiritual subjects by scientists. He elaborates how quantum theory has been a launching point for a number of physicists to write about religious or spiritual ideas.<sup>494</sup> King contends that these developments suggest the time could be ripe for a reevaluation of the meaning of the spiritual in twentieth-century art, science and culture and he casts his critical eye upon Kandinsky and the Bauhaus school, abstract Expressionists and the contemporary electronic arts. There are parallels between the insights of quantum theory and those of Steiner. As I demonstrated in Chapter Two with the discussion of the "evolution of consciousness," and also in the discussion of Eurythmy in Chapter One, Steiner followed Goethe in emphasizing the extremely central role of the perceiver in how the world is experienced. More broadly, there has been in recent years a great growth of research within neuroscience that point to the beneficial affects of meditation, most often in the Buddhist tradition.

---

<sup>494</sup> King cites in particular the following works: *The Mind of God* (Paul Davies) and *The God Particle* (Leon Lederman), along with other works.

Then there is the question of whether Steiner’ s thought will break into the academic mainstream. My quick answer would be: not likely, or at least not anytime in the near future. There have been a few more recent events that might suggest a breakthrough moment, including the large, retrospective Exhibit “Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags” (2010) and the exhibition “Hilma af Klint: Eine Pionierin der Abstraktion” (2013) that highlighted the influence of Steiner’ s philosophy on this pioneering abstract artist. Yet, the pattern seems to be that a few such events may happen, but there are never enough at a given time to create critical numbers of attendees. The annual conference of the German Studies Association has not included a panel on any aspect of Steiner’ s thought since I began my doctoral studies. Even in the field of Expressionist architecture where Steiner’ s work is best recognized, there are very few scholars who have engaged critically and extensively with Steiner’ s spiritually based thought. Factors that contribute toward Steiner’ s marginalization, discussed in the introduction, still have a strong affect. Yet, while Steiner remains largely peripherally known within academic circles, a number of his initiatives have now clearly entered the mainstream. Waldorf education is a world-wide movement; biodynamic farming is now practiced in thirty US states and the increasingly popular community supported agriculture movement, begun in the United States in the 1980s, was influenced directly by Biodynamics; beauty products such as those by the Anthroposophist Dr. Hauschka are also found in stores around the country and Europe. If Steiner’ s place within academic scholarship is tenuous, his presence in the wider world is not.

One issue not covered in the introduction regarding reasons for Steiner’ s neglect is the subject of *practice*. I find this key to understanding his thought. Steiner’ s

aesthetic and spiritual theory, following his reading of Goethe, rests on the claim that it is possible, and necessary, to develop supersensible organs of perception. The development of such supersensory capacities, however, requires practice in the form of spiritual exercises. This is an idea that is sometimes overlooked by scholars, especially those critical of Steiner. In one such instance, art historian Beat Wyss argues that Steiner claimed the forms of the *Goetheanum* building to be not only non-representational, but also that they could be apprehended in an immediate, unmediated manner (Wyss uses the wording, “unmittelbar [...] als sichtbar”).<sup>495</sup> Steiner does, in fact, speak often of his art as both non-representational and as able to be accessed in an immediate way. Yet, what a scholar like Wyss misses is that Steiner makes these assertions with the assumption that one also understands the critical role of practice. In her work *A Science for the Soul*, Corinna Treitel argues for the importance of practice, though she has her own understanding of the meaning of this term. Treitel expounds upon “the absolutely central importance of practice to the appeal and dynamic of the German occult movement.”<sup>496</sup> With the term “practice” she includes popular activities within the “occult sciences” such as automatic writing, knot experiments and spirit photography. Steiner held that one must first hone the perceptive abilities, through repeated practice, that could allow an immediate understanding of his art. If we do not accept this idea on faith, or reject it categorically as irrational, then the third option available is to experiment with the practices ourselves. Certainly, this would *not* be a traditionally academic approach. The well-known Goethe scholar Eckart Förster, however, makes a surprising case for practice at the end of the article “Goethe and the ‘Auge des Geistes.’” He argues that the only

---

<sup>495</sup> Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst: zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*, 143.

<sup>496</sup> Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*, 24.

way to assess claims by both Goethe and Fichte about the existence of the “Auge des Geistes” is to try the exercises described. Förster contends that Goethe and Fichte “insiste[d] that continuous effort and ongoing mental concentration are the prerequisites for acquiring such evidence. So I think we must withhold judgment on this matter until we have undertaken the required exercises.”<sup>497</sup> It may be that Steiner’s thought may remain largely marginal within academic scholarship until or unless there is shift toward an approach that integrates theory and practice.

At the heart of my project is the examination of the thought of Rudolf Steiner in the relation to art—visual arts, architecture and art history—and the resurgence of interest in spiritual subjects in the period between 1890 to the 1920s. I argue that Steiner was one important figure in a larger movement I term “spiritual modernism” made up of artists and theorists who drew on past traditions—including different spiritual streams, humanistic theories and sometimes religious traditions—not as a means to restore an older world order but as a way to create innovative, culturally transformative art and new theoretical perspectives on aesthetics and art history. Thus, a key intervention of my dissertation is to destabilize the notion of aesthetic modernism or abstraction as representing a rupture with the past.

A key goal of the project is to bring Steiner into dialogue with multiple, better known contemporaries to show how Steiner shared an interest in many of the key debates of the day. Sometimes these dialogues were explicit, as in the case with the Expressionist painter Kandinsky whose theory of abstraction was formatively shaped through intensive study of Steiner’s aesthetic and spiritual theory or the writer Paul Scheerbart, who

---

<sup>497</sup> Förster, “Goethe on ‘Das AugeGeistes,’ “ 100-01.

studied Steiner and was in turn a close collaborator with the Expressionist architect Bruno Taut. In other cases, Steiner had only a minimal or no dialogue at all with contemporaries, such as was the case with art historians Alois Riegl and Wilhelm Worringer, respectively. Yet, in all cases I seek to show how Steiner shared an interest with contemporaries in many of the most pressing issues of the day. These included: the meaning of “geistige Kunst” and the potential of art to transform culture; alternatives to artistic naturalism; the meaning of their contemporaneous period in the larger history of art; the definition and origins of artistic abstraction; the relationship of the “spiritual” to the worldly; the link between Expressionist architecture, pacifism and anti-war sentiment to the First World War and, more broadly, the relationship of art to politics.

I also seek to show how Steiner’s thought contributed to a number of modernist movements. These include Organicism, an important element both in Expressionist architecture and in the art historical theory of Worringer and Riegl, as well as Expressionism, specifically the concept that art expresses an *inner* dimension to life. At this point, both versions of the *Goetheanum* building have been accepted as belonging within the canon of Expressionist architecture.

In Chapter One, I show how Munich was an important center for Steiner and a location where he intermingled with Kandinsky and the *Blaue Reiter* group and other Expressionists and Russian symbolists. I examine how Steiner’s aesthetic and spiritual thought, in particular his concept of dematerialization, contributed significantly to Kandinsky’s theory of artistic abstraction. Despite important points of connection, however, I argue that ultimately Steiner’s aesthetics contrasts significantly. Steiner, as I argue, does not aim for abstraction, but instead for a return to the phenomenological

world in an immersive mode reminiscent of Goethean symbolism. With this argument I distinguish my thought from that of Sixten Ringbom. For Steiner, the supersensible is located in the sensible. I end the chapter with a discussion of how Steiner conceived of Eurythmy as an art form that expresses Goethe's morphology in movement. This first chapter raises questions that carry through the whole dissertation: the relationship of abstraction and spirituality to materialism or de-materialism, embodiment or disembodiment and contributes to the theory of abstraction within modernism.

In Chapter Two, I bring Steiner's art historical theory into dialogue with the writings of the German art theorist Wilhelm Worringer and the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl. I argue that both Steiner and Riegl conceive of the history of art as the expression of a collective aesthetic drive, what Riegl calls *Kunstwollen*, and that Worringer and Steiner understand "abstraction" in philosophical rather than periodic terms. This chapter is concerned with three thinkers for whom an encounter with contemporary, abstract art led each to cast their gaze much farther back in art history. In differing ways, they subverted the radical break that modernism was supposed to represent by tracing much earlier roots to artistic abstraction, whether in the "primitive" period, antiquity or the Renaissance. In addition, I show that, in differing ways, each understood art history as progressing in response to transformations in spatial experience and in spiritual or religious outlook. In the case of Steiner and Worringer, I focus also on the differing ways that temporality and subjectivity operate in their art historical accounts. This chapter furthers the consideration of "spiritual modernism" by examining a group of art historians who, though they differed in whether they themselves were

oriented toward spirituality, all held that spiritual or religious outlook formatively shaped the kind of art works created in each historical epoch.

In Chapter Three Steiner I examine Steiner for the first time not only as an art theorist and art historian, but as a practicing artist in his own right, specifically as a painter and sculptor and most especially as an Expressionist architect. Another key focus of this chapter is Steiner as a politically engaged figure that was among a minority of Europeans to take a stance against the First World War from very early on. I read Steiner' s theory of the first *Goetheanum* as an art form meant to promote peace and internationalism alongside the architectural theory of the pacific and Expressionist architect Bruno Taut and his *Glashaus* Pavilion from 1914 and the architecturally inspired fiction of Paul Scheerbart. In particular, I show that as part of Steiner' s cultural and political theory, he thinks in geopolitical categories by highlighting the special role of Central Europe (“Mitteleuropa”) in overcoming nationalism. In this chapter I also point out the elitist and essentializing tendencies in Steiner' s cultural thought, despite the fact that he was sincerely interested in promoting internationalism and peace. By highlighting how Steiner conceived of the *Goetheanum* as an aesthetic response to the war, I show that his spiritually inspired aesthetics were far from divorced from contemporary political issues. The intertwining of art and politics is key to Steiner' s thought and an important way that his thought resonates with many fellow Expressionist thinkers.

There is a broad link between Chapter Three and Chapter One that should be emphasized. In this last chapter I am arguing that Steiner' s spiritual thought was *not* divorced from his aesthetics and politics. In a similar way, in the first chapter I show that Steiner was not interested in remaining in a spiritual, dematerialized or “abstract” state,



but, instead, aimed to create art forms that involved a return to the phenomenological and to the forms of nature. It is also important to emphasize that my project demonstrates Steiner, like other “spiritual modernists,” as someone interested both in calling on past traditions but also as a figure oriented toward the creation of new forms, such as his architecture and Eurythmy. He believed that his modern epoch represented a time of unprecedented self-awareness in which people could consciously re-unite with the spiritual dimension.

More broadly, my dissertation intervenes in the interdisciplinary field of modernism studies in three ways. First, it contributes to the neglected subfield of what I call “spiritual modernism” by demonstrating that those artists and theorists whose work was shaped by an interest in the spiritual were engaging with modernity in their efforts to transform it, not transcend it. Second, by considering the place of Steiner’s architectural theory and practice within Expressionism, my project calls attention to the heterogeneity of this movement. Third, my project seeks to expand our understanding of modernism by complicating traditional binaries that still frequently inform the field, including religious/secular, pre-modern/modern and non-political/political.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Hazard. *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*. Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983.
- Amrine, Frederick. "Discovering a Genius: Rudolf Steiner at 150." *being human*, 2011, 7-17.
- . "Goethean Intuitions." *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011): 35-50.
- . "Idea, Theory, Emotion, Desire." *being human*, no. spring (2015): 30-37.
- . "The Metamorphosis of the Scientist." *Goethe Yearbook* 5 (1990): 187-212.
- Anz, Thomas. *Literatur des Expressionismus*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2002.
- . "Setting the Soul in Vibration! Expressionist Concepts of the Total Artwork." In *The Total Artwork in Expressionism: Art, Film, Literature, Theater, Dance, and Architecture, 1905-25*, edited by Ralf and Claudia Dillmann Beil, 50-67. Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt: Hatje Cantz.
- Bahr, Hermann. *Expressionismus*. München: Delphin-Verlag, 1916.
- Barfield, Owen. *History in English Words*. Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 1967.
- . "Listening to Steiner." *Parabola* 9.4 (1984): 94-100.
- . *Saving the Appearances: A Study of Idolatry*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988.
- Barnes, Henry. *A Life for the Spirit: Rudolf Steiner in the Crosscurrents of Our Time*. Hudson, NY: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1997.
- Bätschmann, Oskar. "Worringer über zeitgenössische Kunst und Künstler." In *Hundert Jahre "Abstraktion und Einfühlung": Konstellationen um Wilhelm Worringer*, edited by Norberto and Johannes Rössler Gramaccini, 113-29. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012.
- Beard, Andrew, ed. *Steiner, Architecture: An Introductory Reader*. Forest Row: Sophia Books, 2003.
- Becker, Sabina, Helmuth Kiesel, and Robert Krause. *Literarische Moderne: Begriff und Phänomen*. Berlin ; New York: W. de Gruyter, 2007.
- Behr, Shulamith, David Fanning and Douglas Jarman, ed. *Expressionism Reassessed*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993.
- Beil, Ralf and Claudia Dillmann, ed. *The Total Artwork in Expressionism: Art, Film, Literature, Theater, Dance, and Architecture 1905-1925*. Berlin, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2011.
- Belyi, Andrei, Aasya Turgenieff, Margarita Woloschin. *Reminiscences of Rudolf Steiner*. Ghent, NY: Adonis Press, 1987.
- Böhringer, Hannes. "Was zum Teufel war abstrakt? Ein Erinnerungsversuch nach hundert Jahren Abstraktion und Einfühlung." In *Hundert Jahre "Abstraktion und Einfühlung": Konstellationen um Wilhelm Worringer*, edited by Norberto and Johannes Rössler Gramaccini, 39-47. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012.
- Bullivant, Keith and Bernhard Spies, ed. *Literarisches Krisenbewußtsein. Ein Perceptions- und Produktionsmuster im 20. Jahrhundert*. Munich: Iudicium, 2001.
- Clement, Christian. *Die Geburt des modernen Mysteriendramas aus dem Geiste Weimars : zur Aktualität Goethes und Schillers in der Dramaturgie Rudolf Steiners*. Berlin: Logos, 2007.

- . *Rudolf Steiner. Ausgewählte Schriften. Kritische Ausgabe.* Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2013.
- Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.
- Davis, Jan. *Light for the New Millennium: Rudolf Steiner's Association with Helmut and Eliza von Moltke.* Edited by T.H. Meyer London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1997.
- Donahue, Neil H., ed. *Invisible Cathedrals: the Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer.* University Park: Pennsylvania State, 1995.
- Eck, Caroline van. *Organicism in Nineteenth-Century Architecture: an Inquiry into its Theoretical and Philosophical Background.* Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 1994.
- Eichendorff, Joseph von. *Wünschelrute.* 1835. <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/joseph-von-eichendorff-gedichte-4294/188>.
- Fischer, Luke. "Goethe contra Hegel: The Question of the End of Art." *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011): 127-57.
- Förster, Eckart "Goethe on " ‘ Das Auge des Geistes’ ”." *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 75 (2001 2001): 87-101.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod (1915).* Projekt Gutenberg, 2009. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29941/29941-h/29941-h.htm>.
- Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kultur- und Zeitgeschichte 1887-1901.* Vol. 31, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989.
- Goethe, J.W. . *Metamorphose der Pflanzen.* Edited by Rudolf Steiner Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1980.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Goethe Werke.* Hamburger Ausgabe. 14 vols. Vol. 12, München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2005.
- . *Goethes Werke. Schriften zur Kunst. Schriften zur Literatur. Maximen und Reflexionen.* Werke Kommentare und Register Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden. Edited by Erich Trunz Vol. 12, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005.
- Golding, John. *Paths to the absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still.* A.W. Mellon lectures in the fine arts ;1997. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. *Die okkulten Wurzeln des Nationalsozialismus.* Graz: Leopold Stocker Verlag, 1997.
- Gramaccini, Norberto and Johannes Rössler, ed. *Hundert Jahre "Abstraktion und Einfühlung": Konstellationen um Wilhelm Worringer.* Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012.
- Grohmann, Will. *Wassily Kandinsky: Leben und Werk.* Köln: Verlag M DuMont Schauberg, 1958.
- Gubser, Michael. "Time and History in Alois Riegl's Theory of Perception." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 3 (2005): 451-74.
- Iversen, Margaret. *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993.
- Jaynes, Julian. *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.

- Jelavich, Peter. *Munich and Theatrical Modernism: Politics, Playwriting, and Performance, 1890-1914*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Kandinsky, Wassily. *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*. Edited by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo 2 vols. Vol. 1 Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982.
- . *Rückblick*. Baden-Baden: Woldemar Klein Verlag, 1955.
- . *Über das Geistige in der Kunst: insbesondere in der Malerei*. 4 ed. Sulgen: Benteli Verlag, 2013. 1912.
- . "Über die Formfrage." In *Der Blaue Reiter*, edited by Klaus Lankheit. München: Piper, 2009.
- Kleinschmidt, Christoph. *Intermaterialität: zum Verhältnis von Schrift, Bild, Film und Bühne im Expressionismus*. Lettre. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012.
- Klinger, Cornelia. "Autonomy-Authenticity-Alterity: On the Aesthetic Ideology of Modernity." In *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernism*, 25-38. Barcelona: Museu D' Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009.
- Koss, Juliet. "On the Limits of Empathy." *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 1 (2006): 139-57.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. "Die Wartenden (1922)." In *Siegfried Kracauer. Schriften. Aufsätze 1915-1926*, edited by Inka Müller-Bach. Frankfurt am Main, 1990.
- Kramer, Andreas. "Goethe and the Cultural Project of German Modernism: Steiner, Kandinsky, Friedlaender, Schwitters and Benjamin." *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 71 (2001).
- Kramer, Hilton. "Introduction." In *Abstraction and Empathy: a Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, vii-xiv. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997.
- Kries, Mateo, ed. *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags*. Ditzingen: Vitra Design Museum, 2010.
- Kühn, Hans. *Dreigliederungs Zeit. Rudolf Steiners Kampf für die Gesellschaftsordnung der Zukunft*. Dornach, Switzerland: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, 1978.
- Lepenies, Wolf. *The Seduction of Culture in German History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Lichtenstern, Christa. *Die Wirkungsgeschichte der Metamorphosenlehre Goethes: von Philipp Otto Runge bis Joseph Beuys*. Metamorphose in der Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts Vol. 1, Weinheim: VCH, 1990.
- Lindenberg, Christoph. "Rudolf Steiner und die geistige Aufgabe Deutschlands." *Die Drei: Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst, und soziales Leben*, no. 12 (1989): 880-905.
- . *Rudolf Steiner. A Biography*. Translated by Jon McAlice. Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 2012.
- Loers, Veit. *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: Von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900-1915: Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt*. Edition Tertium, 1995.
- Long, Rose-Carol Washton. *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.
- . "Kandinsky's Abstract Style: The Veiling of Apocalyptic Folk Imagery." *Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (1975): 217-28.
- Magnússon, Gísli *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik: esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R.M. Rilke*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009.

- Mann, Heinrich. *Zola (1915)*. Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1962.
- Metzger, Rainer. *Munich: Its Golden Age of Art and Culture 1890-1920*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2009.
- Moss, George. *Die völkische Revolution. Über die geistigen Wurzeln des Nationalsozialismus*. Meisenheim: Athenäum, Königstein & Hain, 1991.
- Müller-Westermann, Iris et al., ed. *Hilma af Klint: Eine Pionierin der Abstraktion*. Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2013.
- Norton, Robert Edward. *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Öhlschläger, Claudia. *Abstraktionsdrang Wilhelm Worringer und der Geist der Moderne*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005.
- Olin, Margaret. *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.
- Pehnt, Wolfgang. "Etwas wie Morgenröte: Die Architektur von Rudolf Steiner." In *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags*. Ditzingen: Vitra Design Museum, 2010.
- . *Expressionist Architecture*. Stuttgart and London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.
- . *Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach*. Opus 1. [Berlin]: Ernst & Sohn, 1991.
- Pytlík, Priska. *Okkultismus und Moderne: ein kulturhistorisches Phänomen und seine Bedeutung für die Literatur um 1900*. Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2005.
- Raab, Rex. *Eloquent Concrete: How Rudolf Steiner Employed Reinforced Concrete*. London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1979.
- Raulff, Ulrich. *Kreis ohne Meister: Stefan Georges Nachleben*. Stefan Georges Nachleben. München: Beck, 2009.
- Riegl, Alois. *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*. Translated by Evelyn Kain. Edited by David Castriota. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- . *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*. Berlin: Georg Siemens, 1893.
- Ringbom, Sixten. "Art in 'The Epoch of the Great Spiritual': Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966).
- . "Die Steiner-Annotationen Kandinskys." In *Kandinsky und München. Begegnungen und Wandlungen 1896-1914*, edited by Armin Zweite. München: Prestel-Verlag, 1982.
- . "Kandinsky und das Okkulte." In *Kandinsky und München. Begegnungen und Wandlungen 1896-1914*, edited by Armin Zweite. München: Prestel-Verlag, 1982.
- . *The Sounding Cosmos: a Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting*. Abo Akademi, 1970.
- . "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers." In *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, edited by Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Los Angeles; New York: Abbeville Press, 1986.
- Scheerbart, Paul. *Glasarchitektur*. Berlin: Verlag der Sturm, 1914.
- Schirren, Matthias. *Alpine Architektur. Eine Utopie*. Munich: Prestel, 2004.

- Selg, Peter. *Rudolf Steiner 1861-1925. Lebens- und Werkgeschichte*. 3 vols. Stuttgart: Ita Wegman Institut, 2012.
- Sharp, Dennis. "Expressionist Architecture Today." In *Expressionism Reassessed*, edited by Shulamith Behr, David Fanning and Douglas Jarman, 80-90. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993.
- . *Modern Architecture and Expressionism*. Norwich, England: Longmans, 1966.
- Sheppard, Richard. "Kandinsky's Oeuvre 1900-14: The Avant-Garde as Rear Guard." *Word & Image* 6 (1990): 41-67.
- Staudenmaier, Peter. "Esoteric Alternatives in Imperial Germany: Science, Spirit, and the Modern Occult Revival." In *Revisiting the "Nazi Occult." Histories, Realities, Legacies*, edited by Monica and Eric Kurlander Black, 23-41. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2015.
- Steiner, Rudolf. "Aus Rudolf Steiner's Einleitung in Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften." In *Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, 5-18. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1980.
- . *Bilder okkultur Siegel und Säulen. Der Münchner Kongress Pfingsten 1907 und seine Auswirkungen (1907, 1909 and 1911)*. Vol. 284, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1993.
- . *Das Geheimnis der Wunde. Aufzeichnungen zum sogenannten Samariterkurs gehalten von Rudolf Steiner in Dornach vom 13-16 August 1914*. Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe. Veröffentlichungen aus dem Archiv der Rudolf Steiner-Nachlassverwaltung. Edited by Walter Kugler Vol. Hft Nr. 108, 1992.
- . "Das Sinnlich-Übersinnliche in seiner Verwirklichung durch die Kunst." Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2010. <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>.
- . *Das Wesen des Musikalischen und das Tonerlebnis im Menschen*. Vol. 283, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989. 1906; 1920-1923.
- . *Der Baugedanke des Goetheanum. Einleitender Vortrag mit Erklärungen zu den Bildern des Baus (1921)*. Freie Verwaltung des Nachlasses Rudolf Steiners, 1958.
- . *Der Baugedanke von Dornach (1920)*. Dornach: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag, 1942.
- . *Der Dornacher Bau als Wahrzeichen geschichtlichen Werdens und künstlerischer Unwandelungsimpulse (1914)*. Vol. 287, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1985.
- . *Die Erkenntnis der Seele und des Geistes*. Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe. Fünfzehn öffentliche Vorträge gehalten zwischen dem 10. Oktober 1907 und dem 14. Mai 1908 im Architektenhaus in Berlin, am 3. und 5. Dezember 1907 und 18. März 1908 in München. Vol. GA 56, Dornach, Switzerland: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1985.
- . *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss (1910)*. 4 ed. Vol. GA 13: Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2010.
- . *Die geistigen Hintergründe des Ersten Weltkrieges (1914-1921)*. Vol. 174b, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1992.
- . *Die Mission einzelner Volksseelen im Zusammenhange mit der germanisch-nordisch Mythologie* Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, 2010. <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>.

- . *Die Rätsel der Philosophie (1914)*. Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, 2010. <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>.
- . *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*. Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2010. <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>.
- . *Eurythmie als sichtbare Sprache (1922-1924)*. Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, 1968.
- . *Eurythmie. Die Offenbarung der sprechenden Seele*. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1980.
- . *The First Goetheanum: Towards a New Theory of Architecture*. Edited by Frederick Amrine and John Kettle Vol. GA 289-290, Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, forthcoming.
- . *The First Goetheanum. Architecture as Peacework*. Edited by Frederick Amrine and John Kettle Vol. GA 287, Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, forthcoming.
- . *Gedanken während der Zeit des Krieges. Für Deutsche und diejenigen, die nicht glauben, sie hassen zu müssen*. Aufsätze über die Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus und zur Zeitlage 1915-1921. Vol. GA 24, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1982. 1915.
- . "Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik." GA 30 (1909): 100-490.
- . *Grenzen der Naturerkenntnis*. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1981. <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/vortraege/322.pdf>.
- . *Kunst im Lichte der Mysterienweisheit (1914-1915)*. Vol. GA 275 Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1990.
- . *Kunst und Kunsterkenntnis. Grundlagen einer neuen Ästhetik*. Vol. GA 271, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1985.
- . *Mein Lebensgang. Eine Autobiographie*. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 2009. <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/schriften/028.pdf>
- .
- . *Okkultes Lesen und okkultes Hören*. Vol. GA 156, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1987. 1914.
- . *Stilformen des Organisch-Lebendigen (1921)*. Dornach: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag am Goetheanum, 1933. two lectures.
- . *Theosophie: Einführung in übersinnliche Welterkenntnis und Menschenbestimmung*. Vol. GA 09 (2010), Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 1904.
- . *Wege zu einem neuen Baustil: und der Bau wird Mensch*. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1982.
- . *Weltenwunder, Seelenprüfungen und Geistesoffenbarungen (1911)*. Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, 2010. <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>.
- . *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* , 2010. <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu>.
- . *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen. Das Karma der Unwahrhaftigkeit. Teil I (1916)*. Kosmische und Menschliche Geschichte. Vol. 173, Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1978.
- . "Zolas Schwur und die Wahrheit über Dreyfus (1898)." In *Magazin für Literatur*, 230-31. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989.

- Steiner, Rudolf "Lyrik der Gegenwart. Ein Überblick." *Magazin für Literatur*, 1898, 1-41.
- Taut, Bruno. *Die Stadtkrone*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2002. 1919.
- . "Eine Notwendigkeit." *Der Sturm* 4, no. 196-197 (1914): 174-75.
- Treitl, Corinna. *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Tuchman, Maurice, Judi Freeman, Carel Blotkamp, Art Los Angeles County Museum of, Art Museum of Contemporary, and Gemeentemuseum Haags. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. Los Angeles : New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; Abbeville Press, 1986.
- Vietor, Karl. *Goethe the Thinker*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950.
- Wagner, Christoph, ed. *Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee: das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*. Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber, 2005.
- Washton-Long, Rose-Carol. "Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky's Art of the Future." *Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (1987).
- Weber, Max. "Wissenschaft als Beruf (1919)." In *Max Weber Schriften 1894-1922*, edited by Dirk Kaesler. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2002.
- Weiss, Peg. *Kandinsky in Munich: the Formative Jugendstil Years*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- Whyte, Iain Boyd. *Bruno Taut and the Architecture of Activism*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- . "The Expressionist Sublime." In *Expressionist Utopias. Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy*, edited by Timothy O. Benson, 118-37. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Worringer, Wilhelm. *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. München: R. Piper 1919. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3151128>.
- . *Künstlerische Zeitfragen*. München: H. Bruckmann, 1921.
- Wyss, Beat. *Der Wille zur Kunst: zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*. Köln: DuMont, 1996.
- Zander, Helmut. *Anthroposophie in Deutschland: theosophische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche Praxis 1884-1945*. Göttingen: Bandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007.
- . *Rudolf Steiner: Die Biografie*. München: Piper, 2011.
- Zerner, Henri. "Preface." Translated by Evelyn Kain. In *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, edited by David Castriota, xxi-xxiii. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Zimmerman, Claire. "Siegfried Kracauer's Architectures." In *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, edited by Gerd Gemünden & Johannes von Moltke, 149-65. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2012.
- Zimmermann, Reinhard. "Der Bauhaus-Künstler Kandinsky-ein Esoteriker?". In *Johannes Itten-Wassily Kandinsky-Paul Klee: Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, edited by Christoph Wagner, 47-55. Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2005.
- Zumdick, Wolfgang. "Der heisse Kern der Anthroposophie: Anmerkungen zu Rudolf Steiners Weltbegriff." In *Rudolf Steiner: Die Alchemie des Alltags*, edited by Mateo Kries. Ditingen: Vitra Design Museum und Autoren, 2010.
- Zweite, Armin, and Peter Jelavich. *Kandinsky und München: Begegnungen und Wandlungen, 1896-1914*. . München: Prestel-Verlag, 1982.