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Author(s): Peter Selz
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THE AESTHETIC THEORIES
OF WASSILY KANDINSKY
AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE ORIGIN OF NON-OBJECTIVE PAINTING*

PETER SELZ

At a time when so much painting is in the non-objective vein, it seems relevant to investigate the aesthetic theories of the artist who was the first champion of non-objective art, or "concrete art," as he preferred to call it.

It is possible that non-objective paintings may have been painted prior to Kandinsky's first non-objective watercolor (Fig. 1) of 1910 and his more ambitious Impressions, Improvisations, and Compositions of 1911. There are abstractions by Arthur Dove, for example, which are dated 1910. Picabia and Kupka began working in a non-objective idiom not much later, and Delaunay painted his non-objective Color Disks in 1912. In Germany Adolf Hoelzel ventured into non-objective painting as early as 1910, but whereas for Hoelzel it was merely an experiment in additional possibilities, Kandinsky made non-objectivity the very foundation of his pictorial imagery.

Kandinsky formulated his ideas of non-objective painting over an extended period of time. Notes for his essay, Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* date back to 1901 while the book was completed in 1910. His thoughts were continued in his essay "Über die Formfrage" for the famous almanac Der blaue Reiter.* Both essays were first published in 1912. These essays are to a considerable extent based on previous aesthetic theory and were very much in keeping with the avant-garde thinking of the prewar years. They also constitute almost a programmatic manifesto for the expressionist generation.*

* This article is based on a chapter of the author's forthcoming book, German Expressionist Painting, now in publication at the University of California Press. It was originally a part of a doctoral dissertation, "German Expressionist Painting from Its Inception to the First World War," University of Chicago, 1954. The author wishes to acknowledge his debt particularly to Drs. Ulrich Middeldorf and Joshua Taylor, under whose supervision this dissertation was prepared. The translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated in the footnotes.

2. Kupka's Red and Blue Disks in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, is dated 1911-1912, but it is just possible that this date was added later.
3. Germain Bazin in his biographical notes to René Huyghe's Les Contemporains, Paris, Editions Pierre Tisné, 1949, cites 1914 as the year in which Delaunay did the first non-objective painting in Paris. This author is able to predate this by two years, since he has seen Delaunay's Color Disks (Delaunay Studio, Paris), a completely non-objective painting, dated 1912. It remains possible, however, that Picabia did non-objective paintings in Paris before then. Recently it has been maintained that the self-taught Lithuanian artist, M. K. Ciurlionis, painted non-objective pictures between 1905 and 1910 (Aleksis Rannit, "M. K. Ciurlionis," Das Kunstwerk, 1, 1946-47, pp. 46-48, and idem, "Un pittoresco astratto prima di Kandinsky," La Biennale, VIII, 1954, no. 8). Ciurlionis' work is now in the Ciurlionis Gallery in Kaunas. The reproductions included in Mr. Rannit's articles on Ciurlionis, however, are highly symbolic abstractions, verging on the fantastic art of Kubin, Redon, or some Surrealists.

5. Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, New York, Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947. This book was first published by Piper in Munich as Uber das Geistige in der Kunst in 1912. The first English translation was undertaken by Michael Sadleir under the title The Art of Spiritual Harmony (London, 1914). The first American edition, called On the Spiritual in Art, appeared in 1946 (New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation). The 1947 edition, authorized by Mme. Kandinsky and translated by Francis Godling, Michael Harison and Ferdinand Ostertag, will be used here because it is much closer to the original text.
7. In 1946 Kandinsky published his most systematic treatise, Punk und Linie zur Fläche (Bauhaus Book, IX, Munich, Albert Langen Verlag, 1926). This book, translated as Point and Line to Plane by Howard Davis and Hilla Rebay (New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1947), was written at the Bauhaus and elucidates most clearly Kandinsky's thinking during this later period. It falls, however, beyond the realm of discussion in this study.
8. "If Der blaue Reiter, published by R. Piper, is taken together with Kandinsky's Das Geistige in der Kunst, as a unity, then this double volume is just as much the book of..."
1. **Venus**, Netherlandish woodcut, xv cent.

2. **Saturn**, Netherlandish woodcut, xv cent.

3. Illustration to Chapter 61 (Of Dancing) from Brant’s _Narrenschiff_, Basel, 1494

1. Wassily Kandinsky, First Non-Objective Watercolor (1910)
   Paris, Collection of Mme Nina Kandinsky
Kandinsky’s particular didactic style makes his writings difficult to read and analyze. Kenneth Lindsay in his study of Kandinsky’s theories described Kandinsky’s peculiar literary style as follows: “Characteristic of Kandinsky’s writing is the technique of breaking up the given topic into opposites or alternatives. These opposites or alternatives usually follow directly after the posing of the problem and are numbered. Often they suggest further sets of opposites and alternatives. The sequence of thought is flexible, sometimes abrupt and cross-tracking, and frequently associative. The dominating relativity of the thought process contrasts strongly with the conclusions, which are often positively stated.”

The Rejection of Material Reality

Kandinsky was always strongly predisposed toward sense impressions. In his autobiography he indicates that he experienced objects, events, even music primarily in terms of color, and he did not conceive of color in its physical and material aspects but rather in its emotional effect. During his scientific studies he lost faith in the rational scientific method and felt that reality could be fully comprehended only by means of creative intuition.

Kandinsky was not alone in his rejection of positivism and pragmatism at the turn of the century. Generally it might be said that “the twentieth century has in its first third taken up a position of reaction against classic rationalism and intellectualism.”

Even in the pure sciences the value of the intuitive as against the purely experimental was stressed during the early part of the twentieth century, so that by 1925 Werner Heisenberg was able to formulate the “Principle of Uncertainty,” stating that there is a limit to the precision with which we can observe nature scientifically. This did not mean a return to metaphysics, but it indicated the inherent limitations of quantitative observation.

Kandinsky’s doubt of the ultimate possibilities of quantitative analysis was shared by many philosophers also. His philosophy finds perhaps its closest parallel in the thinking of Henri Bergson, who taught that true reality can be grasped only through artistic intuition, which he contrasted to intellectual conception. The intellect, according to Bergson, is man’s tool for rational action, but “art, whether it be painting or sculpture, poetry or music, has no other object than to brush aside the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself.”

Similarly Kandinsky turns away from the representation of visible objects in his attempt to penetrate beneath the epidermis of appearances to the ultimate or “inner” reality. As early as his first encounter in Moscow with the paintings by Monet, Kandinsky felt that the material object was not a necessary element in his painting: “I had the impression that here painting itself...”


12. Very much the same idea is expressed by Franz Marc: “I am beginning more and more to see behind or, to put it better, through things, to see behind them something which they conceal, for the most part cunningly, with their outward appearance by hoodwinking man with a façade which is quite different from what it actually covers. Of course, from the point of view of physics this is an old story. . . . The scientific interpretation has powerfully transformed the human mind; it has caused the greatest type-change we have so far lived to see. Art is indisputably pursuing the same course, in its own way, certainly, and the problem, our problem, is to discover the way.” (Franz Marc, diary entry, Christmas 1914, in Peter Thoenes [pseud.], Modern German Art, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1958.)
comes into the foreground; I wondered if it would not be possible to go further in this direction. From then on I looked at the art of ikons with different eyes; it meant that I had 'got eyes' for the abstract in art. Later he wrote: "The impossibility and, in art, the purposelessness of copying an object, the desire to make the object express itself, are the beginnings of leading the artist away from 'literary' color to artistic, i.e. pictorial aims."

Agreeing with earlier writers such as the symbolists, Van de Velde, and Endell, Kandinsky felt that art must express the spirit but that in order to accomplish this task it must be dematerialized. Of necessity, this meant creating a new art form.

It was not only for philosophic reasons that Kandinsky wished to forsake objective reality. Psychological reasons, it seems, also played their part. Speaking about his period of study at the Munich Art Academy, he wrote: "The naked body, its lines and movement, sometimes interested me, but often merely repelled me. Some poses in particular were repugnant to me, and I had to force myself to copy them. I could breathe freely only when I was out of the studio door and in the street once again."

It is significant that the human body, which is found as an almost universal motif in the art forms of most cultures, is here eschewed as subject matter. It is true that the art of the west emphasized the nonhuman aspects during the nineteenth century, when painters turned their attention to still life and landscape. The conscious rejection of the human form, however, is certainly psychologically significant. Indeed a psychological interpretation of the reasons for this response might give us a more profound understanding of the non-objective artist and his work.

From the point of view of the history of aesthetics it is also interesting that Kandinsky's rejection of the forms of nature occurred at approximately the same time as Worringer's publication, *Abstraction and Empathy*. Here Worringer submits the theory that the cause for abstraction is man's wish to withdraw from the world or his antagonism toward it. The lifeless form of a pyramid or the suppression of space in Byzantine mosaics clearly shows that what motivated the creation of these works of art was a need for refuge from the vast confusion of the object world—the desire for "a resting-place in the flight of phenomena." Worringer's thesis of abstraction as one of the bases of artistic creation preceded Kandinsky's first non-objective painting by about two years, and it is important to keep in mind that the two men knew each other in Munich during this critical period.

Kandinsky himself maintained that the immediate cause of his first essay at non-objective painting was the shock of suddenly entering his studio to see one of his paintings lying on its side on the easel and being struck with its unusual beauty. This incident, he believed, made it clear to him that the representation of nature was superfluous in his art. The emphasis on the element of distance in the aesthetic experience found a parallel in the theories of the contemporary...
English psychologist, Edward Bullough: "The sudden view of things from their reverse, usually unnoticed, side, comes upon us as a revelation, and such revelations are precisely those of art."

Kandinsky felt, however, that he could not immediately turn to "absolute painting." In a letter to Hilla Rebay, he pointed out that at that time he was still alone in the realization that painting ultimately must discard the object. A long struggle for increasing abstraction from nature was still necessary. In 1910 he was still writing: "Purely abstract forms are in the reach of few artists at present; they are too indefinite for the artist. It seems to him that to limit himself to the indefinite would be to lose possibilities, to exclude the human and therefore to weaken expression."

But he was already pointing out at that time that the abstract idea was constantly gaining ground, that the choice of subjects must originate from the inner necessity of the artist; material, or objective, form may be more or less superfluous. He insists that the artist must be given complete freedom to express himself in any way that is necessary according to the "principle of inner necessity." He looked hopefully to the future where the eventual predominance of the abstract would be inevitable in the "epoch of great spirituality."

In 1910 Kandinsky painted his first abstract painting, a water color. The first large non-objective oil dates from 1911, and throughout 1912 he did both "objective" and "concrete" paintings. After 1912 there were very few "objective" works. His art had become completely free from nature and like music its meaning was now meant to be inherent in the work itself and independent of external objects.

Kandinsky distinguished what he called "objective" art from "concrete" art by distinguishing between the means chosen by the artist. In "objective" art both artistic and natural elements are used, resulting in "mixed art," while in "concrete" art exclusively artistic means are used, resulting in "pure art." In a short article, published in 1935, he gave a lucid example of this distinction: "There is an essential difference between a line and a fish. And that is that the fish can swim, can eat and be eaten. It has the capacities of which the line is deprived. These capacities of the fish are necessary extras for the fish itself and for the kitchen, but not for the painting. And so, not being necessary they are superfluous. That is why I like the line better than the fish—at least in my painting."

The element of representation is thus rejected by Kandinsky for his art. He insists that a picture's quality lies in what is usually called form: its lines, shapes, colors, planes, etc., without reference to anything outside of the canvas. But here occurs an apparent contradiction in Kandinsky's theory, because he—like expressionists in general—did not believe that a picture must be evaluated from its formal aspects. Kandinsky and the expressionists did not agree with "formalists" like Roger Fry, who believe that the aesthetic emotion is essentially an emotion about form. Seeing Kandinsky's first abstractions, Fry concerned himself only with their form: "... one finds that . . . the improvisations become more definite, more logical and more closely knit in structure, more surprisingly beautiful in their color oppositions, more exact in their equilibrium."

Kandinsky himself takes strong issue with this theory. In his aesthetics the formal aspect of a work of art is as unimportant as its representational quality.

The Insignificance of Form

Form, to Kandinsky, is nothing but the outward expression of the artist's inner needs. Form is matter, and the artist is involved in a constant struggle against materialism. Kandinsky's words

22. Ibid., p. 77.
are reminiscent of mediaeval thought when he says: "It is the spirit that rules over matter, and
not the other way around."26

The artist should not seek salvation in form, Kandinsky warns in his essay, "Über die Form-
frage," because form is only an expression of content and is entirely dependent on the innermost
spirit. It is this spirit which chooses form from the storehouse of matter, and it always chooses
the form most expressive of itself. Content always creates its own appropriate form. And form
may be chosen from anywhere between the two extreme poles: the great abstraction and the great
realism. Kandinsky then proceeds to prove that these opposites, the abstract and the realistic, are
actually identical, and that form is therefore an insignificant concern to the artist. This he does
as follows:

In the "great realism" (as exemplified in the art of Henri Rousseau) the external-artificial
element of painting is discarded, and the content, the inner feeling of the object, is brought forth
primitively and "purely" through the representation of the simple, rough object. Artistic purpose
is expressed directly since the painting is not burdened with formal problems. The content is
now strongest because it is divested of external and academic concepts of beauty. Kandinsky pre-
ferred this "great realism," also found in children's drawings, to the use of distortion, which
he felt always aroused literary associations.

Since the "great abstraction" excludes "real" objects, the content is embodied in non-objective
form. Thus the "inner sound" of the picture is most clearly manifest. The scaffolding of the
object has been removed, as in realism the scaffolding of beauty has been discarded. In both cases
we arrive at the spiritual content itself. "The greatest external differentiation becomes the
greatest internal identity:

Realism = Abstraction
Abstraction = Realism"27

The hypothesis that the minimum of abstraction can have the most abstract effect, and vice
versa, is based by Kandinsky on the postulation that a quantitative decrease can be equal to a
qualitative increase: 2 plus 1 can be less than 2 minus 1 in aesthetics. A dot of color, for example,
may lose in its effect of intensity if its actual intensity is increased.28 The pragmatic function of a
form and its sentient meaning are dissimilar, yet abstraction and realism are identical.

Kandinsky cites several examples to prove this thesis. A hyphen, for instance, is of practical
value and significance in its context. If this hyphen is taken out of its practical-purposeful context
and put on canvas, and if it is not used there to fulfill any practical purpose at all—such as the
delineation of an object—it then becomes nothing but a line; it is completely liberated from
signification and abstracted from all its meaning as a syntactical sign; it is the abstract line itself.
At the same time, however, it has also become most real, because now it is no longer a sign but
the real line, the object itself.

It may be argued that Kandinsky uses a very narrow definition of both the abstract and the
realistic, and that the line may be a great deal more realistic and more meaningful as a sign, such
as a hyphen, in its context, than it is as a line only. It is a valid objection to say that this identity
of the abstract and the real holds true only in this verbal analogy, and that Kandinsky has not
presented logical proof. Kandinsky, however, was not concerned with the correctness of intel-
lectual thought, or with the proof of his spiritual values. He admits: "I have always turned
to reason and intellect least of all."29

He concludes his analysis of form by saying: "In principle there is no problem of form."30
The artist who expresses his "soul vibrations" can use any form he wants. Formal rules in aesthetics

are not only impossible but a great stumbling block to the free expression of spiritual value. It is the duty of the artist to fight against them to clear the way for free expression. Often in the history of art, artists were bogged down by matter and could not see beyond the formal. The nineteenth century was such a period, in which men failed to see the spirit in art as they failed to see it in religion. But to seek art and yet be satisfied with form is equivalent to the contentment with the idol in the quest for God. Form is dead unless it is expressive of content. There cannot be a symbol without expressive value.

In his introduction to the second edition of Der blaue Reiter Kandinsky states the aim of the book as "to show by means of examples, practical arrangement and theoretical proof, that the problem of form is secondary in art, that art is above all a matter of content." 31

Kandinsky understood his own time as being the beginning of a new spiritual age when the abstract spirit was taking possession of the human spirit. 32 Now artists would increasingly recognize the insignificance of form per se, and realize its relativity, its true meaning as nothing but the outward expression of inner meaning."

**Art the Affirmation of the Spirit**

We have seen that in Kandinsky's aesthetics form as well as object, the formal and representational aspects of art, have no importance by themselves and are meaningful only insofar as they express the artist's innermost feelings. Only through the expression of the artist's inner emotion can he transmit understanding of true spiritual reality itself. The only "infallible guide" which can carry the artist to "great heights" is the principle of internal necessity (italics his). 33 This concept of internal necessity is the core and the basis of Kandinsky's aesthetic theory and becomes a highly significant element in expressionist criticism in general.

The period of spiritual revolution which Kandinsky believed to be approaching, he called the "spiritual turning point." He perceived indications of this period of transition in many cultural manifestations. In the field of religion, for instance, Theosophy was attempting to counteract the materialist evil. In the Theosophical Society, "one of the most important spiritual movements," 34 man seeks to approach the problem of the spirit by the way of inner enlightenment. In the realm of literature he cites Maeterlinck as, "... perhaps one of the first prophets, one of the first reporters and clairvoyants of the decadence..." Maeterlinck creates his atmosphere principally by artistic means. His material machinery... really plays a symbolic role and helps to give the inner note.... The apt use of a word (in its poetical sense), its repetition, twice, three times, or even more frequently, according to the need of the poem, will not only tend to intensify the internal structure but also bring out unsuspected spiritual properties in the word itself."

By using pure sound for the most immediate effect upon the reader or listener, the writer depends on prelanguage signs, i.e., sounds which—like music—do not depend on language for their meaning. This level of signification is also the basis of Kandinsky's non-objective painting. In music Kandinsky points to Schönberg's panchromatic scheme, which advocates the full renunciation of functional harmonious progression and traditional form and accepts only those means which lead the composer to the most uncompromising self-expression: "His music leads us to where musical experience is a matter not of the ear, but of the soul—and from this point begins

32. This idea is very similar to Herder's theory of Inspiration: J. G. Herder, Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit, Leipzig, 1821.
33. Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, pp. 51-53.
34. ibid., p. 32. Kandinsky himself—as Lindsay has pointed out ("An Examination of the Fundamental Theories of Wassily Kandinsky," pp. 208-213)—was not a member of the Theosophical Society. He admired, however, the cosmology of Mme. Blavatzky which attempted to create a significant synthesis of Indian wisdom and western civilization. The anti-materialistic concepts of the Theosophical movement attracted a good many artists and writers yearning for a new religious spirit during the early part of the century. Besides Kandinsky: Piet Mondrian, Hans Arp, Hugo Ball, William Butler Yeats.
35. Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, pp. 33-34.
the music of the future." Kandinsky conceived of music as an emancipated art, which furthermore had the quality of time-extension and was most effective in inspiring spiritual emotion in the listener. Painting, while still largely dependent on natural form was showing similar signs of emancipation. Picasso's breakdown of volumes and Matisse's free use of color for its own sake were manifestations of the turning point toward a spiritual art.

How would the artist achieve full spiritual harmony in his composition? Kandinsky pointed out that the painter had two basic means at his disposal—form and color—and that there was always an unavoidable mutual relationship between them.

In his prewar writings he still did not come forth with a thorough analysis of forms as he did later with his systematic Point and Line to Plane, yet he was already stating: "Form alone, even though abstract and geometrical, has its internal resonance, a spiritual entity whose properties are identical with the form. A triangle... is such an entity, with its particular spiritual perfume."

But color is the most powerful medium in the hand of the painter. It has a psychic as well as a physical effect upon the observer. It can influence his tactile, olfactory, and especially aural senses, as well as his visual sense, and in chromotherapy it has been shown that "red light stimulates and excites the heart, while blue light can cause temporary paralysis." Color is the artist's means by which he can influence the human soul. Its meaning is expressed metaphorically by Kandinsky: "Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations of the soul."

Kandinsky then proceeds to develop an elaborate explanation of the psychic effect of color. This contrasts to the more scientific color theories of Helmholtz, Rood, Chevreul and Signac and closely approaches the psychological color theory of Goethe and metaphysics of color of Philipp Otto Runge. Like his romanticist predecessor, Kandinsky believed that color could directly influence the human soul.

Blue in Kandinsky's system is the heavenly color; it retreats from the spectator, moving toward its own center. It beckons to the infinite, arousing a longing for purity and the supersensuous. Light blue is like the sound of the flute, while dark blue has the sound of the cello.

Yellow is the color of the earth. It has no profound meaning; it seems to spread out from its own center and advance to the spectator from the canvas. It has the shrill sound of a canary or of a brass horn, and is often associated with the sour taste of lemon.

Green is the mixture of blue and yellow. There the concentricity of blue nullifies the eccentricity of yellow. It is passive and static, and can be compared to the so-called "bourgeoisie," self-satisfied, fat and healthy. In music it is best represented by the placid, long-drawn middle tones of the violin.

White, which was not considered a color by the impressionists, has the spiritual meaning of a color. It is the symbol of a world void of all material quality and substance. It is the color of beginning. It is the "sound" of the earth during the white period of the Ice Age.

Black is like eternal silence. It is without hope. It signifies termination and is therefore the color of mourning.

By the symbolic use of colors combined "according to their spiritual significance," the artist can finally achieve a great composition: "Color itself offers contrapuntal possibilities and, when combined with design, may lead to the great pictorial counterpoint, where also painting achieves composition, and where pure art is in the service of the divine."
Kandinsky's color symbolism is in no way based upon physical laws of color or the psychology of color vision. He himself pointed out when writing about color that "all these statements are the results of empirical feeling, and are not based on exact science." This may even explain his own inconsistencies such as his statement in Concerning the Spiritual in Art that "red light stimulates and excites the heart" contradicted by his assertion that "red . . . has brought about a state of partial paralysis."

It is also true that specific colors call forth different associations in people as well as cultures. Specific reactions to specific colors have never been proved experimentally. Max Raphael in his book, Von Monet bis Picasso, points out that colors have had altogether different meanings for those individuals most occupied with them. Yellow, for example, signified the earth for Leonardo, had gay, happy characteristics for Goethe, meant friendliness to Kant and heavenly splendor to Van Gogh, suggested the night to Gauguin and aggressiveness to Kandinsky. We might add that it symbolizes jealousy in German usage, an emotion which is associated with green in English idiom.

Such examples could be increased ad infinitum and it is very doubtful that Kandinsky attempted to set down scientific rules for color associations. He was articulating his own personal associations; he stated: "It is clear that all I have said of these simple colors is very provisional and general, and so are the feelings (joy, grief, etc.) which have been quoted as parallels to the colors. For these feelings are only material expressions of the soul. Shades of color, like those of sound, are of a much finer texture and awaken in the soul emotions too fine to be expressed in prose."

In his second significant book, Point and Line to Plane, subtitled "A Contribution to the Analysis of the Pictorial Elements," Kandinsky presented his grammar of line, forms, and space in a manner similar to his color theory in Concerning the Spiritual in Art.

It is the task of the painter, according to Kandinsky, to achieve the maximum effect by bringing his media, color and form, into orderly and expressive composition. Each art has its own language, and each artist, be he painter, sculptor, architect, writer or composer, must work in his specific medium and bring it to the expression of greatest inner significance. But once painting, for example, is divested of the scaffolding of natural form and becomes completely abstract, the pure law of pictorial construction can be discovered. And then it will be found that pure painting is internally closely related to pure music or pure poetry.

**Synthesis of the Arts**

Kandinsky points out that human beings, because of individual differences, differ in the type of art expression to which they are most receptive. For some it is musical form, for others painting or literature, which causes the greatest aesthetic enjoyment. He also realized that the artist could achieve aesthetic effects in sensory fields not limited to his own medium. He was much interested, for instance, in Scriabin's experiments with sound-color combinations. The re-enforcement of one art form with another by means of synaesthesia will greatly increase the final aesthetic effect upon the receptor. The greatest effect can be obtained by the synthesis of all the arts in one "monumental art," which is the ultimate end of Kandinsky's aesthetics.

Kandinsky here continues the nineteenth century tradition—from Herder to Wagner—with its desire for a union of all arts. Kandinsky believes that a synthesis of the arts is possible because in the final analysis all artistic means are identical in their inner meaning: ultimately the external differences will become insignificant and the internal identity of all artistic expression will be dis-
closed. Each art form causes a certain "complex of soul vibrations." The aim of the synthesis of art forms is the refinement of the soul through the sum-total of these complexes.

In his essay "Über Bühnenkomposition" and in his "Schematic Plan of Studies and Work of the Institute of Art Culture," Kandinsky outlines the possible steps to be taken for the achievement of "monumental art." Present-day drama, opera, ballet are criticized as much as the plastic arts. By discarding external factors in "stage composition," particularly the factors of plot, external relationship, and external unity, a greater internal unity can be achieved. Kandinsky then experiments with such a composition, "Der gelbe Klang." There he attempts to combine music, the movement of dancers and of objects, the sound of the human voice (without being tied down to word or language meanings), and the effect of color-tone, as experimented with by Scriabin.

Kandinsky admits that his "stage composition" is weak but believes the principle to be valid. It is necessary to remember, he maintains, that we are still at the very beginning of the great abstract period in art. Materialism still has its grasp on modern activity and is not as yet completely vanquished. But the new, "the spiritual in art," already manifests itself in most fields of creativity.

Kandinsky made his first attempt at the realization of a synthesis of the arts when he proposed and founded the Institute of Art Culture in Moscow in 1920, a comprehensive institute for the study and development of the arts and sciences. Kandinsky was active in this organization as vice-president for about a year; then political pressure forced his resignation and he found a similar field of activity in the Bauhaus in Weimar, which he joined in 1922.

Conclusion

Expressionism, which began by shifting emphasis from the object to be painted to the artist’s own subjective interpretation—reached in Kandinsky the total negation of the object. In this respect he was of great inspiration to succeeding artists. The final phase of expressionism also became the beginning of an altogether new artistic concept, non-objective painting, and Kandinsky was heralded as its innovator by the following generation, even by painters such as Diego Rivera working in an altogether different style: "I know of nothing more real than the painting of Kandinsky—nor anything more true and nothing more beautiful. A painting by Kandinsky gives no image of earthly life—it is life itself. If one painter deserves the name ‘creator,’ it is he. He organizes matter as matter was organized, otherwise the Universe would not exist. He opened a window to look inside the All. Someday Kandinsky will be the best known and best loved by men."

In his rejection of the representational aspect of art, Kandinsky cleared the way for new values in art. By experimenting with the possibility of an expressive—rather than a formalistic—art in the non-objective idiom, he threw out a challenge which performed a most valuable function in the history of modern art. Through his activity as an aesthetician as well as a painter he was able to write a series of books which fully articulate his ideas and have become as influential in the history of modern painting as his paintings themselves.

Kandinsky’s aesthetic theory continues, among other things, the precept that the elements of painting—lines and colors and their combinations—evolve emotional associations in the observer. This precept is basic to expressionism, although not original with the expressionist movement. Much of it is implied in romanticist aesthetics and clearly stated in the theory of empathy. It is set forth differently in Paul Signac’s theory of neo-impressionism and occurs again in Bergson’s

50. By "stage composition"—Bühnenkomposition—Kandinsky is referring to the totality of movement on the stage.
51. Kandinsky, "Der gelbe Klang," in Kandinsky and Marc, Der blaue Reiter, pp. 119-131. The possibilities of such a synthesis in the film were not yet explored in 1912.
52. Diego Rivera, quoted in "Notes on the Life, Development and Last Years of Kandinsky," in Wassily Kandinsky Memorial, p. 100.
Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience." It is significant for an understanding of symbolism and its corollary Jugendstil, and was reiterated by such men as Gauguin, Denis, Sérusier, Walter Crane, and August Endell.

Kandinsky’s essays, however, are exceedingly important because they were written by the man who himself was the innovator of non-objective painting. Now in the total absence of representational objects the plastic elements were to become sole carriers of the artist’s message. This probably is why he felt called upon to express verbally what he had done in his painting through the intuition of “inner necessity.”

In the analysis of his color theory it was pointed out that no direct parallels can be established between the artist’s statement and the observer’s response. Both projections rest on highly personal and subjective factors. This, however, does not greatly differ from music. It has, for example, been shown that the major and minor modes are by no means endowed with characteristics which would call forth identical reactions in different listeners. A great deal depends on previous experience and training.

As Kandinsky himself has indicated, prose cannot express the shades of emotion awakened by sound and color. Each person may verbalize differently about the experience of a work of art and his verbalization may be at great variance with that of the artist. Yet direct communication can take place on a primary visual (preverbal) level, before either spectator or artist articulates. It is toward this level of communication that the art of Kandinsky and other expressionists was directed.