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**FROM SYMBOLISM TO THE BAUHAUS**

**MUSICAL STRUCTURES IN ART**

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## INTRODUCTION

The story of the Bauhaus has been told and retold: the subject it seems, will never be exhausted. There are various reasons for this intense interest. The first of course relates to the reputation of the staff who taught there: Feininger, Itten, Klee, Muche, Moholy-Nagy and Schlemmer, who were brought in there to establish a teaching program. The second concerns the nature of the program and the ideals it represented. What is unique about the Bauhaus is the fact that its ideologies epitomize changing concepts concerning the nature and purpose of design in the early twentieth century. The school inherited, reinterpreted and then rejected the crafts ideals of the nineteenth century; it attempted to discover 'laws' in art that could be related to design and architecture, and its fundamental aim was to establish a universal language of form that would represent the elimination of social as well as national barriers

This essay is concerned with this idea of a universal language, and the role music played in its development. It will explore, how the fascination with a synthesis of various art forms, that developed in the nineteenth century and rooted in the search for a lost unity in life, underwent an important change within Bauhaus. Because music continued to play an important role in Bauhaus, in educational theories and in Bauhaus activities like the Bauhaus theater it reflects the emerging dogmas of Modern Movement, which demanded a new language to demonstrate the values of the new age. Developments within the Bauhaus, therefore, reflect in microcosm certain developments within the Modern Movement.



## Chapter 1

### MUSICAL THEMES IN PAINTING

Music has always been fascinating for its neighboring art - painting. The reason for this fascination was, and is, its immateriality, and sovereign independence from the world of the visible and from the reproductive constraints that visual arts for centuries felt bound to. While poetry, despite its higher degree of abstraction, still was attached to the concrete-denominative, music had managed to develop a freedom which was limited only by its own laws of harmony. In a letter which Wassily Kandinsky wrote to Schoenberg in 1911 he said: 'Very lucky are the musicians, that they have come so far in their art. Truly art, that already is in the lucky position to resist a practical purpose. How long will painting have to wait for that?'<sup>1)</sup>

As much as Kandinsky is outstanding for his consistency in his search for a possible link between music and painting, he is by no means a single example.

If we look back to the 19th century we see the German painter Philip Otto Runge, who discovered the possibility to structure his picture 'Lehrstunde einer Nachtigall' (1805) according to the principals of the fuge, saying: 'There has to be music too, in every beautiful picture'. Almost half a century later Moritz von Schwind painted, inspired by Beethoven's 'Phantasie fuer Klavier, Orchester und Chor in D-Dur', his picture 'Symphony' (1852).

On the other side of the channel we find James McNeill Whistler, an American living in London, who called his pictures of the Thames, or Venice by night, 'Nocturnes', and who painted 'Symphonies', monochrome pictures of the human figure. (e.g. Symphony in white No.1 1862)

There is also Mikalojus K. Ciurlionis, the Lithuanian painter and composer (1875-1911) who, earlier than Kandinsky and Schoenberg, abandoned the figure in painting and tonality in music and who throughout his life saw these two artforms as being interrelated.



## Chapter 3

### MUSICAL THEMES IN THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT

Likewise we find the use of musical terminology in symbolist pictures such as Klimpt's allegory 'Die Musik' (1895), or Odilon Redon's visions like 'Ohrzelle'(Earcell) or 'Schweigen'(Silence)

The list of paintings that have musical reference, and the list of artists who have dealt with music in their paintings is endless, but we find indeed that the influence of music on painting assumes a new significance in the symbolist movement.



## Chapter 2

### MUSICAL THEMES IN THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT

In the Symbolist Movement we find that two of the fundamental spiritual impulses were the interest in laws of duality and the fascination with synaesthesia, that is corresponding effects in the optic and acoustic realms. In his article Abstract Film and Color Music, William Moritz explains Pythagoras' view on synaesthesia, also called 'the Music of the Spheres'

"Pythagoras understood that the music of the spheres implied cosmic function: the universe embodies a divine geometrical harmony that is mirrored in all natural phenomena, both in the microcosm and in the macrocosm. The harmonies of celestial orbit parallel the seeming irregularities of life forms on earth. The bases of these correspondences are mathematically precise vibrations that are manifested as light, sound, fragrance, and other sensual stimuli. Fusing one's perceptions of these seemingly discrete sensory inputs constitutes synaesthesia, which Pythagoras considered the greatest philosophical gift and spiritual achievement because it ultimately reconciles the illusory quotidian world with the authentic world of universal, enduring, abstract concepts." 2)

Synaesthetic experiences are common during infancy, where the senses are seemingly not yet kept in sealed compartments. A loud noise, for example, may produce a sensation not only of sound, but also of color. Those synaesthetic experiences are sometimes remembered and often connected with particular words, or with music. As the child gets older the distinction between sensations of sound and color usually become absolute, but some adults continue to associate a color with a particular note, timbre or musical key. Berlioz, Debussy and Wagner were among those composers who were particularly sensitive to sensations of color in music. And it was indeed Wagner who was among the originators of the idea of correspondences and was the most articulate advocate of the Gesamtkunstwerk.



But not only musicians were fascinated with the notion of synaesthesia, Painters too were intrigued with the prospect of intermingling senses and more specifically with the possibility of painting expressing musical content. Baudelaire's Poetry as well as his studies of Delacroix and the Romantic artists' chromatic concerns provided considerable inspiration.

Baudelaire wondered why no painter excelled, as Richard Wagner, in evoking spiritual space and depth. He wrote: "What would be truly surprising would be to find that sound could not suggest color, that colors could not evoke the idea of a melody, and that sound and color were unsuitable for the translation of ideas, seeing that things have always found their expression through a system of reciprocal analogy ever since the day when God uttered the world like a complex and invisible statement."

The attempt to create the Gesamtkunstwerk rooted not only in experimental curiosity but was an expression of a lost unity, a unity that art tried to recreate in a time of an ever increasing specialization through technology and science. Music offered a demonstrative model in the search for 'the work of art' postulated by Worringer, 'as an autonomous organism, which stands beside nature on equal terms and, in its deepest and innermost essence, is devoid of any connection with it.



## Chapter 3

### THE ROOTS OF THE BAUHAUS

In 1895, in his General Remarks on a Synthesis of Art, Henry van der Velde, a Belgian and one of the pioneers of Jugendstil, advocated the view: 'We cannot allow a division in art which aims at setting one of the many manifestations and possibilities of expression above the others.'<sup>3)</sup> In the period after 1900 van der Velde was director of the most progressive school of arts and crafts in Germany, that of the Grand Duke of Sax-Weimar in Weimar. It was through his intervention that the Grand duke took an interest in Walter Gropius' project for a 'College of Construction'. The architect Walter Gropius had previously been one of the youngest and most active members of the German Werkbund, founded in 1907 in Munich. It had formed a central point for the movement, originating in the Jugendstil, which tried to bridge the gap between the crafts and industrial products.

Gropius and some of his colleagues formed the 'Arbeitsrat fuer Kunst' in Berlin, immediately after the end of the war. The Working Council for Art was formed in the revolutionary spirit of the Workers' councils and soldiers' Councils, and promoted the idea of the fraternity of the arts, and the belief, that such a fraternity should be committed to the demonstration of a totally new art which would combine painting, sculpture, craftsmanship and invention in a new unity of expression based on spiritual rather than formal properties.

The ideas that Gropius put forward in his Bauhaus Manifesto in 1919 were reflective of Arbeitsrat ideologies, the manifesto, was in fact, a collage of sentences and paragraphs from a catalog of an Arbeitsrat exhibition.<sup>4)</sup>

At the opening of an exhibition at the Bauhaus in 1919 Walter Gropius restated his ideals for art and the artist in a post war society:



"We are living in chaotic times. We find ourselves in a colossal catastrophe of the world history, in transformation of the whole of life and the whole of the inner man.' Many of the students had returned from the front; their experiences there had changed them completely, and no one could go back to the certainties of the pre-war days. Those days were over and society must be transformed 'not by large spiritual organizations, but from within, by small, secret self-contained groups'. Inspired by the individuals, individualism will be transcended in the creation of the total work of art 'which will shine its abundance of light on to the smallest objects of everyday life." 5)

It was in this revolutionary spirit that the Bauhaus was founded in Weimar in 1919 by Gropius whose central idea was that the fine arts and the crafts were not fundamentally different activities but two varieties of the same thing. And it was both this revolutionary spirit and the the spirit of synthesis that allowed within Bauhaus-teaching the most experimental approach to the theory of combined arts.



## Chapter 4

### THE HISTORY OF THE BAUHAUS

The Bauhaus was founded a few month after Germany's defeat in the first world war. Its fourteen years of existence actually coincide with the dates of the Weimar Republic, years of serious political and social unrest, the struggle between extreme left and right, Putsches, struggles for power, the ruin of trade and inflation.

The history of the Bauhaus can be divided chronologically into clearly defined phases:

The first Expressionist period lasted from 1919 until the crisis of the years 1922 and 1923, and it is this period that this essay will most concern itself with. It was determined by Gropius's enthusiastic appeal for a union of art and crafts. Ittens teaching during that time aimed at liberation of the individual towards selfexpression.

The second Constructivist phase 1923-1928 ran under the Leitmotiv 'Art and technology - a new unity', influenced by Moholy-Nagy who replaced Gropius and De Stijl. The move to Dessau lent point to Functionalism, Hannes Meyer, the new director completely banned every activity connected with painting. Klee and Kandinsky suffered from increasing isolation.

The last years of the Bauhaus from 1930 to 1933 were characterized by Mies van der Rohe's efforts to combine the extremes and to resuscitate the idea of coordination in the arts in Bauhaus.

The Bauhaus finally closed in Berlin Steglitz, but its spirit was carried abroad by students and Staff, principally to the USA.



## Chapter 5

### THE PRELIMINARY COURSE

Although Gropius' conception of a radically new kind of art education was made clear enough by his original Manifesto and although he seems to have had an aversion to easel painting, the men he employed to teach at the Bauhaus implied another approach entirely. The staff of the Bauhaus was composed primarily of painters and brought together important members of the Blaue Reiter movement, such as Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956) who was the first to be called to the position of Master in 1919 by Gropius. He was followed by Paul Klee, and finally by Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) who was the founder of the Blaue Reiter. The others were Johannes Itten, painter and art teacher (1888-1967), and Gerhard Marcks (1889\*) as the only sculptor. In 1919 they were joined by the architect Adolf Meyer and in 1920 by the twenty-five-year-old painter Georg Muche. Oskar Schlemmer and Lothar Schreyer were invited to come from the theater workshop Der Sturm. These various personalities, all highly individual and impressively articulate, embodied the different tendencies which determined the spirit of the Bauhaus.

All of the appointed Masters of Form were intrigued by theories concerning fundamental problems. Although all, with the major exception of Mohol-Nagy, were interested in the ideas which might loosely be described as Expressionist, their work did not have much in common.

It was in the preliminary course of the Bauhaus that the most fundamental ideas were developed and transmitted.



The nature of the preliminary course (Vorkurs) was something which distinguished the Bauhaus from all the other 'reformed' schools in Germany. It seems that Gropius did not originally intend to introduce such a course, and that he was persuaded to do so by Johannes Itten, one of his first appointments to the staff. The Vorkurs first appeared on an experimental basis in the autumn of 1919 and was made compulsory a year later. Once under way, however, the Vorkurs quickly became a crucial part of the Bauhaus curriculum. It was regarded as a probationary period: if a student performed unsatisfactorily in the Vorkurs he was not allowed to proceed to workshop training.

For most of the life of the preliminary course, basic theory was taught by Klee and Kandinsky. Each gave compulsory classes in color and form, Klee until 1931, Kandinsky until 1933, when the school was closed. Itten also taught some theory. And it is those three teachers who had major theoretical influence on the teaching at the Bauhaus during the Expressionist phase of the Bauhaus. They developed color theories independent of each other. And much of their teaching was devoted to these theories. It is within the color theory that the notion of synaesthesia as well as changes in art theory crystallize, and I will therefore discuss them in detail.

While the symbolist movement tried to recreate a 'lost paradise' and counteract technological development in some of the spiritual movements that influenced twentieth century artists, the bond between metaphysical ideas and science was an important element. Metaphysical thinkers for example were especially eager to learn about the advances in physics and chemistry. This knowledge not only was adapted to confirm their beliefs but also allowed them to speculate about the invisible aspects of the material universe.



Some of the new faiths and pseudo-religions that proved so popular in Central Europe before and after the war, infiltrated the Bauhaus. Adolf Meyer was a theosophist and Kandisky, who joined the staff in 1922, had been influenced by Rudolf Steiner Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Itten was a believer of Mazdaznan: 'I studied oriental philosophy, and concerned myself with Persian Mazdaznism and Early Christianity. Thus I realized that our outward-directed scientific research must be balanced by inward-directed thought and forces of the soul.'6)

There is no field in which the use of scientific method is as obvious as in the field of color-theory, the research into color and perception becomes an area of specialisation-an echo of the way science proceeds by specialization. At the same time, studies on the psychological influence of color have the function of stimulating and acting as a point of reference, above all in Symbolist theories but also in Expressionism.

This turn to scientific and pseudo-scientific research marked more than anything the turn of attitudes. It marked the beginning of a new era the era of Geisteswissenschaften in a century which, in good and in evil, is the era of science, and, in a wider sense, the era of rationalism. In color this Zeitgeist is tangible.



## Chapter 6

### JOHANNES ITTEN

Of major importance for the school, although surely not as an artist, was the Swiss painter Johannes Itten, who, previous to his appointment at the Bauhaus, was running his own private school in Vienna. Here he developed an unconventional method of art teaching based partly on the techniques of Pestalozzi, Montessori and Franz Cizek, and strongly influenced by his former teacher at the Stuttgart Academy Adolf Hoelzel. He met Schoenberg, Berg and Adolf Loos in Vienna, as well as Alma Mahler, and it was probably through the contact with the circle around Schoenberg and the recommendation of Alma Mahler that Itten was appointed by Gropius.

As a painter Itten regarded himself pre-eminently as a gifted colorist. In his correspondence he frequently appended the words 'Master of the art of color' to his signature. Fascinated with color he paid scholarly attention to the colortheories of Goethe, Schopenhauer, Runge and Chevreul. He saw a relationship between music and color and he even developed a colorglobe with seven levels of light and twelve notes. In his book: 'Elements of Color', he stated:

"The word and its sound, form and its color are vessels of a transcendental essence that we dimly surmise. As sound lends sparkling color to the spoken word, so color lends psychically resolved tone to form. The primeval essence of color is a phantasmagorical resonance, light becomes music." 7)

Itten also believed that it was in the area of colortheory that he had made his greatest contribution to art education. In his view, color, time, and space formed some kind of dialectic unit. For Itten the qualities of color were by no means merely optical. Itten the mystic believed that generalized emotional states were communicated by color - and also by form. In his investigation of the three basic geometric forms he identified analogies with specific colors. These analogies were emotional and spiritual.



At its most basic level, Itten's philosophy was an extension of nineteenth-century Romanticism and pre-war Expressionism, in that it demanded a fusion between experience and expression. In order to achieve this fusion, however Itten's students had to relate spiritual to physical experience. Itten believed that his students would better comprehend what forms were capable of expressing if they experienced them physically. They were therefore encouraged to move their bodies in, for example, circular or triangular fashion in order to 'feel' and 'live' the shapes before putting anything on paper. And Ittens life drawing classes aimed not at anatomical precision but at the discovery and interpretation of what he believed to be the characteristic expression of each pose. As an aid to that interpretation music was played throughout each session. None of the exercises was seen as an end in itself. Each was simply a preparation, a stage on the road towards independent creativity.



## Chapter 7

### GERTRUD GRUNOW

Another Bauhaus teacher who believed very strongly in synaesthetic theories was Gertrud Grunow. She was a close friend of Itten who had recommended her appointment to the Bauhaus, and she left the Bauhaus shortly after him. Her ideas and theories on synaesthetic relationships placed her in closest intellectual kinship with Itten, and her theory of 'harmonisation' points out the structuring power of the ear. She too saw color and sound as a unity.

In her article: The creation of living form through color, form, and sound she argues:

"The supreme Law, according to which all order is structured is called equilibrium. Nature has placed the the organ of equilibrium in the ear, has given man a guardian and protector of order, the ears thus being designated to be the highest judge of order within the human organism. The strongest effects that sound can have on man can be attributed to equilibrium. Every living force, and thus every color, corresponds to a lawful order, to a sound."  
8)

Gertud Grunow seems to have given Itten support by instructing students individually in methods of meditation and relaxation, an activity officially described as harmonization.



WASSILI KANDINSKY

Another very influential figure at the Bauhaus was Wassily Kandinsky, who replaced Schlemmer as the master of Form in the mural-painting workshop and also developed a basic design course which he taught in tandem with Klee. Before joining the Bauhaus Kandinsky had, in May 1920 initiated and was appointed the first director of Inhuk (Institute of Artistic Culture). Inhuk as Kandinsky conceived it, was to be devoted to theory and to an ambitious program of research into what he described as 'the effect of the means of expression on the inner experience of man'<sup>9</sup>). Kandinsky was proposing a 'scientific' analysis of the spiritual in art. The physiological and psychological effects of line, form, color, sound and movement were to be investigated. Kandinsky's programmes for his two courses in Weimar read like an abstract of his Inhuk proposals<sup>10</sup>). But there are no references to the 'spiritual', to intuition, or to the inner experiences, and the emphasis is on methods of progressing from analysis to synthesis in the study of the 'science of art'. Again art is not considered as an end in itself, but as part of that triumvirate of art, science and industry that the Bauhaus was trying to unite. The basic design course which Kandinsky developed was primarily concerned with color and he gave a seminar on color which all students were obliged to attend. He also designed and taught a course of analytical drawing. Herbert Bayer who later became a Bauhaus teacher himself, provides information on Kandinsky's workshop classes:

"The instruction was based on exercises for murals for interior and exterior spaces. They were intended to develop a feeling for color integrated with architecture. The practical work was amplified by discussions about the nature of color and its relationship to form. Each flowed into the other theory and practice. Kandinsky's theory about the psychology of color and their relationship to space provoked especially animated discussions. In submitting color, form and line to rigorous, quasi scientific analysis he opened his students' eyes to the possibilities afforded by an art that was intellectually controlled as well as emotionally expressive." <sup>11</sup>)



Kandinsky was preoccupied with the idea of integrating all cultural energy so as to produce a social renaissance. 'Apart from the synthesis produced by combined work,' Kandinsky was looking to the Bauhaus 'for a broader, strong and so far unborn, inner development of every art, for an absorption in the human spirit, that will be absolutely free and try, for the first time, to touch the universal idea.'<sup>12)</sup>

Kandinsky realized from an early age that he possessed the gift of synaesthesia: when one of his senses was stimulated another reacted. In his case he usually heard something when looking at a scene or even a single color, or saw a color or scene when listening to music.<sup>13)</sup> What he heard or saw was quite specific: a particular note played on a particular instrument for example. Colors and sounds also evoked quite specific feelings, and although such emotional experiences were inevitably highly subjective, Kandinsky attempted to discover and define universal laws which explained them.

From Theosophy Kandinsky derived his concept of vibration (directly connected with the use of the acoustic term Klang). He believed that human emotion consists of vibrations of the soul, and that the soul is set into vibration by nature: "Words, musical tones, and colors possess the psychically power of calling forth soul vibrations, ultimately bringing about the attainment of knowledge... In Theosophy, vibration is the formative agent behind all material shapes, which are but the manifestation of life concealed by matter."<sup>14)</sup>

Kandinsky's color theory,, derived from Goethe via the anthroposophist Rudolph Steiner, employed as fundamental distinctions the 'temperature of colors-their apparent warmth or coldness-and their tone-their lightness or darkness. What Kandinsky synaesthetically defined as 'four major sounds' thus appeared: warm and bright; warm and dark; cold and bright; cold and dark. But he associated not only temperature with color but also a range of effects on the human mind, and connected with this, musical instruments.<sup>15)</sup>



Those conceptions are naturally vague and subjective, and Kandinsky acknowledges this in his book 'On The Spiritual In Art', but despite this acknowledgment and the fact, that his coordination stand in contrast to those of Steiner , Goethe, Skrjabin and others, Kandinsky kept looking seriously for scientific proof of a possible parallel, and time and again he announced triumphantly the results of so called 'scientific examinations' by Skrjabin or Zachar'ina-Unkovskaja.16)

Another major effort to draw the two arts music and painting closer together was made by Kandinsky together with Franz Marc in the 'Blaue Reiter'-almanac.

Kandinsky describes how the almanac was brought into existence:

"Marc and I were deeply immersed in painting; (yet) painting alone was not sufficient for us. At the time I was contemplating a 'synthetic' book' which was to eradicate superstitions, 'demolish the walls' that existed between official and rejected art, and finally prove that the question of art is not that of form, but that of artistic content. The separation of the arts, their isolated existence inside small 'boxes' with high, rigid, opaque walls, was to my mind one of the unfortunate and dangerous consequences of the 'analytic' method."

Moreover my idea was also to have a painter, a musician, a poet, a dancer, etc., work side by side, and which was with this purpose in mind that I wanted to ask artists in their separate boxes to collaborate on the projected book. Marc was enthusiastic about this plan and we decided to go to work immediately. It was a marvelous task and, within a few months, the 'Blaue Reiter Almanac' had found its publisher. It appeared in 1912. 17)

It is interesting to note that in this book, which aimed at 'demolishing the walls between the arts' predominately included music, while literature hardly featured in the almanac.



Three pieces of music by Schoenberg, Webern and Berg were included as well as Schoenberg's article: 'Das Verhaeltniss zum Text', where he reinforces as a musician Kandinsky's point of view, that a work of art is a 'completely homogeneous organism' and like Kandinsky he came to the conclusion, that while mere imitation of another form of art was not satisfying, that repetition could sometimes be necessary to get a parallel result on a deeper level.

Kandinsky published his article: 'On Stage-Composition' in the almanac, an essay that is based on his experience in this field.



## Chapter 9

### FELIX KLEE

Like Kandinsky and Itten, Klee identified numerous parallels between painting and music and exploited them in his theories. Unlike Itten and Kandinsky, Klee was an accomplished musician himself, a virtuoso violinist who had played with the Berne symphony orchestra at the age of twelve. Klee had strong musical leanings, and believed that the highest kind of artistic expression was an inexplicable mystery. What could be explained and taught, however were the preliminary stages of that expression, and Klee developed a theory of color and form equally elaborate and subtle and as reliant on scientific models as Kandinsky's. His theoretical classes precede those he gave on nature study as a source of creative form.

He took his teaching seriously and was careful to be undogmatic in his pronouncements. The workshop with which Klee had the most contact, and that only later, was the one for weaving, where he gave special classes on formal composition. It was in the basic design course that he was most influential, and in which he sought to persuade his students to develop a critical approach to fundamental problems of imagemaking.

Paul Klee did not intend 'to turn his pupils primarily into draughtsmen and painters.' Nevertheless, he encouraged them to draw and paint, 'because it is an activity which forcibly leads to essential theoretical principles'.

Klee regarded the task of reconciling antithesis as the culmination of his life as an artist. He spoke of his dream in Jena in 1924:

'Sometimes I dream of a work of vast scope spanning all the way across element, object, content and style'.<sup>18)</sup>

Klee's color-theory, like those of Kandinsky and Itten, has its roots on those of Goethe, while also drawing heavily on the theories of Runge, Delacroix, Kandinsky himself, and those of Delaunay whose essay on light he had translated into German.



True to his principle of movement Klee paid greater heed to the dynamic relations between the colors than his predecessors. The natural, disorganized crescendo or diminuendo' of the color relationships, like the movement from light to dark, must be fixed. Klee contrives it with a scale that makes graded mixtures susceptible to measurement. This 'artificial order' recalls a related division of tones analogous to musical scales'.

Between 1921 and 1923 Klee painted a series of watercolors, demonstrating a technique, developed with his color theories. He paints *Fugue in Red*, a title which inspired Will Grohmann to describe the whole group as 'Fugue' paintings. Klee's color graduations of 1921 show a surprising similarity with the color films and epidiastic films that Kurt Schwertfeger (1897-1966) and Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack (1893-1965) would later develop at Bauhaus in 1922, but the absence of documents makes it almost impossible to draw conclusions in retrospect on their mutual dependence.

When Klee discussed with his students how to make a construction leading to equilibrium, he advised them:

Do not be afraid of making mistakes if you want to make an action exiting, but accept them as a motive for further effort (in harmonious music, dissonance acts as an impulse towards a solution. We can arrange colors into chords such as light, very light, slightly moving, warmer, colder. 19)

This points clearly to the idea that the Klee's Paintings of Squares are founded on musical feeling. Klee writes in a letter to his wife on the 10th of August, 1927:

'And the coloring does it; that's what I'm always after: to awaken sounds slumbering within me, a small or a great adventure in color.' 20)



Many of the objective Dessau works, stripped of all subjective movement, have their antithesis in works which are inspired by Klee's prime realm of psychic improvisation. Two pen-and-ink wash drawings are expressly entitled 'Psychogramms': Psychogram of the approach, 1930/65, and Psychogram with the Foot. Intuition and the unconscious communicate directly, with the hand recording like a seismograph. The twisting and turnings of the advancing line describe overlapping planes: the process contains a time space movement within itself. Klee calls simultaneous events at different levels 'Polyphony'. The concept is borrowed from harmony and musically speaking, means the simultaneously playing of several independent themes. The polyphonic principle of creation moves like a Leitmotiv throughout a large part of the artist's work of the early thirties, but also appears later on. A desire is realized here, the significance of which the artist had perceived many years before: 'More and more parallels between music and graphic art force themselves upon my consciousness. Yet no analysis is successful: certainly both arts are temporal; this could be proved easily,' as Klee reflected in 1905. In July 1917 he admitted: 'Polyphonic painting is superior to music in that, here, time element becomes a spatial element. The notion of simultaneity stands out even more richly.' When he was teaching, Klee is said to have explained the complicated phenomenon on the blackboard-with a different-colored chalk in either hand- drawing and writing with both hands at once.



ART AND TECHNOLOGY. A NEW UNITY

In 1922 Itten left the Bauhaus and his departure coincided with a change of direction in the school.

"All of us are fully aware,' Gropius wrote in his memorandum of 1922, 'that the old attitude of l'art pour l'art is obsolete, and that things that concern us today cannot exist in isolation, but must be rooted in our developing attitudes. Thus the basis upon which our work is build cannot be broad enough. Today this basis is to small rather than too large. This is made clear by news of Russian experiments, similar to ours, which have incorporated music, literature, and science as coming from one source...' 21)

In this early attempt to reorientate and redefine the aims of the school, Gropius was once again evoking the concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk. But now Gropius conception of collective endeavor was based on the assumption that new developments in the arts as well as in science, shared a common impulse that would be revealed in what he described as a 'big transformation from analytic to synthetic work'.

The change of direction was demonstrated not only by the appointment of Moholy-Nagy, but also by Gropius' proposal at the same time to introduce classes in mathematics, physics and chemistry. It was even made plainer by the exhibition held at the Bauhaus in the summer of 1923, and by the week of special activities organized in conjunction with it.

The exhibition was a triumph in public relations, attracting visitors not only from the Werkbund conference that took place in Weimar at the same time, but from all over Germany and further afield. The opening was graced by the presence of such international celebrities as Strawinsky, Busoni and the Dutch architect J.J.P.Oud.



Lectures were given by Gropius, Kandinsky and Otl. Schlemmers 'Triadic Ballet' and Mechanical Ballet' were performed and there were premieres of works by Stravinsky, Busoni and Hindemith. Shows of scientific films which exploited slow-motion effects(then decidedly novel) were also arranged.

Gropius lecture, which he called 'Art and Technology: a New Unity', marked the public emergence of a man purged of craftromanticism and utopian dreams.

There are parallels to be found between Gropius change of heart and external economic factors. When Gropius gave his lecture the German economy was threatening to collapse completely under the weight of inflation. In November 1923, however, there was a currency reform, and this and the Dawes Plan of early 1924 stabilized German industry, attracted foreign investment and brought a few years of prosperity until the Wall Street Crash of October 1929.

In the minds of many Germans, a capitalist Utopia based on profits from ever increasing production had replaced a vaguely socialist utopia in which the machine was the enemy of the common man. Technology became a popular subject. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence for the preoccupation with the machine and it's social impact is Fritz Lang's film Metropolis.



THEO VAN DOESBURG

One of the protagonists of the 'new spirit' at the Bauhaus was the Dutch painter and art critic Theo van Doesburg(1883). In 1917 he had founded the magazine *De Stijl* with a group of contributors. Their aim was, rather like that of the Bauhaus, the promotion of a 'universal language' which would 'manifest itself in all objects as a style, born from a new relationship between the artist and society'(22). Van Doesburg's initial conception of this relationship owed a great deal to Kandinsky's *Concerning the spiritual in Art*. However, unlike Kandinsky, van Doesburg saw this relationship as active rather than passive, and the artist as a mediator in practical as well as spiritual change. In his lecture *The Will to Style*, which he gave in Berlin, Jena and Weimar in 1922, van Doesburg maintained that 'the struggle for a solution to the problem of art' was not being 'waged in art, science, philosophy and religion alone, but in our daily life where it takes the form of the struggle for spiritual and material existence'. Van Doesburg, therefore, saw the machine as the 'only means of bringing about...social liberation'. 'This is by no means to say,'he continues, 'that mechanical production is the only requirement for creative perfection. A prerequisite for the correct use of the machines must be governed by artistic consciousness.'(23)

Van Doesburg saw the realization of the unity of spiritual and material existence in 'the organization of various materials(light included) ... into a unity which expressed the maximum energy.(24) The use of color was of course , integral to the expression of energy. 'Color is of extreme importance to the new architecture,' he wrote in 1923. 'It represents an intrinsic part of the material of expression. Color renders visible the spatial effect for which the architect strives.' Color, therefore, could be used to define or dematerialize space and form, and to 'visualize relationships' within an interior, so that 'space and the objects contained within it are perceived as a unity'.



THE BAUHAUS THEATER

One of van Doesburgs allies at the Bauhaus was the Hungarian painter Lazlo Moholy-Nagy(1895), who was appointed in 1922, and was enthusiastically and successfully interested in reviving the theater. He wrote in his article: The Coming theater-the Total Theater:

"The origin of music as a conscious form can be derived from the melodic recitals of the heroic legends. When these came to be cast into a system that allowed only the use of "tones" that fall into definite intervals, and eliminated the so-called "sounds," only poetry was left to explore particular sound effects. This was the fundamental idea on which the Expressionist, Futurist, and Dadaist poets and playwrights based their "sound poems".But today this sensuous and mechanical effect of sound relationships is no longer exclusive to poetry, since music is now embracing sounds of all types. These sound relationships -like tones- are part of the domain of music, just as it is the task of painting, as the domain of the creation of form with color." 26)

That the stage was a central idea of the Bauhaus and, like building, formed a crucible of the arts is clear from Klee's schematic plans for the organization of the Bauhaus, and it is here, that the new spirit of the Bauhaus is most visible.

Van Doesburgs conception of a unity of space and it's contained object probably influenced a number of Bauhaus students as well as teachers in their work. A 'Mechanical Ballett' was created by Kurt Schmidt who was a staff member. It consisted of mansize constructions made of cardboard, wire, canvas and wood in the basic geometrical shapes and the primary colors yellow red and blue. Those constructions could be worn by dancers like costumes and were operated to music composed by Hanz Heinz Stuckenschmidt. The costumes allowed no rotating movement so that the colored planes would be visible throughout the performance and the effect they achieved could be compared to the creation of numerous abstract paintings accompanied by music.



But the Mechanical Ballet by Schmidt proved not to be the only example of work which was influenced by this new spirit at Bauhaus. The "Reflected -Light Compositions" by Hirschfeld-Mack were an experiment very characteristic for the phase of development between 1922 and 1925.

Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack conducted experiments in the field of synthesis which were progressively successful. His reflected - Light compositions in combination with music were a matter of great interest in Weimar and later in Berlin and Wien.. Those experiments were no doubt inspired by the russian composer Alexander Scriabin who already 1911 in his symphony Prometheus, used colored light. Hirschfeld-Macks compositions consisted of yellow red ,green, and blue areas of light in motion,developed in organically conditioned graduations from darkness to highest luminescence, set on a transparent screen  
He commented on his experiments:

'With the Reflected light compositions we believe we have come closer to a new "genre" of art which, with its powerful physical and psychological effects, is capable of evoking pure and profound tensions from the experience of color and music.'(25)



KANDINSKY

Of the painters at Bauhaus it is Kandinsky who is most interested in the stage. His writing in the Blaue Reiter Almanach in 1912, explained his conception of a 'Synthesis of the stage,' in which 'The particular powers of all the arts would be united', he writes:

"There are here three elements that are used as external means, but for their inner value:

1. musical sound and its movement
2. bodily spiritual sound and its movement, expressed by people and objects
3. colour-tones and their movement (a special resource of the stage)." 27)

His theoretical writing goes back to the experience in stage-composition with Thomas von Hartmann whom he met as a young composer, at the Salon Werfekin/Jawlensky, 1908 in Munich and they soon worked together on Kandinskys stage-composition 'Yellow Sound'. Hartmann and Kandinsky worked from the beginning simultaneously with all the elements of a 'total work of art', color, movement, music, and lighting. Thomas von Hartmann remembers:

"Composition No. 1 was then not yet painted. But in those pictures, belonging to this time, one could already clearly guess Kandinskys new approach and see clearly that he is definitely discarding his early form and we therefore would soon witness a new tendency in art. This period was marked by an constantly growing interest in music, his ideas in the teaching of painting in conjunction with musical theories and by an ever increasing discontent with temporary theater (especially with the opera). His highly interesting stage composition, which will supposedly only be realized in the future was one of the results of his ideas in this direction." 28)



His first stage composition, *The Yellow Sound*, of 1908, was not performed during Kandinsky's lifetime. He himself recalled later that the piece had been scheduled for production no less than three times: in Munich in the autumn of 1914, at the Volksbuehne in Berlin in 1922, and at the Bauhaus under Oskar Schlemmer. The unpublished manuscripts of three other such plays, *Daphnis and Cloe*, *Black and White*, and *Green Sound* have been preserved.

His ultimate formula was published 1923 in the journal *State Bauhaus* at Weimar and entitled: 'On abstract stage-synthesis'. Unfortunately Kandinsky's scenery for Musorgsky's *Pictures from an exhibition*, performed at the Friederich Theater in Dessau in 1928, was the only one of his synthetic stage design to be realized.



## Chapter 14

### OSKAR SCHLEMMER

But the most important figure at the Bauhaus-theater was Oskar Schlemmer. He was born in Stuttgart and, like Itten, was a graduate of the Stuttgart Art Academy and a pupil of Adolf Hoelzel. Although trained as a painter Schlemmer quickly became interested in the theater, and before the First World War had worked on several productions of avant-garde, especially Expressionist plays. He was made a Master of Form in the theater workshop in 1923 after the previous incumbent, Lothar Schreyer, had resigned.

Schlemmer quickly became one of the most important teachers at the Bauhaus, the activities of the theater workshop one of the school's most visible aspects.

Schlemmer was interested neither in classical theater nor in the conventional, contemporary stage. He aimed for nothing less than a complete renewal of the medium., which he thought a kind of ritualistic performance, essentially ballet, which stresses its apartness from the real world but emphasizes through stylized movement and costume the relationship between one human figure and another, and the space around them.

The most celebrated of Schlemmer's productions was the 'Triadic Ballet' which was first performed, not at the Bauhaus, but in the Stuttgart theater in September 1922. It employed three figures, one female and two male, dressed in curious, puppet-like costumes. In an elaborated choreographed routine these figures explored various permutations of dancing together, in twos and threes against a series of backgrounds whose colors stressed the triple nature of the entire spectacle. The productions Schlemmer staged at the Bauhaus developed from the 'Triadic Ballet'.



## CONCLUSION

"Life has become so mechanized, thanks to machines and a technology which our senses cannot possibly ignore, that we are intensely aware of man as a machine and the body as a mechanism. In art, especially in painting, we are witnessing a search for the roots and sources of all creativity; this grows out of the bankruptcy brought on by excessive refinement. Modern artists long to recover the original, primordial impulses; on the one hand they woke up to the unconscious, unanalyzable elements in the art forms of... the Africans, peasants, children, and madmen; on the other hand, they have discovered the opposite extreme in the new mathematics of relativity. Both these modes of consciousness- the sense of man as a machine, and insight into the wells of deepest creativity- are symptoms of one and the same yearning. A yearning for synthesis dominates today's art and calls upon architecture to unite the disparate fields of endeavor. This yearning also reaches out for the theater, because the theater offers the promise of total art." 29)

With this note from his diary Oskar Schlemmer summarizes the two main 'modes of consciousness' which art dealt with in the beginning of this century two modes which seem to be antagonistic and which art tries to unite. The first one, which relates to the ideals of the nineteenth century, the attempt to discover 'laws' in art and its fundamental aim, to establish a universal language of form that would represent the elimination of social as well as national barriers

Music played an important role in the development of this language. In his book 'On the Spiritual in Art', Wassili Kandinsky elaborates:



"The various arts are drawing together. They are finding in music the best teacher. With few exceptions music has been for some centuries the art which has devoted itself not to the reproduction of natural phenomena, but rather to the expression of the artist's soul, in musical sound. A painter, who finds no satisfaction in mere representation, however artistic, in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non material of the arts today, achieves this end. He naturally seeks to apply the methods of music to his own art." 30)

This shows the actual reason for Kandinsky's fascination with music: he appreciated music as the most abstract of all the arts. From music, he thought, one could learn the language of abstraction, to compose, with color and line and form without reference to the figure. And yet Kandinsky and other artists of this period went further. They tried to integrate all arts into the Gesamtkunstwerk. This longing for the total work of art was expression of a lost unity in life, a unity that art tried to recreate in a time of an ever increasing specialization through technology and science.

The second mode of consciousness relates to a changing attitude towards science and technology. Klee and Kandinsky as well as the Constructivist painters, had attempted to establish a theory, or 'science' of art in such a way as to express universal experience through their work. Painting, however, as Walter Benjamin was to point out in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' simply is in no position to present an object for simultaneous collective experience. In his attempt to redefine the aims of the Bauhaus Walter Gropius created the motto: Art and Technology-a new Unity, and it's advocate Moholy-Nagy and Van Doesburg claimed, that 'traditional painting has become a historical relic and is finished with'.



After the 1923 exhibition, many of the painters sensed increasingly that they had become irrelevant to the school. Even though Feininger had seen the need for change, he also quickly regretted its results, as did Klee and Kandinsky who, like Feininger, preferred to remain at the school in the hope that they would provide a balance against the weight of rationalist thinking. 'Only optics, mechanics and the desire to put the old static painting out of action,' wrote Feininger:

"There is incessant talk of cinema, optics, mechanics, projection and continuous motion and even of mechanically- produced optical transparencies, multicolored, in the finest colors of the spectrum, which can be stored in the same way as gramophone records."

By equating modern techniques, which would achieve 'machine like perfection' with painting, Moholy was challenging traditional as well as avant-garde attitudes to art. The search of this 'machine precision' rather than the spiritual in art reversed the role of the fine artist in Weimar; a shift from the demonstration of art through craft to the demonstration of art through technology.



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2)

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3)

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4)

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5)

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6)

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13)

Describing a sunset in Moscow Kandinsky wrote:

"The sun dissolves the whole of Moscow into a single spot, which, like a wild tuba, sets all ones soul vibrating. No, this red fusion is not the most beautiful hour! It is only the final chord of the symphony, which brings every color vividly to life, which allows and forces the whole of Moscow to resound like the fff of a giant orchestra."

"Lohengrin, on the other hand, seemed to me the complete realization of that moscow. The violins, the deep tones of the basses, and especially the wind instruments at the time embodied for me all the power of that pre-nocturnal hour. I saw all my colors in my mind; they stood before my eyes. Wild, almost crazy lines were sketched in front of me. I did not dare use the expression that Wagner had painted 'my hour' musically."



Quoted from: "Rueckblicke"(Reminiscences)in Kandinsky, Complete Writings On Art; edited by Kenneth c. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, published by Faber and Faber, London 1982

14)

Wassily Kandinsky, "On The Spiritual In Art", published by Rheinhard Piper & Co., Munich 1911

15)

Kandinsky described blue as a color that created a feeling of rest, or grief. "In music a light blue is like a flute, a darker blue a cello; a still darker a thunderous double bass; and the darkest blue of all an organ." Green to him was a passive, restful color, which would be in music represented by "the placid, middle notes of a violin" White to him had the harmony of silence, like a pause in music, whereas black is described as a silence with no possibilities, in music represented by "one of those profound final pauses, after which any continuation of the melody seems the dawn of another world." He paralleled vermillion red with the feelings of strength, vigor, determination and triumph, represented in music by the sound of trumpets or a great drum.

Quoted from Kandinsky 00. cit.

16)

In the spiritual in art he writes:

"Much theory and practice have been devoted to this question. People have sought to paint in counterpoint. Also unmusical children have been successfully helped to play the piano by quoting parallel in color(e.g.of flowers). On these lines Frau A. Sacharjin-Unkowsky has worked for several years and has evolved a method of "so describing sounds by natural colors, and colors by natural sounds, that color could be heard and sound seen."

Finally Scriabin, on more spiritual lines, has paralleled sounds and colors in a chart not unlike that of Frau Sacharijn Unkowsky. In " Prometheus " he has given convincing proof of his theories."



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