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It Could Have Been Great: An Examination of Kandinsky's Bauhaus Paintings and the Great Synthesis of the Arts

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ABSTRACT

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When Nazism descended upon the German art world in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, artists were treated as an expendable group of "political undesirables." Among them was Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), who experienced firsthand the political pressure placed on his career, as he attempted to visualize a *weltanschauung* or "world view," that involved the marriage of different types of art, media, and practices. For Kandinsky the "Great Synthesis of the Arts" revealed the collective historical narrative, to which all artists contributed, and he strove to actualize this lifelong goal over the course of his teaching career at the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar. His push for synthesis is conveyed in Kandinsky's *Black and Violet* (1923)*, Development* (1926)*, Fragile* (1931) and *Gloomy Situation* (1933). Iconographical analysis of these four paintings reveals the hope for synthesis that ultimately experiences a downturn and inevitable defeat due to the rise of Nazism, the termination of Kandinsky's teaching career, and the eventual dissolution of the Bauhaus.

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INTRODUCTION

When Nazism descended upon the German art world in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, artists were treated as an expendable group of "political undesirables." Artists at the Staatliches Bauhaus in particular addressed this perspective, and other traditional artistic views, through art. Among them was Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), who experienced firsthand the political pressure placed on the Bauhaus, and on his career, and whose abstract paintings lacked the visual clues requisite to traditional iconography. Kandinsky painted masses of geometric and amoebic forms, sharp lines, vivid hues, and black and white, in an attempt to visualize his *weltanschauung* or "world view."

This world view encompassed a single goal, which he undoubtedly felt would come to fruition via the aforementioned Bauhaus. It involved the marriage of different types of art, their media and practices, in an effort to understand the collective historical narrative, to which all artists contributed. He called it the "Great Synthesis of the Arts," and for a while, Kandinsky pursued this synthesis separate from other artists. Upon admittance to the Bauhaus, however, he found a hub of different arts and artists working under a similar idea. Kandinsky flourished in this environment for almost a decade despite the institution's relocation from Weimar to Dessau and from Dessau to Berlin. The Bauhaus years were ones of stylistic transformation for him, as demonstrated by four particular paintings: *Black and Violet* (1923, Figure 1), *Development* (1926, Figure 2), *Fragile* (1931, Figure 3), and *Gloomy Situation* (1933, Figure 4). These paintings exhibit a significant evolution in use of color, form, and spatial relations, and additionally reveal Kandinsky's push for the Great Synthesis that ultimately experiences a

downturn and inevitable defeat as the Nazis' power rose, Kandinsky's teaching career was terminated, and the Bauhaus was dissolved.

Kandinsky officially emerged on the art scene with the Blaue Reiter branch of German Expressionism, a movement that was characterized by the fear and anger that resulted from World War I. He was 30 years-old and pursuing a law degree in Moscow, when he abandoned law for painting. His early works between 1900 and 1910 were primarily impressionistic landscapes and woodblock prints that exhibited Russian Orthodox iconography. These works transitioned to a more gestural, abstract style by 1911. Around the time Kandinsky published his text, *On the Spiritual in Art*, he had begun to relinquish figural forms in favor of exploring the spiritual and emotional effects of line, color, and shape. He called these paintings *Composition, Impressions,* and *Improvisations*—all references to the musical influences imbued in these works— and were characterized by vivid hues and calligraphic black lines.

In 1923, Kandinsky published *Point and Line to Plane,* which coincided with yet another stylistic transformation. He utilized a more graphic style with hard lines, geometric forms, and bold colors, with black and white. After his *Composition VIII* (1923, Figure 11), this style possessed more abstract titles, which often only referenced their colors or the moods they conveyed. Additionally, they were fueled by an exploration of different media and surfaces, including watercolor, gouache, cardboard, paper, and canvas. His paintings from the mid-1920s and 1940s incorporated the use of modern tools and techniques, such as water atomizers and stenciling.

Kandinsky's inventiveness awarded him an invitation to work at the Bauhaus in Weimar two years after its establishment in 1919. The Bauhaus's origins stem from a merger of two schools: the Grand Ducal School of Arts and Crafts, and the Weimar Academy of Fine Art.[1]

Initially called the "Staatliches Bauhaus" by founder architect Walter Gropius—a name which referenced the school's architectural history, as well as Gropius's desire to merge functionality with aesthetics—the Bauhaus's original staff included Johannes Itten, Lionel Feninger, and Gerhard Marcks.[2] However, the hostility that surrounded the Bauhaus led to an almost constant circulation of artists on the Bauhaus staff. By 1925, the Weimar public had succeeded in closing the Bauhaus down, forcing it to relocate north to Dessau. There, the Bauhaus transformed into the Bauhaus School of Design in 1926. Two years later, Gropius relinquished his role as director of the Bauhaus to architect Hannes Meyer, who emphasized function over aesthetics, and architecture over the fine arts.

Meyer was replaced in 1930 by yet another architect: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who attempted to reorient the Bauhaus's focus to a balance between aesthetics and function. Constant financial setback, however, prompted still more emphasis on function and production. The Bauhaus closed once again in 1932, when it relocated further north to Berlin. It was in Berlin that Mies van der Rohe attempted to return to the more inclusive Bauhaus previously established by Gropius in Weimar. Unfortunately, the rise of the Nazi Regime saw the Bauhaus stripped of its funds and eventually dissolved in by 1933.

In my view, Kandinsky captures the results of his experiences at the three iterations of the Bauhaus in his paintings. An analysis of his body of work requires a reading of signs composed of geometric forms and color, which he used to actualize complex thoughts and emotions, and a reconciliation of the divergences in his paintings from the visual language he set out in his texts. His 1920s paintings display an increasingly graphic style accompanied by dark hues, and a significant use of black. He had seemingly abandoned the painterly style of his earlier *Composition* and *Improvisation* series, in favor of one that conformed to the constructivist

philosophy of the Bauhaus. Thus, the paintings should be read as a combination of several distinct sign formations. According to Kandinsky, when combined with form, color affects the other senses like music through the emotions and images they evoke, or the pathway through which these combinations take to reach the soul.

This project follows a larger historical narrative that involves not only Kandinsky and the Bauhaus, but life in Nazi Germany on the eve of World War II. As such, it will be split into three parts: Chapter One provides an overview of Kandinsky and his career up to 1933, when his teaching career at the Bauhaus was terminated. The chapter begins with his influences, which encompass musical, scientific, and religious sources. I will trace that trajectory to Kandinsky's first pivotal text, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911), which imparts the meaningfulness Kandinsky found in color and form, and which he supplemented a decade later with *Point and Line to Plane* (1926). This chapter will end with a summary of the history of the Bauhaus as Kandinsky most likely experienced it.

The subsequent chapters will examine a pair of paintings in relation to Kandinsky's two phases at the Bauhaus: the 1920s and the 1930s. Chapter Two begins with specific events at the Weimar Bauhaus and the Dessau Bauhaus, such as the constant interference of the Weimar public into the Bauhaus's curriculum, the antagonism between Walter Gropius and Swiss painter Johannes Itten, and the drastic transformation of the Staatliches Bauhaus into the Bauhaus School of Design. These events add some perspective to Kandinsky's *Black and Violet* and *Development,* which through the interactions of planes, colors, and line, function as images of hope in spite of the chaos that ultimately led to the Bauhaus's first dissolution and relocation. Similarly, Chapter Three is an analysis of Kandinsky's *Fragile* and *Gloomy Situation,* which together reveal a decidedly less hopeful artist in view of the particular events that occurred in the

1930s, beginning with the rise of the Nazis and ending with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's decision to fire Kandinsky.

In short, the four paintings mentioned above constitute an example of Kandinsky's use of meaning-infused form, and as such, establish a narrative of his pursuit of the Great Synthesis of the Arts. This area requires more research than is presented in this particular project. Ironically, he was only able to achieve his goal strictly in painting, and long after the Bauhaus officially closed. Thus, this project is a glimpse into Kandinsky's pursuit of the Great Synthesis of the Arts, the initial hope that it would come to fruition in the 1920s, and the loss of this hope in light of the chaotic events in the 1930s.

Literature Review

The foundation of Kandinsky scholarship lies in his own writing, particularly *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911), which has thus far played a crucial role in understanding Kandinsky's paintings. This book alone has supplied many scholars the main points of Kandinsky's theories about color and form, which he applied to his own works. Over a decade later, Kandinsky supplemented these ideas with his book *Point and Line to Plane* (1923), in which he details the significance of the line and the point, which had previously gone undiscussed in *On the Spiritual in Art*, but undoubtedly played a somewhat important role in his paintings.

Kandinsky argues the meaningfulness of forms via four main points he makes about color, form, and their relationships in *On the Spiritual in Art.* He first observes that color can be warm and cold, and light and dark, and that furthermore there is a lightness and darkness in warm colors, in addition to a lightness and darkness in cold colors. Secondly, there is what he calls a horizontal movement between yellow and blue, and between black and white; however, in

Kandinsky's view, the black-white spectrum remains inactive because of its lack of warmth and coolness. Thirdly, the movement toward light or dark, i.e. black or white, represents a resistance inherent in the colors. Color's movement toward white represents eternal resistance and the birth of ideas; whereas color's movement toward black eliminates not only resistance, but represents the death of possibilities. In this respect, lightening yellow with white increases its effect in the same way as darkening blue with black by increasing the former's high, warm notes, and the latter's deep, recessive notes. Finally, according to Kandinsky, black and white imply other metaphysical realms.

The second and last ideas may be the most important for interpreting Kandinsky's paintings. He found that yellow's "movement" implied a lack of boundaries; it draws near to the viewer and flows forth unceasingly in all directions. As a result, yellow is disquieting when confined to a geometric form. Blue, on the other hand, implies depth, and its movement away from the viewer allows it to be confined to a geometric form without putting the viewer ill-at-ease. Moreover, Kandinsky considered blue to be particularly immersive, and the visual equivalent of Heaven. Similarly, white is symbolic of a world "so far above us that no sound from it can reach our ears. We hear only a great silence...It is a silence that is not dead, but full of possibilities...the nothingness that exists before birth."[3] Black represented a world completely opposite from white, a world of "...nothingness...an eternal silence without future, without hope. Musically, it is represented by a general pause after which any continuation seems like the beginning of another world ...finished, complete for all time."[4] These color theories suggest color can affect all of the senses, providing a deeply immersive world.

According to Kandinsky, color excites a physical and an emotional response.[5] The eyes can be spiced up and cooled down by colors; colors can be tasted, and even heard. Fueled by his

correspondence with composer Arnold Schoenberg, Kandinsky paid significant attention to the "inner sound" of color: warm colors played warm notes; bright colors play high notes that are disturbing to the ear; and cool colors of course play deep repose.[6] Furthermore, responses to color are determined by how color is used in relationship to form in a painting. In Kandinsky's view, a harmonic composition juxtapose coloristic and linear forms that "…have an independent existence as such, derived from internal necessity, which create within the common life arising from this source a whole that is called a picture."[7] Color-form relationships had the potential to disrupt the harmony of an artwork. As mentioned before, he advised against restricting yellow to a geometric form so as to not make the audience uncomfortable. A yellow triangle best exemplified this notion because the sharpness of the color yellow is emphasized when used on the triangle's directional form. Additionally, due to the expansive nature of the triangle, the yellow triangle is an exception to Kandinsky's rule about confining yellow.

Furthermore, Kandinsky believed an artist could convey a unified composition, in which actions, secret thoughts, and feelings could be visualized in a spiritual atmosphere of color. For instance, he names "Suicide...hatred...egotism...'patriotism'..." and "Self-sacrifice...love...delight in the happiness of others..." as examples of the antithetical sign-formations that could be conveyed on the canvas.[8] This is the crux of my analysis of Kandinsky's works. In my view, the four paintings in question are an attempt to convey his mentality during a time of considerable hardship through sign-formations. Image and setting are condensed into disparate sign formations, projecting a sense of tension and of contradiction through what Mark Roskill calls "emblematic geometry", suspended states of animation, and opposing forces of energy.[9] They are often large dominating geometrical and biomorphic forms hovering in colored space that are most likely meant to be read by their interactions with one another.

On the Spiritual in Art and *Point and Line to Plane* are teeming with a combination of scientific, spiritual, mystical, and philosophical approaches to painting. Only a handful of scholars have elected to take on the task of applying them to Kandinsky's work. Whereas many scholars chart his path from religious figural iconography to pure abstraction; however, there are few publications that deal directly with his paintings. One of the first extensive theoretical readings of his work is Paul Overy's *Kandinsky: The Language of the Eye,* published in 1969.[10] Overy examines over fifty works, primarily from Kandinsky's Bauhaus period, acknowledging an acute sensitivity toward external events, which in turn accounted for the stylistic shifts over the course of his work.

Needless to say, Overy's analysis is crucial to this project as it offers a rare direct connection between Kandinsky's experiences and his paintings. He states that Kandinsky exhibited a certain sensitivity to external events, and demonstrated an almost uncanny ability to read the mood of the time, which he then imbued into his paintings.[11] I intend to expound upon this connection in my own project. His sensitivity prompted Kandinsky to create and send an apocalyptic painting entitled *War in the Air* (1913-1914) to writer and educationalist Sir Michael Sadler eight months before the outbreak of the Great War in Russia, and in my view, it prompted him to paint the four paintings examined in this project, albeit under different circumstances.[12] Moreover, in his pursuit to understand the majority of Kandinsky's body of work, Overy looks at the iconography prevalent in most of these paintings; therefore, his application of Kandinsky's theories to his paintings is only a cursory one. By comparison, my examination of only four of Kandinsky's Bauhaus paintings is more extensive, and it combines not only Kandinsky's experiences, but his relationships with other artists, and his experiments with other art

practices—items Overy overlooks, but are picked up by other scholars such as Jaleena Hahl-Koch and Mark Roskill.

In 1984, Jaleena Hahl-Koch added to the connection between Kandinsky's experiences and his paintings through her analysis of one of the most important, albeit brief, relationships Kandinsky experienced in her book, *Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures and Documents.*[13] Although she does not acknowledge a connection between Kandinsky's friendship with Schoenberg, and his paintings, Hahl-Koch emphasizes an important aspect in Kandinsky's stylistic transformation through correspondence between two artists who shared similar views and approaches to art. Kandinsky's intangible world, and the symbols it provided, grew from what he saw as a clearly-defined relationship between music, emotion, and painting. His close friendship with Schoenberg allowed him to explore further the relationship between painting and music. Schoenberg was considered the inventor of atonal music and for his development of a tonal stability with a chromaticism that was dense enough to be obscured. The twelve notes of the chromatic scale provided no overriding sense of key, no resolution among major and minor scales.[14] He emphasized the disparities of the notes, and in a sense, pieced them back together, and created harmony from dissonance. Together he and Kandinsky studied "dissonance" in painting and music, a phenomenon embraced by modernist visual art through intense, vivid color, broken brush strokes, and fractured forms.

In the nineteenth– and twentieth–centuries, visual dissonance was hardly uncommon. Perhaps the most infamous case is James Abbott-McNeill Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold (The Falling Rocket,* 1875*),* in which he uses broken brush strokes, blots of black and flecks of gold paint to capture the intensity and excitement of fireworks in a night sky. John Ruskin (1819-1900) reputedly denounced Whistler's *Nocturne* as "a pot of paint flung in the public's

face."[15] Cubism (1904-1914) conveyed this fixation with dissonance through broken forms and fractured pictorial planes that characterized the paintings of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963). It also appeared in the work of the Fauves, a short-lived movement in the early twentieth–century spearheaded by Henri Matisse, whose use of high-octane flat color as the primary focus of his paintings influenced the German Expressionist movement that followed.

Arguably, the German Expressionists like Kandinsky pushed the effects of similar colors and broken forms to express the artist's psychological state. For Kandinsky, dissonance provided a means of instilling drama, and a sense of shock in painting. He believed the utilization of the concept was simultaneously innovative and a plague to twentieth–century abstraction. In a letter to composer Arnold Schoenberg, Kandinsky states, "...up to now the painter has thought too little in general. He has conceived his work as a kind of coloristic balancing act."[16] For Kandinsky twentieth–century artists were merely concerned with building coherent forms from color with little regard to how the relationships of these colors worked. For this reason, he had pushed his expressionistic phase further into the abstract by 1911.

Schoenberg similarly rejected the idea of tonality as an organic evolution of musical expression: for him, a new palette of emotions could only be expressed within the parameters of a new musical order that typical diatonic (melodic, unaltered, tonal) harmony could not achieve. Incidentally, Schoenberg experienced his own expressionistic period in the aftermath of WWI. Fragmentation of the mind and alienation of the individual were transferred into his piano works, *Opus 11* and *Opus 19*.[17] He had also published his Theory of Harmony around the same time as Kandinsky published his *On the Spiritual in Art* in 1911.[18] Furthermore, the relationship between music and painting is important because of the depth it adds to the meanings Kandinsky imbued

in his use of color and form. In addition, it added credence to his striving for the Great Synthesis of the Arts because it married two different art forms, and seemingly opened other avenues for the combination of music and painting with other artistic practices.

Mark Roskill's *Klee, Kandinsky, and the Thoughts of Their Time* (1992), provides insight into Kandinsky's friendship with fellow abstractionist, Paul Klee, which continued throughout the Bauhaus years as a seemingly symbiotic relationship between two painters.[19] Kandinsky and Klee undoubtedly shared similar views about color and form, as well as the translatability of artists and their media. Hahl-Koch acknowledges Kandinsky's desire to find a "translatability," or a common element, in all art media that is slightly altered by a unique additional element that ultimately separates these media. Essentially, Kandinsky's lifelong pursuit of the Great Synthesis of the Arts is highlighted in Hahl-Koch's, Roskill's, and even Klee's publications.

The notion of translatability among the arts most likely began with Kandinsky's first experiments with abstraction, and according to Hahl-Koch, continued as he applied music theory to his abstract paintings. Moreover, in the first volume of his *Notebooks* entitled *The Thinking Eye* (1961), Klee supplies the belief that all artists are telling one aspect to the same story, and it was the role of these artists to bring these aspects together in the hopes of supplying a full narrative of human experience.[20] Finally, reconciliation was one of the Bauhaus's prevailing concepts, and in fact serves as a primary reason for its creation. Gropius addresses the idea of "universal unity in which all opposing forces exist in a state of absolute balance…" in his description of "The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus" (1923).[21] When he founded the Bauhaus in Weimar, Gropius envisioned a coalescence of ideas and art forms, which focused on both function and aesthetics. The notion of depicting the sum of one's parts permeated the curriculum: students were required to coordinate independent activity with collective work, to

reconcile construction and expression, and to understand color relations, form relations, and color-form relations. In a sense, art was a means of projecting one's being, as it was one's inner being which influenced the stylistic decisions one made.[22]

Overy's analysis of the direct relationship between painting and experience in Kandinsky's body of work, and Hahl-Koch's, Klee's, and Gropius's idea of the Great Synthesis of the Arts are recognized and applied in my analysis of *Black and Violet, Development, Fragile,* and *Gloomy Situation.* They are instances of Kandinsky referencing his environment, and they seem to reference one another in the context of his views of the Bauhaus, his teaching career, and the goal of synthesizing the arts. Moreover, such a synthesis begins from within, as Kandinsky frequently mentioned the role of the "spirit" and "inner necessity" in his paintings.

Scholars attribute Kandinsky's interest in theosophy and occult mysticism with his desire to capture this spirit, and the extent to which his interest manifested is briefly outlined in Chapter One. Kandinsky's theories and approaches to painting have direct roots in the Theosophic texts of Madame Blavatsky and Anne Besant. Yet, art historian Lisa Florman offers a more down-to-earth interpretation of Kandinsky's "spirit." In her book, *Concerning the Spiritual and the Concrete in Kandinsky's Art* (2014), Florman applies a Hegelian perspective of Kandinsky's theories and paintings.[23] She attempts to downplay the spiritual aspect of *On the Spiritual in Art,* instead focusing on the philosophy behind Kandinsky's theories, seeking instead to reorient the source of influence to Hegel's *Aesthetics* (1885). In doing so, she suggests a culture-wide orientation to historical movement of one kind or another. Through Hegel, Florman presents a view of history as always already structured, and willed in particular direction by the spirit, and it may be that Kandinsky tried to move the art world towards the synthesis of the arts via his synthetic approach to painting.

This is an important insight into Kandinsky's work, but it pales in comparison to the number of spiritual sources that permeate his theories. In fact, philosophy was only one of three aspects of theosophy, to be strengthened by religion and science. Moreover, rather than literally combining several of the arts, as in an opera, however, Kandinsky worked the theme or idea of a synthesis within painting. He combined his knowledge of other forms of art—primarily music and the performance arts—with his knowledge of mysticism, the occult and spiritual practices to enhance the meaningful relationships of color and form, thereby achieving balance on the canvas.

Methodology

The above mentioned publications illustrate a considerable twenty- to thirty-year gap in scholarship dedicated to interpreting Kandinsky's paintings. Further, specific interpretation, albeit a small one, could potentially reveal more about the relationship between Kandinsky's personal and artistic life especially, in the more general scheme of things. Kandinsky's paintings can be broken into two to three sign formations: a large black sign, smaller signs of vivid hues, and arguably the colored space in which the aforementioned signs are suspended. The narrow sample examined in this project tell a story of the Bauhaus, as well as the application of Kandinsky's visual language to expressive purposes; they, like many combinations of Kandinsky's paintings, form a thematic cluster.

I will examine the sign formations, in an effort to understand how they relate to one another, and the events of the years Kandinsky created these four paintings. As a Russian immigrant and artist, there was no shortage of significant moments in his life, particularly when he was invited to the Bauhaus, and experienced indirect and direct pressure from the Nazis. Such events have the

potential to structure the understanding of a work for both myself and the viewer. For instance, *Development* was created the year after the Bauhaus moved to its second location in Dessau where it underwent a change in the curriculum. Likewise, Kandinsky painted *Gloomy Situation* the year the Bauhaus closed its doors. Essentially combining historical and iconographical analysis paints an illuminating portrait of a Russian painter dealing with the restriction of ideas, and the failure of an important goal to be actualized.

The narrative presented by the paintings in question—*Black and Violet, Development, Fragile,* and *Gloomy Situation*— provides a glimpse into significant events which occurred on the eve of, and during, WWII, as Kandinsky was one among many victims of the Nazi's policies towards art. The art world is undeniably influenced in some aspect by politics, which often results in the artists receiving the brunt of the political pressure. Thus, interpreting Kandinsky's paintings in relation to his experience provides some insight into how foreign relations affected the art world and the artists who operated in it. Kandinsky was one of many European artists who experienced the heavy hand of political influence in their lives, especially in the 1930s. He was among the many artists who saw the exhibition of their works as "degenerate art" and/or saw the outright confiscation and destruction of their works. These themes are imbued in the geometric and biomorphic forms, colored space, and expressive lines that characterize the small grouping of paintings I examine.

Conclusion

I hope that my contribution offers a new way of looking at Kandinsky's Bauhaus works. He undoubtedly experienced a significant transition in his career as an artist and art theorist. Gropius's invitation to the Weimar Bauhaus in the 1920s provided a prime opportunity for him to

evolve and disseminate his theories in an effort to achieve the underlying goal of synthesizing the arts. The subsequent years, however, proved to be more trying, and resulted in less color and more black on Kandinsky's canvas, as he began to lose hope of achieving this goal. Thus, in my view, *Black and Violet, Development, Fragile, and Gloomy Situation*, doubtless project the defeat of unwavering hope in Kandinsky's life through the expanses of dark color, which overtake the vivid hues he cherished. From his teaching career at the Weimar Bauhaus, to the termination of his career and the Bauhaus's dissolution—my reading of this handful of Kandinsky's paintings presents his audience with an emotionally–complex portrait of a Russian immigrant during a time of political upheaval.

CHAPTER 2

A PROMISING CAREER: KANDINSKY'S ART, THEORIES, AND TEACHINGS AT THE BAUHAUS

Understanding Kandinsky and his body of work involves addressing a larger project that he saw at work in his paintings and essays, and which connected him to other twentieth–century artists. He sought to bring various art media together in an effort to simultaneously reveal a universal characteristic in them, and explore the additional characteristics that each separate art medium provides. He spent a lifetime seeking a Great Synthesis of the Arts with each other and with the world, so to speak, and utilized several means of achieving this goal. By applying a combination of musical, theoretical, and even theatrical knowledge to his visual projects, and a unique combination of spiritual and analytical approaches to painting, Kandinsky was able to produce complex paintings and a multi-faceted perspective of color theory. This approach cemented his influential role at the Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar and Dessau, but ultimately became impractical in the Bauhaus's later years in Berlin.

Overall, this chapter lays out some of the details of Kandinsky's theories on color, line and form as they are presented in his 1911 publication *On the Spiritual in Art,* in combination with existing Kandinsky scholarship, including Paul Overy's *Kandinsky: The Language of the Eye* (1969), Jaleena Hahl-Koch's *Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures and Documents* (1984), and Lisa Florman's *Concerning the Spiritual and the Concrete in Kandinsky's Art* (2014). These texts provide the bulk of ideas about Kandinsky's practices, which stem from such sources as Theosophy and the occult, Hegelian philosophy, and personal relationships with other artists. Furthermore, Kandinsky's spiritual and metaphysical

weltanschauung ("world view") linked him with several modern artists, and garnered the attention of Walter Gropius, founder of the Staatliches Bauhaus.

In addition, this chapter acknowledges the fact that the mixture of individuals and ideas in the Bauhaus was often met with conflict from the surrounding area, as well as inside the Bauhaus itself. Although it presented a prime opportunity to achieve a lifelong goal via the amalgamation of artists and students, methods and media, an underlying theme during the Bauhaus years involved several different groups of people expressing an implicit desire. This was the desire to protect the new generation of artists, while ensuring stylistic progress and advancing European art. Thus, an increasingly antagonistic public and continual political interference led to the Bauhaus's constant relocation and rebuilding, and several leadership and curriculum changes, which often negatively impacted its students and staff, including Kandinsky. In these respects, experience undoubtedly fueled Kandinsky's approach to painting, and shaped a personal "language" in his works. However, his perceived spiritual crisis in painting propelled the search for a new, and perhaps more enlightening, approach to painting. Kandinsky's own stylistic journey began in nineteenth century Russia as a bizarre new form of mysticism called Theosophy took root.

Kandinsky's Influences

Theosophy and Religious Iconography

Perhaps one of the primary influences in Kandinsky's paintings, has been the Russian Orthodox faith, on which he was raised. This thousand-year-old biblically-based faith is defined by the seven ecumenical councils held by church authorities between A.D. 325 and 787. There teachings included drew from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and the simultaneously

inseparable and distinguishable natures of Jesus Christ—one divine and the other human. Amongst the plethora of saints canonized under Russian Orthodoxy, the Virgin May holds a special place as the Mother of God. Most importantly, Orthodox services are known for the pageantry, and often involve the congregation directly through the use of the vernacular form of liturgy. The liturgy in question involves multiple elaborate systems of symbols meant to convey the content of the faith to the devout. In particular, one of these symbols appears in several of Kandinsky's paintings, and in fact, came to define the Blaue Reiter movement: the image of Saint George as the Blue Rider. Seemingly, Kandinsky combined the image of Saint George the Dragon Slayer with the soon-to-be-discussed spiritual connotations of the color blue to convey a triumphant symbol for the modernist movement, in which he operated. Kandinsky's interest in the occult allows us to understand this spiritual significance further.

Theosophy, a belief system that spanned across Asia, with ties to the Byzantine Empire, gradually emerged through Madame Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) and William Quan Judge (1851-1896). As the founder of the movement, author of *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) and promoter of mastery of the Divine Wisdom, Blavatsky was a powerful individual, who challenged the confusion of Russian Orthodoxy, exposed the fallacies of materialistic science, and even assailed the claims of nineteenth century spiritualism.[24] Although she made many enemies, Blavatsky maintained an influential role in the various Theosophic branches that emerged in 1875 and onward. In regard to Kandinsky's paintings, however, the writings of one of Blavatsky's disciples, Annie "Red Annie" Besant, exerted particular influence in Russia.[25]

Originally, a Christian-turned-atheist, Besant longed for spiritual satisfaction, which she found in *The Secret Doctrine*, and personal meetings with Blavatsky. She became a staunch

follower of Theosophy upon assuming an editorial role with the Theosophist publication *Lucifer*, and eventually assumed a leadership role in the Theosophical Society of England in 1891. The formation of a universal brotherhood—with no distinction of race, status, sex, etc.—was an important factor in the Russian Theosophic Movement, which combined religion, science, and philosophy to understand the laws of nature and discover man's latent abilities.[26] Thus, through Besant's efforts, it took shape in 1901, and became the combined effort of several women, who smuggled, transcribed, and translated some of Theosophy's most influential texts in Russia. Among these women was Madame Nina Konstantinovna Gernet, for whom Theosophy provided an outlet and a purpose in life. The stringent doctrines of the Russian Orthodox Church forced her to keep an extensive personal collection of Theosophical literature a secret in her home.[27] In addition, numerous articles and translations of Besant's works produced by Gernet's childhood friend, Anna Kamenskaia, are often cited as the greatest contributions to Russian Theosophy. Finally, Kandinsky's hometown of Moscow saw the emergence of various Theosophical Congresses operated by another leading figure among Russian Theosophists: philanthropist and feminist Anna Filosofova.[28]

The significance of color and spatial relations in Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art* serves as a testament to Theosophy. His discussion of the pictorial plane hearkens to Blavatsky's writings about the separate, "super-physical" planes and states of being that only the spiritually-superior Adept could enter.[29] These beings transcended the limits of physicality and their own subconscious, surpassing the materialistic existence to which most men had consigned themselves, and this same desire is implicit in Kandinsky's world, which seemingly projects itself beyond the materiality of the canvas to a subconscious and spiritual plane.

Kandinsky's "Language of Forms and Colors" described in *On the Spiritual in Art* is also highly derivative of Theosophic texts, such as *Thought Forms*, written by Besant and fellow Theosophist C.W. Leadbeater. As art critic Hilton Kramer points out, Besant and Leadbeater acknowledge three forms of pictorial thought in *Thought Forms*. The first two deal primarily with images of man and of objects. Besant's illustration of the forms produced by the music of Charles Gounod and of Richard Wagner (1901, Figure 5) is strikingly reminiscent of Kandinsky's *Compositions* series. Explosions of vivid hues, lines, and perhaps even symbols fill the pages. Quite possibly this is the third phase of Thought Forms: the astral or mental planes, which Besant and Leadbeater suggest could be glimpsed through abstraction. Moreover, the third pictorial mode addressed "...form entirely on its own, expressing its inherent qualities in the matter which it draws around it."[30] In addition, the spiritual meaningfulness Kandinsky found in the color blue, which "...the deeper it becomes, the more strongly it calls man toward the infinite, awakening in him a desires for the pure, and finally, the supernatural" is quite similar to Besant's and Leadbeater's suggestion that different shades of blue "all indicate religious feeling."[31]

Essentially, Theosophy postulated a metaphysical significance for color and the pictorial plane, thus, providing a basis for Kandinsky's spiritual view of art; however, this was not the only spiritual basis for *On the Spiritual in Art.* Rather, his Orthodox faith and its iconography, primarily of Saint George and the Dragon, prevailed in Kandinsky's early paintings, and he exhibited a tendency toward the spiritually– and mythologically–influenced symbolist styles that emerged in the late nineteenth century. The emphasis on beautiful, illusionistic paintings disheartened Kandinsky, who anticipated a spiritual awakening at the turn of the century due to the widespread adoption of occultism and mystic practices. For him, the academy's emphasis on materialistic beauty deteriorated awakening souls with "seeds of desperation, unbelief, lack of

purpose," instead of the new stylistic epoch he expected.[32] He describes the situation as a"...nightmare of the materialistic attitude, which has turned the universe into an evil, purposeless game...," and sought to transform the art world through abstraction.[33]

Believing late nineteenth– and twentieth–century art faced a spiritual crisis, in which the soul had been all but snuffed out by the materialism, Kandinsky saw an almost "prophetic power" in abstraction, when it was studied, understood, and utilized properly. This involved abandoning the laws of naturalism—the most materialistic, soulless, and "atheistic" of artistic modes—to study pure form, geometric shapes, and color. In Kandinsky's view, relinquishing the figural form allowed for further exploration of materiality and immateriality in painting, and even his early paintings hint toward an interest in the abstracted form— Russian streets and icons exhibit the gestural forms and modulated color typically associated with Impressionism. By the time he systematically laid out the meanings and effects of the relationships between colors, forms, and lines in *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky's *Composition, Impressions,* and *Improvisation* series had very little to do with definitive form. These paintings exhibited an increased interest in gesture and color through painterly color interactions interspersed with thick black lines. Primary colors (red, blue, and yellow) and basic shapes (the circle, square, and triangle), in addition to the straight line, curved line, and angle, exhibited specific relationships that represented Kandinsky's complex internal machinations. He reoriented his focus back to clear form in the 1920s, when he emphasized shape and geometry, as well as bold combinations of color and expressive lines, and the latter half of his career in 1930s and 1940s saw the return of a semblance of human form as embryonic, biomorphic signs in bright, lively colors often accompanied by black.

Jaleena Hahl-Koch attributes a desire for artistic freedom and a need to push painting to its limit as the catalysts for Kandinsky's turn to abstraction, and in the process, acknowledges

another, non-spiritual influence in his work. In addition to Theosophy and religious iconography, he found partaking in multiple art forms added a richness to his preferred medium. He applied his musical knowledge to his paintings—his experience as an amateur musician, and his friendship with composer Arnold Schoenberg allowed for a profound exploration between music and the sensations encompassed in Kandinsky's paintings.

Arnold Schoenberg and Music Theory

For Kandinsky, the relationship between color and the senses was "a language of the soul." As he describes the effects of colors in *On the Spiritual in Art,* Kandinsky draws several comparisons between color and music, and by extension, painting and music. This relationship is often attributed to two things. The first involves a neurological disorder called *synesthesia*, in which one sensory pathway involuntarily influences another. Scholars suggest Kandinsky may have suffered some form of the disorder because he often spoke as if he "saw" visual representations of music, which he was then able to paint. Kandinsky's theories even suggest that he "heard" the notes color played in his paintings.[34] However, a more concrete explanation of Kandinsky's interest in the inseparability of music and painting is that he utilized his own musical knowledge and experience to inform his paintings.

Kandinsky had always been interested in color-sound relationships, and viewing a performance of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin* (1850) fueled his future explorations of color and sound. However, many scholars fail to acknowledge that Kandinsky spent his childhood playing the cello and the piano. He had even penned some of his own music— *Violet Curtain*, a single sheet of simple melodies written in 1914—and most likely advised his partner, Gabrielle Münter, in her own song compositions.[35] Finally, although eight years older than him, Kandinsky saw Schoenberg as an equal, and the two stand as virtual parallels of one another. Just as Kandinsky

was trained in music, so Schoenberg was trained in painting.[36] Schoenberg worked in chromatic atonal scale in music; Kandinsky worked in a tonal—tone, here, being coloristic values—chromatic spectrum in painting. Both were concerned with harmony and dissonance in their compositions. For a few years, a symbiotic relationship existed between the two, until a misunderstanding severed it.

The brief correspondence between Kandinsky and Schoenberg supposedly ended because Schoenberg believed Kandinsky was anti-Semetic. Despite his clarification on the matter—he wrote, "I love you as an artist and a human being. I think least of all about nationality—it is a matter of the greatest indifference to me"—Kandinsky and Schoenberg stopped writing to one another in 1923.[37] In spite of the dissolution of a promising friendship, the parallel helped to propel Kandinsky's innovation, and his pursuit of the much larger goal of finding translatability in different art forms, which he called the "Great Synthesis of the Arts."

Kandinsky and the Pictorial Plane

There seems to be a disconnect between the relatively rigid symbolic structure Kandinsky lays out in *On the Spiritual in Art,* and the gestural early paintings produced from it. Essentially, in spite of his own rules and systematic approach to painting, Kandinsky found there was still more to be learned about abstraction. In contrast to the literal flatness and materiality that was to become so important to later artists and critics— Barnett Newman (1905-1970), Frank Stella (1936-), and Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) — he sought to project the forms forward and backward, to have these forms figuratively emerging from the ground and from the canvas.[38] He achieved this by relinquishing the unified plane, in which the depth was merely implied and denied by the effects of color and line, and adopted a fairly traditional pictorial means of

capturing the metaphysical, in which the visual field is divided into separate planes that interact to create an "ideal plane."[39]

According to Paul Overy, Kandinsky's ideal plane existed "in front of the material plane of the canvas."[40] In order to achieve these effects, Kandinsky's ideal plane relied on: 1.) the thinness and thickness of the line, 2.) the placing of form on the surface, 3.) the layering of forms, or as Kandinsky so eloquently stated, "the crossing of one form over another, 4.) and finally, color.[41] Utilizing these characteristics, he simultaneously emphasized and blurred the separations between planes. Warm and cool colors on the same plane extend toward and retreat from the viewer, creating variations of depth. Open forms simultaneously dominate and blend into the space upon which they lay. Closed shapes of pure color, usually dark colors like black, blue, and violet, appear like holes or cut-outs despite the fact that they lay upon the highest plane in some of Kandinsky's paintings. These effects occur especially in the paintings *Black and Violet* and *Gloomy Situation*, which will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively.

Ultimately these forms, and Kandinsky's overall approach to painting suggests that the canvas is something that is built upon, and space, particularly colored space, is something of a foundation for the forms and lines he added to it. His canvases were steady constructions of an ideal plane, where he would explore the complicated relationships of disparate objects in the hopes of reconciling them into a whole. By 1926, Kandinsky's approach was different from the concentration, reduction, or formal distillation that prevailed in the works of twentieth–century artists like Barnett Newman, Donald Judd, Frank Stella, and Piet Mondrian, who considered the whole to be comprised of few to no parts. By the 1930s, however, Kandinsky suspended complicated compositions of geometric and embryonic forms in indeterminate space, reconciling the majority of the planes and sign-formations and achieving the ideal plane.

Florman asserts that the large- and small-scale changes in Kandinsky's work may have been driven by a dialectical logic, which he called the "inner necessity" of painting. Essentially, signs and their relationships could not be arranged arbitrarily in space because even the pictorial plane represented a metaphysical realm Kandinsky sought to capture. Florman suggests Kandinsky applied Hegelian aesthetics to compliment the already present theosophical underpinnings in his work because the relationship between the pictorial plane and the forms they lay upon is that the plane ushers the forms into existence. By instilling the three moments of coming into being described in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, Kandinsky "lays in" the main body of the painting, drawing from a preparatory sketch and establishing the Hegelian Universal State.[42] His paintings begin with the primary elements on the same plane, perhaps even hovering in indeterminate colored space as skeletons of the forms that will be. He then balances these elements to create the Particular State, or the state in which the main elements take their places on different planes as a result of Kandinsky's painting techniques and use of color. Finally, Kandinsky adds supportive and intermediary elements that instill the individualized liveliness Overy and Florman acknowledge in his paintings.

As the paintings that will be discussed in the following chapters—*Black and Violet*, *Development*, *Fragile*, and *Gloomy Situation*—demonstrate, Kandinsky's paintings can be broken down into at least three primary planes. There is a universal colored space upon which particular geometric forms are laid, finalized with smaller, more specified lines and shapes—which Kandinsky believes allows these elements to project themselves upon the viewer's subconscious via their inherent traits. Additionally, the polar entities in these paintings can be broken down into three primary contrasting pairs, which represented the contradictory nature of man and his world: the triangle and the circle, the straight line and curved line, and the yellow-

blue and white-black spectrums.[43] The pairs appear intact in many in the paintings he produced between 1920 and 1925, and then emerge jumbled up and fused together in an effort to create newer meaningful forms from 1926 onward. The most fundamental contrasting pair is that of color.

The Primary Contrasting Pairs

Yellow and Blue

The yellow-blue spectrum, and by extension the black and white spectrum, are the first pairings acknowledged in *On the Spiritual in Art,* because of their visual and tonal effects on viewers. Consider, again, the pictorial plane from which the elements of Kandinsky's paintings project. Florman notes Kandinsky's rules were not always strictly observed—as he continued his explorations of his early *Compositions* around the time *On the Spiritual in Art* was written and published. By *Composition IV* (1911, Figure 6), Kandinsky found color could shed its innate properties and transform itself. He could no longer utilize pure primary hues in his paintings, and he could not simply leave the canvas white; it was too symbolic and too pure for most of his paintings to serve as the pictorial plane from which the elements of Kandinsky's paintings are to project. These paintings are arguably inseparable from the earthly realm in which they were created. Florman suggests Kandinsky reoriented his view on color, and began mixing them to create the tints and tones that by the 1920s characterized his paintings. Essentially, almost a decade after writing *On the Spiritual in Art,* he was able to maintain the essence of his rules while creating increasingly complex compositions of evolving forms, lines, and color.

For instance, Kandinsky believed color was needed to "activate" or give the canvas and its forms movement. Yellow and blue, in particular, represented the purest effect of color on a

viewer, and stood as the activated equivalent of the black and white spectrum. Figuratively speaking, these lively colors moved. No other color flowed forth like yellow, and no other color implied depth in its recessive nature like blue. By comparison, the black and white spectrum remained inactive, but no less important. In the time up to the mid-1920s, black served a supporting role as a boundary for overflowing color, while the white canvas implied possibility; it was a realm teeming with un-actualized ideas. Yet both resurface in his *Small Worlds* series, completed in 1922, as separate spaces for the colorful elements bursting forth from them. Here, Kandinsky puts the inactivity of the two colors to work as only the colored elements that exhibit some semblance of movement.

The lithograph *Small Worlds IV* (1922, Figure 7), is a cornucopia of green, yellow, and lavender lines and shapes of varying size and thickness, projecting themselves forth from a black ring in white space. Arguably, it is Kandinsky's treatment of the pictorial plane—primarily his overlapping of shapes— and his use of color which imbue movement in the lithograph's forms. In contrast, white does not contribute to the sense of movement one receives from this piece. The elements—representatives of Kandinsky's ideas—have been realized; however, they are trapped, forever hovering in static, indeterminate space. This is particularly so when comparing *Small Worlds IV* to Kandinsky's *Black and Violet* (1923), which confronts the viewer with a pulsing golden space full of elements invigorated by its presence.

In stark contrast to *Small World IV's* white space, the black space in *Small Worlds VII* (1922, Figure 8) appears to do the opposite. That is not to say that Kandinsky does not at least attempt to etch out some active element. Viewers are presented with a black plane full of white, yellow, green, and blue elements interspersed throughout it, and the effect is, figuratively speaking, like "night" and "day" in comparison to *Small Worlds IV*. Kandinsky utilizes a similar

treatment of the pictorial plane, but not to the same effect. Rather, *Small Worlds VII* threatens the viewer with solid darkness, a threat that is made all the more serious in consideration of the forms Kandinsky uses in his lithographs and paintings.

Triangle and Circle

The triangular and circular planes stand as the greatest contrasting pair for Kandinsky, and the combination of the two presented a symbolic impact "no less powerful than the finger of God touching the finger of Adam in Michelangelo."[44] As the human finger implies a metaphorical force beyond its own physicality for naturalistic artists, so Kandinsky hoped that the triangle-circle would hold forces beyond their geometry for abstractionists. The result of an interaction between these forms implied movement held in equilibrium, a balance similar to an architectural stress. For example, the composition would produce more dynamic if the triangle dominated the balanced tensions of the circle. Furthermore, Overy notes that the triangle-circle pairing parallels Gestalt psychology's Principle of Closure.

Developed in 1912, but not openly practiced until around 1924, Gestalt psychology examined how individuals integrated and organized seemingly disparate pieces of perceptual information into meaningful wholes. One is able to recognize and draw meaning from particular clusters of forms and symbols— to read their "Gestalt" instead of their individual parts. The Principle of Closure suggests each form represents its own metaphysical force, which for Overy is where Kandinsky derives one of his main points in his 1923 publication *Point and Line to Plane.* Forms begin and end at a particular point, thus forming a plane, the implications of which move beyond its enclosed form.[45] The circular plane simultaneously acts as the most unstable and the most stable of the planes— two forces that flowed into one another, while at the same time disappearing without a trace. The contrast between the triangle and the circle appears most

frequently in Kandinsky's Bauhaus works, which perhaps serve as a testament to the pairing's importance as the second metaphysical level upon which his paintings were built.

Kandinsky suggests in *Point and Line to Plane* that the circle is the curved line taken to the extreme, and it most likely represents an omnipresent, God-like, and perhaps apocalyptic force.[46] Similarly, the triangle is a conjunction of straight lines; it is a plane whose beginning and end did not disappear and could be observed. In other words, the triangular plane presented structure and order to the circular plane's constant flow. Thus form, especially the circle and triangle, act as the "ground" or at least a grounded element, to the pictorial plane's "sky." They are ushered forward or pulled back by an activated color, such as yellow or blue, and need to be specially arranged to either continue forward and around the viewer, or recede from the viewer. These forms transform the canvas in to a living object full of vitality and energy that is further enhanced by a singular element, which constructed Kandinsky's planes: line.

Straight Line and Curved Line

The contrast between the straight and the curved line is perhaps the most obscure of Kandinsky's primary contrasting pairs. He acknowledged their significance, yet all that he wrote about the relationship is encompassed in *Point and Line to Plane.* His earlier *Compositions* and *Improvisations* show that Kandinsky placed some importance in line's expressive qualities. There are no planes and color is thrust into a supportive role in view of the thick black strokes used to convey abstracted scenes of colorful Moscow or Saint George the Blue Rider, who appears in several of Kandinsky's steady simplifications of form. Line served a dynamic function that planes later would as he began to understand the significance of the plane in his paintings. By the 1920s, his continual explorations of the above–mentioned contrasting pairs had relegated line

to a supportive role to shape and color. It was the force applied to the point in a given direction by the paintbrush of an artist, and it is a force that cannot act alone.[47]

Kandinsky outlines at least three different types of lines, which could possibly deviate in different directions, in *Point and Line to Plane*. For instance, straight lines are a unique force applied in a single direction, which can continue indefinitely; whereas curved lines, or waves, exhibit the effect of two forces acting simultaneously. The angled line represents the alternation of two forces in different directions. Depending on the orientation of any of these line types, Kandinsky suggests that each line produces its own effect similar to the tonal effects of the colors.[48] He believed the horizontal line corresponds with the ground upon which man moves, and possesses a dark, cold tonality similar to blue/black. In contrast, Kandinsky associated the vertical line with height, offering no support, and moreover that it encompasses a warm tonality close to white/yellow. Finally, the diagonal line provides a middle ground as it represents nothing, and can possess either a warm or cold tonality depending on its inclination toward the horizontal or the vertical.

The Red Square and Other Intermediate Elements

In the above respects, the diagonal line is not the only element to which Kandinsky attributed an intermediary function. The angle, the color red, and the square also acted as elements of neutrality for him. These elements represented the material world, which lay between the extremes of Kandinsky's contrasting pairs. For instance, his code of meaning did not encompass the endless variety presented by the color spectrum; even his strict attention to the primary colors—yellow, red, and blue—in determining the primary contrasting pairs left red as an outlier. Kandinsky refers to it as a color of "unbound warmth", without the "irresponsible appeal of yellow," and states that taken by itself, "red is material and, like yellow has no very deep

appeal."[49] Red's materialistic nature is further emphasized by the colors with which it is combined, such as its "charming" coupling with green.

To the same effect, mixed colors become neutralized, having adopted the characteristics of their parent colors. The ultimate mixture of colors—brown—is so inundated with the characteristics of the three primary colors that it cannot possibly move without the aid of another color. Kandinsky experiments with brown extensively in his late 1920s works like *Accent on Rose* (1926, Figure 9), *Small Dream in Red* (1925, Figure 10), and *Black and Violet* (1923), which provides a starting point in Kandinsky's exploration of brown. Brown appears accompanied by large black signs in Kandinsky's paintings, beginning with *Gloomy Situation* (1930).

Biomorphs and Organic Shapes

In *Gloomy Situation*, Kandinsky introduces one final, additional form: the organic and biomorphic shapes, which characterize his later works. This amoeba-like form, which seemingly encompasses the circle and the curved line, resembles a human embryo and appears to be the only remotely human form in Kandinsky's paintings. In *On the Spiritual in Art*, he provides an interesting explanation of these biomorphic forms: they represent the pulsating vitality and energy of the living organism, particularly humankind.[50] Kandinsky's desire for pure form may have meant he preferred the *suggestion* of a living organism over achieving an imitative representation of it. Man's structure was not as important as what was inside it.

Kandinsky compiled an undoubtedly rigid dictionary of meaningfulness for lines, shapes, and colors—one that evolved as he did, thereby ushering in new stylistic eras for him during some of the most important years of his life: the Bauhaus Years. He came to thrive at the Bauhaus; however, a unique approach to painting seemingly did not prepare him for the issues

the Bauhaus would, and arguably had, faced. He would experience the contrasting leadership approaches of three vastly different architects. Students would turn against their teachers, and staff would turn against the school's director. Aesthetics would take a back seat to functionality and salability, and before the end of a decade, politics had more influence in the Bauhaus than Kandinsky.

The Bauhaus

Weimar (1919-1925)

Since its establishment in 1919, the Staatliches Bauhaus—known simply as "Bauhaus"—was viewed antagonistically by the general public, local politicians, and eventually national authorities. Kandinsky knew there would be strife and undertook it willing, as did its founder, Walter Gropius, who had his sights set on an academy that incorporated several forms of visual arts, including architecture, painting, photography, and sculpture. He garnered positive initial reaction from the Weimar public, until however, it was discovered that Gropius would include "alien" and "Jewish" art in its art curriculum. Almost immediately, the Free Union for the Protection of the Town's Interests formed a staunch opposition against an institution that would promote the work of what it considered "mentally ill" artists, i.e. abstractionists.[51]

Despite its popularity in most areas in Germany, there existed an underlying notion that abstract art was the product of mentally disturbed artists. In Weimar, the Free Union's presiding officer, Dr. Emil Kreubel, perpetuated this association by lumping expressionist painters like Paul Klee, and eventually Kandinsky, in with the likes of Klaus Prinzehorn's *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* ("Artistry of the Mentally Ill").[52] The association fueled the idea that Gropius intended to allow non-German artists to pass judgment over the German ones, prompting the

demand for the closing of the Bauhaus.[53] A lengthy investigation by the Thüringen government into the hyperbolic claims of Kreubel and the Weimar public resulted in the Bauhaus's favor, yet the incident anticipated the persecution the institution would face in the years to come as a perceived den of harmful alien, Jewish, Bolshevik influences. Moreover, just as Gropius refused to close the Bauhaus in the midst of constant opposition to its radical ideas, so Kandinsky most likely refused to let a smear campaign defeat his hopes of being part of one of the greatest movements in the art world.

Kandinsky had most likely been aware of the Bauhaus since it first opened its doors, and he undoubtedly admired Gropius' goal for the Great Synthesis of the Arts. So much so, that he meditated on some of the Bauhaus's ideas in his writings for a project he had submitted to the Institut Khudozhestvennoy Kultur (Institute of Artistic Culture, InKhuK).[54] To the same effect, Gropius had his own interests in Kandinsky's potential contribution to the Bauhaus. In addition to his spiritual approach to art theory and his overall reputation as an author, Kandinsky's systematic and scientific approach to art via the breakdown of the spiritual connotations inherent in shapes and colors, and his prominence as a pioneer in the German and International art scenes garnered Gropius' attention. Consequently, this implicitly reciprocal relationship would prove to be beneficial for both Kandinsky and Gropius.

Once he accepted his position at the Bauhaus, Kandinsky came to teach several courses, including the preliminary Theory of Form course required for all first-year students. The course was considered Kandinsky's greatest work at the Bauhaus, even in view of his role as the director of the Wall-Painting workshop, and later, his free-painting course.[55] Specifically, Kandinsky was in charge of two introductory seminars about form—"The Basic Elements of Form" and "Color Course and Seminar"— in which he outlined an inclusive systematic treatment of simple and

complicated visual phenomena.[56] Kandinsky also involved his students in projects for the Berlin Museum of Modern Art.[57] Needless to say, he flourished during his first few years at the Bauhaus, and the foundation courses he taught oriented him on the right path toward the Great Synthesis. However, the temporary closing of the Bauhaus and its relocation to Dessau saw his influence take a sudden downturn in 1925.

The Bauhaus's new location in Dessau marked years of constant change. Rather than emphasizing theories of color and form, the Bauhaus shifted its focus to the application of artistic and artisanal skills, skills that would ensure the students products would sell and eventually finance the Bauhaus. As a result, the Bauhaus curriculum placed less emphasis on painting, which left little room for Kandinsky's teachings. In addition, constant shifts in leadership and politics in the wake of the emergence of Nazism resulted in more personal attacks against the leadership and the faculty of the Bauhaus. Kandinsky's Russian origins simultaneously made him a prime target for the Nazi Party and a critical target for communists who demanded a reduction of Kandinsky's "bourgeois individualism."[58] In other words, his teaching position was contingent upon how he could benefit the German public, and with limited interest in painting—especially painting taught by a degenerate artist—Kandinsky's role was severely limited. In his subsequent years at the Bauhaus received fewer courses and his influence in the curriculum would be increasingly reduced.

Dessau (1925-1931)

The art scene in Dessau was no better for Kandinsky than in Weimar. Citizens grew concerned about the radical reputation of the Bauhaus, and avoided it.[59] Some of the Bauhaus staff were dismissed, and more restrictions were imposed on its courses in an effort to appease the public and government. Eventually, as a result of decreased donations and increased

criticism, Gropius passed his directorial role to Swiss architect Hannes Meyer in 1928. A self-proclaimed Marxist, Meyer was a politically–radical thinker, who felt the Bauhaus had diverged from its path because of its functionalist goal, and sought to reestablish the school as one for the people.[60] Thus, metal, furniture, and mural painting workshops were combined into the "Interior Furnishing Workshop," while the "Advertising and Marketing Workshop" absorbed the independent printing, advertising, exhibitions, photography, and sculpting workshops.[61] Moreover, Meyer felt art "strangled" life and proceeded to limit the influence of the artists working at the Dessau Bauhaus.[62] Courses in the engineering sciences saw an upsurge in importance, and were increasingly integrated into the curriculum. In contrast, Kandinsky and Klee were given fewer sections of their "free painting" courses to teach.

Under Meyer's leadership, emphasis on music and scientific courses saw the Dessau Bauhaus moving farther off its intended course. The Bauhaus had even developed a style, something its founders wished to avoid.[63] The student body ballooned up to two hundred students, and often led to the exclusion of some of the most talented people. Left-wing political radicalization flourished among the students, which led to an organized group of Communist students calling for a public "world revolution." Their demonstrations led to public intolerance for the "red Bauhaus" threatening the positions of the Bauhaus's anti-communist faculty, including Kandinsky and Joseph Albers.[64] To say that Meyer failed in resetting the Bauhaus's artistic course would be an understatement, and he resigned two years after assuming his directorial role. He was swiftly replaced by another architect: German-American Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.[65]

Interestingly enough, Mies van der Rohe had already garnered the Bauhaus's attention in 1929 with his design for the German pavilion for the World Exposition in Barcelona, Spain.

Under his direction, it was determined that if the Bauhaus was to survive, it would have to do so invisibly. The Bauhaus closed for a brief period, and reemerged with a new budget, curriculum, constitution, content and structure. It was revamped into a technical academy for architecture with a few subdivisions of art and workshop. Changes in the workshop structure placed even more emphasis on architecture, which Mies van der Rohe felt all arts relied upon. [66] In addition, most students were forced to reapply to the school, while others were expelled in an effort to expunge the political radicals. Some of the most promising students were inexplicably eliminated from the Bauhaus roster, and the students who were accepted back into the Bauhaus, saw an increase in student fees, without the use of living studios.[67]

In other words, the Bauhaus was the Bauhaus in name and building only. Consequently, some of the Bauhaus's best professors also left: Paul Klee and Gunta Stözl had resigned by April 1931.[68] Mies van der Rohe attempted to mute the socio-political aspect of the Bauhaus's activity, but to no avail. The Nazi party had increased its numbers and represented the majority by 1932.[69] They denounced the Bauhaus as a "Jewish Dive" and an enemy to their dominant world view, resulting in a reduced budget, a dependence on license income and a struggle for survival.[70] Once the Anhalt government fell to Nazi authority, the Dessau Bauhaus was dissolved and moved to Berlin.

Berlin (1932-1933)

The Bauhaus continued as a private institution in Berlin for less than a year, and regained most of its previous student body. The program developed in Dessau was continued, with Kandinsky heading the free painting course.[71] In this brief period, Mies van der Rohe revived the synthetic goal originally established by Gropius. He placed great importance on the visual arts, and by extension the contributions of Kandinsky, Albers, and photographer, Walter Peterhans.[72]

Yet, the appointment of Adolf Hitler to German Chancellor served as a sobering reminder of the opposition against the Bauhaus as museums and academy directors were attacked and works of modern art removed from museum walls. On April 11, 1933, the Nazis conducted a police raid of the Berlin Bauhaus's rooms, which resulted in the seizure of "incriminating material."[73] The attacks culminated into the pivotal decision by Mies van der Rohe, to terminate two "politically-undesirable" members of its staff.[74] Kandinsky was one of the two; German architect Ludwig Hilberseimer was the second because of his leftist tendencies. Finally, with some students arrested, the building sealed, and no economic or financial means of surviving, the Bauhaus was officially dissolved July 20, 1933.[75]

The Bauhaus was one of the peaks of Kandinsky's career— he was able to disseminate the theories of color, form, and line outlined in his *On the Spiritual in Art*, and he certainly had the means of expanding and transforming his body of work. Additionally, he was part of a community, who, ideally, worked together to usher in a more enlightened generation of artists. Kandinsky undoubtedly thought the Bauhaus was on the right path toward this synthesis when it opened in 1919, and even in the initial years at Dessau. Yet, the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s saw a divergence away from the synthesis in favor of functionality, financial gain, politics—reasons that were most likely too materialistic for Kandinsky, and were neither about art nor aesthetics. Mies van der Rohe presented the tiniest glimpse of hope in his return to Gropius's original plan in 1933; however, by then the damage had been done and Kandinsky was no longer part of the bigger picture. The significance of these events should be considered with respect to the paintings Kandinsky produced during this period: *Black and Violet* (1923), *Development* (1926), *Fragile* (1931), *and Gloomy Situation* (1933), which seemingly reference each other and reveal connections between the events and their conception.

CHAPTER 3

BUILD AND RE-BUILD: THE BAUHAUS'S RELOCATION AND KANDINSKY'S *BLACK AND VIOLET* AND *DEVELOPMENT*

This handful of paintings convey a powerful image of an artist in pursuit of an artistic agenda larger than himself, one extremely close to actualization but buried under politics and power struggles. I will, therefore, trace a trajectory between each of them to the significant changes that occurred in the Bauhaus in an effort to convey how Kandinsky may have considered them in relation to his, and the Bauhaus's, goal of the Great Synthesis of the Arts. *Black and Violet* and *Development*, will be discussed first as they present the closest instances to the Great Synthesis of the Arts. Conversely, *Fragile* and *Gloomy Situation* reflect the impact of changes in leadership and politics, which resulted primarily in the shift away from the Great Synthesis and the brief reconnection with it in the Bauhaus's final year.

Kandinsky's transition from a painterly style to a graphic one that emphasized interactions of color, line, and form within boldly–colored space begins with *Black and Violet*, completed in 1923. A bold, enigmatic piece, *Black and Violet* stands as one of the earliest of Kandinsky's Bauhaus paintings and, in view of the insights introduced in Chapter One, provides a glimpse of a *weltanschauung* influenced by constant polarization in the art community in which he operated. The dichotomy of form, color, and line echo the division between conventional and unconventional artists and art practices represented by the Weimar public and the Bauhaus. It also reflects a rift that had begun to form between Gropius and architect Johannes Itten, and between Gropius and other outside artists who sought to influence the Bauhaus' curriculum.

Kandinsky's *Development* (1926) also provides the sense of drastic change over a short amount of time through complex, interwoven planes of color and form. *Development* can be considered a reflection of changes in Gropius' directorial role, in the teaching staff and curriculum, and even in the building itself as the Bauhaus was relocated north. Essentially, *Black and Violet* portrays a symbolic battle of ideologies that resulted in victory for few of the parties involved, and led to a circulation of ideas necessary to draw the Bauhaus, and Kandinsky, closer to the Great Synthesis of the Arts. To this effect, *Development* is that circulation of ideas applied to the external world in the wake of the shuttering of the Weimar Bauhaus and the construction of the Bauhaus School of Design in Dessau. In other words, Kandinsky's 1920s paintings, *Black and Violet* and *Development*, impart an optimistic perspective of a synthesis through the reconciliation of radical ideas and traditional convention. They simultaneously represent the loss inherent in this reconciliation, as well as the inevitable gain that may have been the Great Synthesis of the Arts.

The Great Synthesis of the Arts

With regard to the Great Synthesis of the Arts, Kandinsky's outlook appears hopeful in spite of the rather bleak events he experienced. In fact, *Black and Violet* and *Development* portray his focus on the constant evolution in the Bauhaus, which he hoped would overcome the challenges and opposing views that plagued the school, and lead to the achievement of his ultimate goal. His theoretical approach to finding a common denominator among all of the arts was similar to the one he developed for painting. He believed each of the arts produced an inner sound that could "…be rendered at the same moment…But apart from this general sound, each art will display that extra element which is essential and peculiar to itself, thereby adding to that

inner sound…a richness and a power that cannot be attained by one art alone."[76] It is as if he considered the arts—visual, music, and performance—to be parts of a symphony, and attempted to synthesize them.

As evidenced by his early music career, described in Chapter One, Kandinsky attempted the synthesis on his own in a variety of ways since the turn of the century. In addition to painting and music, Kandinsky harbored an interest in the performance arts. He conceived *Der Gelbe Klang* (*Yellow Sound*), one of four experimental "color-tone dramas," for theatre between 1909 and 1914. These performances—which included *Yellow Sound, Green Sound, Black and White, and Violet*—followed a larger trend that blended multiple art forms and media. World War I prevented Kandinsky from seeing his pieces performed, and attempts at other productions were deterred during the Nazi Regime. In a sense, synthesizing the arts existed in theory, and could only be achieved gradually. Perhaps for this reason, Kandinsky focused on achieving the synthesis in the visual arts. About four months later, Kandinsky became part of the staff at the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar, where he found the means and the minds, with which to continue his journey toward the great synthesis. Essentially, Kandinsky found a unique institution where the majority of the arts could be studied under one roof, and synthesized. Yet, he would soon find out the difficulty of maintaining such a lofty ideal during a time of rising chaos and constant change to which he most likely responded through painting first *Black and Violet,* and then *Development* a few years later.

Black and Violet **(1923)**

In *Black and Violet,* Kandinsky presents the viewer with a horizontal composition of interwoven planes of color and form, and a bold colored space that is simultaneously ambiguous

and legible. For one, this is perhaps the first of his paintings that explores the inherent potential of the color brown described in *On the Spiritual in Art*, potential that is only unlocked when the artist adds a hue to brown; otherwise it maintains a flat tonality as a result of absorbing the characteristics of all colors. Thus, Kandinsky combines brown with yellow on the canvas to create a bold golden space in which to suspend two enigmatic signs. These two signs act as twin foci: on the left, a black partial circle hybrid, whose end tapers to a point, and a purple quadrangle of equal size on the right stand as the largest and the darkest forms in the painting. They are the ones most likely referenced by the painting's title; they are the only black and violet elements, save for the lines of various lengths and orientations surrounding them. Moreover, just as the golden space around them acts as a platform for the two signs, so these signs act as platforms for the majority of the sign formations in the painting. Ideally, they project many of the smaller signs forward toward viewers, and create depth in the painting while concealing the other signs.

In this respect, *Black and Violet* serves as a fundamental comparison of the effects of mixed colors and black. Occupying the left quadrant of the painting is a large black blot, with short, tail-like strokes protruding from its rounded lower right side. Its pure blackness gives it the appearance of a large hole, or vortex, within the golden space. The black sign remains a static force in a lively chromatic arrangement. Perhaps for this reason, Kandinsky builds upon it, piling various colorful shapes and lines on it. The most notable of these shapes is a small white circle occupying the left side of the blot. Kandinsky's discussion of the achromatic spectrum establishes white as a color that is just as static and inactive as black; and yet, there is a difference between the black blot and the white circle that is perhaps emphasized here by their proximity to one another, as well as their relationships with the colorful elements in the painting.

For instance, it serves as a support for a green, red, and pale yellow triangle; whereas, the small purple and red parallelograms hovering in the upper left and lower right quadrants of the black blot seemingly disappear into it. The other colored elements resting on the blot are seemingly unaffected by it; they manage to project themselves toward the viewer.

Moving counterclockwise from the white circle and pale yellow triangle, one notes a complicated combination of a triangle, two trapezoids, and a rectangle. The triangle in this formation is green and orange, with a small trapezoid resting atop the green section, segmented by thin pale yellow, white, black, and red lines. The second trapezoid rests at the triangle's base and is divided into four sections: blue, red, yellow, and orange. Finally, the trapezoid is supported by a narrow, horizontal rectangle, also separated into four sections (yellow, red, white, and pale blue). To the right of the triangle-trapezoid-rectangle hybrid, is a composition of red and yellow half circles connected by a line resting atop a seemingly transparent orange circle. This circle rests atop a pale yellow triangle, rendering its tip blue. Moreover, each of the above described sign-formations appear to be pointed inward, circling the blot as they move toward the viewer, unhindered by the blot's heavy blackness. In contrast, an additional two planes exist beneath the black blot composed of a black triangle, a pale yellow trapezoid, and an indeterminate pale blue form. Beneath those sign formations, red and blue pulsate on the brown space at the upper and lower quadrants of the blot respectively.

It is in the aforementioned section that Kandinsky's complex use of color-forms is truly at work. They play tricks on the viewer's eyes, projecting toward (the pale blue and yellow forms) and remaining static (the black trapezoid). The pulsing blue and red serve to simultaneously elevate the black blot and pull it back. The hues essentially contribute to the notion that the blot resides within an invisible middle plane on the canvas; although it resides beneath several sign-

formations, it still remains visible. Yet, the sense of transparency the blot introduces is not merely that of one peering through the signs on top of it and seeing black. Rather, the blot's contours are always present through these signs, ensuring that it is never completely buried beneath them.

Similarly, on the right half of the canvas, an angled purple trapezoid hovers next to the blot as if trapped in its orbit. Overy's reading of *On the Spiritual in Art* in *Kandinsky: Language of the Eye* suggests purple is a marriage of the warm, material capabilities of red and the spiritual depth of blue. The parallelogram is not as static as the blot—it moves somewhat toward the viewer, and has the potential to transcend the middle plane it and the black blot seemingly occupy. As such, the parallelogram acts as intermediary for sign-formations, seemingly ushering them to a new plane closer to the viewer. For instance, there are two triangle-trapezoid-rectangle formations similar to the one resting on the blot overlapping the purple shape. One contains a triangle that is bisected more precisely than the other, with a white section at its tip and an orange one at its base. It has only one trapezoid resting beneath the triangle, and is sectioned into colored compartments (from left to right, top to bottom): one pale blue section, a pale yellow section, two dark red sections, a dark blue section, and a red section. The rectangle beneath the trapezoid has been divided into black, red, blue, white, and pale blue sections with a blue triangle acting as a sort of tail for the rectangle.

Similarly, the second triangle-trapezoid-rectangle formation hovers just above the first on the violet parallelogram. Its pale yellow triangle rests atop a trapezoid and rectangle fused together by their pale yellow, white, and black sections. Other elements in *Black and Violet* consist of lines, which as mentioned in Chapter One serve a supportive role to the primary foci in the painting. They populate the scene, hovering in the space, crossing paths with one another, and

coming together in an effort to form a horizontal rectangle with black and pale yellow lines and another square with vertical black and brown lines. Kandinsky's use of line is the final element that conveys the sense of vitality and liveliness in *Black and Violet.* They emphasize the movement of the colored forms in the painting, allowing them to project themselves toward viewer in the same way the triangle-trapezoid-rectangle formations on the black blot and the violet parallelogram subtly project themselves toward the viewer since they overlap very few signs.

In comparison, *Black and Violet* differs considerably from the four other paintings Kandinsky completed in 1923: *Composition VIII, On White II* (Figure 12)*, Green Composition* (Figure 13)*, Orange* (Figure 14)*,* and *Transverse Line* (Figure 15). Each of these paintings has a lively composition of lines, shapes and color similar to *Black and Violet*, but lack the interaction achieved in it. Kandinsky provides ample space for the elements in *Transverse Line, Orange, and Green Composition*, as opposed to concentrating the majority of them at the center of the canvas. In contrast, he saves his central compositions for *On White II* and *Black and Violet*. Most importantly, the golden brown space in the latter appears to have no precedent—Kandinsky utilizes tinted but predominantly white space for *Composition VIII, Orange, Transverse Line,* and *On White II*; whereas, the space in *Green Composition* has no clear ground plane, but contains glimpses of off-white at the right and bottom.

Moreover, because he utilizes this golden brown color in some of his later paintings, such as *Small Dream in Red* (1925) *and Accent on Rose* (1926) it is quite possible that *Black and Violet* may have been one of the last paintings Kandinsky completed that year. Very little black is used in *Composition VIII, Transverse Line, Orange* and *Green Composition,* and yet Kandinsky uses is in equal proportion to white in *On White II's* composition. Finally, while a dichotomy of

elements appears in most of these paintings—it is muddled by numerous other elements. Kandinsky seems to have achieved some semblance of clarity in *Black and Violet*.

In a sense, Kandinsky is building a world on the canvas, one that surrounds the viewers that encounter *Black and Violet*. This world echoes the newness of joining the Bauhaus staff, and operating in an environment of different methods, practices, media, and ideologies presented to Kandinsky. This pulsing golden environment of shapes, colors, and lines seemingly conveys the high ideals he had for the arts in the midst of the constant change and unrelenting chaos that already plagued him, the Bauhaus, and its staff. Thus, to unpack its complexity, and the complexity of the three other paintings to be discussed, the circumstances surrounding its conception must be considered, as they reveal aspects about Kandinsky and his life at the Bauhaus in 1923.

The Bauhaus, Weimar, 1923

Between the time of Gropius' invitation to the Bauhaus and Kandinsky's arrival, the school had seen its fair share of external and internal conflict. The constant threat of political interference was as suffocating as ever as the Weimar Republic continually threatened to close the institution down. Kandinsky witnessed the animosity between director and staff come to a head as the tension between Gropius and Swiss architect Johannes Itten culminated in the destruction of both of their careers, and a constantly rotating staff. Seemingly, the Bauhaus was a powder keg ready to explode by 1923, and yet Kandinsky's *Black and Violet* is a rather optimistic display of tonalities in spite of the issues that occurred during this year, prompting one to believe that he saw these events as necessary occurrences in the overall scheme of the Great Synthesis of the Arts. The new, radical, and differing ideas that the Bauhaus represented were

bound to experience crises, which would result in normalization and abandonment of some ideas, and the eventual introduction of more innovative ones. Simply put, Kandinsky's *Black and Violet* is most likely a model of a world in which ideas are constantly produced and circulated, and progress achieved.

The year 1923 marked the climax of several persistent issues that beleaguered the Bauhaus since its opening. After three years, German nationalists' criticism of the organization and management of the Bauhaus continued as The Citizen's Union, staunch advocates of the restoration of the School of Fine Arts—now the Bauhaus— published a brochure that warned of the Bauhaus's radical and potentially "harmful" influence on Weimar and its young artists. What followed was an extensive battle between Gropius, right-wing politicians and art professors. The fact that he was only able to garner testimonials of sympathy from theatre and arts associates only underlined the situation to National Art Commissioner, Dr. Edwin Redslob, as a conflict between traditional and unconventional approaches toward art.[77] Aware of just how backward it would be to reinstate the School of Arts in view of the beneficial, albeit radical, goals of the Bauhaus, Redslob supported Gropius.[78] Thus, having dealt with the external opposition, Gropius turned his focus to issues that arose inside the Bauhaus, where a well-respected professor became one of the most problematic individuals he would face.

Johannes Itten's peculiar faith practices had been a source of animosity between himself and Gropius, namely because he sought a more authoritative role—one equal to or of greater importance to Gropius's directorial position. As a member of the Mazdaznan religion, a quasi-religion derived from the Zoroastrian faith, Itten encouraged his religious practices among his students, all the while sporting a monk's robe and cleanly–shaved head. These practices required the devout to fast frequently, adopt a vegetarian diet, and endure constant purging and breathing

exercises. As part of the core of the Bauhaus, along with Lyonel Feininger and Gerhard Marcks, Itten was quite influential. He sought to replace Gropius as "high priest" of the Bauhaus, in an effort to thwart Gropius' intended shift from artistic individualism to mass production.[79] In this respect, Itten and Kandinsky may have shared some similar artistic view, including those about colors' effects, and perhaps even music and pure expression. This was as far as their ideas converged, however; the two artists represented polarized views of painting and art theory.

Despite the fact that they taught the same preliminary course at the Bauhaus, they very rarely crossed paths either stylistically or theoretically. For one, Itten adopted an overall conventional approach to painting, advocating the techniques of the Old Masters and teaching his students to adhere as closely to nature as possible.[80] Kandinsky, on the other hand, was perhaps the exact opposite of Itten as his goal was to capture the vitality of the subject rather than its image. In spite of the spiritual practices Itten used to strengthen his painting, his methods adhered too closely to tradition, too closely to the materialistic atheism Kandinsky sought to separate from painting. In 1923, Itten resigned and was replaced by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy in the summer, a change that reoriented the curriculum away from objective experimentation to learning commercial skills in design. In addition, Moholy-Nagy steered the school away from its predominant expressionist tendencies.[81] The shift from the traditional and material to explicitly commercial most likely seemed like the wrong path for the Bauhaus to take, in Kandinsky's view; however, Moholy-Nagy was perhaps a more valuable addition if the Great Synthesis of the Arts were to be achieved. He was able to introduce his expertise in the areas of photography, typography, sculpture, painting, printmaking, and industrial design to the school's curriculum underscored his importance; Moholy-Nagy was the embodiment of a synthesis of the arts.

Moholy-Nagy's presence, however, may have encouraged certain presumptions about where the Bauhaus was headed ideologically, particularly in the mind of De Stijl artist Theo Van Doesburg, who visited the Bauhaus in 1920 and was perhaps given two mistaken impressions after his visit. Van Doesburg believed he was going to eventually work at the Bauhaus, which he saw as a platform to promote the De Stijl as the universal style under which to unite all artists. In a sense, his vision got in the way of securing a position on the Bauhaus staff, when he delivered a controversial, manifesto-based course to Bauhaus students at his studio in Weimar in 1919. The course was problematic, in that it advocated the "domination of the individual" as an "obstacle to development" that most De Stijl artists sought to overcome. Thus, in addition to artists like Itten attempting to usurp Gropius and his directorial role from inside the Bauhaus, Van Doesburg provided considerable opposition from the outside. While Itten severed ties with the Bauhaus, Van Doesburg very publicly polemicized against it for not developing in the way it was envisaged through Moholy-Nagy's inclusion.

Two years later, disapprovers succeeded in shuttering the Bauhaus, as pressure from the rise of Nazis forced Gropius and company to move north to Dessau. Construction most likely began as an extension of the Weimar Bauhaus in 1925; yet, when it was finished a year later, the new school was called the "Bauhaus Hochschule für Gestaltung" ("School of Design"). Moreover, its new identity anticipated significant changes for the Bauhaus's staff and students; the institution now operated under a new goal: commercialization. It served two purposes: to shape the intellectual, craft and technical abilities of creatively talented human beings; and to equip them for design work. Students were encouraged to reorient their studies toward housing construction and interior design, and to develop models for industry and the manual trades.[82]

As a result, the roles of artists like Moholy-Nagy grew in importance, while the roles painters like Kandinsky, and friend and fellow abstractionist, Paul Klee shrunk. Typography emerged as an important field of study under the supervision of Moholy-Nagy and a newcomer, architect Hannes Mayer, despite never having been a primary goal prior to the shift in curriculum described in Chapter One. Consequently, the shift from aesthetics to commercialization set the stage for Kandinsky's later years at the Bauhaus. In his view, the potential the Bauhaus exhibited in 1923 was slightly diminished, but not completely lost. He most likely saw the commercially–driven shift in the Bauhaus as necessary— despite its new goals, the Bauhaus School of Design still could not please the general public, and funds to keep the school open were dwindling, meaning there was an ever–present financial need to be met. Moreover, the notion of a synthesis of the arts still remained, albeit in a secondary role. Yet, the world in which Kandinsky now participated in 1926 Dessau was different from the one in 1923 Weimar—it was one that operated on expansion rather than circulation. This was a world that, like the Bauhaus, was steadily building itself up from the ground floor as Kandinsky's *Development* suggests.

***Development* (1926)**

As with Kandinsky's *Black and Violet, Development* confronts the viewer with a vast colored space; however, the latter diverges from the former, in that its space is a pure yellow instead of a modulated golden brown. The solid black element is included in *Development* as a formation of five black triangles, and a sixth illusory triangle that emerges from behind them. Instead of leaving the black element hovering in space as he did with *Black and Violet*, Kandinsky firmly grounds it with a clear separation between the vertical "ground" and "sky" planes. Moreover, the sixth triangle, which appears to be yellow and splattered with black, acts as a source of

movement for the black triangles. Incapable of movement, black clings to yellow's warmth, and projects forward toward the viewer. Moreover, the yellow space also acts as a wall that appears to have fractured in some places, particularly in the upper left-hand quadrant, where Kandinsky seems to have removed an entire section of it. The modulated greenish-black space can be read in two possible ways. It either rests on the horizon line behind the formation of black triangles, or this removed section opens viewers up to a vast space reminiscent of a field of grass in the dead of night**.** The addition of an ominous green circle hovering in the upper left corner of the painting suggests the latter, and serves as an antithesis for the vibrant golden yellow circle in the middle of the painting's yellow space.

This golden circle's color appears to flow forth unimpeded by the thin lines Kandinsky's made to denote the circle, the ground-sky relationship, the barrier between the black space, the yellow space, and the sixth triangle. Similar thin lines carve out a large, painterly red beam, which protrudes from the golden circle to the upper right hand corner of the painting, in addition to a pale blue section peeking through the yellow space. Finally, Kandinsky has placed a small composition in the lower right quadrant of the painting, next to the formation of five black triangles. This composition consists of: a thin, vertical orange triangle supported by a mall purple rectangle; a thinner, diagonal black rectangle fixed to the triangle; and three hairlines arching from the upper corner of the triangle.

Overall, *Development* contrasts with the other handful of paintings Kandinsky is known to have completed in 1926 in several ways. As was the case with *Black and Violet* and Kandinsky's other 1923 paintings, the colored space in these paintings, which include *Accent on Rose, Several Circles* (Figure 16), and *Merry Structure* (Figure 17), hardly resembles the space in *Development.* For example, *Accent on Rose* and *Several Circles* seemingly preceded

Development and *Merry Structure* because of Kandinsky's use of dark blue and black space, which characterized some of the paintings he had completed the previous year, such as *In Blue* (Figure 18) and even *Yellow-Red-Blue* (Figure 19). To this effect, *Merry Structure* and *Development* appear to be the only paintings of this year with yellow space. Kandinsky most likely combined his two treatments of color space, which supports the idea that *Development* was intended to portray some sort of transition.

Moreover, Kandinsky's use of the primary triangle-circle contrasting pair must be noted in these paintings. He seems to toy with the pair, removing one element completely, or exchanging it with another. *Several Circles* is, of course, a study in the effects of a composition of circles; *Accent on Rose* explores the relationships between the circle and square; and finally, *Merry Structure* and *Development* perhaps return to the tried-and-true contrasting triangle-circle pairing. Furthermore, the brushy, modulated appearance of the color red is reminiscent of Kandinsky's early *Impressions* and *Compositions*, and seemingly, the first time it appears in its modulated form in his later paintings is in *Development* and *Merry Structure.* Modulated red appears somewhat in *Small Worlds III* (1922, Figure 20), but is not placed in the forefront like in the aforementioned paintings. Finally, the triangle-rectangle-line composition next to the formation of black triangles seemingly appears in much larger form in *Merry Structure.* Additionally, the composition appears twice in this painting, with slight variations in the composition. One might even say Kandinsky took the composition and broke it down in *Merry Structure.*

In spite of their differences, *Black and Violet* and *Development* present a few similar ideas of transition, transformation, and hope. The events that surrounded his teaching career at the Bauhaus particularly provide a more solid idea of what Kandinsky may have been trying to

convey with these paintings. As wholes, *Black and Violet* and *Development* could represent Kandinsky's own ideas, his own internal struggle in a world that valued decadence over spirituality, and eventual acceptance of the reconciliation of traditional, commercial and modern ideas for the sake of the Great Synthesis of the Arts. Both paintings give the sense of an inner struggle as to whether to advocate either the abandonment of tradition, or the reconciliation of traditional aesthetics with modern ideas. Yet, they also imply a strong external presence, the transformation of a world outside of Kandinsky.

Black and Violet, Development, **and Hope for the Bauhaus**

In essence, Kandinsky presents a triumphant view of the Bauhaus in 1923 via his *Black and Violet*, and *Development* offers an optimistic perspective of what could be considered a dire situation. Although, the internal and external issues the Bauhaus faced did not directly affect Kandinsky, he witnessed several significant changes that culminated in the complete reinvention of the Bauhaus, its staff and its students, and led to a shift from art to craft that undoubtedly affected his teaching career. Rather than lament adapting to the changes, however, Kandinsky felt that the strong opposition against the Bauhaus served to reinforce it as a hub for the circulation of new ideas and practices, even if it meant the reduction of his role as a professor. *Black and Violet* and *Development* portray tumultuous world, where the losses were far outweighed by the gains, and each action is necessary for the progression towards the ultimate goal of the synthesis of the arts. This idea is, in essence, imbued in most of the elements of these paintings, such as the colors and forms enhanced by Kandinsky's use of line.

For instance, *Black and Violet's* pulsing golden space projects the majority of the forms toward the viewer as if promoting each particular sign formation, and can be interpreted as the

initial foundation of the Bauhaus. Despite the changes that occurred before Kandinsky's arrival, the Bauhaus still more or less operated on the same goals Gropius intended for it, which is expressed here in the blending of yellow with brown. Brown comes alive, so to speak, and absorbs some of yellow's vibrant warmth for itself. This mixture of colors sets an optimistic tone for the rest of the painting. Similarly, the yellow environment of *Development* utilizes a different type of mixture, namely yellow and white, to project a different type of optimism. Kandinsky toys with yellow's effects, toning its warm-yet-harsh notes with static white, amplifying it as he described in *On the Spiritual in Art*. The result is a somewhat inviting color for the viewer's eyes; yet, its flatness leaves something to be desired in view of the blend of tones introduced by *Black and Violet*. Mixing yellow with white in *Development* arguably controls the former's progressive abilities, relegating it to a single flat plane that lacks the movement one sees in *Black and Violet.* Moreover, *Development* lacks the dimension of *Black and Violet*: it operates on fewer planes than the latter, and therefore projects in a different manner. To this effect, interpreting these colored spaces as the foundations of the Bauhaus—the Weimar Bauhaus in 1923, and the newly-constructed Dessau Bauhaus in 1926—seems more appropriate. On the one hand, the Weimar Bauhaus was established with a clearly defined goal, but lacked a clear direction toward that goal. Conversely, when the Bauhaus relocated to Dessau, the goal became more commercially defined. There was no sense of liminal space by 1926; hence, the grounded notion one perceives in *Development.* Furthermore, the black elements in each painting provide the antithesis of these warm, projecting environments.

The optimism of the golden plane in *Black and Violet*, and the pale yellow environment in *Development,* are in direct contrast with the black elements of their respective paintings. The large black blot that serves as one of the foci in *Black and Violet*, and takes the form of a

composition of triangles as well as a removed piece of environment in *Development* encompass a variety of connotations that conflict with the yellow and golden spaces. As a symbol of the "death of ideas," in Kandinsky's view, the blot seeks to snuff out its optimistic space. At the very least, the blot acts as a hole in the plane, but Kandinsky may have intended for the blot to act as the death of traditional aesthetics. The School of Arts that the Weimar public adamantly fought to resurrect was no longer; it was the Staatliches Bauhaus, and would remain that way regardless of public opinion. That is, until public opinion resulted in shut down and relocation of the Bauhaus to Dessau, where the black element took on a slightly different meaning in *Development.*

Here, black represents the death of one world and the potential beginning of another as described in *On the Spiritual in Art*. Such symbolism undoubtedly applies to the missing section in *Development's* environment; it is possible that the yellow represents an almost finished product, or rather an almost finished Bauhaus. The yellow environment was meant to represent Gropius and company beginning new lives and establishing themselves in Dessau. In addition, the formation of black triangles may be the construction of the Bauhaus, or more likely its reputation as a commercial institution. Essentially, these static black elements function as transitional elements during times of significant change in ideologies and institutions. This change is further emphasized by the colors and colored forms Kandinsky utilized in his lively compositions, which provide movement to otherwise immobile forms. This is prevalent in *Black and Violet*, which utilizes colors to establish a dichotomy of forms, to blur the relationship between form and plane, and to engulf viewers in a dynamic tonal environment.

Take for instance the blot in *Black and Violet*, which is occupied by red on one end, and blue on the other. The blue, in all its deep receding richness, pulls the blot below and beyond to

puncture the golden plane; whereas, the red attempts to pull the blot upward to a higher plane. Kandinsky spells out in *On the Spiritual in Art* that red is a materialistic color; therefore, its intention is perhaps to swallow up the smaller sign formations that interact with one another just out of reach. It is almost as if the red intends for the blot to take over the golden plane, something the blue most likely intends to prevent. Simply put, the blot is being pulled in two directions. Maintaining the notion of the blot as tradition, it could be that the blue and red symbolize the struggle to maintain some traditional ideas, while pulling them forward into the twentieth–century, so to speak. The Bauhaus may have been a radical attempt to change the face of the art world by synthesizing most art practices, but that is not to say Gropius and company wanted to completely eliminate traditional convention. They only meant to transform it, as opposed to returning completely to the traditional aesthetics of the Weimar School of the Arts. The connotations of blue, and its recessiveness, is the Bauhaus's retreat from the public in an attempt to achieve a more spiritualistic goal.

Moreover, the relationship of blue and red to the blot symbolizes the external opposition the Bauhaus faced in Weimar. The second focal point for the painting — the violet parallelogram— was perhaps meant to represent the Bauhaus itself, or perhaps even Gropius. Considering that violet contains the qualities of both blue and red, it encompasses the spiritual and materialistic conflict that undoubtedly raged within both Gropius and the Bauhaus. Struggles for leadership divided the Bauhaus as Itten sought to usurp Gropius, and Van Doesburg sought to use the Bauhaus to promote the De Stijl. Gropius struggled to simultaneously maintain the Bauhaus's goals and keep it afloat financially. Moreover, the fact that the violet parallelogram is angled, lends to the sense that it utilizes its transitory function to ushering the other colored elements upward, outward, and away from the black blot. Thus, the other elements in the painting, the

various colorful sign formations serve as the varied ideas, which continued to circulate, including Kandinsky's. Seemingly, such ideas continued unimpeded in view of the hostility directed toward them. In addition, these sign formations quite possibly represent the new possibilities introduced to the Bauhaus via the jack-of-all-trades Moholy-Nagy. The same can be said for the singular white circle, which offers itself as a platform for one of the elements. In fact, this circle could be a hopeful nod toward future ideas and directions for the Bauhaus.

The Bauhaus had essentially transitioned into a new world with Kandinsky still in it, and his *Development* reflects this new world of changes just as his *Black and Violet* did years earlier. This transition is clearly marked by the yellow environment and its removed section, in addition to the dichotomy between the obviously present golden circle and a green circle shoved into the upper left hand corner of the black environment. Their relationship can be interpreted simply as one between the sun and the moon, namely a rising sun and a setting moon. The golden circle emerges from the right side of the formation of triangles, from the "east" of the triangles; whereas, the green moon resides on the "west" side of the triangles. Kandinsky made an important observation about the color green in regards to the circle: "Pure green is to the realm of color what the so-called bourgeoisie is to human society: it is an immobile, complacent element, limited in every respect."[83] Kandinsky's observation is in direct relation to theosophical views of the color green: "green seems to always denote adaptability, in the lowest case, when mingled with selfishness, this adaptability become deceit."[84] As in *Black and Violet*, Kandinsky depicts the end of a traditional, bourgeoisie art world in Weimar, and the beginning of a new world of possibilities in Dessau.

That is not to say, however, that Kandinsky would have been entirely comfortable with the idea of the Bauhaus assuming a more commercial role. Perhaps it is also for this reason that he

reveals to his audience this portion of bourgeoisie convention with an ample display of green moon. Perhaps this is why the sixth yellow triangle is smattered with black, perhaps even a deep shade of blue close to black, containing the properties of both worlds. This notion also accounts for the other seemingly arbitrary elements of *Development*. Interpretations of the pale blue sliver are bound up in the commercial direction, the Bauhaus began to take after its relocation to Dessau. Quite possibly this piece was meant to represent Kandinsky and the other painters struggling to maintain the spiritualistic ideals of the original Bauhaus, with the mixture of blue and white symbolizing unacknowledged spiritual possibilities in art and aesthetics.

Finally, the red beam and the triangle-square-line combination in the lower right hand corner have a complex and ambiguous place in the grand scheme of the painting. It too serves to usher in the new world that encompasses the formation of black triangles, and provide depth to it. The fact that it is shooting from the golden circle, the "sun", and beyond the confines of the canvas, signals yet another hopeful idea in *Development.* The red beam could be the commercial route the Bauhaus took, and its attempts to broadcast the new curriculum to a wider audience, in the hope of acquiring financial backing. Although a contradictory reading, it nonetheless reiterates that the forms in *Development* serve to actualize Kandinsky's situation and hopes. In the same instance, the red beam suggests uncertainty in the face of developing a new image in Dessau because of its projection into an unknown and unfamiliar world. To this effect, the triangle-square-line sign formation could be a representative of the human response to the Bauhaus, its mixed colors (orange and purple) conveying the fickle nature of this audience, the sparse community the Bauhaus reached, or it could be Gropius, perhaps even Kandinsky, contemplating the future direction of the Bauhaus.

Conclusion

Despite arriving some three years after its establishment, Kandinsky experienced the unrelenting antagonism that plagued the Bauhaus since it first opened its doors. The period between 1923 and 1926 marks some significant changes for it and its staff, changes that Kandinsky may have imbedded into colored space, geometric forms, and expressive lines in his *Black and Violet.* Moreover, in *Development,* he portrays the dichotomies of different art worlds, personal ideologies and practices. *Black and Violet* encompasses Kandinsky's first years as a teacher at the Bauhaus, where a plethora of complementary and opposing ideas meant its direction had not yet been determined. In spite of the Bauhaus's ambiguous position, his interest perhaps lay with the circulation of ideas and practices that came with the changing of a member of the Bauhaus staff.

Public opposition toward the radical transformation of art via these ideas, as well as the Nazis' rise to power, unfortunately spelled the demise for the first Bauhaus as the public rallied against it. The closing and relocation of the Staatliches Bauhaus, and its reemergence in Dessau as the Bauhaus School of Design, symbolically represented the loss of one world in favor of another. However, Kandinsky's *Development* implies progress in the face of tradition as a pale yellow world slowly but surely closes in on dark former world rife with materialistic illusion. And progressing into this new world perhaps meant relinquishing spiritual ideals for the benefit of the school as the Bauhaus, Gropius, and its staff were thrust into a prolonged period of financial turmoil in the years to come. As Kandinsky soon discovered, Dessau would not be the last location the Bauhaus would attempt to occupy. As some of his later paintings, *Fragile* and *Gloomy Situation* convey, the Bauhaus' identity was in a state of flux, constantly reinventing

itself through the abandonment of people, ideas and ideologies, and the prioritization of the commercial over the spiritual.

CHAPTER 4

TORN ASUNDER: THE NAZI FORCE AGAINST THE BAUHAUS AND KANDINSKY'S *FRAGILE* AND *GLOOMY SITUATION*

The Bauhaus experienced a decline as it entered an especially bleak and confining art world in the 1930s. Gropius had by then passed his leadership over to architect Hannes Meyer after two unsuccessful attempts to quell an increasingly antagonistic public via the relocation and retooling of the Bauhaus into the Bauhaus School of Design, now located in Dessau. The shift from aesthetic experimentation to commercial production did little to ease the ever-present financial burden on the Bauhaus. And with the school's goals more off-base than ever under Meyer's leadership, emphasis on architecture, interior design, and gaining practical artisan skills meant the Bauhaus was less about a synthesis of the arts, and more about keeping the institution afloat for another year or two. Furthermore, as Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party reshaped the German image there was more interference and constant persecution of perceivably non-German individuals, people Hitler deemed "undesirables." Kandinsky was counted among these undesirables, and in view of the Bauhaus' increased hardship, the hope conveyed by paintings like *Black and Violet* and *Development* was undoubtedly challenged in the 1930s.

The years between 1931 and 1933, took their toll on the Bauhaus and Kandinsky, in that the former had been completely deprived of funds, and the latter would soon be deprived of his teaching career. Consequently, Kandinsky's paintings become darker, and perhaps more spiritual, as evidenced by *Fragile* (1931) and *Gloomy Situation* (1933). These paintings bookend two significant moments of Kandinsky's teaching position, namely, the Bauhaus' final relocation to Berlin, and the termination of Kandinsky's teaching career and the dissolution of the Bauhaus. *Fragile* does so through a composition of white lines in deep blue space reminiscent of a

blueprint, and *Gloomy Situation* through a similar dichotomy of forms as that found in *Black and Violet* without the additional colorful signs and lines or golden space. The hope found in *Black and Violet* and *Development* can still be found in *Fragile*, but it seems to have run out by the time Kandinsky painted *Gloomy Situation*. The 1930s must have seemed like a prolonged bad joke to Kandinsky, one in which the Bauhaus continually flirted with the idea of the Great Synthesis of the Arts, only to lose it completely upon the Bauhaus' dissolution.

***Fragile* (1931)**

Kandinsky's *Fragile* is a fairly straightforward painting. A vast expanse of blue dominates the scene, supporting several virtually transparent white and pale yellow sign formations composed of triangles, rectangles, and circles confined to the center of the canvas. Size is seemingly the only indicator of depth in *Fragile* as there are no clear planar separations like the ones provided in *Development* and *Black and Violet.* Starting on the left side of the painting, one notes a post-and-lintel structure hovering in space, independent of the main composition. Similarly, a slightly larger white circle occupies a plane near this structure. It is possible that the structure occupies the painting's background, and the circle occupies the middle ground. Moreover, the painting's foreground supports the main composition: an arch with nine tick-marks supporting the aforementioned white and pale yellow sign formations, including a small formation of rectangles resting on its curve on the left, two thin, vertical white triangles toward the middle of its curve, a small grouping of circles on the right, and a lone triangle on the far right of its curve.

The formation of rectangles consists of a stout pale yellow rectangle resting in front of a slightly taller gray rectangle. A small yellow square appears to be attached to the upper right corner of the gray rectangle. Tiny pale yellow triangles and rectangles jut out from the taller of

the two vertical triangles, which stand on their points and appear to have been painted with varied shades of dark blue mixed with white. In similar fashion to the gray rectangle, a pale yellow triangle occupies the upper left corner of the tallest thin triangle. The second pale yellow triangle juts from its left side, and a small pale yellow parallelogram occupies the thin triangle's right corner. A minuscule pale pink circle hovers just next to it. In addition, a thin diagonal line protrudes from the tallest of the thin triangles, and three horizontal white lines span the space between the thin line and tall triangle. Similar horizontal white lines occupy the space to the immediate left and right of the tallest thin triangle. Finally, the small grouping of circles consists of one pale yellow, almost white circle resting on two of its brethren, and the lone triangle on the far right of the arch has varying shades of blue and white similar to the tall thin triangles.

Kandinsky is known to have completed at least one other painting in 1931, *Circulation Slowed* (Figure 21). Both consist of dark backgrounds; however, in comparison to *Fragile* the dark gray, almost black, space in *Circulation Slowed* exhibits some semblance of texture that may have been achieved with a different tool than a paintbrush, most likely a sponge. In addition, the composition in *Circulation Slowed* is seemingly more haphazard, and confronts the viewer with an array of separate, autonomous parts that, when one looks more closely, appears to be laid out on a grid. The elements in *Fragile* come together at the center of the canvas to form a unified structure. That both paintings look like blueprints, perhaps even maps, is undeniable. Yet *Fragile* arguably produces a deeper, more spiritual feeling when viewed. Moreover, there is the sense that the possible relationship between these two paintings is one of imagination versus reality. *Fragile* represents the imagined future Kandinsky held as the Bauhaus continued to survive Nazi Germany; *Circulation Slowed* was the inevitable reality of the situation.

Because *Fragile* is reminiscent of two aforementioned paintings: *Development* and *Merry Structures*, it seems that Kandinsky is still depicting a world that is coming into being spiritually and ideologically. The *structure* in *Fragile* possesses little, if any, sense of ground and sky; its structure appears to be floating in indeterminate blue space. Quite possibly this is the sliver of blue space breaking through and expanding beyond the yellow space in *Development*. The difference however between the blue sliver in *Development* and the blue space in *Fragile* is the separation of blue and white in the latter. The blue space is clearly darker, with white and pale yellow elements resting upon it. In consideration of the Bauhaus's fight for survival in Nazi Germany, this mixture of barely solid, almost transparent triangles, squares, and circles appears oddly prophetic.

The Bauhaus, Dessau, 1931

In 1931, the Bauhaus still stood as the School of Design in Dessau; yet it had been under new leadership since 1928. Initially, Hannes Meyer had taken over as director after Gropius resigned, unable to bear the financial burden increasing its hold on the institution, not to mention the dubiousness of the Bauhaus's current goals, which had by then shifted from aesthetic experimentation to commercial production and craft. As mentioned in Chapter One, Meyer continued in the commercial vein, increasing the importance of craft and artisanal skills in architecture and interior design, in the hopes of generating enough profit to ensure the Bauhaus' future. He had well–intentioned motivations, but a variety of aforementioned reasons contributed to Meyer's failure to achieve this goal. Perhaps the most grievous error on his part was the fact that he could not, in any way, direct he student body's political ideals. The Bauhaus gained a new type of radical identity as the sight of political demonstrations, further tainting its image.

Eventually, leadership passed over to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who only continued to downsize the importance of fine arts, like painting, in favor of architecture and artisanal crafts. The shift in leadership could not have come with more protest, nor could it have come at a worse time. Tension between the Bauhaus and the Nazis spelled the end of the Bauhaus' funds, while political pressure became too much for some members of the Bauhaus staff. Some sought employment elsewhere, including one whom Kandinsky may have considered a valuable contribution to the Great Synthesis of the Arts. In April 1931, Paul Klee terminated his contract with the Bauhaus, and took up a post at the Dusseldorf Academy. Although Kandinsky's reaction to Klee's actions remains unknown, one can assume that it was met with profound disappointment. The two artists had been friends for nearly three decades, a friendship characterized not only by close companionship, but critical commentary concerning one another's approach to painting. Klee and Kandinsky shared a double house between the years 1926 and 1932, and the closeness of their relationship was reflected in their works.[85] The implications of their living arrangement perhaps applies to technique alone— there are few visual similarities in Kandinsky's and Klee's—however, it nonetheless illustrates a rather symbiotic relationship that Kandinsky had with no other artist since Schoenberg. It stands to reason that Klee may have also been an important factor in the Great Synthesis of the Arts—without him, painting was woefully underrepresented by the Bauhaus curriculum.

Also without Klee, representation of arts other than graphic design, interior design, and architecture were most likely diminished; the Bauhaus had become less of a synthesis in Kandinsky's view. Painting was perhaps the hardest hit department during the 1930s. Herbert Bayer was skilled in a plethora of art mediums, including painting, and yet he, Marcel Breuer, and others were forced out of the Bauhaus in the previous years by Meyer's radicalism. The

architecture department suffered losses; however, when one architect was turned away from the Bauhaus, another was invited in. Furthermore, aside from hiring interior designer and close friend, Lily Reich, Mies van der Rohe appointed no new staff in the remaining years of the Bauhaus. This, in addition to the Council elections in Dessau, which had granted the Nazi Party most of it power, undoubtedly placed Kandinsky in a precarious situation. He was one of few representatives of the fine arts that remained at the Bauhaus, and he had been labeled politically undesirable because of his Russian origins. Ultimately, as its first campaign move, the Nazis demanded that the Bauhaus be completely deprived of its funding and the building demolished.

The Bauhaus, Berlin, 1933

A few years later, Nazi Germany was officially established in the wake of the Reichstag Fire, which destroyed the parliament building in Berlin the night of February 27, 1933**.** The event has been a source of controversy, as many believed the fire was conceived by the Nazis as a means of standing out amongst their opponents. Reichstag president and chief minister, Hermann Göring supposedly conducted an official investigation, and managed to pin the blame on the Communists, and yet many claimed he brought Dutchman Marinus van der Lubbe to the scene of the crime in order to frame him for the fire, and absolve the Nazis of any wrongdoing. Still others claimed that the Nazis had absolutely nothing to do with the fire.[86] Regardless of how and by whom the fire was started, it swayed the public opinion to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi government. The result was the suspension of civil liberties across Germany, including *habeas corpus,* freedom of expression, freedom of the press, the right of free association and public assembly, and the secrecy of the post and of the telephone.[87]

A few months after the Reichstag Fire, the Main Office of Press and Propaganda of the German Student Union initiated a public book burning between April and May 1933, a literary purge of works which detailed so-called "un-German" ideals. In essence, the torching of around 25,000 volumes of "un-German" books cemented the notion of the uncompromising era of censorship that was to follow. Among the literary works burned were those of emigrants and authors from foreign countries who, from the Nazi perspective, believed they could attack and denigrate the new Germany (H.G. Wells, Romain Rolland) and books the Nazis felt advocated decadent, bloodless, or purely constructivist art (George Grosz, Otto Dix, Bauhaus, Erich Mendelsohn).[88]

Not to say that the Nazis rallied against all arts, even art produced by the Bauhaus. As early as the first incarnation of the Bauhaus in Weimar, the Nazi influence was so powerful that many artists and architects saw it as a valuable financial opportunity, so much so that according to Winfred Nerdinger, Bauhaus architects and even Gropius himself expressed interest in working with the state during the Nazi period. In fact, a sizable number of architects were trained in the Bauhaus's Weimar years, and architecture flourished as the need to rebuild German cities grew.[89] This is most likely the reason architecture achieved its elevated status during the Bauhaus's remaining years: it was a financially stable industry that could keep the Bauhaus's doors open.

Consequently, Kandinsky's teaching had a marginal effect in the Bauhaus due to constant change in leadership, and by extension the curriculum, which saw him shut out of the Bauhaus. The Nazi’s intimidation tactics climaxed in 1933 with Kandinsky's termination from the Bauhaus in April, and the Bauhaus' dissolution a few months later. These events signaled an

ultimately crushing blow to Kandinsky's goal of the Great Synthesis of the Arts as evidenced in a particularly dark painting of Kandinsky's entitled *Gloomy Situation.*

***Gloomy Situation* (1933)**

Perhaps the first thing one notices upon viewing Kandinsky's *Gloomy Situation* is its overall drabness in comparison with the extensive studies in color he had produced in years prior. Rather than a lively composition of hues and shapes in boldly colored space, this painting presents a still space of modulated shades of brown, the darkest of these shades concentrated in the middle of the canvas. Moreover, the space in *Gloomy Situation* is as difficult to define as *Fragile*. It is deceptively simple; there are very few indicators of the planes Kandinsky explored in *Black and Violet* and *Development.* Hovering in this space are five overlapping rectangles of varying length and width. These rectangles appear to be a pale brown, perhaps beige color, and may or may not have been achieved by a stencil, as evidenced by their perfection in shape and transparency.

In the space, layered over the rectangles are two or three, black sign formations, one to the left and the other on the right. The left black figure is composed of a horizontal, almond-shaped head with an upwardly curving tail; a long, vertical, oblong body with a blue strip across its middle and curved strokes that indicate arms, and a small dark red, styus which connects its body to a dark blue rectangle. The figure on the right is considerably different. It has a more organic shape, which resembles a bean or a human embryo. Three little appendages jut out from its amoebic body, which dangle from a long, curved crescent similar to its companion's arms. A small square hovers to the left of the curve; whether the square is in the same plane as the figure or in the distance is difficult to determine. A third sign formation composed of four, small black

triangles balanced on their tips upon a larger triangle—also black—resides in the upper right hand corner. It may be part of the second figure, or perhaps stands as an additional third figure, with the same spatial ambiguity as the aforementioned small black square.

One of the few brown paintings in Kandinsky's body of work, *Gloomy Situation* exhibits an interest in stenciling, spray painting, atomizers and water spray diffusers popularized in the Bauhaus, which may have also been used to achieve some of the mottled color in *Development*.[90] He continues this idiom in the two other paintings he completed in the same year: *Soft Roughness* (Figure 22) and *Compensation Rose* (Figure 23). In fact, Kandinsky's extensive use of brown seems to be limited to 1933, which he treats differently than he does in early paintings like *Black and Violet.* For instance, in *Soft Roughness* and *Compensation Rose*, Kandinsky has mixed brown with a color: red and brown in the former, and yellow and brown in the latter. Not so with *Gloomy Situation*, which confronts his audience with a muted brown space, and appears to be a study in brown on its own, as evidenced by the varying shades of brown that provide depth in the painting's space. Granted, Kandinsky may have mixed brown with black and white, which has muted the painting—therefore achieving a stillness in it as opposed to the warmth that prevails in *Soft Roughness* and *Compensation Rose*—but an underlying idea prevails here: *Gloomy Situation* is one of the darkest paintings Kandinsky has ever produced.

Whereas *Compensation Rose* is a myriad of reds, blues, yellows, greens, and pinks, *Gloomy Situation* only contains a small strip of blue and perhaps dark red amongst black forms. These forms also inhabit a clearly divided composition of rectangles in *Soft Roughness* and *Gloomy Situation* that is not seen in *Compensation Rose*, which is a single, unified composition of stacked rectangles. Kandinsky achieves an added notion of depth by overlapping rectangular areas—achieved perhaps through the use of a stencil—which become increasingly lighter in hue.

The most important difference between *Gloomy Situation, Soft Roughness,* and *Compensation Rose* is the presence of biomorphic, amoebic shapes, in addition to the use of black in the painting. Both elements emerge full force in the majority of Kandinsky's later paintings, and stand as the foci of *Gloomy Situation*. Comparatively speaking, the forms in *Compensation Rose* and *Soft Roughness* appear rather geometric, and the amount of black scarce. Kandinsky may have completed *Gloomy Situation* after the other two paintings, and even during or after the decline of the Bauhaus and his termination.

Fragile, Gloomy Situation, and Hope Lost

The relationship between the white elements and the blue space provides a few ideas of the message Kandinsky sought to convey with *Fragile.* Firstly, there is the sense of invisibility, perhaps even of a world disappearing. The blue space in *Fragile* serves the same function as the black space in *Development*—it implies the death of a previous world, but has the added connotation of the establishment of a new world. He could not have known of the eventual dissolution and reestablishment of the Bauhaus in Berlin, so this may have been mere observation and/or commentary from Kandinsky about where the Bauhaus was headed in view of the current situation. An alternative interpretation involves painting's diminished role in the Bauhaus, in favor of commercial and industrial, architectural and artisanal skills. In either case, *Fragile* may be an image of the diminished hope for the Great Synthesis of the Arts. His last Bauhaus work, *Gloomy Situation* seemingly lends to this idea, and undoubtedly carries it further to and tragic climax.

Unlike *Black and Violet, Development,* and *Fragile, Gloomy Situation* is explicitly acknowledged as one of the rare instances of Kandinsky referencing his environment. Jamie

McKendrick states in his article, "Wassily Kandinsky," *Gloomy Situation* is most likely a "valedictory watercolor to the Bauhaus period...a rare instance of external or political reference."[91] As seems to be the case with the aforementioned paintings, *Gloomy Situation* marks a distinct stylistic change that is most likely tied to certain events that occurred in the years in which they were completed. McKendrick and Felix Klee suggest *Gloomy Situation* is a response to local right-wing attacks, particularly the one which resulted in the Bauhaus's first move to Dessau: "In the midst of gloomy industrial sites (sugar, gas, Agfa, Junkers), this little capital drowsed like a sleeping beauty."[92] Moreover, between the state elections in Thuringia in December 1929, and the national Reichstag elections in September 1930, the Nazi party became a prominent part of Weimar politics.[93]

The key aspect of *Gloomy Situation* is obviously the use of brown and black. Given the historical context undoubtedly bound up in this particular painting, brown in particular represents one specific aspect of Kandinsky's life with the Bauhaus in Nazi Germany for scholars. Unlike Kandinsky's other paintings, scholars have deduced brown to represent a particular object in *Gloomy Situation:* Nazi Uniforms. Kandinsky does not explicitly state the "brown equals Nazi" connection; however, in *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky expresses an almost distaste for the color brown on its own, and McKendrick suggests there is a flicker of grim humor many painters would have after witnessing the dissolution and reconstruction of a valuable art institution twice in less than a decade.[94]

Moreover, the rectangles serve as a prime focus in *Gloomy Situation,* acting as a barrier between the two forms, thereby implying the painting is about separation, but of what? Perhaps even German and Un-German, and political Desirables and Undesirables. *Gloomy Situation* may even be Kandinsky's polemicizing view of the Bauhaus in the 1930s. The final relocation to

Berlin offered little hope in an effective Bauhaus when the atmosphere within the institution had become politically polarized, its dynamic character suffering under Mies van der Rohe's leadership, in addition to Hitler's rise to power and Nazi hostility. Ultimately, *Gloomy Situation* can be considered the division of the real world, and the defeat of an ideological one.

Gloomy Situation offers humanoid concepts for black as the forms attempts to interact in brown space. Whereas paintings like *Black and Violet* and *Development*, with their ominous black blots and spaces, the black figures in *Gloomy Situation* are like silhouettes, shadows left behind. This brings to mind ideas about censorship, or perhaps in a more general sense, the elimination of people and ideas. There is no circulation of signs, of additional people and ideas in *Gloomy Situation*. Paul Overy's analysis and interpretation of Kandinsky's work as the essence of living organisms speaks to this interpretation. Moreover, like *Development* and *Fragile, Gloomy Situation* appears to be the antithesis of *Black and Violet.* Rather than representing two schools of thought in the former, Kandinsky represents one: his own modern way of thinking.

In a vein similar to *Fragile*, Kandinsky expresses a metaphysical view of what the art world should have been. Twenty-two years before completing *Gloomy Situation*, he mentioned the embryonic form at a conference in Odessa, postulating that spirituality in the creation of art was in its "… embryonic form… amidst the apparent victory of materialism, which provides, and will provide the soil, in which this kind of monumental work of art must come to fruition…"[95]As mentioned in Chapter Two, Kandinsky presents the idea of a revolutionary aesthetic practice just beginning in the 1920s. He suggests a need for this idea to be nurtured by not only himself, but by other artists in the hopes eradicating the materialistic aesthetic that had taken art by storm in the nineteenth– and early twentieth–centuries. Moreover, this idea undoubtedly speaks to Kandinsky's desire for the Great Synthesis of the Arts, for the arts to come together and play the

harmonic, metaphorical notes of a spiritually and scientifically sound art world. It is an idea that appears quite literally in *Gloomy Situation* as an embryonic form almost as large at the figure of shapes, whose space it occupies. In this respect, the brown space takes on the added connotation of being the soil in which Kandinsky's hope for modern art was supposed to come to fruition. Reconciling this meaning with the other interpretations mentioned above, and the black embryo that rests in it, presents the rather disturbing image of dead and fruitless soil halting artistic progress. As an emblem of hope, the embryonic form adds to the bitterness of the painting as it shows unlikely, perhaps even lost opportunities.

Thus, the other humanoid figure remains in *Gloomy Situation.* In a rare instance, Kandinsky may have combined geometrical forms into a semblance of a figure reminiscent of those that emerged with Hans Arp, Constantin Brancusi, and French Concretism. This figure could stand for a multitude of people. Modern artists who saw their ideas and works stamped out and destroyed in the increasingly violent Nazi campaign. Mies van der Rohe's last minute attempt at returning the Bauhaus to some semblance of its original curriculum before the Bauhaus' official dissolution in June 1933.

Most likely, the figure is Kandinsky, with a "so close and yet so far" notion, so to speak as the figures curled limbs reach out to the form, the idea, just on the other side of a barrier of thin rectangles. McKendrick's acknowledgment of grim humor in the piece underscores the inevitable fleetingness of the Great Synthesis of the Arts. However, the figure encompasses a much less "humorous" implication as well, in that it suggests that the death of ideas equals the death of the artist—the figure could be a lamenting one, in that regard—and in a sense this figure could be the personification of black's meaningfulness described in *On the Spiritual in Art.* Kandinsky's behavior suggests profound disappointment that the Great Synthesis did not take

shape at the Bauhaus, yes, but it does not suggest that he was completely ready to give up, to "die," in any sense of the word, as he and many other Bauhaus painters continued relatively successful careers after the Bauhaus. The grasping figure may be Kandinsky, or other artists like Klee, who may have seen the Bauhaus' original vision of synthesizing the arts become lost in continuous financial crises and political turmoil.

In the above respect, one may count the underlying sense of hope that permeated *Black and Violet, Development,* and *Fragile* as the dead element in this painting, and yet this is not so. Rather, the idea of the figure as a *grasping* one signifies some amount of hope, in that it still hungers for what is just out of reach. The Bauhaus may not have lived up to its full potential as the site for the Great Synthesis of the Arts, but it served as an important avenue through which to usher it in. And after his teaching career ended April 1933 Kandinsky arguably continued his pursuit of this synthesis until his death in 1944. His paintings *Fragile* and *Gloomy Situation,* thus serve as a glimpse into the world that could have been, but inevitably was not, and were perhaps even silent hopes for a return to the Bauhaus' roots.

Conclusion

As two of some of the last paintings Kandinsky completed at the Bauhaus, *Fragile* and *Gloomy Situation* are revealing images in several respects. For one, they offer glimpses into his life as a painter, and part of a slowly fading but nonetheless radical institution in Nazi Germany. *Fragile* is a spiritual perspective Kandinsky may have taken in response to the steadily changing Bauhaus from a synthetic curriculum to a more commercial and materialistic one. Here, he prompts a reconciliation of the institution's old parts with its new ones, in order to maintain the delicate balance it had as far back as a Weimar and even the first years at Dessau. In essence,

Fragile presents the silent hope that the Bauhaus would not give in completely to materialism to keep its doors open. *Gloomy Situation,* however, reveals an effectively diminished hope in the form of a black grasping figure constantly reaching out to a dying idea presented to its audience in the form of an upside-down, black, embryonic shape. Operating iconographically, Kandinsky utilizes form as the core in *Fragile and Gloomy Situation*; whereas in *Black and Violet* and *Development,* these forms were utilized as supporting elements. Furthermore, the spiritual, skeletal and dying forms Kandinsky utilizes in these paintings are amplified by color and spatial treatments.

A complete contrast to the yellow-blue color spectrum first described in *On the Spiritual in Art, Fragile* offers a religious coolness to *Development's* materialistic warmth. The forms are reversed and any remaining color, save for a few whites and pale yellows, is effectively sapped away from the scene. As a result, there are less planar separations, no interactions of different planes most likely because *Fragile* is an image of the Ideal plane Kandinsky treasured. There is "sky," but there is no "ground" in any sense of the word--there is hardly a separation of foreground, middle ground, and background. Thus, *Fragile* confronts viewers with a virtually transparent castle in the sky, so to speak. *Gloomy Situation,* on the other hand, can be seen as all ground, as the dying soil of fruitless ideas much different than the golden brown space Kandinsky painted a decade earlier. In this soil, all color is muted to black and white tones which emphasize the planes that do appear to separate one form from another. Ultimately, *Fragile and Gloomy Situation* are possibly a pair of images of what the Great Synthesis of the Arts could have been and its inevitable defeat in view of the Bauhaus' dissolution less than a month later.

It is quite possible to find reference in the paintings discussed here and Kandinsky's experiences, in spite of the lack of connections drawn between them. It is as simple as the switch

from light to darkness, as the spaces in Kandinsky's paintings lose their golden and yellow hues, which are replaced by deep blue and dark brown. The tenacious optimism exhibited in Kandinsky's 1920s paintings, like *Black and Violet* and *Development,* become less so in *Fragile* and is seemingly wiped out by *Gloomy Situation.* Moreover, the forms have seemingly inverted themselves: the structure rising vertically from *Development's* ground descends vertically from *Fragile's* sky with no foreseeable ground to anchor it; the geometric force ushering in a new progressive era of art in *Black and Violet* struggles to take hold of the mere hope of progress in *Gloomy Situation.* The inversion and lack of any grounded element in *Fragile* and *Gloomy Situation* suggests an internalization of these issues, a withdrawal of painting into itself in an effort to adapt to the difficult situation.

CHAPTER 5

IT COULD HAVE BEEN GREAT: KANDINSKY AND THE GREAT SYNTHESIS OF THE ARTS

Kandinsky offered a new means of analyzing and producing artwork, and offered a unique view of twentieth century painting, and the arts in general. He perceived a spiritual crisis in artwork that titillated the eyes as opposed to renewing and expanding the spirit, and sought to rectify the situation with an amalgamation of experiential, mystical and spiritual, and musical practices. For Kandinsky, these practices offered a newer, richer, experience for both artist and viewer, and he spent a lifetime searching for a way to synthesize all arts to produce a similar one on a much larger scale. He saw an opportunity to do this at the Bauhaus, a radical institution in itself, which brought different artists, media, and methods together under one roof through Walter Gropius. And yet, although the Bauhaus represented a prime opportunity, it was a hotbed of issues that experienced frequent change in staff and curriculum, which inevitably proved difficult for either of its three leaders to control.

The issues began in Wiemar in 1919, and seemingly ended with the last iteration of the Bauhaus in 1933 Berlin. For years, it did battle with the public, who saw it as a dive for the "mentally ill," instead of a progressive institution that sought to reshape society. Funding became a persistent issue. Governmental interference was a frequent occurrence. Even issues *inside* the Bauhaus influenced the school's operations. Moreover, the problems did not end when the Bauhaus shuttered its doors and moved north to Dessau. They increased almost immediately after Gropius relinquished his role as director to Hannes Meyer. The Bauhaus School of Design became increasingly commercial in an effort to keep itself open, and the marriage of different art practices and media gave way to architecture and design, with heavy emphasis on architecture. It

returned to its original goal with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Berlin, but perhaps only as a last ditch effort to revive a dying institution.

In my view, the narrative of struggle and disillusion are captured in four of Kandinsky's paintings—*Black and Violet, Development, Fragile,* and *Gloomy Situation*, completed between 1923 and 1933. They encompass the steady transformation of hope for a Great Synthesis of the Arts to source of grim humor through pairs of works that provide two phases of Kandinsky's experience, one in the 1920s and the other in the 1930s, Kandinsky laid out an extensive catalog of meanings encompassed in the forms, lines, planes and colors in the these paintings in his *On the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line to Plane.* In turn, I have married these sources with the contextual information provided about Kandinsky's experiences before and during his time with the Bauhaus.

Black and Violet, a painting completed a year into Kandinsky's teaching career at the Bauhaus, is a vivid painting of activated golden space populated with two large signs and a host of smaller, colorful shapes and lines. Utilizing the interpretations of Paul Overy's *Kandinsky: The Language of the Eye,* Jaleena Hahl-Koch's *Arnold Schoenberg and Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures, and Documents,* Lisa Florman's *Concerning the Spiritual and the Concrete in Kandinsky's Art,* and finally Mark Roskill's *Klee, Kandinsky and the Thought of Their Time*, I have deduced *Black and Violet* can be seen as Kandinsky's initial hope for the Bauhaus in 1923 Weimar through the visual language laid out in *On the Spiritual in Art.* Namely, his mixture of yellow with brown, thereby imbuing optimism and warmth into the space in which the geometric form hover. The twin foci in the painting, one black and one violet, stand as two individuals and two ideas: one tradition and the other progressive. Kandinsky's use of black hearkens back to *On the Spiritual in Art* and the inactive black and white spectrum, which represented the death of

ideas in one and the presence of possibilities in the other. Here, the former seemingly rings true as the Bauhaus sought to separate itself from convention, thereby angering the majority of the Weimar Republic. The violet parallelogram—a mixture of spiritual blue and materialistic red—symbolizes this strive for progress. Similarly, red and blue separately function to blur the distinctions between the multiple planes Kandinsky used to create the sense of projection in *Black and Violet,* pulling some elements into the darkness of the black blot and elevating others. Overall, the painting suggests a reconciliation of traditional artistic views with newer modern ones, and perhaps even the reduction of Kandinsky's own role in the fine arts at the Bauhaus in order to make way for the circulation of new and old ideas introduced by a consistently changing staff.

Ultimately, the hope in *Black and Violet* continued where Kandinsky's *Development* begins: in 1926 Dessau, with the newly constructed Bauhaus School of Design. Here, viewers are provided an image of a new world forming with the new school. An amalgam of antithesis, *Development* demonstrates the separation of traditional and modern via the divorce of black from yellow. Triangles stand proudly as representatives for the Bauhaus, while a golden sun rises on the new institution, and the green moon sets on the old one. The new Bauhaus, and all that it encompassed was in development as a new curriculum was put into place under its new director, one that failed to usher forth the new epoch Kandinsky hoped for.

Development in a sense gave way to *Fragile* in theory and practice. The Bauhaus had become a shell of its former self under Meyer and Mies van der Rohe, and the Great Synthesis of the Arts was hardly a possibility in the midst of the struggle to stay afloat financially, as well as the diminishment of painting and the drive to instrumentalize art. Thus, *Fragile* could be Kandinsky losing hope, and instead envisioning what could have happened as opposed to what

really occurred. He most likely saw a spiritual revolution in art slipping away, and therefore painted a ghost world in deep blue and white, a world that is less grounded than the one depicted in *Development.* This world merely hovers in space, its elements concentrated around it instead of circulating around like in *Black and Violet.* Additionally, instead of multiple planes being depicted as in *Development* and *Black and Violet*, *Fragile* a few, implying reconciliation as he reaches the ideal plane he has sought just as earnestly as the Great Synthesis of the Arts. This deep and undoubtedly emotional image transforms into something of a grim joke in the final painting discussed: *Gloomy Situation*.

Life in Nazi Germany had not been kind to either Kandinsky or the Bauhaus, which had relocated to its final place in Berlin. He depicts this truly difficult experience in *Gloomy Situation,* a bleak image of the defeat of an idea in brown and black. A grasping figure reaches for what could the remains of an idea, namely the Great Synthesis of the Arts, which Kandinsky had described less than a decade earlier as being in an embryonic state and in need of nurturing in order to come to fruition. In 1933, the Bauhaus was on its last legs—financially drained, publicly persecuted, and having lost some of its most influential individuals due to Hitler's interference. *Gloomy Situation* reflects this. Here, nurturing soil is dead, and the figures mere silhouettes lying in the soil—a fitting image in view of not only the termination of Kandinsky's teaching career but also in of the dissolution of the Bauhaus in July 1933. *Gloomy Situation* simultaneously represented the loss of hope for a truly great idea to be actualized at the Bauhaus, and the push to have that idea realized elsewhere. Paradoxically, Kandinsky's Great Synthesis of the Arts could perhaps only be achieved via a synthesis of influences, methods and practices in *painting* rather than in any and all arts.

In this respect, I believe Kandinsky may have resumed pursuing the Great Synthesis of the Arts after the Bauhaus, from the safety of his new home in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France. As many of the Bauhaus artists demonstrate, Kandinsky's close friend Paul Klee among them, the Bauhaus did not truly end when it shuttered its doors in 1933. Rather, the artists that worked there scattered its ideas outside of Nazi Germany, particularly across the water in America. I would like to explore whether or not Kandinsky was part of this phenomena, and if not, how he continued his pursuit of the Great Synthesis. In addition, the French art scene during the mid-1930s and through the 1940s will be thoroughly examined in an effort to determine the extent to which Kandinsky participated in it. Moreover, I would like to explore some of Kandinsky's later works, which exhibit a return to lively colors, lines and shapes once again through the lens of *On the Spiritual in Art and Point* and *Line to Plane,* Overy's *Kandinsky: The Language of the Eye,* and Florman's *Concerning the Spiritual and the Concrete in Kandinsky's Art* in my subsequent research. Their biomorphic forms appear white and dancing as opposed to black and grasping, in a sense, their spatial relations appearing more like a part in colorful space.

Thus, my intentions for my next project are to examine Kandinsky's final paintings—the paintings he created after the Bauhaus — in an effort to determine whether or not he had, in his view, achieved the Great Synthesis of the Arts. Aside from a few paintings in the early 1940s Kandinsky appears to have abandoned the compositions of geometric shapes altogether; virtually none of his later paintings are reminiscent of *Fragile* or *Development.* These paintings demonstrate more organic interactions of form, color, and line that are perhaps only demonstrated in *Black and Violet* and *Gloomy Situation.* In fact, the two paintings could be seen as models for Kandinsky's later works because of their use of organic shapes, as well as the myriads of sign formations circulating around his later canvases. The biomorphic shapes come

together to make one enormous form, or they intermingle like separate particles in a petri dish. Perhaps these elements were meant to represent the diverse art scene Kandinsky encountered during World War II in France, where artistic experimentation had become the norm via the Surrealists, Dadaists, and Cubists in the 1930s.We can even see him mimicking such practices in 1940s paintings like his *White Line* (1936, Figure 24), *Fixed Points* (1942, Figure 25), *White Figure* (1943, Figure 26), and *Untitled* (1944, Figure 27).

The main question driving this next phase of research is not simply whether or not Kandinsky had reached the Great Synthesis of the Arts, but rather *to what extent* had he reached the Great Synthesis? Why is this phase of his art career considered the "Great Synthesis," and what is the theme that holds the aforementioned paintings together? Moreover, what does an examination of the unified figures in *White Line, Fixed Points, White Figure,* and Kandinsky's 1944 *Untitled* painting mean in relation to the scattered sign-formations found in *Black and Violet, Development, Fragile* and *Gloomy Situation*? What kind of synthetic ideas did Kandinsky intend to express with these paintings that was not found in his earlier works? In my view, they present a single entity that combines ideas and practices to create a richer experience. This entity could be an area or a group—one that, must be sought out and made known. Quite possibly, an examination of this last phase of Kandinsky's art career will reveal how his push to achieve the Great Synthesis of the Arts—from the beginning of his career to his time with the Bauhaus—allowed him to finally capture the synthesis he had been striving for.

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APPENDIX

Fig. 1 Wassily Kandinsky, *Black and Violet*, 1923, Oil on Canvas, Private Collection

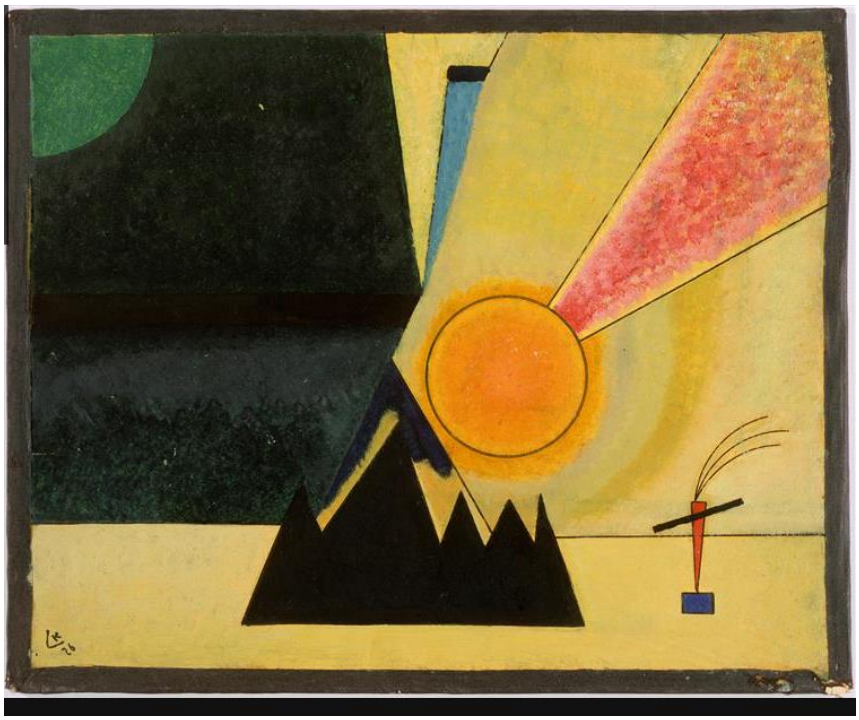

Fig. 2 Wassily Kandinsky, *Development*, 1926, Oil on Panel,
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Fig. 3 Wassily Kandinsky, *Fragile*, 1931, Tempera on Cardboard, Musée des Beaux Arts, Nantes, France

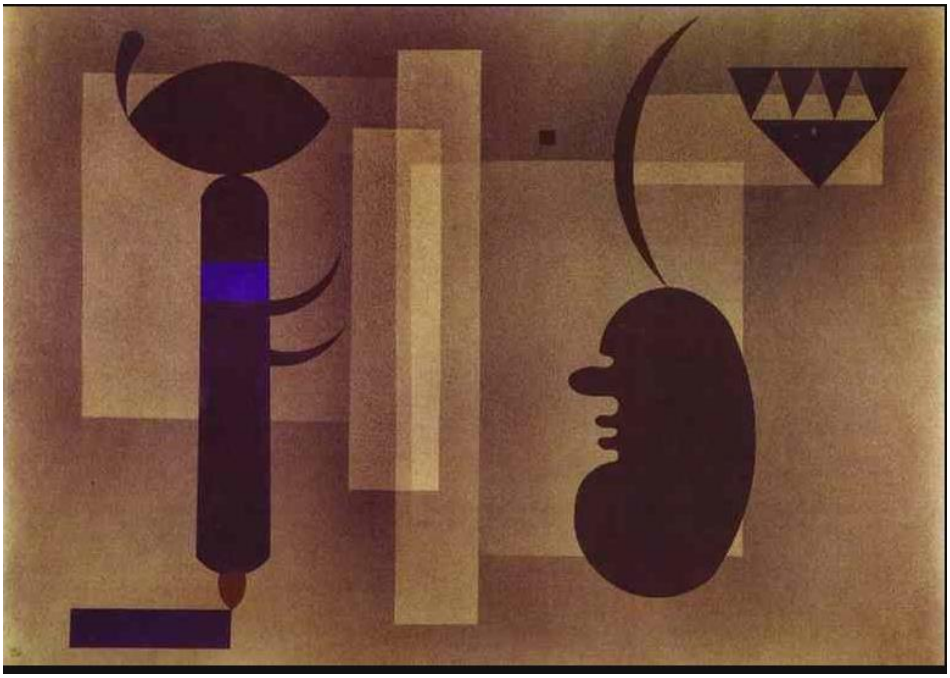

Fig. 4 Wassily Kandinsky, *Gloomy Situation*, 1933, Watercolor and Gouache on Paper, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY

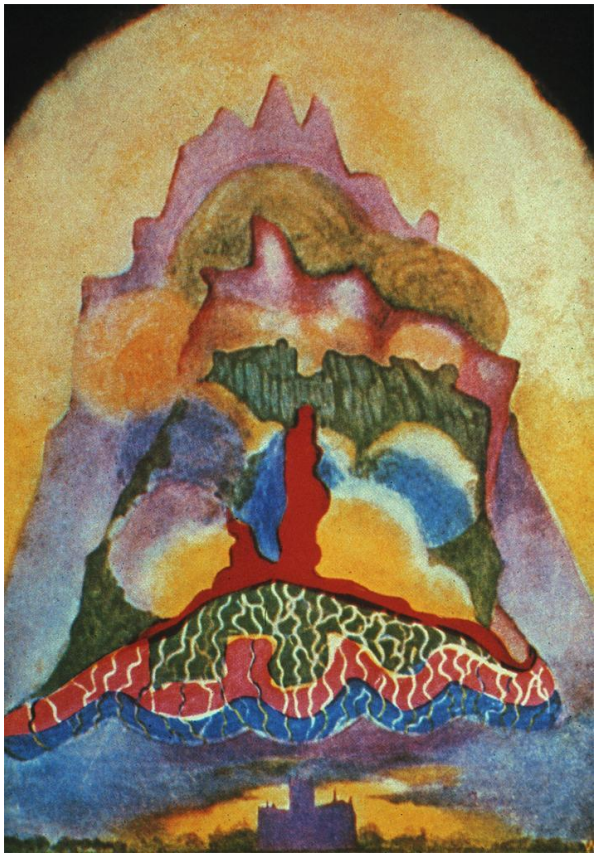

Fig. 5 Annie Bessant, *Thought Forms: Wagner*, 1901, Illustration, University of California, San Diego, CA

Fig. 6 Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition IV*, 1911, Oil on Canvas, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany

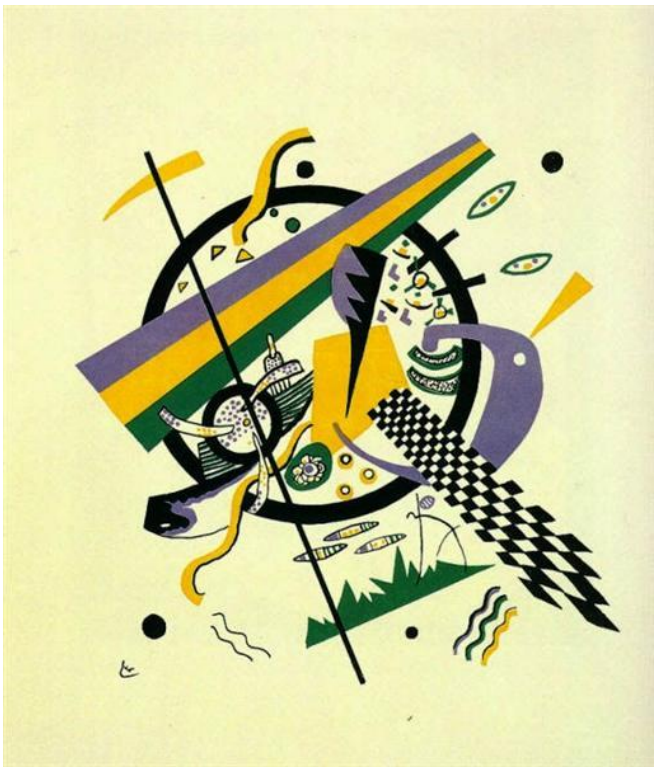

Fig. 7 Wassily Kandinsky, *Small Worlds IV*, 1922, Lithograph, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Fig. 8 Wassily Kandinsky, *Small Worlds VII*, 1922, Lithograph, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Fig. 9 Wassily Kandinsky, *Accent on Rose*, 1926, Oil on Canvas,
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Fig. 10 Wassily Kandinsky, *Small Dream in Red*, 1925,
Oil on Cardboard, Bern Kunstmuseum, Switzerland

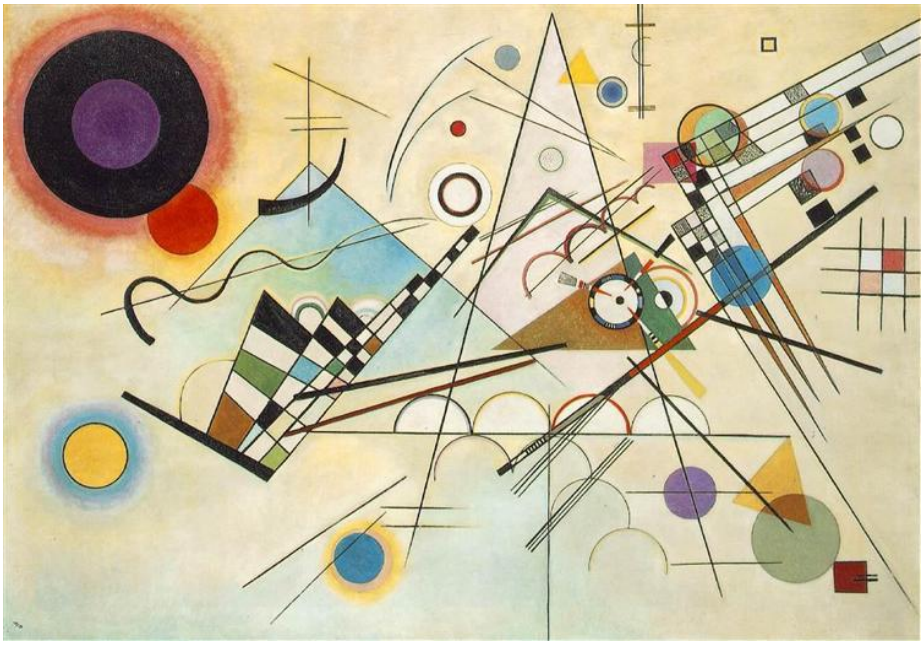

Fig. 11 Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VIII*, 1923, Oil on Canvas,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY

Fig. 12 Wassily Kandinsky, *On White II*, 1923, Oil on Canvas,
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Fig. 13 Wassily Kandinsky, *Green Composition*, 1923, Oil on Canvas, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA

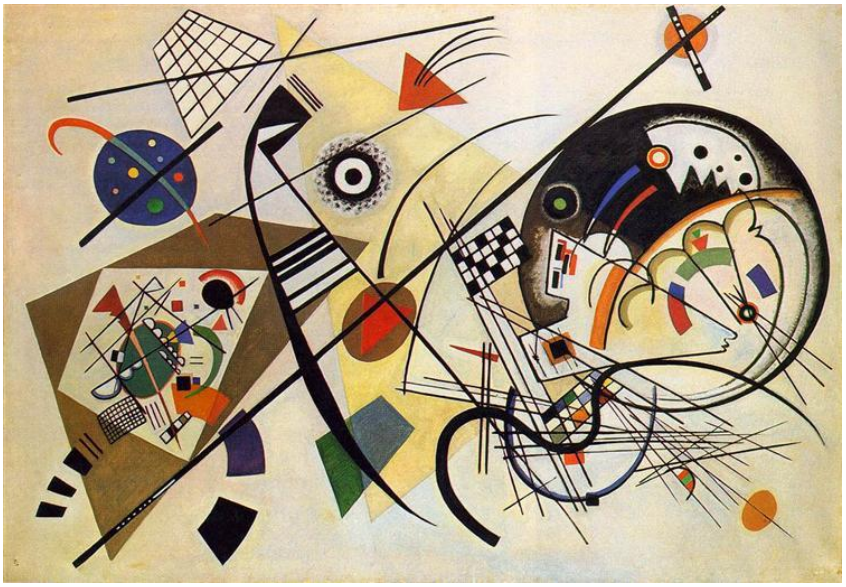

Fig. 14 Wassily Kandinsky, *Transverse Line*, 1923, Oil on Canvas, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany

Fig. 15 Wassily Kandinsky, *Orange*, 1923, Lithograph, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Fig. 16 Wassily Kandinsky, *Several Circles*, 1926, Oil on Canvas, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY

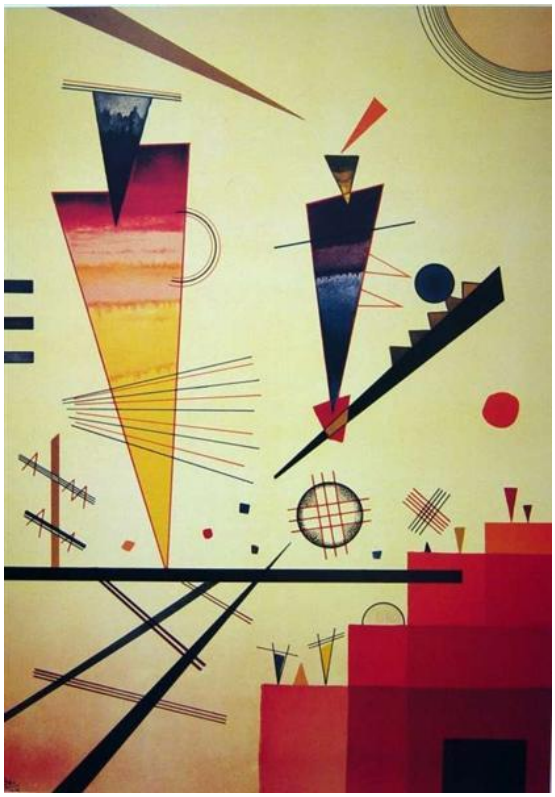

Fig. 17 Wassily Kandinsky, *Merry Structure*, 1926, Oil on Canvas

Fig. 18 Wassily Kandinsky, *In Blue*, 1925, Oil on Canvas, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany

Fig. 19 Wassily Kandinsky, *Yellow-Red-Blue*, 1925, Oil on Canvas,
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

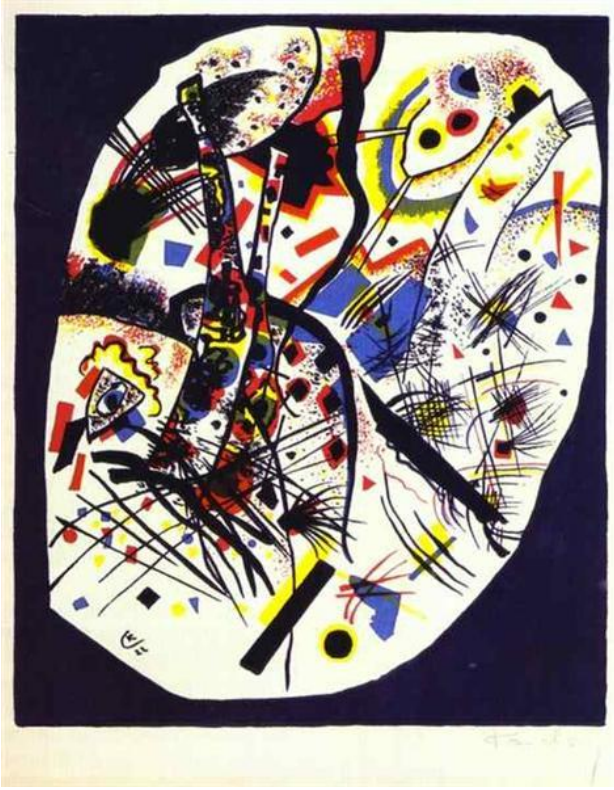

Fig. 20 Wassily Kandinsky, *Small Worlds III*, 1922, Lithograph,
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, UK

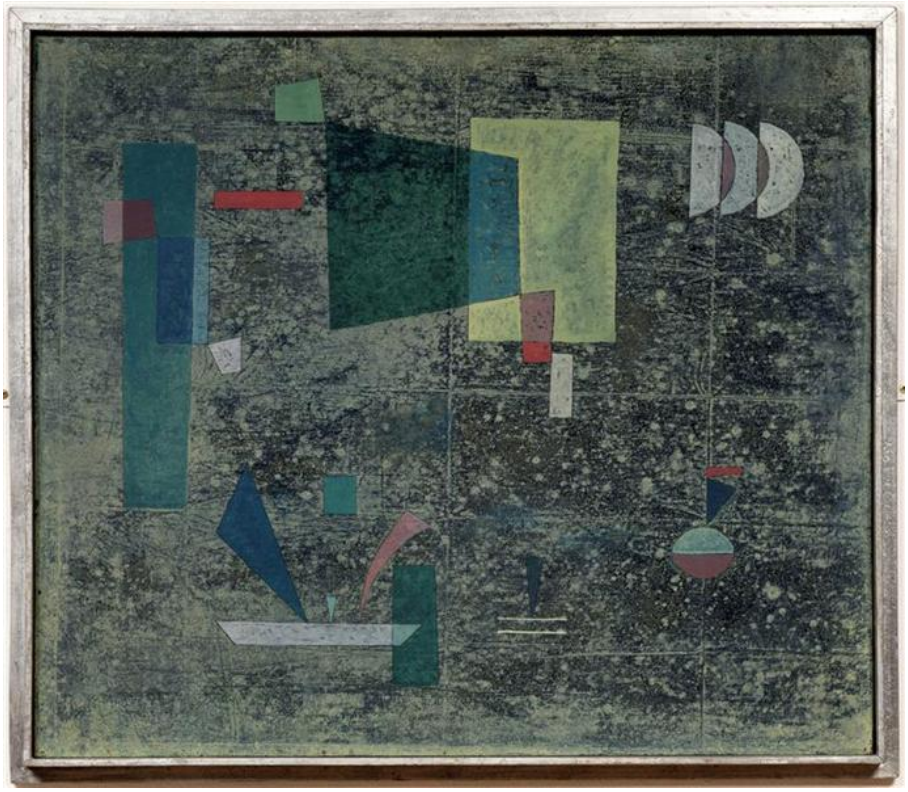

Fig. 21 Wassily Kandinsky, *Circulation Slowed*, 1931, Tempera on Canvas,
Musée des Beaux Arts, Nantes, France

Fig. 22 Wassily Kandinsky, *Soft Roughness*, 1933,
Tempera on Cardboard, Musée des Beaux Arts, Nantes, France

Fig. 23 Wassily Kandinsky, *Compensation Rose*, 1933,
Oil and Tempera on Canvas, Musée des Beaux Arts, Nantes, France

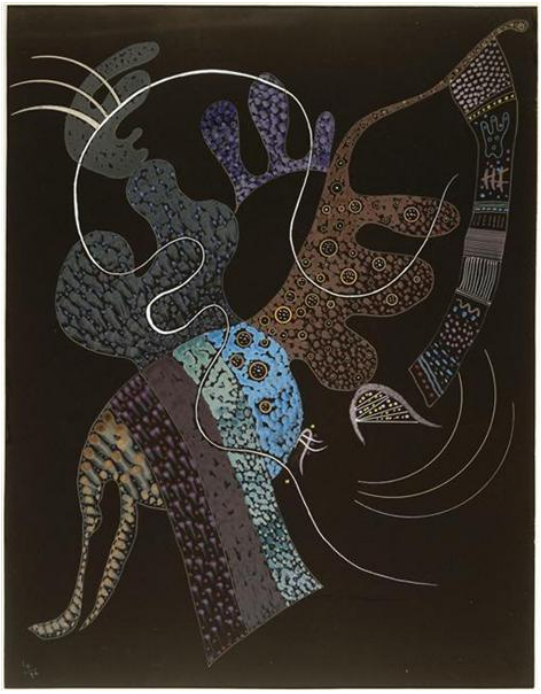

Fig. 24 Wassily Kandinsky, *White Line*, 1936, Gouache and Tempera on Canvas,
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Fig. 25 Wassily Kandinsky, *Fixed Points*, 1942,
Oil on Canvas, Private Collection

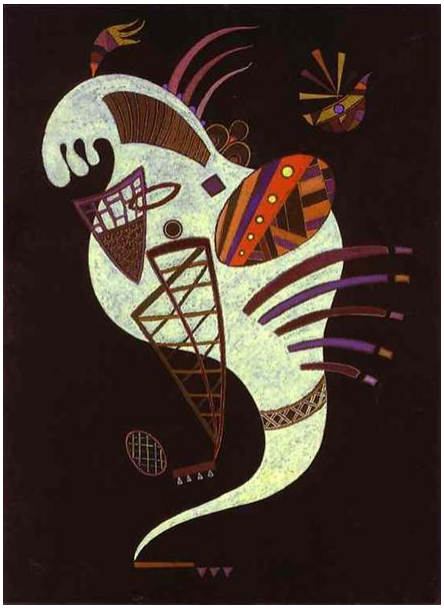

Fig. 26 Wassily Kandinsky, *White Figure*, 1943, Oil on Cardboard,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY

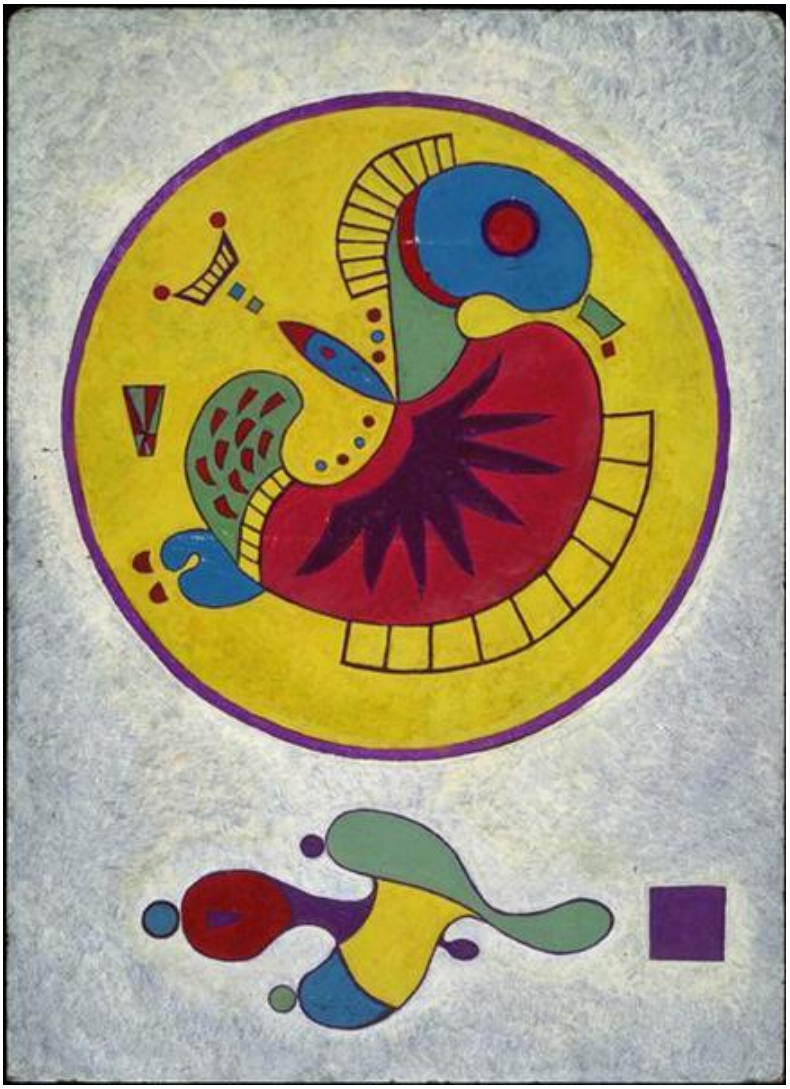

Fig. 27 Wassily Kandinsky, *Untitled*, 1944, Tempera on Cardboard, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

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