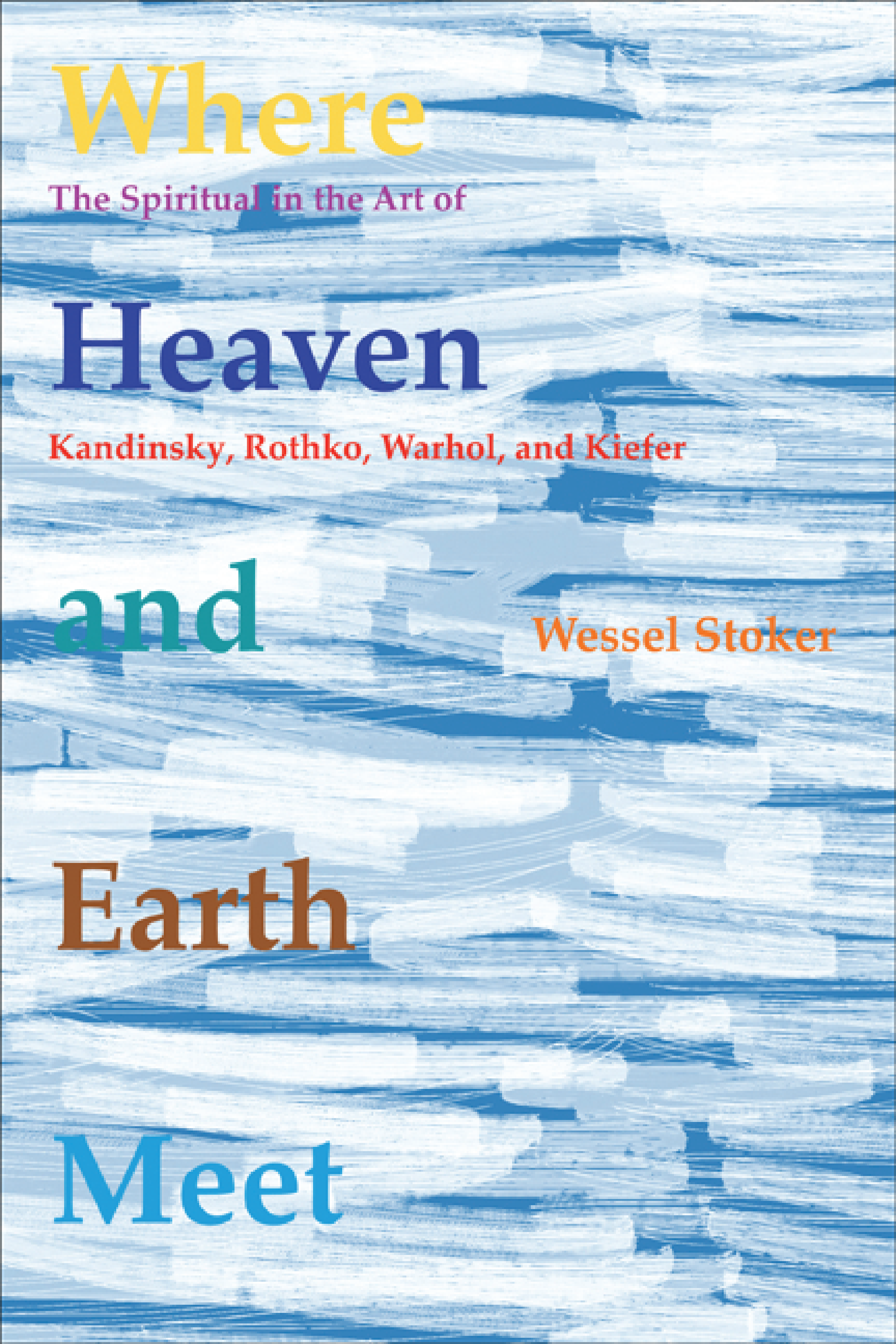

Where
The Spiritual in the Art of
Heaven
Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer
and

Wessel Stoker

Earth
Meet

Where Heaven and Earth Meet

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Where Heaven and Earth Meet

The Spiritual in the Art of Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer

Wessel Stoker

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For Julian

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Preface

This study of secular spiritual images in painting did not emerge only from my passion for art and teaching aesthetics at the VU University Amsterdam. There were two insights from previous research into rationality and religion that also played a role. In *Is Faith Rational?* I showed how rationality is viewed at present in a more contextual way, which makes speaking of a universal rationality a more modest—if not an impossible—enterprise. This more *modest place for rationality* allows room for imagination and images. Apart from the insight that many things in life lack a "strong" rational basis and are not self-evident, we should also acknowledge that, instead of being opposed, *reason and emotion go together*. That also gives more room to art, which appeals to our senses. Our primary relation to the world is not epistemological/cognitive in nature but affective/practical. Consciousness is not only intellectual; it involves all of our senses. M. Merleau-Ponty no longer describes the human being as a thinking I but as a body-subject, showing that there is something that precedes the conscious orientation of the thinking subject to the world: the original pact between the body-subject and the world makes knowledge possible. He refers in this context to what the painter Cézanne once remarked: "The landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness." And the credo of the colourist of the Hague school, Jacob Maris, was: "I think in my material." We participate through our feelings in the qualities of the world, and these feelings are a way of knowing.

This background allows us to understand why people speak of a return to the image in Western culture, of an "iconic turn" ("icon" literally means "image"). And that turn is the result not only of a changed view of reason but also of the rise of photography, film, and, at the end of the 20th century, digital technology. One of the witnesses of this turn to the image is contemporary art itself, which greatly expanded its possibilities of presenting images in comparison to painting before the 20th century.

One of the insights of this study is that the image has its own means of expression, its own logic, over against the language of science. The image shows what cannot be adequately paraphrased in words. In that respect, there is an affinity between art and religion: both evoke a reality that cannot be properly expressed in the language of science. This insight does not cancel the need for a (verbal) philosophical, theological, or history of art approach. But such approaches turn out to be limited. The verbal interpretation of paintings cannot replace the act of viewing them. The explanatory word does not destroy the image's own power, as I will show in the final chapter of this study.

In my study of the spiritual image in secular art, I will take a phenomenological approach by starting with the work of art itself. The work provides the keys for its interpretation. With primarily abstract works, however, such keys are not immediately or clearly present, and the explanation of the artist is important. Of course, the artist's explanation is not necessarily the same as the meaning of the painting, but he does provide direction for the interpretation. Paintings have open meanings that are continually shifting. In discussion with the interpretations of the work of art given by art historians, philosophers, and the artist himself, I will analyze the spirituality of secular spiritual art in Western culture.

Acknowledgements

The spiritual image in secular art was the subject of my courses in the faculties of philosophy, arts, and theology. I have learned a great deal from the comments by my students. The heuristic model of transcendence, a core point in this study, was discussed extensively in the research group "Culture and Transcendence" of VISOR (VU Institute for the Study of Religion, Culture and Society). Martien Brinkman was willing to read the draft of the study and stimulated me to clarify the concept of symbol in art. Bart Thijs read the whole manuscript carefully and commented on it on the basis of his passionate knowledge of art and religion. The art historian Heidi de Mare gave me valuable advice based on her area of expertise. The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam granted me permission to examine some works in their depository. I am grateful to all of them and to the editors of the series Currents of Encounter for their willingness to include this book in their series. I would also like to thank Henry Jansen for his meticulous translation.

This book makes use of lectures I have given on the topic discussed here, but I can only mention a few of them. I delivered a lecture called "Hemel en aarde in kunst en theologie" (Heaven and Earth in Art and Theology) at a symposium hosted by the *Nederlands Genootschap van Esthetica* (Dutch Society of Aesthetics) in October 2008 in Amsterdam. The lecture "Cultuur en Transcendence," given at a seminar in Stellenbosch (South Africa) on 31 July 2009, laid the basis for this study. Together with my colleague at the VU, Willie van der Merwe, I organized a conference on "Culture and Transcendence" in October 2010, for which the heuristic model of transcendence used in this study was the starting point. This conference resulted in two volumes.[1]

---

[1] W. Stoker and W.L. van der Merwe (eds.), *Culture and Transcendence: A Typology of Transcendence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012) and W. Stoker and W.L. van der Merwe (eds.), *Looking Beyond? Shifting Views of Transcendence in Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Politics,* Currents of Encounter 42 (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2012).

The following preliminary studies have already been published: "De religieuze kunst van Kandinsky," *Zelem* 1 (2010): 102-17; "The Rothko Chapel Paintings and 'the Urgency of the Transcendent Experience'," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 64 (2008): 89-102 (Dutch text in: *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 62 [2008] 2: 89-105). An earlier version of chapter 4, on Kiefer, was already published as "Can Heaven Bear the Weight of History? The 'Spirituality of Concrete' in the Work of Anselm Kiefer," *Literature and Theology* 24 (2010): 379-410 (Dutch text in: *Esthetica: Tijdschrift voor kunst en filosofie* (www.estheticatijdschrift.nl).

Introduction

If we look at Anselm Kiefer's *Heaven-Earth* (1974) (fig.1), we see a striking depiction of the subject of this book.[1] A palette is situated between heaven and earth with the word *malen* ("to paint") written on it. The work indicates that the function of art is to connect heaven and earth or, as the title of this book indicates, that art is the place "where heaven and earth meet." This study concerns the spiritual or religious character of 20th-century and contemporary secular painting. Art speaks to us through feelings and emotions and can give us spiritual insight. Using the works of Wassily Kandinsky, Mark Rothko, Andy Warhol, and Kiefer I will show what spiritual art can communicate.[2] Probing the work of these artists will also afford us a view of their spirituality and thus also the spiritual insights their works yield.

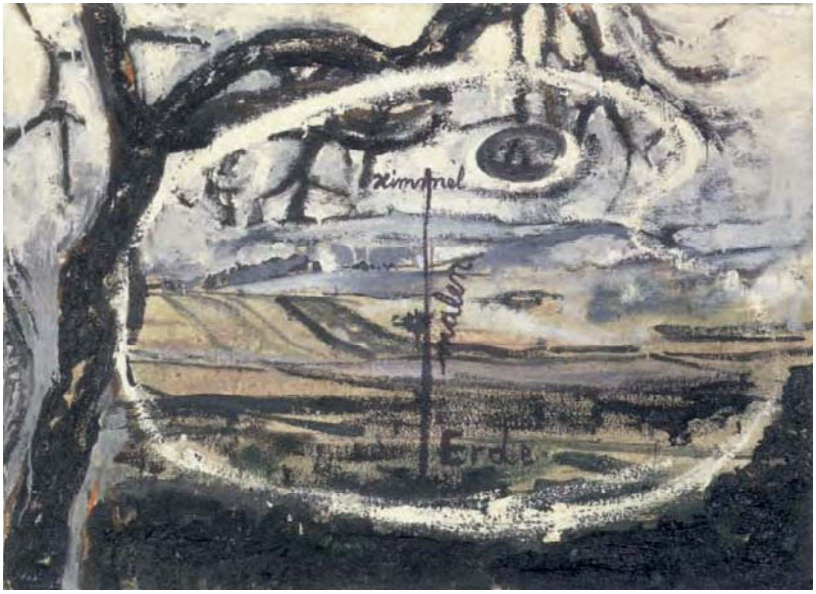

Fig.1. Anselm Kiefer, *Heaven-Earth* (1974), © Anselm Kiefer

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[1] Oil on canvas, 68 x 74 cm.

[2] For any painting not included in this text, please see www.google.com (images).

These artists make secular spiritual art. This art is not the same as art that functions liturgically in a religious community, as we will see in this study. I will briefly clarify my use of the terms spirituality and religion in secular art.

Spirituality refers to a spiritual attitude toward life and has to do with one's orientation in life. People search for the transformation of their internal being and of the relationships between humans, the world, and (usually) God or the divine. Spirituality is not tied to a particular religion; it can also take shape outside of religion as secular spirituality.[3] Works by the painters who will be studied here are religious and spiritual in nature, as I will show. Kandinsky and Kiefer themselves use the word spiritual for their art, and Rothko uses the term religious. The spirituality found in their works varies a great deal from artist to artist. Various sources, such as Jewish mysticism, Christianity, theosophy, and esotericism in general, serve as the material they draw on for what they depict in their art. Kandinsky uses theosophy, and in Rothko and Kiefer we find a spirituality that draws from various religious traditions. Warhol works within the Christian religion. My use of the term religion here is not limited to organized religion but has the broad meaning of concern with a reality that is experienced as holy or sacred. Religions and religious traditions differ on whether this is another reality or a matter of experiencing everyday reality in a different way. As we will see, in a spiritual sense, the word "heaven" has several meanings. In any case, reality that is experienced as holy or sacred is a "different" reality. Because spirituality is religious spirituality for these artists, I will use the terms religion and spirituality interchangeably in this study. We will define these still vague terms more closely in the course of this study by looking at the unique characteristics of religious spirituality of the works of the artist.

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[3] For an example of secular spirituality, see Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* in ch. 6 below, pp. 200-02, and D. Antin, "The Existential Allegory of the Rothko Chapel," in: G. Phillips and T. Crow (eds.), *Seeing Rothko: Issues and Debates* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2005), pp. 123-34.

It cannot be denied that art historians have paid close attention to the spiritual character of the art of Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer. This usually consists of a careful establishment of the sources the artists used and citing the works' spirituality with a vague reference to transcendence. "Transcendence" literally means crossing a border, and in a religious sense, this is viewed as a concern with something sacred or holy. It often functions as an umbrella term without there being any further discussion of the way in which art deals with the holy or how the relation between heaven and earth is depicted.[4] In this study, I will discuss the spirituality found in the work of these artists in a sharper way than is usually done. I will do this by means of a search model, a heuristic model of ways in which in the relationship between heaven and earth is viewed in religion and spirituality. This model distinguishes various experiences of the holy. It makes quite a difference, spiritually speaking, if the divine or God is experienced as near or far, if the holy is a personal God as in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, or if the cosmos is experienced as it is in theosophy. There can also be differences in the attitude to the world: Does it concern political spirituality or a spirituality that is only directed at people's inner being?

This study was written from the perspective of theological aesthetics. I develop a compact theological theory of art with the heuristic model cited above as the core of my argument here. The difference between the spiritual image in secular art and in the art of a religious community will also be discussed. Theological aesthetics requires philosophical aesthetics. In connection with Kandinsky, I explore the extent to which he shares points of overlap with the philosophical phenomenology of the French philosopher Michel Henry. Our discussion of Rothko raises the question if the sublime properly expresses the experience of viewing his paintings. Because of Baudrillard's interpretation of Pop art, the question of the relation between reality and image will be decisive when we discuss Warhol. With Kiefer, we need to ask if his work can be understood as postmodern in the sense that Nietzsche is postmodern.

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[4] See, for example, G. Boehm, "Ikonoklastik und Transzendenz," in: W. Schmied and. J. Schilling (eds.), *GegenwartEwigkeit: Spuren des Transzendenten in der Kunst unserer Zeit* (Stuttgart: Canz, 1990), pp. 28, 34, and W. Schmied and J. Schilling (eds.), *GegenwartEwigkeit*, and M. Tuchman *et al*. (eds.), *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), pp. 17-61, and *Traces du Sacré,* Exhibition Catalogue (Centre Pompidou, 2008).

This book is limited in various ways. First of all, I limit my discussion to the Western art of Europe and America. Furthermore, I do not look at religious art in popular culture, although Warhol is a boundary figure between what is considered art by the art world and the often kitsch images found in popular culture.[5] I have chosen to research prominent artists who represent not only important periods (with respect to both art history and politics) from the previous century up until the present. They also embody a wide range of spiritual views. At the beginning of the century is Kandinsky with his abstract works that break with traditional secular and religious painting. His work shows the response of painting to World War I. Rothko not only interprets the mood of World War II but presents something new in his colour fields, which led (along with the work of others) to the development of an American school of art for the first time, Abstract Expressionism. The Pop art artist Warhol broke with the high art of Abstract Expressionism and is an example of high and low art coming together and of the connection between Christianity and the consumer society. The German Kiefer not only depicted Auschwitz but also portrays a spirituality in his work in general that constantly revolves around the relationship between heaven and earth and focuses on the problem of evil. I could have chosen other artists.

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[5] For religious art in popular culture see D. Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); W.D. Romanowski, *Popculture Wars: Religion the Role of Entertainment in American Life (*Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996). For kitsch in religious art see F. Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste & Christian Taste* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

This study is structured as follows. In the first chapter I will take up the question of what makes art spiritual or religious art and how the spiritual can be determined in secular art. To that end I will develop the compact theory of art with the search tool of transcendence as its core. The next four chapters will discuss the works of Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer in that order. The final chapter will show that the function of the spiritual image in secular art differs from that in art of a religious community. Using the artists discussed, this final chapter will demonstrate why we, as human beings, long for transcendence and provides, in summary, the spiritual insights offered by the work of these artists.

CHAPTER I

Art and Spirituality

Introduction

A painting, as Maurice Denis remarked, "before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."[1] Materials like canvas and the paint applied to it can suddenly speak to us. We see something meaningful in it: a few lines show us a horse. The materials the painter uses are transformed into something significant, something iconic, an icon in its literal sense as image. We see a figure in a few lines. This is called the "iconic difference," which makes it possible to see one thing via another, to see the few lines as a figure.[2] Until the 19th century, the images used in secular and religious painting were usually clearly recognizable and their meaning was more or less fixed. That changed in the 19th century: in abstract art especially, a few lines no longer constituted a recognizable figure. Until 1800, religious art was usually church art, created in line with certain rules derived from a church tradition. That has slowly changed, and in our time there is a great deal of spiritual art outside the church that has no such tradition. Kiefer's painting *Heaven-Earth* (fig.1 p. 1 above) is an example of this. The fact that such spiritual art exists raises the question of how secular art can be seen as spiritual or religious.

What Makes Secular Art Spiritual Art?

A first answer to the question of what falls under the category of spiritual art is art that fulfils a function in a religious ritual. In that case, we are usually talking about art in a church or religious community.[3] The works of art that we will discuss in this study do not have any function in religious ritual, with the possible exception of Rothko's paintings. The latter could be part of a ritual because they hang in the sacred space of the Rothko Chapel in Houston. Another answer is art, like traditional Christian art, that is easily recognizable as such by the religious scene or theme that is depicted. Scenes have been borrowed from biblical stories countless times, such as the Annunciation (the announcement of Jesus' birth), the Last Supper, a *pietà* (Mary holding the dead body of Jesus on her lap), Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Since the Romantic period, this Christian iconography has lost a great deal of its meaning, and religious or spiritual art became less and less synonymous with church art. The religious image has gradually changed.

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[1] M. Denis, "Definition of Neotraditionism," (1890), in: H.B. Chipp (ed.), *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 94.

[2] G. Boehm, *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen: die Macht des Zeichens* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2010), 37.

There are two primary reasons why it is not easy to determine if works of art are spiritual. The first is that the figurative aspect in painting became blurred in the last century. This development was part of painting as a whole but becomes more complex with respect to the spiritual image. The second reason lies in the development of Western religion itself, i.e. the increase in spirituality outside the church or religious communities. That also leads to change in and a blurring of the spiritual or religious image.

Change in and Blurring of the Religious Image

It is usually stated in art history that, from the Renaissance until the modern period, genres determined what and how something had to be depicted in painting.[4] The historical genre concerned primarily the great deeds and facts from world history. In addition, there were other genres, such as the portrait, the "genre" (depicting scenes from everyday life), landscape (nature), and still lifes (a flower piece, food, etc.).[5] The meaning was more or less fixed, and iconography attempted to trace that meaning. One example is Johannes Vermeer's *Gold Weigher* (c. 1664). This is more than a scene from everyday life of a woman weighing gold on a scale. Behind her is a painting depicting the Last Judgement. Iconography tells us that this painting belongs to the "gold weigher" type and, in view of the painting in the background, interprets the woman as the personification of divine justice.[6]

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[3] On the function of the religious image before the Renaissance see H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); on the icon in Eastern Orthodoxy see P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1972); for contemporary popular religious culture see D. Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 48-74.

[4] Heidi de Mare referred me to art historians like L. De Pauw-de Veen and H. Miedema, who argued that the division into genres dated from the 19th century and was not always in accordance with

Technological developments have also contributed to changes in the image in painting. The advent of the photograph (and later digital image technology) gave rise to a tendency to view everything in our world as an image. Since Avant-garde painting at the beginning of the 20th century, genres have not played as large a role as previously in determining what artists choose to depict. The meaning of a painting can no longer be established "objectively" because there are no binding rules for interpretation.[7] The idea of personal truth and vision began to play a dominant role in art.[8] Kandinsky and Mondrian abandoned figuration and started to produce more abstract works.

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the kinds of scenes painted in the premodern era. Cf. H. de Mare, *Huiselijke taferelen: De veranderende rol van het beeld in de Hollandse Gouden Eeuw* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2012,).

[5] Boehm, *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen*, pp. 159-79. For a fine description of Dutch painting in terms of genres see R. Fuchs, *Schilderen in Nederland. De geschiedenis van 1000 jaar kunst* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2003).

[6] R. van Straten, *Inleiding in de iconografie* (Bussum: Coutinho, 2002), p. 22.

[7] G. Kopp-Schmidt, *Ikonographie und Ikonologie. Einführung* (Cologne: Deubner Verlag, 2004), pp. 181-82.

[8] Fuchs' description of this is too weak: "But that was how the idea of personal truth and vision began to play a role in art" (Fuchs, *Schilderen in Nederland*, p. 242). In religious art, this happened already in the Renaissance (see below).

Russian artists especially rejected the notion of the imitation of reality and constructed a new world of objects. E. Lissitzky replaced the usual object with a spatial image as in *Prounenraum Reconstruction* (1923). Cubism still depicted traditional examples from genres, such as a portrait or a still life, but the figuration was so entirely different that objects or human figures became difficult to recognize. Since the 1960s, minimal art, such as that by Donald Judd for example, shows how much the image has changed. The preparatory work for this had already been done by the New York painters Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, who reduced composition to a single stripe and to colour fields or monochrome paintings. As a result, colour became very important in their work.

In much 20th-century painting, such as Cubism, Surrealism, and various forms of abstraction, the image is often less clear than it was in the Renaissance, the Baroque period, or the Enlightenment. This is also the case in spiritual abstract art. Of course, this does not hold for all secular or spiritual modern art, such as Pop art or other new forms of contemporary figurative art.

As far as the spiritual image is concerned, we need to take a step further back, to the time before "the age of art," before the Renaissance. Traditional, secular painting according to the genres mentioned above arose precisely because of a crisis in the religious image during the Renaissance and the Reformation. Hans Belting refers to this in his *Likeness and Presence,* which is subtitled: *A History of the Image before the Era of Art*.[9] Since late antiquity, in Western and Eastern Christianity the image was used primarily in the cultus, both religiously and politically. An image of Christ, Mary, or a saint made that person present. An image had power. Thus, the emperor Heraclius (610-641) believed that an image of Mary provided protection when he went to war in 622 against the Persians.[10] If Demetrius, the patron saint of Thessalonica, appeared in the dreams of a sick person in the form in which he was depicted on icons, that individual would be healed.[11] Concerning this early period, Belting demonstrates that it is wrong to see images, as theologians did later in the iconoclastic period, only as objects of religious contemplation "since they were constantly used for very tangible purposes, from the repulsion of evil to healing and the defense of the realm."[12] Truth, when used in connection with an image like the portrait of a saint, has nothing to do with the question if the image depicts the person portrayed in his or her physical likeness (mimesis). Rather, truth here has to do with the demand that the image be an authentic archetype and go back to the original model of a certain icon. An archetype requires repetition, which is why icons tend to be conservative.[13]

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[9] H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*: *A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[10] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 36.

I am not concerned here with the developments in the icon tradition nor the theological corrections introduced by the church and theology with respect to the veneration of images.[14] I only want to emphasize that the image was originally used in worship and that this changed at the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation, as Belting shows. The cultic image entered a crisis period. Luther's view of the image was one of the factors that led to art (in our sense). Referring to the Old Testament prohibition against images, Luther argued that there were two kinds of images: God does not condemn all images but only those that are worshipped in place of God. Luther prohibits only cultic images, and thus not only did the image disappear from the Protestant church, but a new image came into existence whose place would be in the art collections of private individuals.[15]

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[11] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 38.

[12] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 44.

[13] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 19; H. Belting, *Das echte Bild. Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), pp. 45-85.

[14] For judgements about images by theologians and councils of the early church see G.E. Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (London: SCM Press, 2004), pp. 1-103. For iconoclasm see A. Besançn, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of* Iconoclasm (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

In Luther's time, there were two kinds of images (statues and paintings): the formerly religious image that was removed from its sacred surroundings and the new image outside the church that had to meet primarily aesthetic criteria. The artist injected his *own* view into that new image; he became a poet and claimed poetic license to interpret religious truths as well. Images were now given their place as art in the history of art.[16] Optics, correct perspective, and the artist's own view became important, and the repertoire of images developed into the genres mentioned above.

It was because of this development that the spiritual or religious image did not disappear in the West. Luther, who was a friend of the painter Lucas Cranach, preserved the image in religion but made it subordinate to the Word. The image could remain in the church (as Cranach's altarpiece [1547] in the church in Wittenberg testifies), but its function was no longer that of a cultic image. It was now a neutral sign in service to the Word.[17] The image continued to exist in the Roman Catholic church, but its role changed. The Eastern Orthodox icon scholar Paul Evdokimov sees the Western break with the icon tradition as having already occurred at the end of the 13th century with the Italian painters Giotto, Duccio, and Cimabue, who introduced optical illusion, depth perspective, and chiaroscuro, the play of light and dark.[18] In addition to the Italians, the Flemish and Dutch painters also added something personal to the classical icon tradition and gave their own interpretation of it. Joos van Cleve's *Virgin and Child* (after 1511) depicts, on the one hand, a traditional image of Mary nursing Jesus. But the person in the background is not Joseph but the seller of the painting with part of the Ave Maria and the Magnificat in his hand. At the bottom of the painting is something surprising, something resembling what we would call a "still life." We see a plate with various fruits, a somewhat unusual addition, given the theme of the painting.[19] Here art gives the old image a new aura. After the crisis of the cultic image, the spiritual image remained recognizable in churches and in the homes of collectors. Church art continued to be determined by the rules of the church.

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[15] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 458-70. For a detailed discussion see J.L. Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[16] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 458-59.

[17] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 467-70; Belting, *Das echte Bild*, pp. 162-67, 182-89.

[18] Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, p. 169. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) placed the accent on remembering but not on the epiphanic presence as Eastern Orthodoxy did. According to Evdokimov (*Art of the Icon*, p. 180), Trent thus placed itself outside the sacramental perspective of presence.

After the Enlightenment, much religious or spiritual art became less recognizable as such. This can be seen, for example, in Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), who revived Christian iconography in a revolutionary way. The genre of landscape was at that time a typical subject for the middle classes and was part of a non-religious context. Friedrich broke through that by turning his landscape paintings into religious paintings. His *Cross in the Mountains* (1808) depicts a cross with a Christ figure on a high rock surrounded by pine trees in the copper-coloured light of the setting sun. However revolutionary it may have been to use the landscape genre for religious art, Friedrich's own explanation of the painting is still traditional and is more or less established "objectively." He provides a allegorical explanation: the setting sun represents God the Father, the rock faith, and the evergreens the hope in Christ, the crucified.[20] Friedrich turned the landscape into an allegory for faith in Christ.

Such a recognizable general meaning disappears in the later development of much spiritual or religious art. Traditional Christian images can still be seen in the early Kandinsky, but his work gradually becomes more abstract. How these images are to be interpreted or how his work can be called spiritual cannot be determined on the basis of objective criteria like those that obtained for traditional church art or in terms of what Friedrich did via an allegorical explanation of his work.

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[19] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 474-75.

[20] T. Noll, *Die Landschaftsmalerei von Caspar David Friedrich. Physikotheologie, Wirkungsästhetiek und Emblematik, Voraussetzungen und Deutung* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2006), p. 35. For the use of emblematic images in Friedrich, see Noll, *Die Landschaftsmalerei*, chs. 7 and 8.

Aside from the blurring of the image in some secular and religious art, the other reason why it is difficult to argue that a secular work is spiritual in nature lies within religion itself. Because many artists find a source of inspiration in esotericism, particularly theosophy, along with Christianity, the spiritual character can still be seen, as shown in symbolism.[21] There is now a great deal of spirituality in secular art that is no longer bound to a specific religion, as Rothko and Kiefer show.[22] Such spirituality is, as such, not immediately recognizable, unless the presentation, a recognizable symbol, or the title of the work offers a key. Secular art, as opposed to church art, here refers to art that is not intended for a religious community. What makes secular art spiritual art?

A Compact Theological Theory of Art

It is to Paul Tillich's credit that he developed a theological theory of art that can draw attention to the religious or spiritual aspect in secular art as well. He thus developed a broad concept of religion in his theology of culture.[23] In addition to organized religion, he uses religion in the broad sense in culture to refer to concern with the ultimate, the religious transcendent. Secular areas of culture, such as law, art, and society in general, also stand in relation to the ultimate. Tillich determines if a secular work of art is spiritual or religious not by asking if the theme of the work of art is religious but by referring to its *style*. Paintings with a secular theme can also be religious, according to him. A example of this is Picasso's *Guernica*, which shows the alienating effects of war and refers, as a contrast experience, to the ultimate.[24] Tillich views style, i.e. compositional technique, as the immediate influence of the "import" (*Gehalt*) on the form of a work of art.[25] The word "import" does not refer to the content of a work of art but to its (religious) depth. The style shows if a work of art is open to the ultimate or displays something of the ultimate, of religious transcendence. Another word Tillich uses for religious depth is "expressivity" (*Ausdrucksmächtigkeit*). This term does not mean the expression of an emotion but is to be understood as a religious term. The style determines if a painting shows expressivity or religious depth.[26]

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[21] M. Tuchman, *et al*. (eds.), *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), passim; M. de Bois *et al*., *In het diepst van mijn gedachten … Symbolisme in Nederland 1890-1935* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2004).

[22] For the Netherlands see J. de Wal, *Kunst zonder kerk. Nederlandse beeldende kunst en religie 1945-1990* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002).

[23] See, e.g., P. Tillich, "Über die Idee einer Theologie der Kultur (1919)," in: R. Albrecht (ed.), *Paul Tillich Gesammelte Werke* IX (Stuttgart Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967), p. 18. On this see W. Stoker, *Zingeving en Plurale Samenleving. Hoe actueel is Paul Tillichs visie op zin, religie en cultuur?* (Bolsward: Het Witte Boekhuis, 1994).

In short, the presence or absence of a religious theme does not determine if a work of art can be called religious. Rather, the criterion for establishing if a work of art is or is not religious is expressivity, its openness to the ultimate.[27] The depth or expressivity in a secular spiritual work of art is an expression of religion in the broad sense of the word, as ultimate concern.

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[24] P. Tillich, "Contemporary Visual Arts and the Revelatory Character of Style (1958)," in: J. Dillenberger and J. Dillenberger (eds.), *On Art and Architecture* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), p. 136.

[25] P. Tillich, "Religious Style and Religious Material in the Fine Arts (1919)," in: Dillenberger and Dillenberger *On Art and Architecture*, p. 51. In the English translations of Tillich's work, *Gehalt* is rendered by "import" and by Tillich himself as "substance" ("Religious Style and Religious Material," p. 51).

[26] P. Tillich, "Zur Theologie der bildenden Kunst und der Architektur (1962)," in: R. Albrecht (ed.), *Paul Tillich Gesammelte Werke* IX (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967), p. 347; V. Nuovo, "Tillich's Theory of Art and the Possibility of a Theology of Culture," in: M. Despland *et al.* (eds.), *Religion and Culture* (Quebec City: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1987), p. 394.

[27] M.F. Palmer, *Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Art* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), p. 24.

Like Tillich, I am using a broad concept of religion in this study: religion as concern with a reality that is experienced as holy or sacred. Religion appears in different ways in society, as organized religion and in various cultural spheres. Organized religion, with its doctrines, rituals, and moral prescriptions, can be clearly described, but religion in art is much more diffuse and often not connected to, or exists outside of, organized religion, even if it is influenced by elements from it. What religion is thus differs, depending on whether it concerns religion in the broad sense or not. This distinction in the concept of religion is important for the difference between the spiritual image in secular art and art of a religious community (cf. below, pp. 188-99).

Tillich's theory of art falls short on two points, however, both of which are connected to his vague use of the word depth. On the one hand, he connects the term to a certain style that points to the intended depth and thus indicates that the work of art is religious (the "that"). On the other hand, depth could also be an indication of what is unique about one artist's spiritual work in distinction from that of other artists (the "how" of the depth in a certain work of art). The one concerns the work of art and its style, the distinction between religious and non-religious art, and the other what is unique about the spirituality expressed in a certain work. Tillich's reflections do not deal with the latter: he seems to consider only the "that" (i.e. that there is religious art in distinction from secular art) to be important, and not the "how" of the relationship to the ultimate. I will make two comments on his theory of art that will also indicate that I intend to follow a different path.

First, Tillich determines beforehand, apart from any work of art, how we can establish religious depth in art. But that is an arbitrary decision. His starting point here is, namely, German Expressionism. Works by Franz Marc, Emil Nolde, and Kandinsky show that they have broken through a certain surface and that a different reality is evoked.[28] Because he also refers to other works outside this movement, such as M. Grünewald's *The Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512-1516) as expressionistic, the link to German expressionism seems to be too limited for Tillich. I think the terms "religious depth" and "expressivity" are too vague to determine if a work of art is religious. For example, an icon in the Eastern Orthodox Church is not characterized by an expressionist style but by the reverse perspective, the use of two-dimensionality, the stylization of the subjects, and a certain use of colour. Icons depict the evangelists, saints, and others in so stylized a way that they make a somewhat abstract impression. Or we could look at the frescoes by Fra Angelico (ca. 1400-1455) in the monks' cells in the San Marco Convent in Florence. Those works are not expressionistic either. This 15th-century painter and monk followed the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite in depicting the Christian mystery. He disfigures the form and, paradoxically, turns the likeness into unlikeness.[29] Something similar obtains for modern spiritual art such as Warhol's. His work does not show any depth in an expressionistic sense, but certain of his works can be called religious. Newman and Rothko emphasize flatness in their work and thus reject the illusory perspective. They reflect nothing of depth in the expressionist style.

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[28] P. Tillich, "Theology and Architecture (1955)," in: J. Dillenberger and J. Dillenberger (eds.), *On Art and Architecture* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 190-91.

In short, Tillich's "expressivity" and his expressionistically defined term "import" (*Gehalt*), is too limited and too vague to indicate the presence of the spiritual in art. His expressionist guideline is applicable, of course, to the work of "expressionists" in the broad sense, but it cannot indicate the spiritual aspect in other secular or church art.

Second, Tillich does not specify *in what way* a work has spiritual or religious depth. With respect to spirituality, Tillich seems, as stated above, to view only the "that" of the relationship with the ultimate (the distinction between religious and non-religious art) as important but does not take the "how" into consideration. But there do appear to be different possibilities for looking at the relationship between heaven and earth that bring different types of spirituality into play.

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[29] G. Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 6-7, 45-60.

My approach differs from Tillich with respect to both issues. As far as the first point is concerned, we should not, as Tillich does, decide *a priori* that spiritual art is only possible via a certain style. How spirituality becomes visible in any work can only be shown *a posteriori* via an analysis of the "how." We will see that Kandinsky and Rothko choose abstraction for their spiritual works, whereas Warhol and Kiefer choose figuration—and they do that with their visual language. Research in the area of art history is indispensable for the latter.

Regarding the second point, the fact that a work displays religious transcendence does not say anything about the specifics of the spirituality that it expresses. The late Kandinsky sometimes painted spiritual reality in the style of geometric abstraction with circles and triangles and with a certain colour language. That indicates a very different spirituality than that found in works that depict reality in a figurative way with natural materials, such as lead and straw, as Kiefer does. In one way or another, spiritual works of art always display *a certain relationship between heaven and earth*, between the beyond and the here and now, between the present and a primordial era or future salvation. In spiritual works of art, the artist sketches the other reality of what I call—for the sake of brevity—the relationship between heaven and earth *in a certain way*. This distinguishes the spirituality of the work of the one artist from the spirituality of the work of other artists. In addition to the "that," the "how," the way in which the relation between heaven and earth and thus the unique aspect of spiritual art, is to be investigated. I will now present a search tool to aid in that task.

A Search Tool

As stated above, when tracing the unique aspect of the spiritual in art, art history research is necessary to establish the style of a work of art. In addition, we also need a search tool that indicates how people in Western culture indicate the relationship between heaven and earth. There are patterns in how reality is experienced as holy or sacred. It can be experienced as close or distant, in a theistic way (God as creator of this world), in a pantheistic way (God as the unity of the reality of humankind and nature), or in another way, as some contemporary forms of spirituality that are not associated with any religious institution do. To indicate those patterns of spirituality, we need to specify the term transcendence in the religious sense.

The term transcendence does not only occur in theology, philosophy, or political science but also comes up in literature on art. Literally, it means crossing a border, going across something. The opposite of transcendence is immanence, which means "indwelling." The two terms are correlatively connected: the content of the one term determines that of the other. Kandinsky's work, for example (as we will see) transcends matter, the visible, material world. But it does not go beyond it to heaven, as Kiefer's *Heaven-Earth* (fig.1. p. 1) does. Rather, it goes to a spiritual inner world. This example clearly shows that both artists view the heaven-earth relationship differently and thus also depict very different spiritualities. I will indicate the types of transcendence that will help clarify the spiritual character of works of art more than the literature in this field usually does. The starting point for this remains the analysis of the work of art itself. Using the search tool of types of transcendence, I will explore the unique character of a spiritual work of art.

A Heuristic Model[30]

Types of Transcendence

Throughout culture, parallels between artists and theologians and/or philosophers can be seen with respect to the treatment of philosophical or existential questions. As a philosopher, Merleau-Ponty researched human perception and detected in Cézanne a similar view of perception in his attempt to paint the world of nature. American writers like David Foster Wallace, Dave Eggers, and Jonathan Safran Foer describe attitudes of life in contemporary Western culture, such as "hyperreflexivity" and "endless irony," in profound ways. These attitudes are also discussed in philosophy by thinkers like Sartre and Kierkegaard.[31] Thus, there are parallels with respect to worldview themes in writers and artists. The parallels can also be indicated in (religious) spirituality. I will cite three types of transcendence. The first two are derived from Christianity, the third from Greek mythology and the pantheism of Spinoza. All three types can also be seen in other spiritual contexts, separated from their original backgrounds. They cut across schools and movements and appear in various cultural areas like political science, philosophy, theology, and art.[32]

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[30] The heuristic model presented here is discussed in W. Stoker, "Culture and Transcendence: A Typology," in: W. Stoker and W. L. van der Merwe (eds.), *Culture and Transcendence: A Typology of Transcendence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), pp 5-26. There I provide examples from philosophy and theology. Here I will give examples from the field of painting.

The first type refers to an immediate connection between God or the absolute and humankind. Despite their alienation from the absolute, people have an immediate awareness of it. In overcoming this alienation, the individual discovers something that is related to himself, even though it transcends him infinitely. It is something from which the human being is alienated, but also something from which he can never be separated. I call this relationship between God and the human being *immanent transcendence*: both realities are presented as closely related; the absolute is experienced in and through earthly reality. Variants of this type can be found in, for example, philosophers and theologians like Schleiermacher, Tillich, and Bonhoeffer, in a philosopher like Hegel, and in Prince Myshkin, the main character in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, and in painters like Caspar David Friedrich, Warhol, and Kiefer.

The second type depicts the relationship between humankind and God or the divine as a relationship with an unknown. Human beings and God are essentially not of the same order:

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[31] A. den Dulk, *"Love Me Till My Heart Stops": Existentialist Engagement in Contemporary American Literature* (forthcoming). For that matter, such discussions have always been a part of works by novelists, poets, essayists, and others. See Henry Jansen, *Laughter among the Ruins: Postmodern Comic Approaches to Suffering* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001).

[32] For examples of this, see W. Stoker and W. L. van der Merwe, *Looking Beyond? Shifting Views of Transcendence in Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Politics*, Currents of Encounter 42 (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2012).

they differ radically from each other. The prophet Isaiah experienced this radical difference when he was called to be a prophet as the radical distinction between the holy God and the sinful human being (Isaiah 6:1-13). The encounter of the human being with God is an encounter with a stranger. Theologically speaking, the first type lays more of an accent on human openness to revelation from God, whereas the second starts with the movement from God or the absolute to the human being. I call this relationship between God and the human being *radical transcendence*: the absolute is the wholly other and thus sharply separated from our reality. Variants of this type can be found, for example, in Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Jean-Luc Marion. It is also found in the playwright Samuel Beckett, in his *Waiting for Godot*, and in painters like Newman and Rothko in their later work.

The third type relates the "here and now" and the "beyond" so closely to each other that the one pole, i.e. transcendence, is almost abandoned, and only immanence appears to remain. This third type can be called *radical immanence*: the absolute is no longer to be sought outside earthly reality. An early form of this is found in Greek mythology, according to which the gods, as inhabitants of Mount Olympus, are aspects of our own reality. As part of the cosmos, they are completely immanent to our world, such as Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and Poseidon, the god of the sea, etc. Transcendence was located completely within earthly reality. The Greek gods transcended the human being but did have human traits. This can be found in another, more philosophical, way in the pantheism of Spinoza, the "God is dead" theology of Thomas Altizer, in theosophy, and in artists like Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian. In contrast to the first two types of transcendence, there is nothing here that refers to a personal God (theism) who transcends the world or to Greek gods associated with nature. The view here is pantheistic. The relationship between God and the world is symmetrical: no world without God and no God without a world. For Spinoza, God and nature are the same reality with the understanding that there is a distinction between *natura naturans* (substance) and *natura natura* (*modi*). There is a substance that exists necessarily and that is the infinite cause of the *modi* of all things. The laws of nature are the deepest truths about humankind, God, and the world. They are not the product of God's creative acts as in theism, but they are God himself. Transcendence no longer points here to a transcendence of the world in the sense of a personal God but is this-worldy: achieving harmony with the *natura naturans*. As a living whole, the universe is divine.[33]

The Types as Open Concepts

The types of transcendence cut across philosophy, theology, art, and politics. Is it not too simplistic to group different artists or philosophers and theologians under one type of transcendence? From the perspective of art history, there is a great difference between the work of Caspar David Friedrich and that of Warhol, but both portray a spirituality of immanent transcendence in their work, as we will see. A comparison between an artist and a theology can also yield surprising results. The theologian Karl Barth argues in his work for a form of radical transcendence, whereas the artist Rothko also depicts a form of radical transcendence, although he does so outside the context of Christian faith. To do full justice to the unique contribution of an artist or thinker, the types should be viewed as *forms* or *open concepts*. They thus receive further *content* or *specification* by a certain thinker or artist.

There are *two elements* that one should be aware of in establishing the specific religious or spiritual aspect of the work of art: the *form*, the type of transcendence, the way in which the thinker or artist views the relation between heaven and earth, and the *content*, the further specification that he personally indicates. Form and content should be viewed as inextricably bound to one another. In my view, it is not so that there is first a form of transcendence and then a specification of it, but form and content, concept and intuition, are always connected. As a form, transcendence is often present in a veiled way because it often appears with a certain content. It is the content, i.e. its cultural and religious setting, that gives a type of transcendence its particular accent. That is why the types of transcendence are to be viewed as forms or open concepts. It is still the same form of transcendence but the content, the further specification of the type of transcendence in question, is different, apart from whatever differences there may be in the media used: a linguistic medium (the word) and an non-linguistic medium like painting (the image).[34]

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[33] Radical immanence can also have to do with secular forms of spirituality, but the artists in this study do not display this radical immanence. See Stoker, "Culture and Transcendence," pp 15-18.

As stated above, I am using these three types of transcendence as a heuristic model to get a better view of the spirituality that emerges in the work of Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer.[35] I will give a brief example here of each of the three types and show how form and content always go together. I will do so by looking at the work of Caspar David Friedrich, Barnett Newman, and Piet Mondrian, focusing on how transcendence is evoked in their paintings. I will show how the content of a certain type of transcendence is always cast in a certain form and that the content that a certain type of transcendence gives to the form leads to the individual expression of a certain type of spirituality.

In short, transcendence as a form is often present in a veiled way because it always occurs with a certain content that is produced by a certain artist.

Immanent Transcendence: Friedrich

Immanent transcendence is defined as closely relating both realities to each other; the absolute is experienced in and through earthly reality. Using some paintings by the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), we will see how he uses his Lutheran background to give content to immanent transcendence. Even though there are divergent interpretations of his work, there is now a general consensus that Friedrich's work is religious. I will take *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819) and *Monk by the Sea* (1808-1810) as examples.

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[34] The relation between word and image needs a separate study. For a brief comment on this see ch. 6, pp. 197-99 of this volume.

[35] Elsewhere, I have pointed to yet a fourth type, transcendence as alterity: cf. Stoker, "Culture and Transcendence," pp. 18-24. This type comes up only tangentially in this book, and therefore I will not discuss it any further (see below, pp. 200-02).

Two Men Contemplating the Moon (fig. 2) depicts two men on a slope in the reddish half-light of evening, looking at the moon and the evening star.[36] The older man is probably the painter, and the younger, whose hand is on Friedrich, his pupil August Heinrich. They are looking with concentration at the crescent moon and the evening star, both of which have a luminescent glow surrounding them. The moon and the evening star cast their light on nature. An enormous bare oak is clearly visible, with a weather-beaten rock next to it, possibly a dolmen, and a small pine. The painting has been explained in a political way, given the political agitation stirred up by demagogues at that time. The two men are, after all, wearing the old German style of clothes that had been forbidden.[37] An objection to this explanation is that their attitude is one of contemplation, as the title of the painting also indicates, and there are no signs of actions that one would associate with demagogues. As stated above, Friedrich interprets the secular genre of landscape in a religious way, and this is the case here as well. The painting shows how Friedrich relates heaven and earth closely to each other, thus providing an example of a spirituality of immanent transcendence.

The different elements of the painting can be explained allegorically: the bare oak refers to the heathenism of old; the rock resembling a dolmen could be a reinforcement of the meaning of the oak; the evergreen is the sign of hope of life after death; and the moon refers, as a symbol of light, to Christ.

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[36] Oil on canvas, 110 x 171.5 cm.

[37] For the various interpretations of this painting see W. Busch, *Caspar David Friedrich: Ästhetik und Religion* (Regensburg: C.H. Beck, 2003), 172-85. I do not agree with his somewhat one-sided explanation that strongly emphasizes the use of the golden ratio.

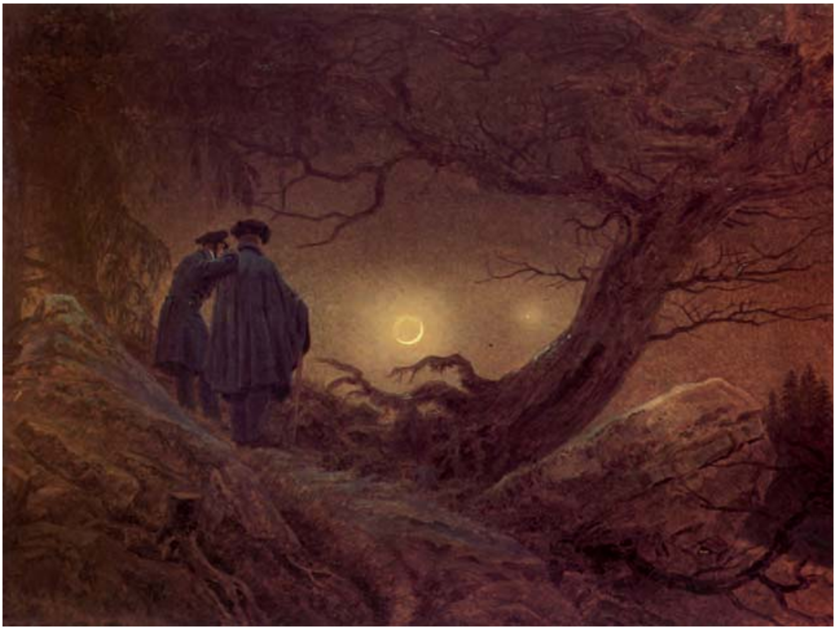

Fig. 2. Caspar David Friedrich, *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (c. 1819)

The evening star is also the morning star, and that makes it a sign of the certainty that resurrection follows death.[38] There is a tension between light and dark in the painting. The victory of light over darkness can be explained as the desire for political freedom, but it can also be explained in a religious sense as the conversion from heathenism to Christianity. However that may be, the painting concerns an experience of transcendence: the rays of light from the moon (Christ)—just as the sun is a symbol of God the Father—illuminate the landscape. Here heaven and earth meet: Christ both shines through and transcends nature. The latter is expressed in the painting because there is only a foreground (the landscape) and a background (the moon and the evening star). There is no middle area. There is a clear line between the "here" of nature with the two men and the "beyond" of the moon and the evening star, whereas their light is immanent in nature.

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[38] Thus H. Börsch-Supan on the evening star in the frame of *Cross in the Mountains*; cf. A. Piepenbroek, "Een teken van hoop en troost. Een literatuurstudie over de religieuze interpretatie van het *Tetschener Altar* van Caspar David Friedrich," MA thesis (VU, Aesthetics), p. 41.

Friedrich's religious landscapes are not pantheistic but theistic. He stands in the tradition of physicotheology, which viewed nature, as the creation of God, as a testimony to God's presence.[39] His Christocentric, Lutheran belief that heaven and earth are closely connected to each other is evident in *Cross in the Mountains* (1808) and in other paintings in which crosses are found in the landscape (*Cross and Cathedral in the Mountains* [c. 1813]; *Cross on the Baltic Sea* [1815]), and others.

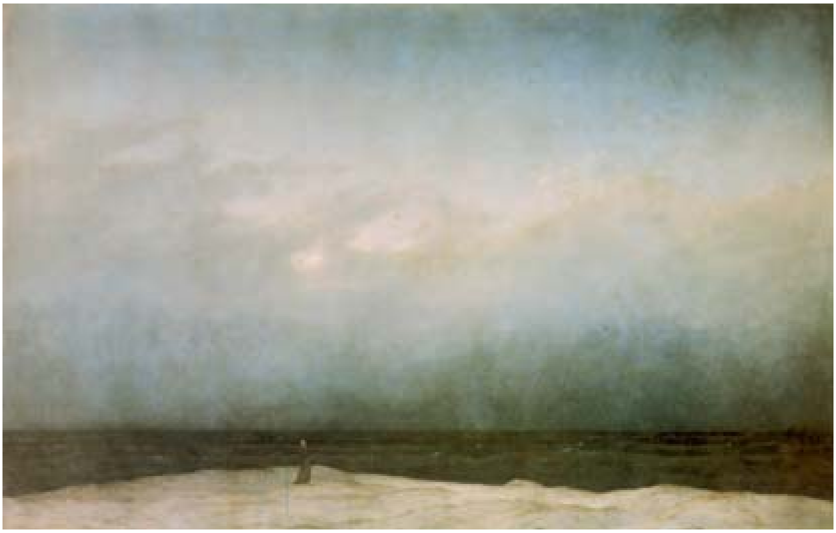

Fig. 3: Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea* (1808-1810)

Monk by the Sea (fig. 3) displays a spirituality of immanent transcendence as well. It is an empty painting, with only a small human figure, a monk on a beach, sea, and an infinite sky that takes up the largest part of the painting.[40] The monk stands with his chin on his hand gazing at the horizon of the sea. Seagulls fly around above the expansive sea that changes into the sky, which starts out dark and becomes increasingly lighter.

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[39] On Friedrich and physicotheology see Noll, *Die Landschaftsmalerei*, chs. 4 and 5.

[40] Oil on canvas, 35 x 44 cm.

The sky is most threatening at its darkest and lowest level. This is not just a nature scene; it is a spiritual religious painting, as Friedrich wrote in a letter (end of 1810, beginning of 1811):

> A man dressed in a black robe walks pensively on the beach; seagulls fly anxiously around him, screeching, as if they are warning him not to venture onto the unruly sea. This was the description, now come the ideas, and even if you ponder from morning to evening, from evening to dawn, you will not fathom and understand the impenetrable "Beyond"! With overconfident self-satisfaction, you think you will be a light for progeny, will unriddle the future. People want to know and understand what is only a holy conjecture, only seen and understood in faith! Your footsteps do indeed sink deep into the lonely sandy beach, but a soft wind blows over them and your footsteps will disappear forever: this foolish man full of vain self-satisfaction![41]

Friedrich sees his painting as a polemic against the rationalistic Enlightenment that wanted to unravel the infinite with the help of reason. He views the infinite as a matter of faith rather than one of knowledge. The seagulls warn against entering the unruly sea. In accordance with his own Lutheran faith, Friedrich characterizes the monk as humble before the almighty God who created this sky, sea, and earth. As we read in Schleiermacher's *On Religion*:

> And if we have gazed upon the universe and then look again at our own I, how it sinks into nothingness in comparison with the universe, what else is there for mortal humankind than genuine, unaffected humility?[42]

In *Monk by the Sea* God and humankind are brought into close connection with each other. Pantheism, the notion of the human individual being absorbed into the infinite, is as absent here as it is in *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*. The horizontal boundary between sea and sky indicates a clear line separating the human being from the infinite. The monk is confronted directly with the "Beyond" in this seascape, but it remains impenetrable because it lies beyond that boundary and is a matter of faith.

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[41] Cited by Noll, *Die Landschaftsmalerei*, p. 44.

[42] F. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. 1969), § 108-09, p. 73; translation mine.

Other interpretations are possible of course, beyond Friedrich's own allegorical one. The interpretation of a work of art does not necessarily coincide with the one the artist offers. In a subsequent chapter we will see how R. Rosenblum interprets this painting as an example of the Romantic sublime, the confrontation with the infinite in "reverent fear and terror." Friedrich's own, more specific interpretation is thus subsumed under a larger denominator that allows a comparison between the spirituality of Friedrich's works and that of, for example, Rothko's works with his often empty paintings in which some areas of colour are also light and dazzling (cf. below, pp. 100-08). In Rosenblum's interpretation as well, this painting is an example of immanent transcendence, as we will see.

In short, Friedrich's work displays a close relationship between heaven and earth. God is present in the everyday world. Friedrich depicts that relationship from the perspective of his Lutheran view of nature. We will see how Warhol and Kiefer give their own content to a spirituality of immanent transcendence.

Radical Transcendence: Newman

In radical transcendence, the absolute is defined as the Wholly Other and is therefore to be distinguished sharply from earthly reality. As an example of a spirituality of radical transcendence, I will look at some later works by Barnett Newman (1905-1970). I will first give a short introduction to this painter.

Along with other artists from the New York school, such as Gottlieb and Rothko, Newman emphasized the tragic view of life in the middle of the 20th century, a view that grew out of the economic world crisis and later World War II. These events showed him and his contemporaries that the modern experience and the "primitive" experience were in fact the same.[43] They could have read that in Nietzsche, Jung, and Worringer. Newman writes on terror and the tragic:

> We now know the terror to expect. Hiroshima showed it to us. We are no longer, then, in the face of a mystery. After all, wasn't it an American boy who did it? The terror has indeed become as real as life. What we have now is a tragic rather than a terrifying situation.[44]

Under the influence of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy,* Newman's version of tragic modernity took a Dionysian turn: the chaos of humankind and the world should not be glossed over by Apollonian harmony and beauty. According to Newman, the Greeks' discovery of beauty put European art on the wrong track. The natural human desire to express one's relation to the absolute in art was identified and confused with the absolutism of perfect creatures.[45] Newman rejected this striving after beauty in art and preferred the sublime. The experience of the sublime cannot be found in the beauty of the perfect form but has more to do with the desire to destroy form and beauty in order to bring about a new experience that comes directly from ourselves and also can be seen directly by others. "The Sublime is Now."

Newman was named Baruch by his Jewish parents (Americanized into Barnett) and was inspired at a quite young age already by his namesake, Baruch Spinoza, primarily by the latter's theory of intuition. In his work, Newman later made use of primarily Jewish mysticism, although he distanced himself from the Jewish religion. If Spinoza's influence on Newman also included pantheism, Newman's works would then be examples of *radical immanence* as far as spirituality is concerned. But his works, which were influenced by a Jewish mysticism that he interpreted freely, point rather to God as person and creator.[46] Newman's art is complex, and examples of *radical transcendence* can be found only in certain works. Along with works with mythical themes, he also painted a number of works with biblical themes.[47]

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[43] W.J. Rushing, "The Impact of Nietzsche and North West Coast Indian Art on Barnett's Newman's Idea of Redemption in the Abstract Sublime," in: E.G. Landau (ed.), *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 422-42.

[44] B. Newman, "The New Sense of Fate," (1947-1948), in: B. Newman, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) p. 169.

[45] For this and what now follows see B. Newman, "The Sublime is Now," (1948), in: Newman, *Selected Writings*, pp. 171-73.

Some examples of a spirituality of radical transcendence are *Uriel* (1955), *Cathedra* (1951), and the series *The Stations of the* Cross (1958-1966). In these works we see flat, expansive spaces of light and colour, interrupted by zips (long vertical, narrow stripes on the canvas). The colours, the position of the zips, the monumental size of the canvases, title, and explanation of the artist help us to arrive at a certain interpretation.

Uriel is Hebrew for "light is God."[48] The painting shows the light that drives away the darkness at creation. The large space on the left is turquoise in colour and evokes streams of divine light in the creation event. The stream of divine light is first caught by a narrow black zip with white on its left side. The stream of light continues in a small, turquoise, interspace. It finally encounters a russet zip and, momentarily interrupted by a narrow white space, a large russet area that, like the russet zip, refers to earth or matter. The canvas has no edges or a close as is the case with *Primordial Light* (1954), another canvas by Newman on the same theme. *Primordial Light* is a vertical painting that is black with turquoise zips on both sides that drive away the dark like rays of light. Meyer interprets *Uriel* as follows:

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[46] T. Hess, *Barnett Newman* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1972), pp. 8-9, 42-43.

[47] Examples of mythical works are: *Gea* (1945), *The Slaying of Osiris* (1944), *The Song of Orpheus* (1944-1945), and *Argos* (1949); works with biblical themes are, among others: *Eve* (1950), *Adam* (1951-1952), *Cathedra* (1951), *Uriel* (1955), and the series *The Stations of the Cross* (1958-1966).

[48] Oil on canvas, 244 x 549 cm. See note 47.

> One could claim that the effect of *Uriel*, in comparison with paintings done in 1954, is absolute, for with respect to the thematized experience [of the divine], the symbolically marked place for entering the painting is now missing—for example in the form of a zip or narrow area connected to the edge of the painting. The viewer of the painting is confronted much more directly with the reported experience than ever before. The divine is, according to the title, "light" and dominates in a way that does not seem able to be traced back to a subjective perception. Here, so to say, an *objective* event is depicted that includes and supports all the physical substance of the russet parts on the right. In Newman's mystical vision of 1954 and 1955 the moment of *ruling out the subject* has been reached: Newman has, Hess wrote—citing an expression by De Kooning—painted himself out of the painting.[49]

Meyer describes *Uriel* here as an example of what I call radical transcendence. God's light appears as an objective power in which human action no longer matters. As viewers, we are confronted with something beyond ourselves. It is the same with *Cathedra* (fig. 4).[50]

In this painting we see a monumental dark blue canvas whose uniformity is ever so slightly broken by a light blue zip on the extreme right. The bright white zip to the left of the centre seems to stand somewhat apart from the canvas. It prevents the viewer from feeling that he is being absorbed into the sea of blue. Thus, there is a dividing line between the viewer and what the canvas evokes, and the title, which refers to the call of Isaiah in Isaiah 6, also points to that. The text informs us about this call in which the prophet "sees" God sitting on his throne as the Holy One: "I saw the Lord seated on a throne [*cathedra*], high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1 [NIV]). The colour blue has a spiritual meaning: in Christian iconography Mary is often dressed in blue, and here, in Newman's painting, it refers to the train of the robe of the holy God. Aside from Isaiah, one can also think here of Jewish mysticism, as Hess remarks in his discussion of *Cathedra*:

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[49] F. Meyer, *The Stations of the Cross: Lema Sabachtani* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2003), p. 122 (italics mine).

[50] Oil on canvas, 244 x 541cm.

> The whole spiritual energy and passion of the mystic are directed to the ascent through the spheres that separate the earth from heaven; he has to find *The Way* and *The Gate* that are suited for him—on the way to the Throne, *Cathedra*.[51]

Isaiah and the Jewish mystic have an experience of radical transcendence. Isaiah experiences himself as a sinful human being in sharp contrast to the holy God. The Jewish mystic does not, after going through all the gates in his ecstasy, attain union with God. He stands before God's throne, sees and hears God, but is not absorbed into God. There is a dividing line between the human being and God. That is why the white zip is so significant: it points to a line between the viewer and the Wholly Other.

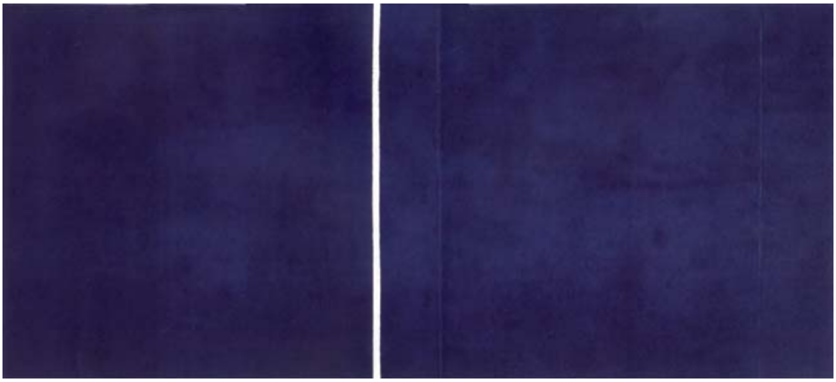

Fig. 4. Barnett Newman, *Cathedra* (1951)

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[51] Hess, *Barnett Newman*, p. 70 (translation is my own from the Dutch edition).

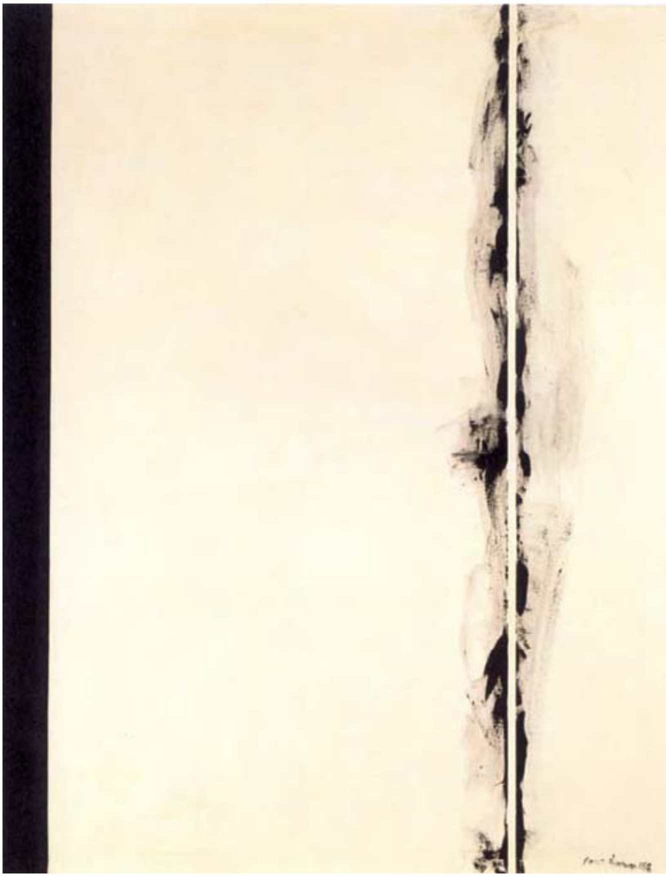

Fig. 5. Barnett Newman, *The Stations of the Cross, First Station* (1958)

The Stations of the Cross

In *Uriel* and *Cathedra* Newman evokes radical transcendence: the absolute is the Wholly Other and is therefore to be sharply distinguished from earthly reality. Something similar can be seen in his *The Stations of the Cross* (1958-1966, fig. 5), but this series evokes radical transcendence in a very dramatic way.[52] The title refers to the Catholic tradition of the fourteen stations of the cross, representing particular scenes in Christ's journey from Pilate's residence to the cross on Golgotha. The subtitle of the series consists of the words Jesus spoke on the cross "Lema sabachtani [Why have you forsaken me?]." Newman wrote that he did not intend to depict the historical, dateable event of Christ's dolorous journey but wanted to express the suffering in the lives of everyone through the question of "why?"[53] The size of the painting was chosen because it is the "human scale for the human cry."[54]

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[52] Oil, acrylic, or magma on the various canvases, c. 198 x 152-154 cm. I will focus my discussion in "God, Master of Arts" (*Ars Disputandi: The Online Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7 [2007]) on the type of transcendence that is at issue here.

The series consists of paintings without frames, all flat surfaces without perspective. All fourteen are approximately the same size: 2 x 1.5 meters. We see the zip field (the vertical line) at a single glance. The use of colour is restrained at first—light ivory and black in different gradations—and fits the theme of the series, the "why?" of human suffering. The zip is introduced in continually varying ways. A major change occurs in station seven, where there is now a broad line on the right, whereas previously it was on the left. There is no black from the ninth to the eleventh and in the fourteenth station; and the surface is entirely in off-white in varying shades.

Light and dark alternate in the stations. The black in station five and six is severe. In station five, the black dots that pull away from the wide black edge on the left point like prickles of energy to the cry of "why?" while the zip on the right narrows to a line—is that a reference to the silence on the other side? Station six indicates resignation because the prickles of energy of the cry have disappeared. After the rejection of the divine answer in stations five and six, the divine appears in station seven in a dramatic contrast indicated by the broad black edge on the right of the canvas, whereas the black zip has become very narrow. Station eight seems to indicate a directionless balance.[55]

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[53] B. Newman, "From *Barnett Newman: The Stations of the Cross, Lema Sebachthani*," (1966), in: Newman, *Selected Writings*, p. 188.

[54] B. Newman, "The Fourteen Stations of the Cross (1958-1966)," (1966), in: Newman, *Selected Writings*, p. 190.

[55] So also Meyer, *The Stations of the Cross*, p. 140.

From the perspective of the story of Jesus' suffering, one could compare stations nine to eleven, where there is no black, to the transfiguration on the mountain and view it as a ray of light in the midst of suffering itself, and both light and suffering are brought together here in the cry of "why?". From the point of view of Christian iconography, the light ivory without black in the last station could allow one to interpret it as the resurrection. Understood in this way, the painting can express a *radical transcendence* that shows God's love for humankind through his act of resurrection: the wholly other God who becomes involved with humankind in Christ, as in Karl Barth's version of radical transcendence.

As stated above, however, Newman himself views radical transcendence differently. He cites the Jewish work *Pirke Abot*, which states that we who are born must die and that we do not have control over our lives and death.[56] It is only that cry of "why?" that Newman wants to depict. By combining the cry on the cross with the quote from *Pirke Abot*, Newman takes the cry on the cross out of the context of the Gospel in *The Stations of the Cross*. He gives new meaning to the suffering of Jesus: Jesus' cry is like the *cry of every person about his or her own finitude*. Newman widens the specific nature of Jesus' cry about his own suffering to the general question of suffering as the consequence of the finitude of human existence. Jesus functions here as an archetype: his suffering is the suffering of all. Newman thus reiterates in a new way his theme of the tragic understanding of human life.

The contradictory content of *The Stations of the Cross* makes them sublime: the viewer is fascinated by something that terrifies or invokes incomprehension (the "why?") and, in spite—or precisely because— of that, experiences a feeling of relief or power. The positive feeling here is not connected with God. There is a cry of "why?" directed to God, but God is silent. The feeling of power does not arise through the resurrection as God's act of a new beginning but from Jesus as a human being. Newman points to the paradoxical fact that Jesus, as the persecuted one on the cross, asks God to forgive those who persecuted and crucified him.[57] Through his word of forgiveness, Jesus is capable of a new beginning in this most hopeless of situations. Newman thus reiterates his old theme of genesis, creation, and beginning anew.[58] Radical transcendence is presented here as the silence of an inaccessible God, but Jesus' act can give hope for a new beginning.

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[56] Newman, "From *Barnett Newman*," p. 188.

In short, in the works cited above, Newman portrays the Wholly Other, sharply distinguished from earthly reality. Radical transcendence is viewed as silence by God, of whom no traces appear visible in the world. We will see how Rothko also invokes a spirituality of radical transcendence in his later works, although he does so in a more ambivalent and less self-conscious way than Newman.

Radical Immanence: Mondrian

Radical immanence is the view in which the absolute is not sought beyond earthly reality: both realities are one. Examples of a spirituality of radical immanence can be found in works by Piet Mondrian (1872-1944).

The influence of theosophy on Mondrian's figurative and semi-abstract work is generally acknowledged. Opinions differ with respect to the interpretation of his abstract work (since about 1919). Clement Greenberg and others explain Mondrian's works in an formal-analytical way, only with respect to the further development of views on figuration in painting.[59] Blotkamp and Bax point to the theosophical background of Mondrian's abstract work as well, although Blotkamp is more reserved in this than Bax.[60] Blotkamp does not think that one should look for symbolic elements in Mondrian's abstract work that can be found in the theosophist H.P. Blavatsky. Aside from *Evolution* and a few other works around 1910, Mondrian does not use any symbols like auras and "thought-forms"from theosophy.[61] Nonetheless, Mondrian's later abstract work is influenced in a spiritual sense by theosophy. He is searching for the true reality behind the visible world. In a sketch book from 1913 (or the beginning of 1914), we read that people have to go beyond the world of forms in order to ascend from visible reality to abstraction. It is in this way that one approaches spirit or purity itself.[62]

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[57] B. Newman, "A Conversation: Barnett Newman and Thomas B. Hess," (1966), in: Newman, *Selected Writings*, pp. 276-77.

[58] S. Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 188-95.

[59] C. Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), p. 12.

[60] Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, p. 12; M. Bax, *Het web der schlepping. Theosofie en kunst in Nederland, van Lauweriks tot Mondriaan* (Amsterdam: Sun, 2006).

Let us look briefly at theosophy. This worldview is a philosophy of the divine and spiritual powers and has developed views of nature and being human on the basis of that philosophy. The purpose of theosophical education is to give human beings intuitive wisdom and experience of the spiritual and to deepen their awareness of the relationship between nature and spirit. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) explains the evolution of the cosmos and humankind. There is a cosmic, dynamic process of emanation from God and a return to God through seven stages. The whole process of cosmic and human evolution is the story of a divine awakening in which the Spirit interacts with nature and comes to self-consciousness through the evolution of consciousness.[63]

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[61] Blotkamp, "Annunciation of the New Mysticism: Dutch Symbolism and Early Abstraction," in: Tuchman *et al.*, *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 104. R.P. Welsh, "Mondrian and Theosophy," in: *Piet Mondrian 1872-1944*: *Centennial Exhibition* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1971), pp. 35-51. In H. Foster *et al*. (*Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* [London: Thames & Hudson, 2004], pp. 148-53), the spiritual in Mondrian is not denied but associated primarily with Hegel.

[62] P. Mondriaan, *Two Mondrian Sketchbooks 1912-1914,* ed. R.P. Welsh and J.M. Joosten (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff International, 1969), p. 36. Mark Cheetham gives a philosophical interpretation of Mondrian's work. He refers for the background of Mondrian's abstraction and his striving for purity to the philosophy of Plato, Neo-Platonism, Hegel, and others. Cheetham's interpretation can be seen as a supplement to my spiritual interpretation and also provides grounds for characterizing the type of transcendence in Mondrian as radical immanence. (M.A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentalist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], ch. 2).

Mondrian's theosophical work is an example of a *spirituality of radical immanence* because the divine does not transcend the world. The world, namely, is a process of development toward the one, the primal source. That is why radical immanence differs from both previous types of transcendence, i.e. immanent transcendence and radical transcendence, where a certain distance between the world-transcending God and the human being remains. For Mondrian, transcendence is limited to this world: one transcends the sensory world toward its spiritual core.

Before 1910, Mondrian depicted the higher cosmic order by means of mills with their cruciform sails (*Eastside Mill with Blue, Yellow, and Purple Sky* [1907 or 1908]), the church in Domburg, flowers, and seascapes. The unity of air, earth, wind, and fire can thus be seen in *Sea after Sunset* (1909) (two versions);[64] reality is seen in its depth and experienced in a mystical unity. One example of this is his *Apple Tree, Pointillist Version* (1908-1909).[65] Here we see a composition with the intense colors of light blue and russet, whereas the tree itself is primarily black. It does not matter if this is a good depiction of a real apple tree because at issue here is the tree in its purity, viewed with a spiritual eye. That is why the tree's form is not natural but triangular. The text on the painting in the Dallas Museum of Art points to the painter's theosophical background and his focus on the evolution of humankind toward spiritual oneness.[66]

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[63] R. Galbreath, "A Glossary of Spiritual and Related Terms," Tuchman *et al.*, *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 388. For an extensive discussion on Mondrian and theosophy, see Bax, *Het web der schepping*.

[64] Blotkamp, "Annunciation of the New Mysticism,"p. 100; Bax, *Het web der schepping*, pp. 316-20.

[65] Oil on board, 83 x 74.93 cm.

[66] Dallas Museum of Art (viewed 10 June 2011).

The works cited above are done in a free style, but that changed in *Evolution* (1910-11).[67] In this triptych we see delimited areas that make his preference for geometric distribution obvious. The painting depicts the theosophical teaching of evolution from Matter to Spirit. This evolution proceeds from the female figure in the left panel to that in the right panel and finally to the one in the central panel. The elements are symbolic—the position of the head, the eyes, the form of the nipples and navel, the flowers—and everything is reinforced by small variations in colour.[68]

According to Mondrian, the universe is moving and contains the polar opposites of subject and object, spirit and matter, that together form a unity. He wants to visualize this in the painting as follows:

> Just as a whole is the one thing plus another, therefore a duality, so it is with any one thing. This one thing *only appears to us* as one. Actually, it is again a *duality, a whole*. Each thing repeats the whole on a smaller scale: the structure of the microcosm resembles that of the macrocosm …. Y. I am reconciled … to the destruction of the natural! Z. Provided that its destruction, as in the New Plastic, simultaneously involves *reconstruction: equivalence in the expression of the physical and the spiritual as unity*. The natural is then not destroyed but only stripped of the *most* external: apparent unity becomes *duality*, and apparent duality can become *pure unity*.[69]

This close connection between nature and spirit, between externality and internality, comes into play in his *Checkerboard Compositions* (1919). If we look at *Composition with Grid 9: Chec-*

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[67] Oil on canvas, centre panel, 183 x 87.5 cm, side panels 178 x 85 cm.

[68] Blotkamp, "Annunciation of the New Mysticism," p. 100.

[69] Piet Mondrian, "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality: A Trialogue (While Strolling from the Country to the City," (1919-20), in: P. Mondrian, *The New Art-The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, ed. and transl. H. Holtzman and Marion S. James (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), pp. 86, 95,

kerboard Composition with Light Colors [1919]) (fig. 6), we see a regular grid[70] divided into small units 16 across and 16 high. This evenness is interrupted by the continually changing colours of the units. The primary colors are weakened into light pastel-like hues and there are also off-white and grey colours. The colours are found in various combinations in the small units. This causes a tension between the objective fact of the regular grid and the subjective play of colour distribution. The dark version *Composition (Checkerboard, Dark Colours)* (1919) is painted in a red colour that is almost purple and orange-brown.[71] Blotkamp calls both works mood pieces that almost evoke the atmosphere of a landscape, which is emphasized by the horizontal format common to landscape painting.[72] This explanation seems implausible because it is an abstract and not a figurative painting of a landscape or of clouds. Nevertheless, the interpretation is plausible, given the connection between nature and spirit, external and internal, as indicated by Mondrian in the

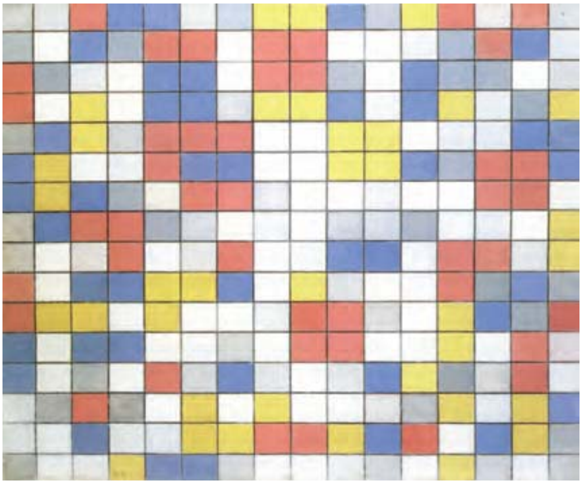

Fig. 6. Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Grid 9: Checkerboard Composition with Light Colors, 1919;* © 2012 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International Washington DC

quote above. That is confirmed in a letter to Theo van Doesburg in which he writes that *Composition (Checkerboard, Dark Colours)* is based on nature:

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[70] Oil on canvas, 86 x 106 cm.

[71] Oil on canvas, 84 x 102 cm.

[72] Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, pp. 125-26, 170.

> And then about whether or not to work from a given in nature. In my view, you define this in a rather narrow sense. In the main, I do agree with you that the destruction of the natural, and its reconstruction, must be accomplished according to a spiritual image, but I believe we should take a broad view here. What is natural does not have to be a representation of something. I'm now working on a thing that is a reconstruction of a starry sky, and yet I'm making it without a given from nature. Someone who says he uses a theme from nature can be right, but also someone who says he uses nothing at all![73]

Blotkamp comments as follows: if *Composition (Checkerboard, Dark Colours)* is a reconstruction of a starry sky, then *Composition with Grid 9: Checkerboard Composition with Light Colors* (1919) is one of a cloudy morning or afternoon sky.[74]

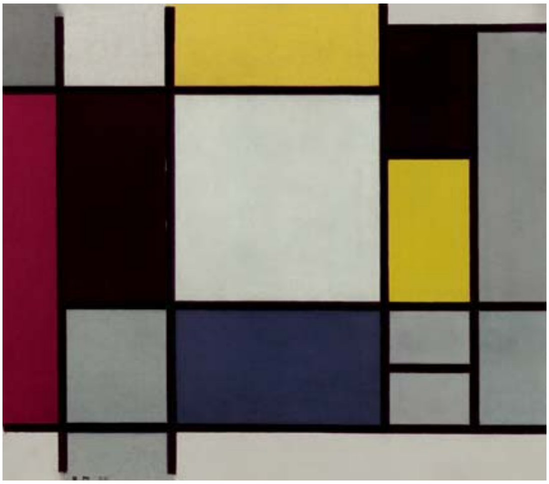

Fig. 7. Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Yellow, Red, Blue, Black and Grey* (1920); © 2012 Mondrian Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International Washington DC

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[73] Cited in Blotkamp, *Mondrian*,p. 126.

[74] Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, pp. 126, 170.

Mondrian's mature style, Neoplasticism, a new type of figuration (*Nieuwe Beelding*), emerged at the end of 1920. All emphasis now came to lie on lines and colours that Mondrian reduces to horizontal and vertical contrasts and on the use of primarily the colours red, yellow, and blue. If we look at *Composition with Yellow, Red, Blue, Black and Grey* (1920) (fig. 7), we see black horizontal and vertical lines, just as in other paintings from this period. But they no longer form a regular grid; rather, they divide the canvas into rectangles of different sizes. The primary colours are clear. The black lines are thick and in tension with the powerful colours. There is no symmetry here because Mondrian views unity in a dynamic way as a unity of opposites.

The philosopher Jan Bor probably saw *Composition with Yellow, Red, Blue, Black and Grey* (1920) in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and said:

> I myself felt as if I was being sucked up by it: the rhythm of the lines, areas and colours, and the perfect harmony of the whole made me forget myself for a moment, as if I was being lifted out of the fragmented world of everyday and transported into a world not of stasis but of a tense, dynamic balance. Emotion overwhelmed me.[75]

Bor analyzes his experience of transcendence *a posteriori*. Personally, he had no affinity with the notion of transcendence as dwelling in "transcendent spheres." But he did feel that he had transcended the world of everyday, which is not the same as transcending the world in the sense of Plato's Phaedrus myth, which tells of how the winged soul glimpses "heaven above." Nor is it the same as the transcendence described in the first two types: immanent transcendence in Friedrich and radical transcendence in Newman. Bor's description of his experience of transcendence with Mondrian's painting corresponds to my definition of this type of transcendence, i.e. radical immanence. It is not a matter of reaching for a reality beyond this world but one of crossing a boundary within this world. It was not a theosophical experience for Bor. His experience with the painting was an immediate experience, the "transition" to experiencing the world as having no object. It was an experience of "pure presence."

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[75] For this and what immediately follows see J. Bor, "Transcendentie in transcendentaal perpectief. Een kleine beschouwing over een groot probleem," *Linea* XIV (1991): 23-29. Bor himself cites *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue (*1922). I will leave it open as to which version he saw; the painting pictured above (fig. 7) is now called *Composition with Yellow, Red, Blue, Black and Grey*.

In short, Mondrian brings both realities of the "here and now" and the "beyond" together in his works in which transcendence is limited to this world. Such an experience can be secular, as in Bor, or theosophical, as in Mondrian and others. We will see how Kandinsky also presents a spirituality of radical immanence in his works, albeit in a different way from Mondrian.

Using the compact art theory explained above, we will explore the spiritual character of the work of Kandinsky, Rothko, Warhol, and Kiefer in the following chapters. In this discussion I will presuppose a broad concept of religion: religion or spirituality as concern with a reality that is experienced as holy or sacred. Because of the blurring of the spiritual image in secular art, it is only after researching the work of an artist that one can describe the means by which the spiritual character of the work is evoked. Not only can one point out the "that" of transcendence, one can also indicate the "how." The heuristic model of types of transcendence will help us do this.

CHAPTER II

Kandinsky

Art as Spiritual Bread

The world sounds.
It is a cosmos of spiritually affective beings.
Thus, dead matter is living spirit.[1]

Introduction

Abstract paintings will not always be regarded as religious or spiritual. In itself, abstract art is not religious, since artists can produce abstract art for different reasons. An artist can, for instance, turn to abstraction in imitation of the ascendant technology at the beginning of the 20th century, as was the case with Rodchenko and Russian Constructivism. One can attempt to discover what is most fundamental in art by omitting as many elements as possible, as Frank Stella does.[2] If we look at Wassily Kandinsky's (1866-1944) *Yellow-Red-Blue*, (1925) (fig. 8), we see a painting with primary colours moving from light (left) to dark (right) with circles, curved and wavy lines, rectangles, etc.[3] How are we to interpret this? Do colours and lines have an existential meaning, and do they invoke a spiritual reality, as Kandinsky claims to be pursuing in his paintings? Or do we need to look for a veiled figuration in his work? The thick black line could be a spear, and the winding, twisting line could be a dragon's tail. In that case, the painting is about a fight with a dragon, about St. George fighting the dragon.[4] St. George and the dragon is a well-known icon type in Eastern Orthodoxy. This work was produced when Kandinsky was lecturing at the Bauhaus, and the painting can also be an application of his lessons on colour, line, point, and plane that he gave at the Bauhaus.

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[1] W. Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form", *Der Blaue Reiter* (1912) in: W. Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*, ed. K.C. Lindsay and P. Vergo (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), p. 250. The title is borrowed from Kandinsky's declaration "Art is Spiritual Bread," from Kandinsky, "Whither the 'New' Art? (1911)," in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, p. 103.

[2] See L. Krukowski, "Abstraction," in: *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*; Stella helds that Kandinsky did a disservice to abstract art by seeking support for it in theosophy. Cf. C. Blotkamp, "Annunciation of the New Mysticism: Dutch Symbolism and Early Abstraction," in: M. Tuchman *et al.* (eds.). *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), p. 89.

[3] Oil on canvas, 127 x 200 cm.

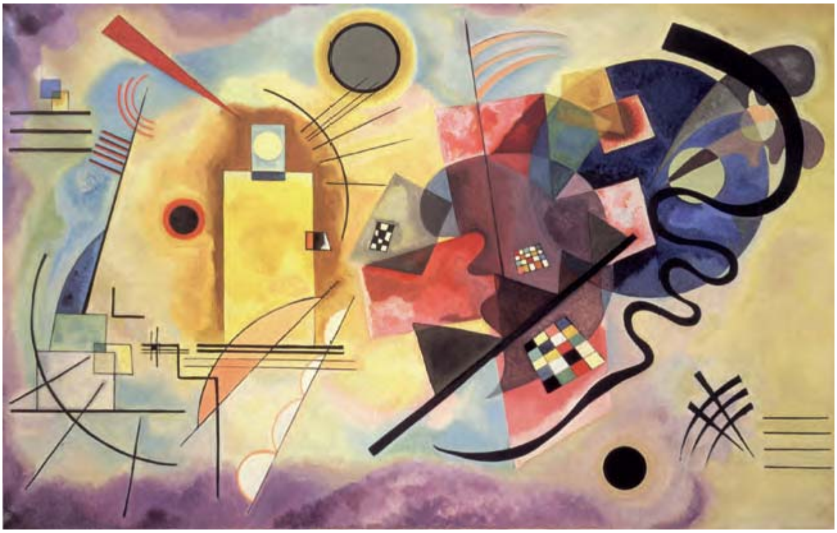

Fig. 8: Wassily Kandinsky, *Yellow-Red-Blue* (1925)

Through his abstract art and writings on art, Kandinsky wanted to awaken the ability to experience the spiritual in the material and in abstract things. "Art is spiritual bread."[5] He sometimes gives an explanation of a work, or it is apparent from the title of his preliminary sketches for a painting that it is a spiritual painting. Thus, a preliminary sketch of the abstract painting *Composition 6* (1913) is *Improvisation Deluge* (1913). In "On the Spiritual in Art" he writes about the exalted function of art and the artist. The artist is a seer who reproduces what he sees, and his profession is "to shine light into the depths of the human heart."[6] For Kandinsky, at the beginning of the 20th century, that meant throwing up a dam against spiritless materialism and positivism and showing the value of the spiritual life.[7] Did Kandinsky succeed in communicating his art to his viewers as spiritual bread? His art is generally recognized more for its high aesthetic quality than its spiritual content. Is his art not directed more at the initiate? Is it not art for a religious community rather than secular art with a spiritual theme? Would not the theosophical community be a more fitting place for such art than a museum?

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[4] W. Kandinsky, "Figures de l'invisible," DVD (Arte Editions, 1994).

[5] See note 1.

Studies on Kandinsky show that spirituality is not only important for him personally but also a factor in his work as an artist. These studies discuss the sources for his work. In his *The Sounding Cosmos* (1970), S. Ringbom explains Kandinsky's abstract art in terms of theosophy, even though he does conclude that direct influences of whatever nature are very rare.[8] In a later article, Ringbom is somewhat more explicit concerning the direct influence of primarily Rudolf Steiner on Kandinsky.[9] In her *The Development of an Abstract Style* (1980), R.-C.W. Long writes that it is possible to understand, on the sole basis of his philosophical beliefs and primarily his belief in the utopia of a new age, why Kandinsky developed a new style of painting. She does argue that Ringbom overestimates the influence of theosophy on Kandinsky and points to other influences such as symbolism.[10] She shows that his abstraction is influenced by reading mystical and occult literature and by the anti-naturalism of Symbolism and Fauvism. She writes elsewhere:

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[6] W. Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, (1912), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, pp. 16, 19.

[7] W. Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, p. 181.

[8] S. Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting* (Äbo: Äbo Akademi, 1970), p. 85.

[9] S. Ringbom, "Kandinsky und das Okkulte," in: A. Zweite (ed.), *Kandinsky und München: Begegnungen und Wandlungen 1896-1914* (Munich: Prestel, 1982), pp. 85-101; S. Ringbom, "Die Steiner-Annotationen Kandinskys," in: Zweite, *Kandinsky und München*, pp. 102-05.

> Like other artists and writers of the Symbolist generation, Kandinsky sought for forms that would be suggestive of "the higher realities, the cosmic orders" rather than descriptive of the mundane physical world.[11]

Ringbom and Long point to the sources of Kandinsky's spirituality in connection with explaining his abstract art. But that is not enough. The question of why Kandinsky chooses this type of abstraction for his spiritual work and not, for example, the abstraction of the late work of Newman and Rothko is thus only partially answered. In this chapter I will discuss the question of how abstraction is an expression of a certain spirituality in Kandinsky's work. I will show that his work displays a spirituality of inwardness. Kandinsky's spiritual vision is different from that of Newman and Rothko. My hypothesis is that this difference in spirituality, in addition to non-spiritual factors, clarifies his choice for a certain type of abstraction. Spiritually speaking, Kandinsky is closer to Mondrian. The spirituality of theosophy is an important factor in the latter's abstraction as well.

I will proceed as follows. In the first section, we will see how Kandinsky's work is intended to evoke the inner sound of things. In the second, I will outline the spiritual factor in the early development of his veiled-figurative abstraction. In the third section, we will discuss his movement, in the 1920s, from this veiled-figurative abstraction to geometric abstraction and, after 1933, to biomorphic abstraction. We will look at the question if the later Kandinsky's geometric and biomorphic abstraction have a spiritual character. I will, in the fourth section, specify the nature of the spirituality of Kandinsky's work more closely as the spirituality of inwardness, using the heuristic model developed in the previous chapter. At the same time, I will also point to the problem of the communicability of his work. Here, in this fourth section, I will look at the interpretation of the French phenomenologist Michel Henry, who sees a surprising parallel between Kandinsky's esotericism and his own phenomenology.

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[10] R-C.W. Long, *The Development of an Abstract Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. VIII-IX.

[11] R-C.W. Long, "Expressionism, Abstraction, and the Search for Utopia in Germany," in: Tuchman *et al.*, *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 202.

"Expressive" Art: The Inner Sound

The religious character of Kandinsky's work does not consist primarily in a recognizable presentation of religious themes. From 1910-1913 he did use Christian themes in a figurative way, such as the apocalypse with the motif of the four horsemen, angels with trumpets, and the resurrection of the dead. Although it requires a certain effort, one can recognize figures of people, horses, and trumpets in paintings like *Angel of the Last Judgment* (1911) and *All Saints Day I* (c. 1911). In other works from the same period, the figuration is even more veiled. This veiled-figurative abstraction is a good example of what Tillich meant by religious art. "Expressivity" comes to the fore in Kandinsky's early abstract works in which the style serves the *Gehalt*, the deeper spiritual meaning. According to Kandinsky, the artist has to touch the soul of the viewer through the colour and form of his work. Objects should not be reproduced with precision; they are allusions to "true" reality. Before I take up his veiled-figurative abstraction, I will first look at what that "true" reality is, in Kandinsky's view, i.e. the inner sound of things.

Kandinsky attempts to depict the mystical worldview he writes about in his works on the theory of art. The human individual, the world, and the cosmos consist of two elements: an inner and outer side. Kandinsky applies this distinction to the artist, his work, and the public. The inner element is the emotion in the soul of the artist who can produce a corresponding emotion in someone else. One can think here of the tone of a musical instrument that can evoke an analogous tone in another instrument. The work of art is the artist's means of conveying the vibration in his own soul to someone else. It is suited for that because, as stated above, it has an inner and an outer element. Its material form is the external element of the work of art, whereas the internal element has to do with the content, the inner sound.[12]

Kandinsky's theory of the inner sound belongs to a number of related mystical and occult views that come to the fore in one way or another in him as well as in French, Dutch, and Russian Symbolists and other painters since 1860. These painters took up the following themes: the universe as a living substance; matter and spirit as one, in which priority is given to the spirit (viewed by Kandinsky as the *inner sound*); all things develop *dialectically*, i.e. the universe contains opposites (sometimes viewed as male/female, light/dark, vertical/horizontal, positive/negative); everything *corresponds* to everything else in a unversal analogy; the things above correspond to the things below; *imagination* translates true reality; *self-development* comes through enlightenment, by chance or through meditation.[13]

Also, depending on which esoteric sources they used, artists gave their own depiction of these themes. I will refer briefly to Kandinsky's view of development and that of correspondence. He borrows the theme of development primarily from Joachim of Fiore's three-stage doctrine of Father, Son, and Spirit. Kandinsky directed all his attention to the coming age of the Spirit, the spiritual age. With respect to *correspondence*, Kandinsky points to synesthesia, the correspondence between sounds and colours. He himself had once seen the colours of the sounds when listening to Wagner's *Lohengrin*.[14] We will see how the later Kandinsky made use of the distinction between "above" and "below" in his geometric abstraction, and also points to correspondence between forms and colours (cf. below, pp. 68-74). His view of the inner sound that pervades humankind, the world, and the cosmos is also a matter of correspondence and also entails that the universe is a living substance.

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[12] W. Kandinsky, "Content and Form," (1910-1911), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, p. 87; W. Kandinsky, "The Battle for Art," (1911), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, p. 106; W. Kandinsky, "Painting as Pure Art," (1913), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, p. 349.

[13] M. Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art," in: Tuchman *et al.*, *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 19.

[14] W. Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," (1913), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, pp. 363-64.

The *inner sound* or *vibration* is the dominant theme in Kandinsky. A work of art should be of such quality that the form affects the soul and, through the form, evokes the content, the spirit, the inner sound.[15] For this, he refers to theosophy and also to the Symbolist artist Maurice Maeterlinck.[16] In addition to a direct meaning—the reference to an object—the word also has an inner meaning. If the object is not visible and only its name is mentioned, this can evoke the dematerialized object, that which calls up a vibration in one's heart.

> The green or yellow or red tree as it stands in the meadow is merely a material occurrence, an accidental materialization of the form of that tree we feel within ourselves when we hear the word *tree.*[17]

Children still give evidence of the inner sound of objects in their drawings: they have not yet reduced objects to useful tools.[18] Arnold Schönberg's music also reflects this inner sound. "Schoenberg's music leads us into a new realm where musical experiences are no longer acoustic, but purely spiritual."[19] In *Der Blaue Reiter* (1912) Kandinsky writes what is quoted at the beginning of this chapter: "The world sounds. It is a cosmos of spiritually affective beings. Thus, dead matter is living spirit." The inner sound is the inner vibration of things. He borrows this from the theosophy of Annie Besant and Charles. W. Leadbeater and from the anthroposophy of Rudolph Steiner. This notion exists in the context of the mystical tradition of Jakob Böhme and Romanticism with its view of the universal vibration caused by the vibration between two polar forces.[20]

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[15] Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," p. 239.

[16] For this and what follows see Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, pp. 146-47, "On the Question of Form," pp. 158-59.

[17] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 147.

[18] Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," pp. 251-52.

[19] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 149. J.E. Bowlt refers to P.D. Ouspensky for the rhythm of the "incalculable, musical time … the musical wave effusing from the global orchestra" and sees an affinity with Kandinsky's notion of an inner sound (cf. J.E. Bowlt, "Esoteric Culture and Russian Society," in: M. Tuchman *et al.*, *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 170). For Kandinsky and Schönberg, see Da Costa Meyer *et al.* (eds.), *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider* (London: Scala Publishers, 2003).

This vision of an all-pervasive cosmic vibration interprets the view of the divine as an incomprehensible spirit *and* as that which manifests itself in the materialized cosmos. There is a movement in the cosmos because of its being divided into two. The cosmos is developed as a divine body in a dynamic vibration between polar opposites. Under Böhme's influence, F.W.J. Schelling describes the "universal heartbeat" as the dynamic oscillation between two polar opposites. This vibration is the expression of divine energy. For access to the source of this energy, one needs to move from the material to the immaterial domain. Kandinsky translated this vision years later in 1935 as follows:

> This experience of the "hidden soul" in all the things, seen either by the unaided eye or through microscopes or binoculars, is what I call the "internal eye". This eye penetrates the hard shell, the external "form" goes deep into the object and lets us feel with all our sense its internal "pulse".... The "dead" material trembles. And in addition, the internal "voice" of simple objects sounds not alone but in harmony —"the music of the spheres."[21]

Lady in Moscow and *Black Spot I*

I will give an example here of how Kandinsky depicts this inner vibration in the painting *Lady in Moscow* (1912) (fig. 9)[22] and the more abstract painting *Black Spot I* (1912) (fig. 10).[23] Both betray the direct influence of *Thought-Forms* (1901) by Besant and Leadbeater and of Steiner's adaptation of the latter. Thoughts and emotions develop separate colour patterns and forms in someone's aura that are visible to the clairvoyant person. Forms become less closed and more refined as the tempo of the activity of the spiritual essence increases. Every thought or emotion is characterized by a certain speed of the vibration, which, in turn, interacts with a certain form or colour. If the vibration is strong enough, the thought-form can even detach itself from its aura and become an entity able to move about freely in space. This theosophical view can be found portrayed in *Lady in Moscow* as follows.

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[20] H. Watts, "Arp, Kandinsky and the Legacy of Jakob Böhme," in: Tuchman *et al.*, *The Spiritual in Art*, pp. 239-55.

[21] Kandinsky, "Two Directions," (1935), *Complete Writings*, p. 779.

[22] Oil on canvas, 109 x 109 cm.

[23] Oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm.

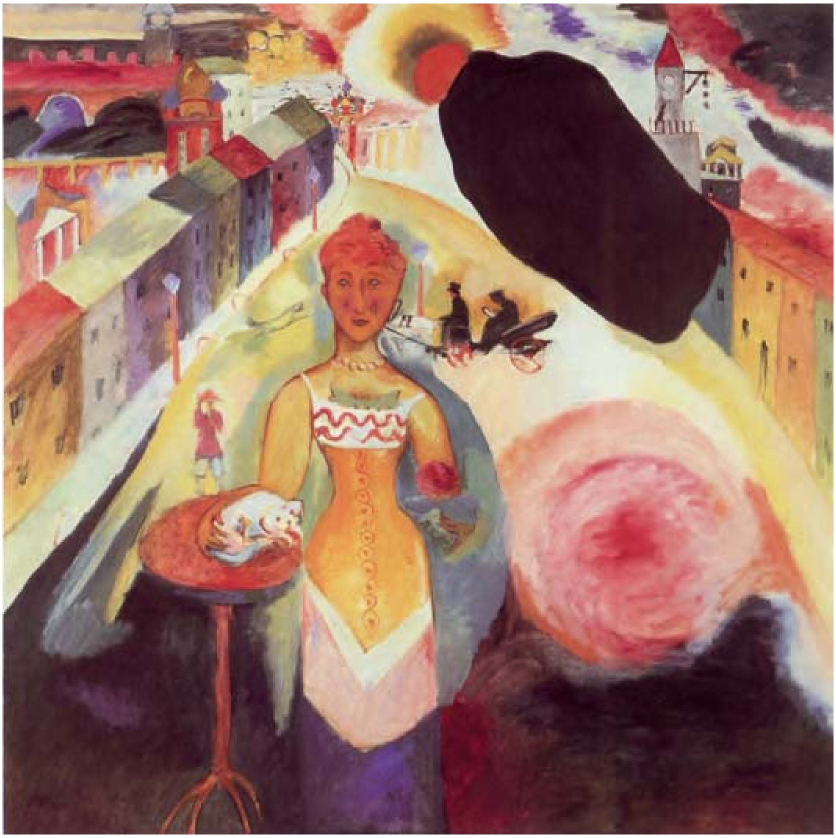

Fig. 9. Wassily Kandinsky, *Lady in Moscow* (1912)

A woman stands facing the viewer, in the streets of Moscow with a small table next to her on which a lapdog is lying. In her left hand she is holding a rose, and, behind her, a coach is riding down the street. The pure light rose red, cloud-like aura next to her expresses her selfless love. But around her hovers a grey, greenish blue cloud-like form: her health aura. According to Leadbeater, human beings have a health aura surrounding them that is to absorb the energy of the sun. Given the dark colour of her health aura, it is clear that some catastrophe is imminent. A pitch-black cloud is hanging above her and the whole city, depicting an ominous thought-form that obscures the sun, the giver of life and health. Will this woman's health be affected?

We see here an example of a *parallel representation*, the view that actions and thoughts on the physical level (the woman in a Moscow street) have a parallel on a higher spiritual level. This painting has to do with a parallel representation of a material world with an influx from the spiritual sphere (auras and thought-forms).[24] In the more abstract painting *Black Spot I*, the reverse is the case. The spiritual sphere is central and the references to the material world of buildings, houses, people, and the coach are scarcely figurative any more. The tragic comes to the fore through the colours and form constructions. The meaning is the same: the opposite of light and dark: the dark that threatens the light, the struggle between good and evil. The black shape moves, namely, toward the source of the light in top right corner of the painting. In Kandinsky, abstraction expresses spiritual reality. He writes about this shift from a more realistic painting such as *Lady in Moscow* to the abstract work *Black Spot I:*

> In order "to understand" this kind of picture, the same emancipation is necessary as in the case of realism, i.e., it must here too become possible to hear the whole world just as it is, without objective interpretation. Here, those abstracted or abstract forms (lines, planes, patches, etc.) are not important in themselves, but rather for their inner sound, their life. Just as in the case of realism, it is not the object itself,

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[24] S. Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers," in: Tuchman *et al.*, *The Spiritual in Art*, pp. 139-43.

> nor its external shell, but its inner sound, its life that are important.[25]

The later Kandinsky devotes all his attention to lines, surfaces, and shapes (on which he already writes in this quote from 1912) in his work *Point and Line to Plane* (1926)—and with a view to their inner sound, as we will see below (pp. 64-75). He needed years to develop the appropriate visual language. The move from the figurative *Lady in Moscow* to the veiled-figurative abstract work *Black Spot I* was already a first step.

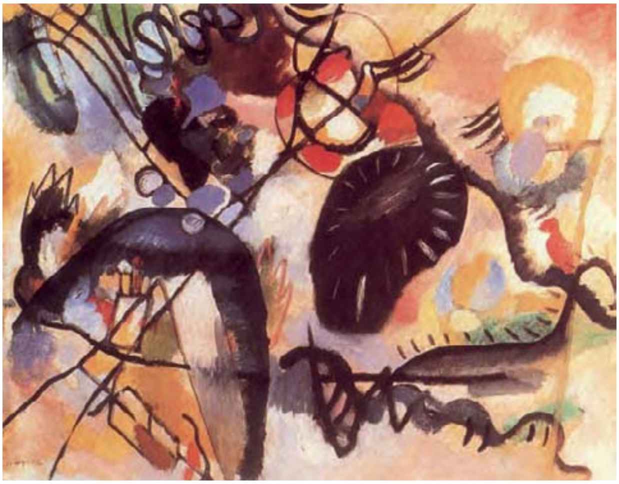

Fig. 10. Wassily Kandinsky, *Black Spot I* (1912)

Veiled-Figurative Abstraction

Kandinsky did not think the public was ready enough at this time (1911) to see things according to their inner nature. He held that the current art public was too focused on representation, on the pure imitation of nature. The "seekers of God" also get no further than the external form of a work of art by Giotto or Raphael. "The spectator of today is, however, rarely capable of perceiving such vibrations."[26] He placed his spiritual view of art in the context of a philosophy of history. In the years leading up to World War I, he saw a clash between good and evil, between spirituality and materialism, between spirit and matter. The materialistic worldview was falling into decline, which led to emptiness for many. For some, like himself, however, it was also a time of the premonition of the "path to the Truth."[27] By that he meant the future turning point, the disappearance of materialism and of positivism in science and the dawning of the age of spirituality. He constructed his abstract art, with its accent on the inner sound, precisely in service to this age of the Spirit he was expecting.[28] He saw abstract art as the completion of history, the "third Revelation." That is why, as we stated above, he follows Joachim of Fiore and G.E. Lessing in the idea of three stages of history and speaks about the age of the Spirit. The artists are the forerunners of this age.

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[25] Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," p. 244.

[26] For this and what follows see Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 129; Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," pp. 238-39.

Against the background sketched here, Kandinsky noted that abstraction as a pure composition of colour and form cannot be achieved. He wrote:

> If, even today, we were to begin to dissolve completely the tie that binds us to nature, to direct our energies toward forcible emancipation and content ourselves exclusively with the combination of pure color and independent form, we would create works having the appearance of geometrical ornament, which would—to put it crudely—be like a tie or a carpet. Beauty of color and form (despite the assertions of the pure aesthetes or naturalists, whose principle aim is "beauty"), is not a sufficient aim of art. Precisely because of the elementary state of state of our painting today, we are as yet scarcely able to derive inner experience from composition with wholly emancipated forms and colors.[29]

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[27] Kandinsky, "Whither the 'New' Art?" p. 103.

[28] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," pp. 376-77; Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 136; Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos*, p. 24.

[29] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 197. For more on art and nature see *On the Spiritual in Art*, pp. 207-09 and *Point and Line to Plane* (1926), pp. 625-32.

Kandinsky himself did not view the choice between forms derived from nature or a pure colour and form composition as a dilemma. He noted repeatedly that it did not matter if one chose one's starting point for form in nature, as Paul Cézanne and Franz Marc did, or in abstraction.[30] Each thing, each object has an inner sound that the painter can evoke. It is not the question of form that is the most important but the *Gehalt* (to use Tillich's term), that which the form is intended to evoke, i.e. the inner sound of things.

Abstraction was indeed the goal for him, as he wrote a few years later in his 1913 autobiography. He related an experience he had when he returned one day with his paintbox to his studio towards evening.[31] He saw an indescribably beautiful painting with an inner glow, consisting only of colours and forms whose content was incomprehensible. It turned out to be a painting he himself had done that was lying on its side against the wall. The next day he attempted during to repeat the impression the painting had made on him, but he saw only objects without the glow they had received in the twilight: "Now I could see clearly that objects harmed my pictures." He then asks: "What is to replace the object?" It could not be the ornament as used in Art Nouveau; it could only the pictorial form "in pure abstract terms," referring here to forms that emerge from the artist as artist. What kind of images arise from him spontaneously? One might think that Kandinsky is talking here about his later geometric or biomorphic abstraction. But he also states that this has to do with images he was using in 1913, well before the time he began to use geometric or biomorphic abstraction.[32] For that reason, he could be referring here to his veiled-figurative abstraction, to images that he himself processed in his work, i.e. images that he did indeed take from nature (horses, people, trees, hills) or from culture (cities, houses, boats, and trumpets) but rendered abstractly. In *Black Spot I*, for example, one can detect a coach, a house or church, and a sun-like spot. He used such images until the 1920s, and only then did he begin to turn to geometric abstraction. He processed these images using the method of hidden construction, in order, ultimately, to dissolve their form as images. This process is similar to what the mystic does who views sensorily perceptible images as obstructing the inner view.[33]

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[30] E.g., Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, pp. 169-75.

[31] For this and what follows see Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/ Three Pictures," pp. 369-70.

[32] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," pp. 370, 380; cf. also the text in note 53 by the editors in Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, p. 892.

Hidden Construction

G. Boehm places Kandinsky's abstraction within the broad field of the development of painting, pointing to the iconoclasm that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century. We already discussed that above in connection with the blurring of the image (cf. above, pp. 8-14). The traditional genres (history, portraiture, landscape, still lifes, and genre) that determined to a large degree what a painting had to look like were no longer taken for granted after the representation crisis in the 19th century. One of the means for arriving at a whole new visual language was the internal negation, the weakening or erasing of differences. Kandinsky, Malevich, Rainer, and others were part of this iconoclasm.[34] Originally, the term iconoclasm had a religious background and referred to God's commandment against making images (Exodus 20:4), as thematized in the story of Moses' conflict with Aaron about the golden calf (Exodus 32). This original religious commandment acquired a function in the development of the image in 20th-century painting.

Boehm points here to the development of the image in a technical sense in painting from figuration to abstraction at the beginning of the 20th century. Kandinsky attempts to transform figurative depictions of the Flood and the Last Judgement into abstract images through a process of chaotization, the disappearance of order, and an increase in intensity. The memory of a visible world like a landscape fades, allowing a new abstract work

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[33] Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible," p. 132.

[34] G. Boehm, *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen. Die Macht des Zeichens* (Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2010), pp. 60-67.

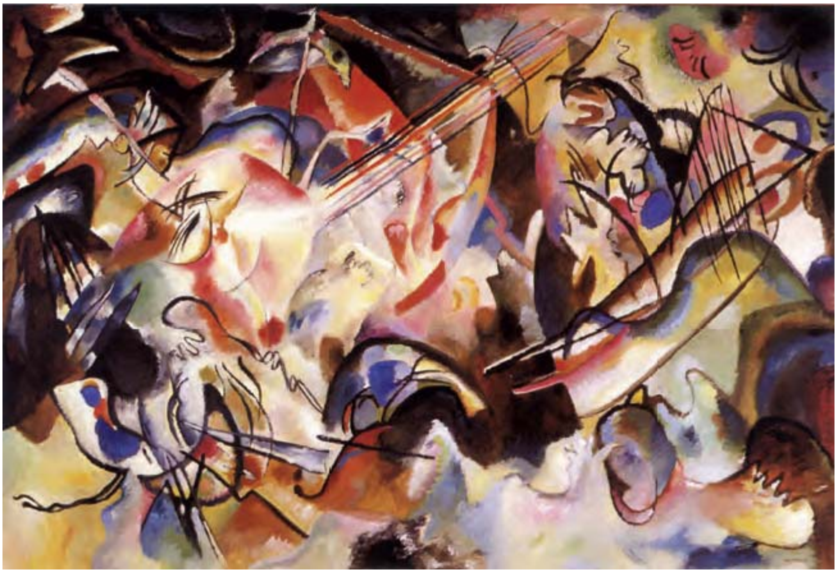

Fig. 11. Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition 6* (1913)

like *Composition 6* (fig. 11) to emerge.[35] Kandinsky's very first confrontation with Claude Monet's *Haystacks* is important here. Kandinsky was initially only acquainted with realistic art, but he was struck by this painting at an exhibition of French Impressionists in 1896. He did not recognize it as the depiction of a haystack—an experience he found painful. He thought that Monet had painted so imprecisely and in such an unclear way that the object in the painting was missing. It was a memory that stayed with him, struck as he was by the unsuspected power of the palette. He came to understand that objects were no longer an essential element in painting.[36] *Haystacks* shows, Boehm remarks, a measure of indeterminacy that catches one's attention primarily if one looks at the separate elements of ground, air, and the figure of the haystack itself. The extensive use of insignificant colour contrasts evokes indeterminacy. What one sees lies between chaos and the world of the familiar.

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[35] Oil on canvas, 195 x 300 cm.

[36] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," p. 363. It is unclear which one of Monet's *Haystacks* series he saw (editor's note, *Complete Writings*, pp. 888-89).

Observation or listening that is centred on something specific and brings it into focus gives way here to a non-thematic observation or listening. It is similar to hearing the murmur of the sea on the beach: we do not hear a separate sound but a totality of sounds that together make up the murmur of the sea.[37]

Boehm's reference to indeterminacy in the transformation of images and the iconoclastic tendency in painting is clarifying, but it should be supplemented by looking at Kandinsky's spiritual motief in transforming images. He explains the veiling of images in *On the Spiritual in Art* as follows. When looking at an abstract painting we should pay attention to three elements: the effect of the colour of the object, the effect of its form, and the effect of the object itself independent of colour and form.[38] Each object, whether shaped by the human hand or by nature, is an entity with its own life, and there is an effect that flows from that. Discussing a rhomboid composition, he remarks that an object must be found that fits better as such with the inner sound of the abstract, either as consonance or as dissonance. The choice of object in general should depend only on the principle of internal necessity.[39]

What is the internal necessity to which Kandinsky repeatedly appeals? For that he points to the feeling of the artist. The choice of object is thus a matter of the artist's intuition. Whether it now concerns transposed form or a composition using pure abstract forms, "the only judge, guide, and arbitrator should be one's feelings."[40] This is not only subjective; it is also objective. It always concerns the internal necessity, which, for the artist, entails giving expression to the uniqueness of art in general, "the pure, the eternally artistic." This means that art should constantly image the inner sound of things. Thus, "a 'crudely' carved column from an Indian temple [is] just as much animated by the same soul as any living 'modern' work."[41] But this does not change the fact that, as a creative human being, every artist is charged with bringing to expression his own uniqueness. The artist should not imitate nature but should allow what he wants to paint to emerge from within himself. This does not, in my view, negate the image from nature, for the artist also has to evoke the inner sound of natural objects. As stated above, Kandinsky does not even have any objection to the figurative painting of Cézanne or Marc. He thus brings the subjective and the objective in art together: the one is not present without the other.

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[37] Boehm, *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen*, pp. 205-07 (with Cézanne as the primary example).

[38] For this and what follows see Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, pp. 168-73.

[39] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 169.

[40] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 169.

Kandinsky himself preferred abstraction. He entered abstract art through veiling the images or, better, combining "the revealed and the hidden."[42] A clearly emerging "geometric" construction was, to be sure, not present in his art at this time (1913).[43] He chose hidden construction, "the hidden type that emerges unnoticed from the picture and thus is less suited to the eye than to the soul."[44] To hide means placing objects where they are not expected, obliterating their contours with colours that do not fit, or simplifying objects by only drawing a vague outline. He describes it thus:

> This hidden construction can consist of forms thrown apparently by chance on the canvas, forms that, again apparently, do not exist in any relationship with each other at all: here the external absence of this relationship is inner presence.[45]

This method of hidden construction can be found in a number of his paintings, as a comparison of the study for *Church in Murnau II* (1910) with *Church in Murnau I* (1910) shows. In the former, the landscape elements are placed after one another, the houses and church are clearly visible, painted as areas with clear contours. In the latter, figurative elements dissolve into clouds of colour, whereby the tower remains the most recognizable. If we look at a different version, *Landscape with Red Spots I* (1913), then the colour appears to float even more independently of the objects. The red spot, vague and diffuse in form, is placed at the centre of the painting above the church roof.

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[41] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 173.

[42] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 170.

[43] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," p. 380.

[44] For this and what follows see Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 209.

[45] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 209.

Composition 6

Kandinsky's spiritual motivation for moving toward abstract art was the inner sound of things. His road to abstraction seems to have been almost mystical, according to his comments on *Composition 6* (1913).[46] This work originated in a (now lost) stained-glass painting with the objective forms of the ark, nudes, animals, palm trees, lightning, and rain. After completing it, Kandinsky wanted to make a so-called "Composition" from it. Just as the mystic wants to move away from sensory images that stand in the way of the mystical vision, so Kandinsky wrestled with the question of how he could dissolve the "physical forms." He knew about Rudolf Steiner's distinction in mysticism, as is evident from his notes on Steiner's essays in his *Lucifer Gnosis*.[47] Steiner distinguished mystical knowledge from sensory knowledge. In the imagination as a form of inner knowledge, forms can be imagined separate from sensory objects. For this ascent to the higher, imagined world, inspiration and intuition are necessary.[48] This may have played a role in Kandinsky's description of how *Composition 6* originated. It was only with difficulty that Kandinsky could free himself from the "physical forms," and he sought the explanation for that in that he was guided more by the external impression of the word "deluge" and not by its inner sound. "I was not guided by its inner sound but by the external impression."[49] The reader should recall here the inner/outer distinction that, according to Kandinsky, also obtains for words. Apart from a direct, external meaning (the reference to an object such as the flood narrative), the word also has an inner meaning, its inner sound, the dematerialized object that evokes a vibration. When he looked at the stained-glass painting later, he was struck by the colour, the compositional element, the linear form without reference to the object. Through a vibration in his soul, the sound produced pure pictorial images that allowed him to paint *Composition 6*.[50] Here, like a mystic, Kandinsky struggles to free himself from "material forms" and invokes formless images via the process of mystical knowledge as described by Steiner.

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[46] For this and what follows see Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/ Three Pictures," pp. 385-88. See also J. Golding, *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), pp. 99-102; Long, *The Development of an Abstract Style*, pp. 93-97.

[47] Ringbom, "Die Steiner-Annotationen Kandinskys," p. 103.

[48] According to Kandinsky's note; see note 45.

Composition 6 should be compared with the preliminary study *Improvisation Deluge* (1913). In connection with this, I should say that, in comparison with an "improvisation" and an "impression," a "composition"emphasizes precisely the inner side of the work of art. "Impressions" are works that express the external world, like the lost stained-glass painting that was the initial impetus for *Compositon 6*, and, for example, *Impression III (Concert)* (1911), which was painted in reference to a concert by Arnold Schönberg in Munich. "Improvisations" are expressions of events with an inner character, whereas "compositions" are "expressions of feelings that have been forming within [one] in a similar way (but over a long period of time)."[51] *Improvisation Deluge* is a maelstrom of colours. Rays of white light shoot from the above right to the centre of the painting. The title helps give the impression of a catastrophe taking place. In the preliminary study and in *Composition 6* we see two centres: on the left the fragile, rose, sometimes flesh-coloured, somewhat blurred centre with weak, vague lines in the middle and on the right the unfinished red-blue somewhat discordant area with somewhat ominous, powerful, and very accurate lines. We also see in *Composition 6*, although veiled, a large semi-circular boat on the left with three oars. Above it is what may be an angel blowing on a trumpet, and in the centre is the body of a fish.[52] The white rays of light from above to the centre are now black (a sign of rain?). Between both centres on the right and left is also a centre where the flesh colour and the white seem to seethe. It looks, Kandinsky writes, like a Russian steambath. A man is standing somewhere in the steam: according to Kandinsky, this sense of "somewhere" determines the inner sound of the painting.

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[49] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," p. 385.

[50] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," p. 386.

[51] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 218.

Composition 6 is a visionary apocalyptic painting that evokes the destruction and rebirth of the world. The painting, which is primarily black on the left has a light colour on the right, which points to a view of the new world. According to Kandinsky, one should no longer refer to "physical forms," like the angel with the trumpet and the boat from the flood narrative. *Here the form is an expression of the content*. The sensory image has been dissolved; the formless form expresses the content of the composition, the inner sound that is the same as the spirit.[53] *"The world sounds. It is a cosmos of spiritually affective beings. Thus, dead matter is living spirit."*

Geometric and Biomorphic Abstraction

The removal of the object from the painting makes it difficult for one to experience internal, pure pictorial forms. Kandinsky wrote in 1913 that the viewer has to be brought to that perception. That requires a new atmosphere for which he wants to create the possibilities:

> In this atmosphere, although much, much later *pure art* will be formed, an art that today hovers before our eyes with

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[52] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," p. 387. H. Friedel and A. Hoberg point to an angel and fish that, in my view, are difficult to detect. Cf. H. Friedel and A. Hoberg, *The Blue Rider in the Lenbachhaus, Munich* (Munich/New York: Prestel, 2000) (Kandinksy, no. 30 *Improvisation Deluge*).

[53] Kandinsky, "On the Question of Form," pp. 238-40.

> indescribable allure, in dreams that slip between our fingers.[54]

Looking back from the point of view of Kandinsky's later development, this future pure abstract art proved to be the geometric abstraction of his Bauhaus period (1922-1933) and the biomorphic abstraction of his time in Paris (1933-1944).

The groundwork for his change in style was laid during Kandinsky's stay in Russia (1915-1921), where he fled via Switzerland because of World War I. The often sharply coloured veiled-figurative abstract painting from his time in Munich (1894-1914) slowly gave way to geometric abstraction of points, lines, circles, triangles, etc. Kandinsky could not see eye to eye with members of the Russian avant-garde who criticized his expressionistic, amorphous areas and his appeal to intuition.[55] Nevertheless, there was mutual influence. A Russian edition of *On the Spiritual in Art* was published, and Kandinsky put painters like Malevich on the road to abstraction. In Kandinsky's *Red Spot II* (1921) we see a red spot as a deliberate immense power within a trapezium whose corners have been cut off. The trapezium symbolizes Malevich's suprematism. *Red Spot II* also contains circles for the first time in Kandinsky's art. The influence of Rodchenko's use of circles, points, and linear groups can be seen here.[56] Kandinsky's works at this time are very different from those of members of the Russian avant-garde such as Tatlin, Rodchenko, or Malevich. Poling points out that Kandinsky's new style continues to be recognizable as his own because he put the elements he took from others in his *own* visual language. This language is recognizable in both the early and later Kandinsky. Just as *Composition 8*, for example, shows, this language is characterized by a plurality of forms and alternation and often has something of an atmospheric space, an abstract reference to the landscape and its singular forms.[57] I will return to this painting below.

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[54] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," p. 380 (italics mine); see also note 32.

[55] Kandinsky, "Interview with Charles-André Julien," (1921), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, pp. 475-77.

[56] C.V. Poling, *Kandinsky: Russian and Bauhaus Years 1915-1933*, Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1983), p. 33.

I would like to explore the question if Kandinsky retained the spiritual character of his work as, from the 1920s on, figurative abstraction gradually gave way to geometric and later biomorphic abstraction. In itself, geometric abstraction does not have to be spiritual. It was especially popular after World War I because it gave expression to a universal language and fit well into the climate of the Russian avant-garde and later that of the Bauhaus. Kandinsky's theoretical writings at the time came to place more emphasis on objective theories concerning the elements of art. His second important work, *Point and Line to Plane* (1926), came out when he was working at the Bauhaus and presented analyses of the point, line, and plane, and also investigated the effect of colours in connection with those analyses. The more objective and academic tendency in Kandinsky was apparent not only in his geometric abstraction but also in his use of examples from the sciences and technology in his theorectical work.

I will show how Kandinsky's geometric and later biomorphic abstraction are new expressions of the same spirituality that can also be detected in his earlier period. I will look at the example of *Composition 8* (1923), which he himself considered a high point in the post-war period.[58] By way of introduction, I will first say something about the spiritual character of his later theory of the elements of art.[59]

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[57] Poling, *Kandinsky*, p. 36 (pp. 13-36).

[58] W. Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: M. Dumont Schauberg, 1961), p. 188.

[59] For his Russian and Bauhaus periods see Poling, *Kandinsky* and Long, "Expressionism, Abstraction, and the Search for Utopia," pp. 208-15, and for his Parisian period see H. Watts, "Arp, Kandinsky," pp. 241-54.

Kandinsky's Later Theory on Spirituality in Art

During World War I, Kandinsky continued to speak about a new age of spiritual awakening. After having sketched a painting on spring, he continues:

> The old picture of the new spring is our time. The time of awakening, resolution, regeneration, and the hurricane, the time of glowing vigor and wondrous power.… Our providential time is the time of the *great liberation*, liberation from the formal, from the superficial. The free individual … observes with wide-open eyes … listening to the voice of the living spirit which is hidden from the superficial.[60]

He subsequently refers to the distinction discussed above between the inner and outer elements and to the desire to replace the outer by the inner.[61] He reiterated that distinction ten years later in his *Point and Line to Plane*, referring to the spiritual purpose of art for which the distinction between inner and outer is important. He writes about that in a poetic fashion. One can experience the life of the street by, for example, viewing it from a window as a living whole that is entirely foreign to oneself. That is what we see, for example, in Kirchner's *Street, Dresden* (1908). Kirchner uses abstraction here to evoke alienation. The painting calls up fear and alienation through the mask-like faces of the women and the distorted area with its bleak orange-red colour. According to Kandinsky, the life of the street can be experienced in a very different way: internally, experiencing oneself as part of it. The heartbeat of street life is then one's own heartbeat. Just as the life of the street is experienced both internally and externally, so works of art can also be experienced in that way:

> The work of art is reflected on the surface of one's consciousness. It lies beyond and, once the stimulus has gone, vanishes from the surface without trace. Here, too, is a kind of glass pane, transparent, but hard and firm, which pre-

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[60] W. Kandinsky, "On the Artist," (1916), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, pp. 409-10.

[61] Kandinsky, "On the Artist," p. 411.

> cludes any direct, inner contact. And here, too, exists the possibility of entering into the work of art, involving oneself actively in it, and experiencing its pulsations with all one's senses.[62]

Kandinsky also remarks that, in addition to those who only know the material side of life, there are also those who recognize the spiritual in distinction from the material.[63] Here too, he is talking about the inner sound of the work, which he now calls the *inner pulsation* of the work.[64] The purpose of his theoretical research is to discover the vibration of life, the systematic nature of life.[65] Each phenomenon has an expression of its inner being, whether it be "a thunderstorm, J.S. Bach, fear, a cosmic event, Raphaël, toothache …."[66] For Kandinsky, the study of art history leads in the end to the "union" of the "human" and the "divine."[67]

Geometric Abstraction: *Composition 8*

Before we look at the work *Composition 8* with its various triangles, circles with rings or halos surrounding them, broad lines, etc., I will first say something about Kandinsky's view of geometric forms. They are more than simply geometric forms: they have human-existential qualities and their own sounds. He writes about the abstract form in *On the Spiritual in Art*:

> form itself, even if completely abstract, resembling geometrical form, has its own inner sound, is a spiritual being possessing qualities that are identical with that form. A triangle

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[62] W. Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, p. 532.

[63] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, pp. 548; 670-71.

[64] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 533.

[65] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 672.

[66] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 619.

[67] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 537; "Foreword to the Catalogue of the First International Art Exhibition, Düsseldorf," (1922), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, 478-79; "A New Naturalism," (1922), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, pp. 480-82.

> … is one such a being, with its own particular spiritual perfume.[68]

Years later, he elaborated on that in *Point and Line to Plane* and discussed the point, line, and plane, and the effect of colour in combination with them. The point is the primary element, the line the result of the point in movement, whereas the plane is the result of the line. Each element has its own sound.

Linguistically, the *point* has become an external sign for a "period" through which its inner sound has become lost. In geometry, the point is an invisible entity: it is nothing with respect to external perception, but it does have hidden "human" qualities and is associated with "utmost conciseness," i.e. the greatest, although eloquent reserve. The point is the "the ultimate and most singular combination of silence and speech."[69] Kandinsky attempts to bring out the inner aspect of the point, thus disturbing human lives. The tension adhering to the point is its concentric power by which it refuses to take up space and movement into itself.[70]

Unlike the point, the *line* expresses movement. That is why life with its movement and power can be expressed well in a line. Straight, curved, horizontal, and vertical lines always express a certain feeling. Kandinsky thus considers the straight line lyrical and clashing/conflicting lines tragic.[71]

A *plane* can assume all kinds of forms, such as a square or a triangle. Here as well Kandinsky points to the human-existential side. Each living being stands in a necessary relationship to "above"/"heaven" and "below"/"earth," which can be applied on the canvas of the painting that is itself a living being. "Above" stands for a feeling of lightness, liberation, and freedom, and "below" for the opposite, i.e. gravity and bondage.[72]

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[68] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 163.

[69] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 538.

[70] Cf. the subtle analysis by Henry Michel, *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 46-49.

[71] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 583.

[72] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, pp. 639-40, 645.

In this way Kandinsky applied the views circulating in his time on the occult in his reflections on his art (cf. pp. 49-55 above).

The *circle*, which he began to use in his Russian period, gradually became more central. In a letter from 1930 to his biographer W. Grohmann, he calls the circle a connection with the cosmos. One reason the circle fascinates him is that it is the synthesis of the greatest contradictions. In a single form, it combines the concentric and eccentric in balance with each other. It points most clearly to the fourth dimension of the three primary forms.[73] The fourth dimension points to cosmic infinity and is one of the metaphors used by Malevich and other Russian artists for the awareness that is necessary for the perception of a new world.[74]

The later Kandinsky also continued his research into *colours*. An example of this can be found in his painting *Yellow-Red-Blue* discussed at the beginning of this chapter (cf. pp. 45-46 above). The title refers to the succession of colour as discussed in *Point and Line to Plane*.[75] There we find a diagram of the succession of the colours yellow, red, and blue. White and black are placed at the extremes of this spectrum: white is a symbol of birth and black a symbol of death. Like white and black, yellow and blue are also opposites. Yellow is an earthly colour, warm and moves (physically) toward the viewer, whereas blue, a heavenly colour, is cold, and moves (spiritually) away from the viewer and leads toward depth.[76] Kandinsky associates red with liveliness and nimbleness; it evokes an almost immense power.[77] *Yellow-Red-Blue* contains white in the circle above and black in the circle below. Further study of the circles, curved and wavy lines, rectangles, etc. should determine if it is a spiritual painting. In any case, the primary colours, supplemented with black and white seem to be pointing to that. If we see the thick black line as a spear and the winding line as the tail of a dragon, the painting would then be about the struggle between good and evil. That is a theme that came up earlier in *Lady in Moscow* and *Black Spot I* but is depicted in an entirely different way in *Composition 8*, as we will see.

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[73] Poling, *Kandinsky*, 54. See also W. Kandinsky, *The Psychology of the Productive Personality*, (1929), in: Kandinsky, *Complete Writings*, p. 740. See, e.g., *Blue Circle* (1922), *Circles within the Circle* (1923).

[74] Long, "Expressionism, Abstraction, and the Search for Utopia," p. 214.

[75] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, pp. 578-79.

[76] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 178; U. Becks-Malorny refers to Kandinsky's colour seminar at the Bauhaus: the three basic colours are distributed across the three basic forms: the triangle yellow (sharp colour and sharp form); the circle blue (tending toward depth in a round form); the square red (U. Becks-Malorny, *Kandinsky 1866-1944. De weg naar abstractie* [Cologne: Taschen, 2002], pp. 144, 154).

Composition 8

In *Composition 8* (fig. 12) we see a plurality of different forms: triangles, circles with rings or halos around them, wide lines, a trapezium, crooked lines, a rectangle, chessboard fragments.[78] The large triangle is light blue, filled in with circles in white. The canvas above is light, with a black circle on the left, a violet centre and a pink ring surrounding it, and a small light red circle against it. The painting suggests a landscape, even though the forms in the painting are geometric in nature. Two triangles point up, with the large circle above left and the smaller circles above right.

How should we interpret this painting? Kandinsky himself gives two clues in his theoretical work. The first is his distinction between a simple and a complex composition. It is undeniable that *Composition 8* is an example of a complex composition. Unlike a simple composition, which has a form that is immediately apparent to the eye, the complex composition consists of various forms that are "subordinated to an obvious or concealed principal form.” This principal form can be very hard to recognize externally, which causes the internal basis to receive a particularly powerful tone. That is why he calls the complex composition symphonic over against a simple composition, which he in turn calls melodic.[79] The other clue concerns the composition.

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[77] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 186.

[78] Oil on linen, 140 x 200 cm.

[79] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 215.

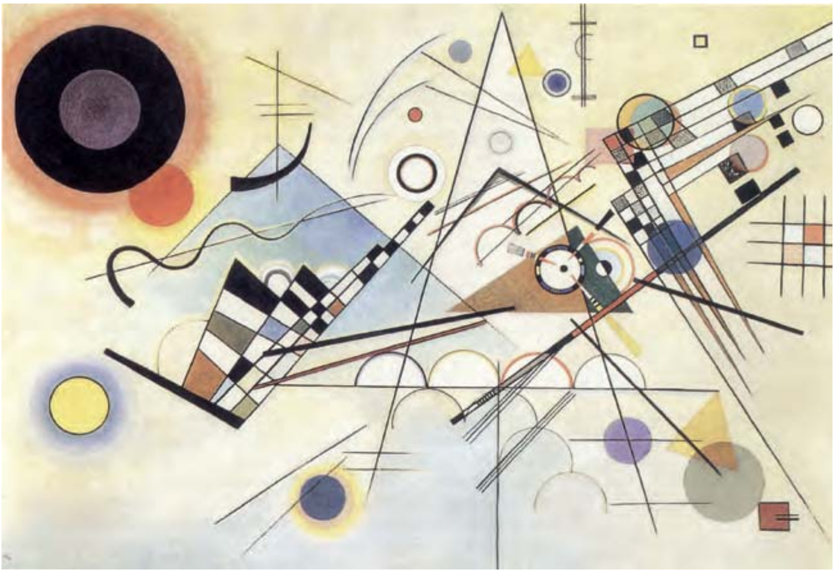

Fig. 12. Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition 8* (1923)

The elements and construction should, according to Kandinsky, be subordinate to the mysterious law of pulsation.[80] The composition is directed at invoking the vibration for the viewer by the powers and tensions of the elements. We detect the content of the work through paying attention to the composition, the internally organized whole of tensions between the elements, the circles, triangles, etc.[81]

The principal form of *Composition 8* lies in the polarity between circles and triangles. Kandinsky calls the circle and triangle the "most strongly contrasting plane figures."[82] The triangles in the painting are turned toward the top, which indicates stability and direction upward, whereas the circles can have an eccentric or concentric movement. For example, if we look at the two circles on the lower left, the one is yellow and the other blue. The yellow circle is eccentric and the blue concentric. Their different movements are subdued as a result of the rings around them having precisely the opposite colours: the yellow circle has a blue ring and the blue a yellow one. Aside from a tension between the circles and the triangles, there is thus also a tension between the blue and the yellow circles.

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[80] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 516.

[81] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 548.

[82] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, p. 600.

The greatest tension I see is that between the large light blue triangle pointing upward and the even sharper triangle in white, also pointing upward, on the one hand and the large black circle on the upper left with a violet centre on the other. In his courses at the Bauhaus, Kandinsky assigned his students exercises to discover which geometric forms express aggression, calm, and inner depth. These were the triangle, the square, and the circle, respectively.[83] But how is this to be applied to the play of oppositions in *Composition 8*?

The smaller blue circles suggest spiritual depth. Do the larger vertical light blue triangle and the white triangle represent aggression? That seems strange given their non-aggressive colour. But that changes if we view aggression as a struggle against evil. Both triangles are in tension with the black circle with a violet centre on the upper left. The struggle between good and evil is depicted abstractly in this way. The triangle and circle are, after all, as stated above, the "most strongly contrasting plane figures." Both the light blue triangle and the white one contrast with the black circle. In addition to the contrasts of yellow and blue, there is also the contrast between the black of the circle on the upper left and the off-white triangle and the other white circles. We read this in *On the Spiritual in Art* on black and white: black is "the nothing without potential, black sound internally like the dead nothing after extinguishing of the sun, like an eternal silence without future or hope."[84] In contrast, white has a mystical meaning. It refers to a world from which all colours as material properties and substances have disappeared:

> This world is so far above us that no sound from it can reach our ears. We hear alone a great silence that, represented in material terms, appears to us like an insurmountable,

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[83] Poling, *Kandinsky*, p. 54.

[84] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 185.

> cold indestructible wall, stretching away to *infinity*…. White … is a nothingness having the character of youth or, more exactly, the nothingness that exists before beginning, before birth. Perhaps the earth sounded thus in the white period of the ice age.[85]

Composition 8 depicts the struggle between good and evil and the desire for an inner, spiritual world. In the brown-blue triangle that converges somewhat with the off-white circle is a white circle with three arrows directed at a black point. We should recall that the circle is the synthesis of the greatest tensions. It combines, as stated above, the concentric and the eccentric, which keep each other in balance. When the unity of the oppositions is completed, the circle becomes a point, the point of indifference. The point is the unity of silence and speech.

In short, the geometry in his later paintings can also be interpreted spiritually. *Composition 8* is an example of this. We should not see the forms as merely geometric means but as pictorial means that have human-existential qualities and evoke an inner life. Kandinsky states that the contact of a sharp angle of a triangle with a circle has no less effect than God's finger touching Adam's in Michelangelo.[86]

Biomorphic Abstraction

Another new development in the spiritual character of Kandinsky's work is biomorphic abstraction. We will look at the example of *Environment* (1936).[87] Here organic images are borrowed from the original stages of animal development. This appears to be a break with his geometric abstraction and a return to forms from nature. In any case, he breaks with the trend of dematerialization and dissolution of images. The images do remain veiled here: there are no animals or plants to be seen here, simply their embryonic states.

Biomorphic abstraction is also rooted in esotericism, as H. Watts has shown. Just as life is sought in all its depths in geometric abstraction, so Kandinsky also, following Arp, makes use of the esoteric tradition in searching for the primordial forms of life. J.W. Goethe was already fascinated by the idea of a primordial plant from which all other plants developed. He expanded his speculation to include the primordial elements of clouds and seeds and considered granite to be the primordial stone. People were thus looking for the structural elements of nature that displayed manifestations of divine forces in the universe.[88] Kandinsky was also searching for spiritual reality in his biomorphic abstraction, but now he was looking for it in *nature*. Through the primordial forms, depicting the embryonic stage, the world still seemed incomplete but continually awaiting renewal.

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[85] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 185.

[86] Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, pp. 759-60.

[87] Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm (Grohmann, *Kandinsky*, p. 233).

The geometric and biomorphic abstraction of, respectively, *Composition 8* and *Environment* is spiritual in nature. Circles, triangles, etc. are more than geometric forms and are intended to invoke an inner, spiritual world. The biomorphic forms also point to the inner world. Both the early and late abstraction are motivated by Kandinsky's view of spirituality with its distinction between an inner and an outer element in the human being, the world, and the cosmos. In his biomorphic abstraction, this inner element is detected genealogically in the search for the primordial forms of life.

A Spirituality of Inwardness: Radical Immanence

In Kandinsky, art is spiritual bread, and therefore it is just as important that this art communicate its message to the viewer. But is his abstraction a suitable means for such communication? Or does one need to be an initiate in esotericism to understand such paintings? Before I take up this question, I first want to indicate what is specific about this spirituality.

As we saw, Kandinsky uses three forms of abstraction to evoke the inner, spiritual world in those who view his work. All three forms of abstraction are connected in one way or another with the observable world, either in veiled figures, geometric forms, or biomorphic figures. Kandinsky gives expression to the spiritual depth in his work in this way. The "how" of that depth emerges when we look at how his work displays the relationship between heaven and earth in distinction from other forms of spirituality. We will thus also be able to understand why he uses the forms of abstraction we discussed and does not turn to, for example, the abstraction of the later Newman and Rothko with their almost empty canvases. Spirituality is one of the factors influencing these artists in the choice for a certain form of the work. I will use the heuristic model of types of transcendence as follows to describe his spirituality more closely.

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[88] Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings," p. 31; Watts, "Arp, Kandinsky," pp. 242-44.

Radical Immanence

This spirituality does not search for the absolute, the spiritual world, outside mundane reality. Rather, both realities merge because of a process of development. Transcendence here is a matter of going beyond the material world as externality to the spiritual world as the inner element of things. Spiritual reality is reality as inwardness. I have called this type of "transcendence" *radical immanence*: the absolute is sought not outside but within earthly reality, in its inner core. This has to do with a spirituality of inwardness, just as Kandinsky indicated by the colour blue in combination with the circle. The blue points to spiritual depth and develops a concentric inward movement "like a snail disappearing into its shell."[89] Compared with the two other types of transcendence, immanent transcendence and radical transcendence, radical immanence has to do with a this-worldly transcendence: "here" and "beyond" are related to each other in this world, and human beings need to transcend the external, material aspect of things to the inner, spiritual side of the world. This spirituality is a variant of monism, of cosmological transcendence that views transcendence as a matter of going beyond to the inner world and thus to the cosmic order with which one desires to be one.

As an artist, Kandinsky wrestled with the problem of how to depict the inner world until he had the mystical experience of letting the images rise out of his inner being. Inspiration and intuition are necessary for this transcendence to the higher, imagined world. With the imagination as a form of inner knowledge, one could depict images apart from their forms. Transcendence here is thus going beyond the boundary of the external to the internal. Kandinsky's abstraction expresses radical immanence, a spirituality of inwardness. In that respect, there is an affinity with the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart.

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[89] Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, p. 179.

Eckhart also wants to dissolve outward images and detach the human being from created reality for the sake of the inner world of the soul. To do so, he also uses the internal/external distinction: the outer eye sees in images whereas the inner one is directed inward. What for Kandinsky is spiritual reality is, for Eckhart, the reality of God:

> The soul has two eyes: an inner and an outer eye. The inner eye of the soul is the one which perceives being and receives its own being directly from God: This is the activity which is particular to itself. The outer eye of the soul is that which is directed towards all creatures and which perceives them in the manner of an image and the function of a faculty. But they who are turned within themselves so that they know God according to their own taste and in their own being, are freed from all created things and are secure in themselves in a very fortress of truth.[90]

According to Eckhart, it is in one's inner being that one finds God, who has no image. One's inner being or the soul is the same as God.

Kandinsky's spirituality of inwardness differs from the spirituality expressed in the work of Newman and of Rothko that will be discussed in the following chapter. That difference is also expressed in another use of abstraction. I used Newman's work in chapter 1 (pp. 28-36) as an example of radical transcendence: his *Cathedra* evokes the image of a God who transcends the world, the Wholly Other who is sharply distinguished from this world. Newman expresses that by means of an almost entirely empty canvas. For Kandinsky, in contrast, spiritual reality is closely bound up with this reality because it is its inner side. In his early phase, this took the form of veiled-figuration because of the method of hidden construction. His later abstraction is not pure abstraction but displays abstract references to landscape or natural organisms.

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[90] Meister Eckhart, *Sermon 15, DW 10, W 66*. http:/historymedren.about.com/od/quotes/a/quote_eckhart.htm.

There is more similarity with the spirituality of Mondrian. Both were inspired by theosophy, and Mondrian's spirituality is one of inwardness as well. [91] In the previous chapter, I used his work as an example of radical immanence. Both artists depict themes like the distinction between the inner and outer, between spirit and matter, the cosmos as a living order, and vibration or dynamic as the basis of life. Both wanted to transcend the material world for its spiritual side. Both underwent a development from figuration to abstraction, and both discuss their abstraction in similar terms. The one uses the method of hidden construction, and the other speaks of destruction and reconstruction.

These similarities do not erase all differences in the expression of spirituality in their work. Kandinsky's use of geometric abstraction is different from Mondrian's Neoplasticism of horizontal and vertical lines. Blotkamp sees the difference in abstraction between them in that Kandinsky was looking for a system of signs without any reference to visible reality. Mondrian, on the other hand, abstracted from visible phenomena until he thought he had arrived at the essence of reality, the true reality behind the illusions that made up the visible world.[92] Blotkamp is wrong with respect to Kandinsky because the latter's intention was similar to what Blotkamp ascribes solely to Mondrian, i.e. to penetrate to true reality. Moreover, Kandinsky depicts the spiritual world through circles, triangles, etc. There are other factors that clarify the difference in working out the same type of spirituality.

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[91] Cheetham also points in his philosophical interpretation of Kandinsky to the similarity with Mondrian and shows the influence of Neo-Platonism, Hegel and others on Kandinsky's work. His philosophical interpretation confirms my view that transcendence in Kandinsky can be understood as radical immanence. Cf. M.A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentalist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), ch. 3. See also ch. 1, note 62 above.

[92] Cited in C. Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), p. 94.

First of all, there are differences of time and place. Mondrian's development was also influenced by Dutch artists like Van Toorop, Van der Leck, and Van Doesburg. Moreover, Mondrian, unlike Kandinsky, makes use of the Cubism that he became acquainted with in Paris. Furthermore, they emphasized different things in their related spiritualities. Kandinsky's work has an undeniably apocalyptic undertone and depicts the struggle between good and evil dramatically. Mondrian, however, does not deny the oppositions but does search for a (utopian) harmony. That is why in Kandinsky we see the jagged lines and open, amorphous planes whereas Mondrian prefers straight lines and rectilinear, limited spaces. Mondrian's *Composition with Yellow, Red, Blue, Black and Grey* (fig. 7; p. 41) should be compared with Kandinsky's *Yellow-Red-Blue* (fig. 8; p. 46).

As an example of the Mondrian's own expression of a similar spirituality, I will look at Mondrian's *Devotion* (1908), in comparison with Kandinsky's *Lady in Moscow* that we discussed above. *Devotion* shows a girl at prayer, looking upward while a flower hovers around her head.[93] The flower is an indication of an aura that is visible only to those who have been properly initiated. It depicts the eternal process of birth, life, decline, death, and regeneration.[94] The large vertical brushstrokes and the dark red hair of the girl are striking, whereas her face is light red. Mondrian points to the significance of colour and line in this painting:

> I wanted that girl to express a prayerful act … and, by giving that hair that sort of red, to tone down the material side of things, to suppress any thoughts about hair, costume, etc.

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[93] Oil on canvas, 94 x 61 cm.

[94] R.P. Welsh, "Mondrian and Theosophy," in: *Piet Mondrian 1872-1944*: *Centennial Exhibition* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1971), pp. 41-43.

> and to stress the spiritual. I believe that colour and line can do much toward this end.[95]

The unnatural colour of her hair emphasizes the spiritual aspect of the act of prayer. Kandinsky's *Lady in Moscow* is about the relationship to the spiritual world, also indicated by an aura.

Michel Henry: The Communicability of Art

Unlike conceptual art where it is the concept of the artist rather than the public that is central, Kandinsky holds that the work of art cannot exist without a public. The viewer must live in the painting. In his autobiography, he says that he was looking for the possibility of "letting the viewer *within the picture*, forcing him to become absorbed in the picture, forgetful of himself."[96] But can the viewer do that? The question that Kandinsky's abstract works raise is that of the extent to which their content can be communicated. Do we not first need an explanation like the one given above before we actually view the painting so that a certain arrangement of colour, form, and line can evoke the inner sound of things? The question if this work can be communicated obtains for abstract works in general but particularly so for works that are intended to bring people into contact with spiritual reality through the work. Mondrian was acutely aware of this problem, pointing to the artist's influence on his art and indicating at the same time that this can lead to problems with respect to its communicability:

> Should a painter progress so far that he attains certain first-hand knowledge of the finer regions through development of the finer senses, then perhaps his art will become incomprehensible to mankind, which as yet has not come to know these finer regions.[97]

Kandinsky views art as religion, but do his paintings lead the viewer to experience spiritual reality? Or is this art something only for initiates? Does someone who views Kandinsky's work have points of contact that enable him or her to hear the inner sound? The use of colour, form, and area are determined in a strongly personal way, as is apparent from his commentary in his theoretical writings. Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist art also require a certain measure of initiation in order to be understood. The art of these world religions is recognizable to a certain extent because they have their own iconography. Kandinsky came up with his own rules for colour and form, such as point, line, and circle. He holds that only the artist can judge how far the form corresponds to the content in a work of art. To the remark already cited above that the form is determined by the content, the inner sound, he adds: "*Form is the material expression of abstract content*. Thus only its author can fully assess the caliber of a work of art."[98] He does not intend a subjectivism of any kind here for, according to him, the form or a work is always determined by internal necessity: "the principle of internal necessity is in essence the one, invariable law of art."[99] The necessity of form and colour are, after all, determined by the internal world and not by the external. "Internal necessity" is a matter of intuition, of evidence in itself. Intuition obtains for certain perceptions such as "I have a perception of something red," as well as for mystical perceptions of the internal eye that are more complex. Here it concerns not so much seeing directly, in the external perception of something red, but intuition on the level of feeling, of invisible life. Viewed that way, this seems to be an art for initiates.

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[95] Cited in Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, p. 35.

[96] Kandinsky, "Reminiscences/Three Pictures," p. 368.

[97] Blotkamp, *Mondrian*, p. 36.

In connection with the discussion of the communicability of Kandinsky's work I will look briefly at the interpretation of the French phenomenologist Michel Henry. Henry provides a phenomenological explanation of Kandinsky's work. What is interesting about this attempt is that in what Kandinsky evokes in the visual language of his works Henry sees what he himself had in mind in his philosophy. With his phenomenology, Henry articulates a spirituality of inwardness that he argues can be found in Kandinsky's work. He explains this abstract art as immanence, as the "manifestation of Life," according to his translation of Kandinsky's language of the inward and the spiritual. Here he agrees with Kandinsky who, after all, understood the inner sound of the things as life, although Henry views life more narrowly than Kandinsky himself does, as we will see.

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[98] Kandinsky, "Content and Form," p. 87.

[99] Kandinsky, "Content and Form," p. 88.

According to Henry, Kandinsky makes the invisible visible, as the title of his book indicates: *Seeing the Invisible* (*Voir l'invisible*). Kandinsky's writings on theory contain an implicit phenomenology of the invisible, and that is why he takes up Kandinsky's distinction between inner and outer. He places the representation of the visible world between brackets, and his theory of colours and forms performs a kind of phenomenological reduction. In Husserl, this phenomenological reduction has to do with putting our knowledge of the world between brackets so that we can attain pure awareness. In Kandinsky, this reduction leads us back to the pure impression as such: the impression of colour and form is not viewed with respect to what they represent; rather, it is the impression itself that is of interest. Kandinsky himself called that the inner aspect of things, the existential aspect of colour, its dynamic and emotional power: yellow, for instance, can come at us aggressively, whereas blue can move away from us and give rest. That obtains also for the form: life can be expressed by a line because life is a force. Kandinsky's colours and forms provide a phenomenological description of the different tonalities and forces produced by the pure impressions of colour and forms.[100]

Form is determined by content, as we saw above, and that content, Henry explains, is Life, written with a capital to indicate the invisible, internal life in distinction from the external life in the world.[101] For Henry, Life is a core concept, not in the sense of biological life but more in the sense in which John talks about it in his gospel.[102] It is not a visible phenomenon but an *immanent experience of the self*. Life is not something that shows itself in the world. Stated in terms of classic phenomenology, Life is not a phenomenon with a relationship to something outside consciousness. The pure experience of the self is an experience without intentionality, an ability that precedes the intentional consciousness.[103] Henry sees this in Kandinsky. In his theory of colours, the impression is nothing other than the perception of colour itself in feeling: "Being-felt-by-oneself is its sole conceivable reality and truth."[104] In Kandinsky, abstraction no longer refers to what is deduced from the world but "to what was prior to the world and does not need the world to exist."[105] It refers to Life that is situated "preconsciously" in feeling. It is a matter of what Kandinsky calls spirit or inner sound and Henry calls "absolute subjectivity":

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[100] Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. xi (translator's introduction).

[101] Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, p. 24.

[102] Michel Henry, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), ch. 3.

> to construct upon a purely spiritual basis means that the choice and use of each element, or primitive complex of elements (Point/Plane, Colour/Form) depend entirely on their tension. This reality is situated in absolute subjectivity. Kandinsky rightly calls this "spirit" (*esprit)*.[106]

Henry wants to make clear that communicating with Kandinsky's work on the plane of the preconscious experience of the self occurs in feeling. In his paintings, Kandinsky communicates a feeling or sense of the inner world by combining the tonalities of invisible colours and the forms. That does not occur via language. The colours are connected to the feelings of our soul not by an external relationship or by a connection to an object. As stated above, this concerns a self-experience of the Life that is preconscious. (We should recall that Henry gives a radically implemented phenomenological reduction that pushes through to the area that precedes the intentional consciousness that is connected with the world.) It concerns a pure self-experience, an original affection that is not separated from itself and thus not predicative. It is an experience, an invisible, nocturnal experience that has not yet been expressed in language and story.[107] The colours find their true being in the feelings of our soul as pure experience; they converge with our invisible life and are their pathos: suffering, boredom, neglect or joy. The communication between the work of art and the viewer thus lies, according to Henry, on the level of preconscious sensibility and the emotions and not on that of words or culture.[108]

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[103] R. Welten, "De oerfenomenologie van het Christendom. Over Michel Henry," in: P. Jonkers and R. Welten (eds.), *God in Frankrijk* (Budel: Damon, 2003), pp. 130-31.

[104] Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 72.

[105] Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 16.

[106] Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 95.

Immanence cannot be conceived of more radically than Henry does here. For him, there is no transcendence at all (viewed as an orientation to something outside the consciousness) in self-experience and feeling. Self-experience and feeling are concerned with something that precedes our intentional consciousness, i.e. the consciousness characterized by transcendence in the sense that it goes beyond to something else. It concerns an immanence that is not externalized. Here, feeling is not a sense of something outside oneself. When I feel shame, I do not experience the gaze of the other, as Sartre maintained; rather, I experience my presence with myself. Presence with oneself is the condition for every other intentionality. Feeling has to do with a self-affection that refers to a relation to itself without a necessary detour via the external.

I consider Henry's interpretation impressive and important because he manages to explain Kandinsky's esotericism in the philosophical terms of his phenomenology. I do wonder if he does not read too much of his own phenomenology of inwardness into Kandinsky. For Henry, it has to do with human inner life, and while that is true for Kandinsky as well, the latter connects it to the whole cosmos. Henry's phenomenology is anthropologically oriented, and Kandinsky's cosmocentric. For the latter, it is a matter of the inner side of all objects. Every phenomenon has an expression of its inner side, whether it is a thunderstorm or J.S. Bach.[109] Henry connects his phenomenology in his *I am the Truth* with a philosophically understood Johannine Christianity and rejects pantheism, whereas Kandinsky displays a pantheistic monism in his work.[110] Henry holds that all art, also figurative art, is in essence abstract and refers to the inner, to the invisible life. By way of example, he mentions the representation of the "Adoration of the Magi from the East" in Christian iconography. In his view, such a depiction is not intended as representation. The artist was not a witness to this event. The colours are not chosen in connection with the clothing that the magi wore, for the artist had no knowledge of their clothing. The choice of colour depends on the inner or invisible aspect of the colours.[111] Kandinsky, in contrast, has less difficulty with figurative art if it is intended to portray the inner side of things, as in Henri Rousseau or Franz Marc. In my view, Henry's statement that abstraction in Kandinsky had to do with "what precedes the world and does not need the world to exist" is difficult to square with Kandinsky's hidden construction. Even his geometric abstraction, as in *Composition 8*, still bears reference to a landscape. His biomorphic abstraction, in which the spirit is sought in nature, cannot be properly explained by Henry's phenomenology either.

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[107] Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 16; Welten, "De oerfenomenologie van het Christendom," pp. 122-23.

[108] Henry, Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 73.

[109] See note 66.

This criticism does not at all change the fact that Henry makes an impressive attempt to explain Kandinsky's work. Through the combination of the tonalities of invisible colours and forms, the latter's paintings communicate a sense of the inner world for the viewer. And that happens, according to Henry, preconsciously and not via language. The colours are connected with the feelings of our soul, not through an external relation, not through a connecion with an object. Henry attempts to show that a preconscious communication via a painting is possible. Nevertheless, I cannot escape the impression that Kandinsky's art explained in this way is a matter for initiates. Kandinsky's work is usually viewed as secular art that is spiritual in nature. It hangs in museums and not in the space where theosophical communities might congregate. I will discuss the difference between secular spiritual art and art of a specific religious community in the final chapter, (cf. below, pp.

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[110] Henry, *I am the Truth*, p. 94.

[111] Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, pp. 129-32.

188-99). Kandinksy is an example of the fact that there is indeed no principial difference between both kinds of spiritual art.

CHAPTER III

Rothko

The Tragedy of Human Existence

> *The romantics were prompted to seek exotic subjects and to travel to far off places. They failed to realize that, though the transcendental must involve the strange and unfamiliar, not everything strange and unfamiliar is transcendental.*[1]

Introduction

Looking at Rothko's paintings is quite an experience. Many are familiar with the classical Rothkos, the colourful, rectangular forms placed above one another with frayed edges, hovering on a background of colour. It is difficult to articulate what people experience when viewing his works. The reactions to, for example, the Rothko Chapel in Houston vary quite widely. For some, the Chapel paintings are a religious experience, and for others an existential experience with no reference to any religious transcendence.[2] Abstract paintings have something indeterminate about them, and that is very much the case with Rothko's paintings. The theme of his work is the tragedy of human existence. How can one discern that when viewing colours on a painting, if such a meaning is only suggested?

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[1] M. Rothko "The Romantics Were Prompted," in: M. Rothko, *Writings on Art*, ed. M. López-Remiro (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 58.

[2] S. Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings: Origins, Structure, Meaning* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); D. Antin, "The Existential Allegory of the Rothko Chapel," in: G. Phillips and T. Crow (eds.), *Seeing Rothko: Issues and Debates* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2005), pp.123-34; D. Anfam, "The World in a Frame," in: A. Borchardt-Hume (ed.), *Rothko: The Late Series* (London: Tate Modern, 2008), p. 57.

Rothko (1903-1970) was raised in an orthodox Jewish family but later turned his back on Judaism. In his works he wanted to depict the eternal symbols of the "human drama,"[3] the "tragic and timeless,"[4] the tragedy of human existence that he saw especially in the myths of ancient peoples. In the 1940s, sometimes in a surrealistic style, he painted mythical subjects with more or less recognizable (human) forms, such as the *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* (c. 1942), *The Omen of the Eagle* (1942), or various *Untitleds* (1941-1942). In 1943, he wrote that art is timeless and that the depiction of an archaic symbol continues to be completely relevant in the present.[5] That is why he wants to evoke the *tragedy* of human existence via the old Greek myths, but he portrays it as well via the Christian symbolism of life and death, as in *Baptismal Scene* (1945), *Gethsemane* (1945), and *Entombment* (c. 1946).

From 1947 on, his works became radically abstract and developed gradually into the classical Rothkos with their colourful rectangular forms hovering against a background of colour. The visual language had changed radically. The reason for no longer using the old myths to depict the tragedy of human existence has to do with what Rothko observed in 1947: those who viewed his paintings were no longer familiar with ritual and with the transcendent experience common in ancient societies when "the urgent necessity of the transcendent experience was understood and given an official status."[6]

Rothko kept to the theme of tragic existence but no longer depicted it via Greek myth. Do the colour fields and the monumental works in the Rothko Chapel reflect the same view of the tragic as before 1947? The explanations A.C. Chave and R. Rosenblum give of the colour fields are important here. Both give a religious-spiritual interpretation but explain the colour fields in very different ways. Chave points out that the colour fields display rudimentary signs borrowed from Christian art. The fields that at first glance appear to be empty are actually filled in by these traces and can be read as a palimpsest.[7] Rosenblum emphasizes the light and emptiness of the colour fields, seeing in them a similarity to the also almost empty landscape paintings with veiled light from the Romantic period, such as Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*. Paintings like the latter have something sublime about them and evoke an experience of transcendence.[8]

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[3] M. Rothko, "'The Portrait and the Modern Artist' by Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb," (13 October 1943), in: Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 39; M. Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute," (1958), in: Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 126.

[4] M. Rothko, "Rothko's and Gottlieb's Letter to the Editor," (1943), in: Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 36; M. Rothko, *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 80.

[5] Rothko, "Rothko's and Gottlieb's Letter to the Editor," pp. 35-36; Rothko, "'The Portrait and the Modern Artist'," p. 39.

[6] For this and what follows see M. Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," (1947), in: Rothko, *Writings on Art*, pp. 58-59.

In this chapter I will explore how the tragedy of human existence is evoked in the different phases of Rothko's work. The tragedy of human existence is a vague term that only gradually becomes defined. I will show that the content of the tragic in Rothko's work shifts with his visual language. The tragic was translated differently in his early mythical phase (1940-1946) from how it was later in his classical works (1947 onward) and in the Chapel paintings in Houston (1964-1968). To show the shift in his work, I will first look at his mythical period and the colour fields. We will see that the installation of the Chapel paintings are the climax, spiritually speaking, of Rothko's work.

Myths as the Expression of the Tragic

Along with others of the New York School, such as Gottlieb, Newman, and Still, Rothko sought an answer in the 1940s to the moral crisis caused by World War II (see also pp. 28-29 above). They found that answer in myths, in the stories of gods and heroes. At the opening of an exhibition by Clyfford Still in 1946, what Rothko stated about the latter's work also obtained for his own: "Still expresses the tragic-religious drama which is generic to all Myths at all times, no matter where they occur."[9] Rothko depicted Greek myths in, for example, his *Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, *The Omen of the Eagle*, and *Tiresias* (1944). These paintings are difficult to interpret.

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[7] A.C. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989); S. Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 117-49

[8] R. Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," in: E.G. Landau (ed.), *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 239-44; R. Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), ch. 8.

As an example, let us look at *The Omen of the Eagle* (1942) (fig. 13),[10] which refers to the tragedy *Agamemnon*, the first play in Aeschylus' Oresteian trilogy. The Oresteia has to do with the curse on and guilt of the house of Atreus caused by a chain of crimes. The title of Rothko's work *The Omen of the Eagle* refers to the song by the chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* about the sign that foreshadows doom regarding coming events, the war with Troy, and the sacrifice of the innocent Iphigeneia:

> I am the man to speak, if you would hear
> The whole tale from its hopeful starting-place—
> That portent, which amazed our marching youth.
> …
> How those twin monarchs of our warlike race,
> Their leaders one in purpose, were sped forth—
> Their vengeful spears in thousands pointing North
> To Troy—by four wings' furious beat:
> Two kings of birds, that seemed to bode
> Great fortune to the kings of that great fleet.
> Close to the palace, on spear-side of the road,
> One tawny-feathered, one white in the tail,
> Perched in full view, they ravenously tear
> The body of a pregnant hare

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[9] M. Rothko, "Introduction to First Exhibition Paintings: Clyfford Still," (1946), in: Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 48.

[10] Oil and graphite on canvas, 65.4 x 45.1 cm.

Big with her burden, now a living prey.
In the last darkness of their unborn day.[11]

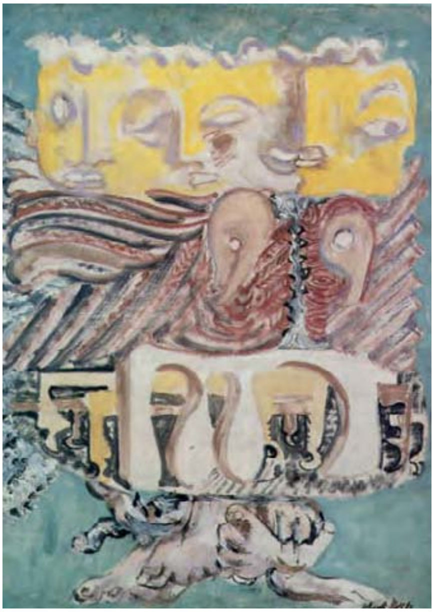

Fig. 13. Mark Rothko, *The Omen of the Eagle* (1942)

The Omen of the Eagle consists of three layers: on the top are a number of Greek heads, with the corresponding feet below the third layer. The heads on the top layer possibly refer to the omniscient gods.[12] The next layer shows the heads of two eagles and their wings, with the one on the right ending in what seems to be claws or tentacles, and the two others on the left suggesting nursing breasts. The arch also suggests the Hebrew term *chai*, which means "living." The visual language is surrealistic because of the hybrid, totem-like human figures, part god or human and part animal. Rothko here shows a totem object, the totem as a holy symbol of a tribe and its revered ancestor.[13]

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[11] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, in Aeschylus, *The Oresteian Tragedy*, transl. with an introduction by Philip Vellacourt (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 45.

[12] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 135.

[13] Chave *Mark Rothko*, p. 84.

In an explanation of the painting, Rothko said that it is not a depiction of the inevitable history of the house of Agamemnon but of the spirit of the myth in general:

> The picture deals … with the Spirit of Myth, which is generic to all myths at all times. It involves a pantheism in which man, bird, beast and tree—the known as well the knowable—merge into a single tragic idea.[14]

Rothko argues that humankind *and* nature are tragic: the eagles (and the hare) are, after all, involved in the doom that strikes the house of Agamemnon. He attempts through such paintings, to portray the tragic truth of human existence via myths, using them to depict the tragedy of his own time. The historical circumstances, primarily World War II, raised the question again of what it is to be human in the existential sense.[15] The human being can recognize himself in the old myths, for myths say something universal about human consciousness; they deal with *eternal symbols of human existence*:

> If our titles recall the known myths of antiquity, we have used them again because they are the eternal symbols upon which we must fall back to express basic psychological ideas. They are the symbols of the man's primitive fears and motivations, no matter in which land or what time, changing only in detail but never in substance, be they Greek, Aztec, Iceland, or Egyptian. And modern psychology finds them persisting still in our dreams, our vernacular, and our art, for all the changes in the outward conditions of life.[16]

By "primitive fears and motivations" Rothko is thinking of the Dionysian side of human life. He initially understood the tragic in the sense in which Nietzsche wrote about it in his *The Birth of Tragedy*. The Dionysian side of human life—the recognition of the terror and horror of existence—is central. The Apollonian is the world of dreams, the Dionysian world of intoxication, the drunken lunacy that destroys all forms and rules. The experience of life as suffering and seeing the world as chaos and absurd—that is the heart of the tragic vision. Nietzsche summons the reader to the bold venture of being a tragic human being, for that would lead to redemption.[17] He connected this tragic understanding of life with the sublime (*das Erhabene*). According to him, as the saving and healing "sorceress," art has the task of making life bearable and justifying the world. Only art is able to bend one's nausea at the appalling or the absurdity of existence into imaginary constructs that allow one to go on living: "These constructs are the *Sublime* as the artistic mastering of the horrible and the *Comic* as the artistic release from disgust at the absurd."[18] The sublime here has the character of the Dionysian spirit, in distinction from the Appollonian, which represents the beautiful.[19] The comfort that tragedy offers is that life is indestructibly delightful and powerful.[20] Even though the individual person dies, life itself is eternal.

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[14] M. Rothko, "Comments on *The Omen of the Eagle*," (1943), in: Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 41.

[15] M. Leja, "Modern Man Discourse and the New York School," in: Landau, *Reading Abstract Expressionism*, pp. 527-34.

[16] Rothko, "'The Portrait and the Modern Artist'," p. 39; Rothko, *The Artist's Reality*, pp. 91-104; Barnett Newman, "The New Sense of Fate," in: Barnett Newman, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 164-69.

Rothko depicts this Nietzschean approach to "primitive fears and motivations" in his mythical works. The themes of sacrifice, violence, and death come up repeatedly, not only in *The Omen of the Eagle* but also in *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* and in the different *Untitleds* he did in those years.[21]

The practice of seeking a common theme in myths was quite widespread at that time and was done by bracketing the historical, social, and religious context of the myths in order to distill what they had in common. J.G. Frazer did that in his famous *The Golden Bough* (1890): for him, the theme of all myths was that of origin and end, the cycle of life and death and the promise of rebirth. Joseph Campbell also asserted that mythology was the same everywhere, despite the different forms in which it appeared.[22] He compared the old myths with the dream situation of modern humankind via the psychology of Freud and Jung. Rothko also held that the old myths were about the inner self of the human being.[23]

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[17] F.W. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* transl. Ian Johnston, § 20. http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/tragedy_all.htm.

[18] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 7; translator's italics.

[19] Nietzsche, "Die dionysische Weltanschauung," in: G. Colli and M. Montinari (eds.), *Kritische Studienausgabe* I (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), pp. 567-68.

[20] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, § 7.

[21] For these works see M. Rothko, *Mark Rothko Catalogue*, ed. J. Weiss (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 36-75.

Along with Frazer and Campbell, Rothko went back to the prehistoric origin of humankind for the essence of tragedy. Our representation of myths should be more primitive than the myths themselves: "more primitive and more modern than the myths themselves—more primitive because we seek the primeval and atavistic roots of the idea rather than the graceful classical version." At the same time he claimed that our representation of the myths must be more modern than the myths themselves. He argued for a hermeneutical understanding of the old myths as rewriting them on the basis of one's own experience: "we must redescribe their implications through our own experience."[24]

Rothko called his depiction of the tragic myth in the first half of the 1940s pantheistic. This was a pantheism in which human being, bird, beast, and tree are all merge into a single tragic idea, as he stated in his explanation of *The Omen of the Eagle*.[25] That is a spirituality in which gods and people are in close contact and gods are aspects of our reality. The sacred dwells in everyday life, such as the ominous portent of the eagles in *Agamemnon*. I called that radical immanence, for the absolute is not sought outside mundane reality: humans, animals, and gods are connected. This form of transcendence is presented here in the form of the old Greek myths, which Rothko read primarily from the perspective of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. Rothko's mythical works translate the desire for surrender to a life that is indestructibly powerful. The content of radical immanence here is thus different from that of the theosophical spirituality of Mondrian and Kandinsky, in whom radical immanence is a transcendence of the material world to the spiritual interior of things (pp. 36-43, 75-86 above).

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[22] J. Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato: New World Library, 2003), p. 16.

[23] M. Rothko, "Letter to the Editor," (8 July 1945), in: Rothko, *Writing on Art*, p. 46.

[24] Rothko, "The Portrait and the Modern Artist," p. 39.

[25] See note 14.

Rothko gradually discovered that myth was no longer alive in his time (i.e. the 1940s). Already previously, in the 1930s, he had complained to a friend that myth was dead and the old stories had lost their attraction.[26] As stated above, he wrote in 1947 that people were no longer familiar with ritual in his time and the urgent necessity of the transcendent experience was no longer recognized as it had been in ancient times.[27] He regretted that because "without monsters and gods, art cannot enact our drama." His own mythical works did not find a ready audience. "The unfriendliness of society to his activity is difficult for the artist to accept. Yet this very hostility can act as lever for the true liberation."

To communicate his theme of the tragic as concretely as possible, Rothko abandoned his abstract figurative style and adopted a more radically abstract one. Playing a role here was the insight I also indicated in Kandinsky and Mondrian, i.e. that abstraction is a matter of breaking through to a more essential visual language in order to express the spiritual.[28]

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[26] W. Putnam, "Mark Rothko Told Me," *Arts* (April 1974): 45, cited by Chave, *Mark Rothko*, 44.

[27] For this and what follows see Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted (1947)," pp. 58-59.

[28] See, e.g., M. Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art," in: M. Tuchman *et al*. (eds.), *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), pp. 17-61; Rothko, *The Artist's Reality*, pp. 80, 96.

Colour Fields: Filled or Empty?

Already in 1943 Rothko argued for "the simple expression of the complex thought" and for "flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth."[29] In a letter to Barnett Newman two years later, he wrote about the concretization of his symbols: he struggled with this a great deal.[30] From 1947 to 1949 he produced *Untitleds* or works called *Number* followed by a number.[31] Some of these are *multiforms*.[32] One example is *Number 10* (1947) (fig. 14).[33] The painting suggests a human form: a face, torso, and arms are vaguely visible. The format is larger than most of his works prior to this time, and the biomorphic-like forms are no longer immediately recognizable as natural human-like figures. In 1947 Rothko himself wrote about these new forms:

> They are organisms with volition and a passion for self-assertion. They move with internal freedom, and without need to conform with or to violate what is probable in the familiar world. They have no direct association with any particular visible experience.[34]

In 1953 he claimed that he had developed a new type of unity.[35] We see the result of this development in the classical Rothkos, the colourful rectangular form with frayed edges, horizontal, sometimes vertical as well, floating on a background of colour.

The multiforms and colour fields are difficult to interpret, and their meaning not easy to determine. But which meaning?

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[29] Rothko, "Rothko and Gottlieb's Letter to the Editor," p. 36.

[30] M. Rothko, "Letter to Barnett Newman," (31 July 1945), in: M. Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 47.

[31] For these works see Rothko, *Mark Rothko*, pp. 76-96.

[32] J. Golding, *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), pp. 163, 218.

[33] Oil on canvas, approximately 163 x 107 cm.

[34] Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," p. 59.

[35] M. Rothko, "Notes from an Interview by William Seitz (March 25 1953)," in Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 85.

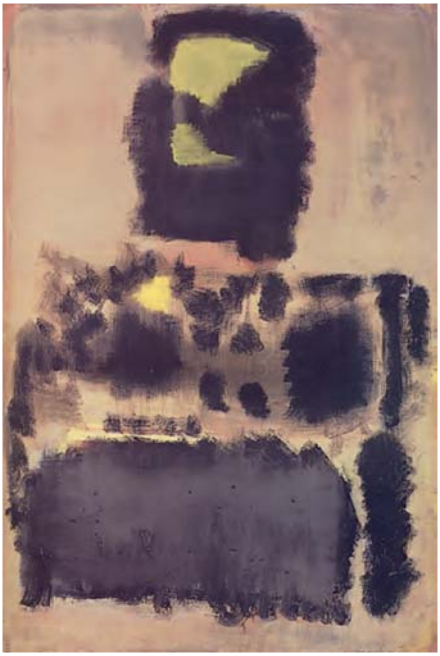

Fig. 14. Mark Rothko, *Number 10* (1947)

And how does one determine what they mean? According to Rothko, painting has nothing to do with self–expression: "it is a communication about the world to someone else. Tragic art, romantic art, etc., deals with the knowledge of death."[36] Does the move from the surrealist, abstract figurative style of the mythical phase to the radically abstract style imply a change in his view of the tragic as well? Here the different explanations by Chave and Rosenblum are important. The former views the works after 1947 as filled with traces of old religious images. The latter considers them empty and sees a similarity to Romantic landscape paintings that, just like Rothko's colour fields, are "sublime" and evoke the infinite.

We will first look at Chave's explanation of rudimentary traces of religious images in Rothko's works and then ask if those works can also be explained by Rosenblum's invocation of the sublime. Then we will discuss how the theme of tragedy can be evoked in the multiforms and colour fields.

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[36] Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute," p. 125.

Rudimentary Signs

Chave argues that the works after 1947 contain traces that recall images from the previous period. For example, these works are vertical in structure and human-like forms can be detected. In some works, the forms are filled in by evoking a sense of old religious art in a veiled way. Chave refers to *Number 17* (1947) (fig. 15)[37] and compares the abstract forms to a traditional *Madonna and Child*.[38] The forms on the lower left up to the area above can be seen as contours of a *Madonna and Child*. In addition to the multiforms, she also points to colour fields, such as an untitled work from 1953 and *Four Darks in Red* (1958).[39] Chave brings these compositions into connection with the pictorial structure of a conventional *entombment* in which the body of a martyr appears in the lowest section of the pictorial area of the canvas.[40] She also points to *White Band (Number 27)* (1954) here.[41] In this painting, we see three areas underneath one another against a blue background.[42] The blue-white long narrow rectangle in the middle, which seems to cause a break between the dark-blue area above and the almost black area below, is striking. Given the black colour, the area below points to mortality or death, and the area in the middle can also be seen as a rift between the area above and that below; there is something eerie and ominous about the white. The painting thus evokes the tragic finitude of the human being whose death breaks his relationship with the living.

Chave's argument does not appeal to the visual aspect. It is not that the open-minded viewer is able to see a *pietà* or conventional entombment in the work. Rothko used, she points out, the

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[37] Oil on canvas, 121 x 90.1 cm.

[38] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 162.

[39] Oil on canvas, 259.1 x 294.6 cm.

[40] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, pp. 158-59.

[41] Oil on canvas, 205.7 x 220 cm.

[42] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, pp. 158-59.

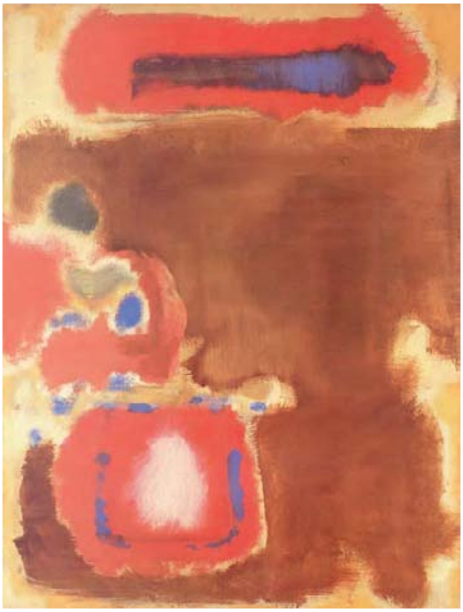

Fig. 15. Mark Rothko, *Number 17* (1947)

usual horizontal format of a landscape painting in combination with the vertical aspect of a portrait. His canvases are, after all, smaller than the usual size of a landscape painting, but the focus within the area of the painting itself is not as narrow as the conventional portrait with its wide margins: in Rothko, rather, the forms take up almost the whole canvas, as in a landscape painting. Here, Chave points out that the rectangular areas do not function as the background in the painting but take the place of figures in the foreground.[43] She can also find support here in what Rothko stated in an interview with Seitz in 1952: the person has been removed from the painting, and now "the symbols for the figures, and in turn the shapes in the later canvases were new *substitutes* for the figures."[44] Rothko himself saw his paintings as dramas and the forms on his canvases as actors.[45] The colourful areas are thus filled with human forms that can be observed. Chave summarizes her astute study as follows:

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[43] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, pp. 130-32.

[44] Rothko, "Notes from an Interview by William Seitz," (25 March, 1953), p. 77. See also C. Cernuschi's explanation of Rothko in "Mark Rothko's Mature Paintings: A Question of Content," *Arts Magazine* (May, 1986): 54-57.

> I have argued that the classic paintings evince religous associations because they are iconic and implement traces of the conventional structures of sacred art. Although viewers will not generally be cognizant of the specific associations involved, the painting "memories" or traces in Rothko's art may resonate in the viewers' unconscious, along with those aspects of the classic pictures that are not associated with preexisting pictorial codes.[46]

Chave explains the spiritual aspect of Rothko's classical works as revolving around the theme of the tragedy of existence, life as a cycle of life and death with the primary accent on death.[47] The explanation she gives for why Rothko changed his style is a technical one, but she does not connect that to what the artist wants to express as far as content is concerned. Did he change his style to depict the same thing differently or can a shift in content regarding the tragic also be detected in the multiforms and colour fields?

The Abstract Sublime

While Chave uses portrait painting, Rosenblum looks to landscape painting to explain the spiritual character of Rothko's works. The two writers are not arguing that a hidden portrait or landscape must be sought in these abstract paintings—that does not do justice to the abstract visual language that is not derived from figuration but is intended to present something new.[48] The colour fields, therefore, are not veiled portraits or landscapes. That does not at all change the fact that the abstract paintings evoke something that can be explained as the interaction between "persons" in the painting or as the *interaction* between the painting and viewer that leads to a sublime experience.

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[45] Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," p. 58.

[46] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 189.

[47] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, pp. 146-71.

[48] Thus, rightly, Chave, *Mark Rothko*, pp. 125, 159.

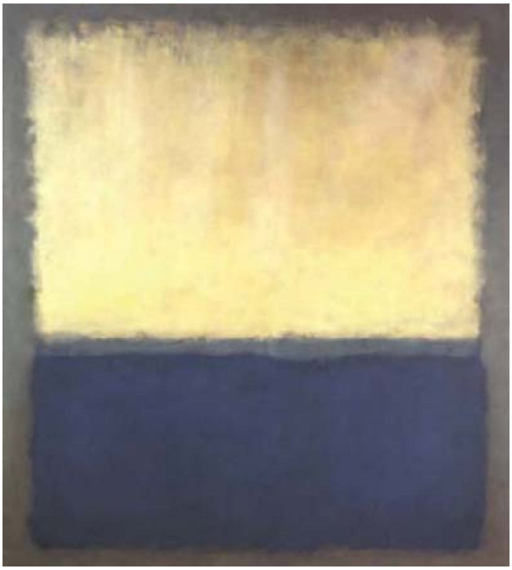

Fig. 16. Mark Rothko *Light, Earth and Blue* (1954)

Rosenblum points out the emptiness of the colour fields, comparing Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* and Turner's *Evening Star* (c. 1830) with Rothko's colour fields like *Light, Earth and Blue* (1954) (fig. 16), *Green on Blue* (1956) and *Number 10* (1950).[49] The works by these three artists are full of light and emptiness, But no landscape can be seen in Rothko's works. Rather, we see two large rectangles. *Light, Earth and Blue* has two rectangular areas floating on a grey background. The one above is large and extends across the centre of the canvas. It illuminates, with its radiating yellow, tempered by dark strips with frayed edges. The rectangular form below is dark blue and connected to the one above by two dark blue stripes.[50] *Number 10* (1950) shows a yellow and cloudy white rectangle with frayed edges bordering on brown with two small bars at the top of the canvas in white and blue.[51] Rosenblum sees a similarity to Friedrich's and Turner's works in the sublime understood as a confrontation with another world. J.B. Twitchell, who writes on the English Romantic landscape, points out that in the Romantic sublime landscape, the boundary is often formed by the horizon, which is even more important than the landscapes it bounds. In Turner's *Evening Star*, as in Friedrich's painting, one sees low-hanging clouds above the sea.[52] According to Twitchell, that is where our gaze is directed:

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[49] Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," p. 241. Aside from these works, he also refers to the Rothko Chapel, cf. Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, illustrations 2, 309, 312-14. With respect to Turner, one can also point to other examples such as *Colour Beginning* (1819) or *Landscape with a River and a Bay in the Distance* (1840-1850).

[50] Oil on canvas, 191.2 x 170.2 cm.

> [English Romantic landscapes] are often focused on a point just where the horizontal margin of nature meets the supernatural world of the sky, where the landscape is connected with the quiet of the sky.[53]

According to Rosenblum, with their empty canvases of the sea, of veiled light, and a low horizon, Friedrich and Turner invoke the infinite. The Rothko works he cites show light and emptiness, such as *Light, Earth and Blue* with its cloudy yellow and dark blue rectangle. The empty areas with their frayed edges seem to invoke the infinite. The painting evokes a transcendent experience. Rosenblum writes about Friedrich's painting *Monk by the Sea*:

> Friedrich's painting suddenly corresponds to an experience familiar to the spectator in the modern world, an experience in which the individual is pitted against, or confronted by the overwhelming, incomprehensible immensity of the universe, as if the mysteries of religion had left the rituals of church and synagogue and had been relocated in the natural world…. Friedrich's painting might even fulfill the transcendental expectations of religious art ….[54]

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[51] Oil on canvas, 229.6 x 145.1 cm.

[52] Oil on canvas, 91.1 x 122.6 cm.

[53] J.B. Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), p. 9.

[54] Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, p. 14.

With the light and emptiness on his canvas, Rothko, like Friedrich and Turner, places us on the threshold of "formless" infinity, a subject of the aestheticians of the sublime.[55] Rosenblum describes the sublime of the 18th century as an expression of "experiences of awe, terror, boundlessness, and divinity."[56] Landscape in Rothko has indeed given way to colour fields, which is why Rosenblum speaks of the "abstract sublime." This effect on the viewer arises because of the floating areas with frayed edges and because of the way in which the layers of paint have been applied to the canvas. There is "an interplay between the translucent and opaque layers of paint" and with "rich and varied surfaces that engage and interact with the viewer."[57]

There are several nuances to the term sublime. We will see if this term contributes to the interpretation of Rothko's work. Rothko was familiar with Burke's view of the sublime and was sympathetic to the view advanced in Rosenblum's article on the "abstract sublime."[58]

The Romantic sublime consists of two elements: the shocking event and immensity, infinity. The sublime arises as a shocking event, a view found in Edmund Burke. Rosenblum mentions this element in the context of discussing Friedrich and Rothko when he speaks of experiences of reverent fear and terror (cf. above, p. 28). In addition, he points to the other aspect of the confrontation of the human being with the overwhelmingness and immensity of the universe. This view can be found in Kant. Unlike an experience of beauty, which is an experience of pleasure, an experience of the sublime gives that double feeling of unease and pleasure. The experience produces a break with a familiar means of observation, a break that is necessary for one to experience something "else." Let us see if the view of the sublime in Burke and Kant can clarify the explanation of Rothko's work.

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[55] Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," p. 242.

[56] Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," p. 240.

[57] This quote by Leslie Carlyle *et al.*, was made with respect to the *Seagram Murals* but also applies, in my view, to the colour fields I am referring to here. Cf. Leslie Carlyle *et al.*, "The Substance of Things," in Rothko, *Rothko*: *The Late Series*, pp. 84-85.

[58] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 19, note 42.

The Sublime as Shocking Event

Burke points to the contradictory content of the sublime: fascination by something even though it causes pain or inspires fear or incomprehension:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*.[59]

It is not, according to Burke, terror as such but a "delightful terror" that is the source of the sublime. He remarks here, namely, that the pain and danger should not be too close, for then they cannot convey any delight but only terror.[60] The sublime arises primarily when we lack something. Everyday life is disrupted because we "lack" something, familiar boundaries disappear, leaving us with nothing to hang on to in the sensory world. Reality, for example, can lead to a lack, which in turn leads to *emptiness*.[61]

"The other" that breaks through the monotony of daily life does not, for Burke, imply an appeal to something higher or deeper than sensory reality. If a fatal accident occurs, such as a major fire, people will then pour in from all sides to look at the ruins.[62] For Burke, the sublime is a transcendence within the immanent world. All accent falls on the shocking event. Contemporary examples can be found in art and in seeking sublime experiences in extreme sports.[63]

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[59] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. A. Philips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 36.

[60] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 36.

[61] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 65.

[62] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 44.

[63] For the sublime in contemporary art see P. Crowther, "The Contemporary Sublime: Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock," *Art and Design* 10 (1995): pp. 6-94, and for extreme sports see A. du Preez, "Thrilling! Transcendence in Contemporary Cultures of the Ex-

A feeling of terror or fear can undeniably arise when looking at Rothko's *The Omen of the Eagle* from his mythical phase. The painting evokes the experience of a shocking event by depicting human existence in this way. Other than in Burke, the painting does refer to something higher than this world: in the top layer we see the gods who determine the fate of human beings. Rothko produces sublime depictions as a check against terror, and the sublime is to be understood here as a shocking event, the shock that continually confronts the human being with fate and finitude, the suffering of the human being under the tragedy of existence. This aspect of the sublime also returns in some colour fields, such as *White Band (Number 27)*, *White and Greens in Blue* (1957) (fig. 31) and in the Rothko Chapel (figs. 17, 18).[64]

The Infinite Sublime

With his examples of Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* and Turner's *Evening Star*, Rosenblum also refers primarily to the second element of the sublime. Kant explains this as the mathematical sublime, the experience of the largest and the immense in nature or of the boundlessness of the universe.[65] Kant explores primarily our experience of nature and refers to art only in passing. He calls great structures like the pyramids of Egypt or St. Peter's in Rome sublime.[66] The sublime is "that which is absolutely great."[67] The feeling of unease emerges from the limitation of our observation, the impossibility of understanding the infinite that transcends our senses. There is also a feeling of delight because we can think the infinite.[68] Thus, some-

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treme," in: W. Stoker and W.L. van der Merwe (eds.), *Culture and Transcendence: A Typology of Transcendence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), pp. 105-17.

[64] For what follows and for the discussion on *White and Greens in Blue*, cf. pp. 204-05 below.

[65] I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* transl. Paul Guyer (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), § 26, pp. 134-40.

[66] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 25, p. 131.

[67] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 26, p. 138

[68] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 26, p. 138

thing breaks through in our experience that, despite a moment of frustration, gives a feeling of relief. This concerns something that transcends the observable.[69] According to Kant, the sublime is not a matter of what can be understood and observed. Rather, it has to do with reason with its "concepts" that Kant calls ideas. It thus concerns matters that we are no longer able to know and are impossible to intuit. As far as the senses are concerned then, any representation can only be negative.

Kant brings up something that artists like Rothko have struggled with, i.e. the Mosaic prohibition against making images of the Holy:

> There need be no anxiety that the feeling of the sublime will lose anything through such an abstract presentation, which becomes entirely negative in regard to the sensible; for the imagination, although it certainly finds nothing beyond the sensible to which it can attach itself, nevertheless feels itself to be unbounded precisely because of this elimination of the limits of sensibility; and that separation is thus a presentation of the infinite, which for that very reason can never be anything other than a merely negative presentation, which nevertheless expands the soul. Perhaps there is no more sublime passage in the Jewish Book of the Law than the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor any likeness either of that which is in heaven, or on the earth, or yet under the earth, etc.[70]

This aspect of the sublime as referring to the infinite is also present in Rothko. In a discussion with Dore Ashton on the commission to produce the Chapel paintings, he stated that he wanted to paint both the finite and the infinite.[71] He struggled with what Kant calls negative representation, the iconoclasm of depicting the other. Here Rothko differs from Friedrich and Turner; for them, the place where heaven and earth meet is the break where the infinite is evoked. We see a low horizon in the landscape paintings by Friedrich and Rothko that were cited above. But that is not what we see in Rothko's colour fields such as *Light, Earth and Blue* (1954) (fig.16). There is no low horizon in this painting with the two areas. The sublime has shifted because it is no longer a depiction of nature. The representation has been minimalized to colour and form that portray abstractly what transcends human sensory abilities. There is no scene depicted here that can be called sublime. Rather, the sublime is now manifested in the interaction between the abstract painting and the viewer. Whereas Friedrich painted a monk staring out over an immense sea, in Rothko we ourselves are the monk, looking at his paintings.[72] Rothko himself placed all emphasis on the event between his paintings and the public. According to him—and here he follows what Newman wrote in "The Sublime is Now"—the painting is "not a picture of an experience; it is an experience."[73] The sublime is now more hidden and can be manifested in the interplay between canvas and viewer:

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[69] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 23, pp. 128-29.

[70] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 29, p. 156.

[71] D. Ashton, "The Rothko Chapel in Houston," *Studio International* (June 1971): 274, cited in Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 194.

> Like the mystic trinity of sky, water, and earth that, in the Friedrich and Turner, appears to emanate from one unseen source, the floating, horizontal tiers of veiled light in Rothko seem to conceal a total, remote presence that we can only intuit and never fully grasp. These infinite, glowing voids carry us beyond reason to the Sublime; we can only submit to them in an act of faith and let ourselves be absorbed into their radiant depths.[74]

Kant also emphasizes that the sublime does not have to do with the depiction itself but with our assessment of it. The term "sublime" or "exalted" refers to a certain subjective feeling. It can only be found in the human being and not in high mountains or raging seas.[75] Kant believed ultimately that such an assessment of nature made us aware of our moral disposition.

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[72] Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," p. 242.

[73] D. Seiberling, cited in Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 172.

[74] Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," p. 242.

[75] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 26, p. 139.

Our internal moral disposition is sublime.[76] According to Kant, the subjective feeling of the sublime is aroused by an unboundedness or formlessness of the object side of our experience. The imagination reaches its limit in imagining the other. Kant is concerned here with the issue of transcendence, of not being able—in his view—to transcend a limit. In Rothko's colour fields, as in *Light, Earth and Blue*, transcendence is no longer connected directly with the world of nature, as in Turner and Friedrich, for whom a landscape or the sea could evoke an experience of transcendence. The colour fields in *Light, Earth and Blue* do not refer to nature. The painting itself is or, better, gives the experience to the viewer.

Rosenblum is right that viewing colour fields like those in *Light, Earth and Blue, Green on Blue* and *Number 10* (1950) can be a sublime experience. Does that conflict with Chave's reading? Chave holds that Rosenblum's explanation is implausible because the colour fields are not the same size as landscape paintings. That is why she maintains that the colour fields cannot be about emptiness without any concrete form.[77] In my view, however, the two explanations are not mutually exclusive. The painting itself determines if its reference to the infinite can be explained better in terms of being filled with rudimentary signs or in terms of emptiness. The latter arises in the interpretation the Chapel paintings (cf. below, pp. 113-22). But we will first discuss the fact that Rothko's view of the tragic has shifted along with his shift in style. One indication is that the landscape is no longer referential, as it was in the Romantic sublime.

Radical Transcendence

Chave assumes that the theme of Rothko's work remained the same after 1947, when he replaced his abstract figurative style with an abstract style of multiforms and colour fields. Rothko continued with the theme of the tragedy of existence, life as a cycle of life and death, with the accent primarily on death.

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[76] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 27, pp. 140-41.

[77] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 130. Polcari has a different assessment, although he does, with Chave, also point to rudimentary traces in Rothko's later work (Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism*, p. 144).

Chave does nothing with the fact that Rothko used other sources in his mythical phase, such as Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, than he did in the works after 1947 in which traces of Christian art can be found. Moreover, she ignores the new element in the colour fields Rosenblum refers to: the evocation of the infinite. That is why her view is not sufficient to explain Rothko's shift from the abstract style of the mythical period to the abstract style of the colour fields.

Rosenblum sees a similarity between Rothko's colour fields and the Romantic sublime, but, aside from the replacement of the landscape by the colour fields (and the experience of viewing the painting connected with them), he does not discuss the difference between the Romantic sublime and Rothko's abstract sublime regarding the spiritual any further. The same obtains for Van de Vall whose interpretation Rosenblum follows. Van de Vall also sees little difference between Romanticism and abstract expressionism with respect to spirituality when she writes:

> The analogy lies in the naturalization of the transcendent. In both cases the world of the ideal is sought not outside but in the material—and is thus never unproblematically present as such but always as the momentarily felt "beyond" in the experience of a limit.[78]

For the Romantics, in her view, the "world of the ideal" lay in nature, in the landscape, whereas for abstract expressionists it lay "in the paint" or "in painting itself," "going beyond the known." That is somewhat vague. What does the claim that the world of the ideal lies "in the paint" mean? Obviously, she does not mean what obtains for all paintings, i.e. that paint is converted in a certain way into something meaningful. That is simply a question of the iconic difference. Rather, what she seems to have in mind is that the painting no longer refers to nature, as it did in Turner and Friedrich. But she does not conclude from this that Rothko therefore holds to a different spirituality from that found in the Romantics.

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[78] R. van de Vall, *Een subliem gevoel van plaats. Een filosofische interpretatie van het werk van Barnett Newman* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1994), p. 394.

Rothko does indeed continue with the theme of tragic existence 1947, but his *view of the tragic has changed*. The tragic is still a theme, as can be seen in the rudimentary signs that indicate the issue of life and death in the Christian tradition in certain works after 1947, in the abstract sublime in works like *Number 17* (1947) (fig. 15, p. 99 above) and in the repeated statements by Rothko himself on the tragic as a continuing theme in his work. But his view of the tragic has changed. Rothko distances himself from Aeschylus and Nietszche and is now guided more by the view found in Shakespeare and Kierkegaard concerning the tragic, as he stated to Peter Selz around 1961.[79] He was acquainted with Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* in which the difference between the tragic in the Greeks and the modern view of the tragic can be found:

> In ancient tragedy, the action itself has an epic element; it is just as much event as action. This, of course, is because the ancient world did not have subjectivity reflected in itself. Even if the the individual moved freely, he nevertheless rested in substantial determinants, in the state, the family, in fate. This substantial determinant is the essential fateful factor in Greek tragedy and is its essential characteristic. The hero's downfall, therefore, is not a result solely of his action but is also a suffering, whereas in modern tragedy the hero's downfall is not really suffering but is a deed. Thus, in the modern period situation and character are in fact predominant. The tragic hero is subjectively reflected in himself, and this reflection has not only reflected him out of every immediate relation to state, kindred, and fate but often has even reflected him out of his own past life.... Therefore, modern tragedy has no epic foreground, no epic remainder. The hero stands and falls entirely on his own deeds.[80]

In the later Rothko, the human being has become an individual "[reflected] subjectively in himself," who is more separated from state, kindred, and fate than his fellow-sufferers in *The*

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[79] Cited in Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 82.

[80] S. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* I, transl. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 143-44.

Omen of the Eagle were, where gods and monsters (in the form of the eagles) played a role in events. Let us recall here that Rothko remarked in 1947 that in contemporary society the experience of transcendence had changed from that at the time of the myths. It is precisely that which becomes visible in the changed imagery of the colour fields, as I will indicate below. I will first look at how the spirituality of the colour fields differs from that of the Romantic sublime of Friedrich and then at how it differs from that found in Rothko's own mythical works. In both cases the understanding of transcendence shifts and with it that of the tragic.

Colour Fields and the Romantic Sublime

In the Romantics, transcendence and immanence are closely connected, as we saw in Friedrich (cf. above, pp. 23-28). The latter was discussed as an example of *immanent transcendence* because, although the sacred can indeed be distinguished from the mundane, it is closely connected with it. The visual language on Rothko's canvases is, in a certain respect, different from that of Friedrich. The shift from the Romantic sublime to the abstract sublime is a shift in the understanding of transcendence: nature, the world, no longer refers to transcendence. Those who viewed Turner's and Friedrich's work could experience the transcendent in nature, but that is no longer the case in Rothko's colour fields. Transcendence is evoked differently in the colour fields: here it is transcendence as the Wholly Other, as absolute transcendence that is clearly distinguished from immanence. I called that *radical transcendence*, using a few of Barnett Newman's works as examples (pp. 28-36). The colour fields can be explained by what Kant called negative representation and Lyotard the presentation of the unpresentable.[81]

Colour Fields and the Mythical Phase

The colour fields also show a different kind of spirituality from the earlier mythical paintings by Rothko. In the old myths, heaven and earth flowed together pantheistically, and, as we saw, one could speak of radical immanence. Transcendent reality was manifested in Rothko's time differently from how it was manifested in the time of the old myths—so Rothko discovered in 1947. The world has become empty of references to the transcendent, and the transcendent is thus radically different from the world. That casts more light on Rothko's concentration on the tragedy of human existence than his earlier pantheism does. He lamented the fact that, other than in the time of the Greek myths, the transcendent experience is no longer part of everyday life. We should recall here Burke's view of the sublime as a "lack," a deprivation. The everyday course of affairs is broken through because something goes "missing." Reality can be missing, as a result of which an *emptiness* arises. The problem for art, according to Rothko, is that "without monsters and gods [it] cannot enact our drama."[82] *The world has become empty* in the sense that "monsters and gods" are no longer mentioned concretely, as they were in the old myths. That seems to me to be *the spiritual reason why Rothko replaced the figurative abstract style with that of the colour fields*. The tragic is thus intensified. That is why the experience of transcendence has shifted from radical immanence to radical transcendence. If the world is full of gods and monsters in *The Omen of the Eagle,* it has now become empty, as indicated in the colour fields. *White Band (Number 27),* with its three fields arranged underneath one another against a blue background, is an example of this. The field at the bottom can indeed refer to mortality or death, given the black colour. The white has an eerie and ominous quality. There is a sense of waiting for a gesture or a voice. Here one can speak of the sublime in both senses: as a shocking event and as reaching toward the infinite. The desire for transcendence has become ambivalent.

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[81] J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 77-82.

In short, the sacred has changed in Rothko in his colour fields and become radically other, unlike the pantheism of the old myths but also unlike the religious experience of nature in Friedrich. The theme of the tragedy of human existence has continued, although in a modern form in which the human being and his actions are central. But the tragic has become more unbearable now that the world is empty and a "different reality" no longer speaks clearly.

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[82] Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," p. 59.

The Rothko Chapel Paintings

Rothko started something new at the end of the 1950s. He started to make works that constitute series, such as the *Seagram Murals* (1958-1959), the *Harvard Murals* (1961-1963), and the series of paintings in the Rothko Chapel (1964-1968). These paintings are larger than his earlier works, and, in his view, their monumental size deepens the experience. "To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience. However, you paint the larger picture, you are in it. It isn't something you can command."[83] This is no longer about the well-known colour fields, and the arrangement evokes different responses from visitors to the chapel. D. Anfam calls them "the infinite eternity of death" and then cites the playwright Samuel Beckett: "Infinite emptiness will be all around you, all the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it."[84] We will look at the Chapel paintings to discover how they can be interpreted as spiritual.

Paintings as Drama

Rothko chose an octogonal shape with an apse on the north side for this chapel, a form that Meyer Shapiro later told Rothko was the shape of early Eastern Orthodox churches. Let us enter the chapel in our imagination. We are standing with our backs to the painting that hangs on the wall of the entrance, the south side of the chapel (fig. 17). This narrow vertical canvas is different from the others in that it not a monochrome or a triptych. This is the piece that reminds one the most of Rothko's classical work: it is a large vertical black rectangular form that, from the top down, takes up the largest part of the canvas against

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[83] Cited in Borchard-Hume, *Rothko: The Late Series*, room 2; Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute," p. 128.

[84] Anfam, "The World in a Frame," p. 57.

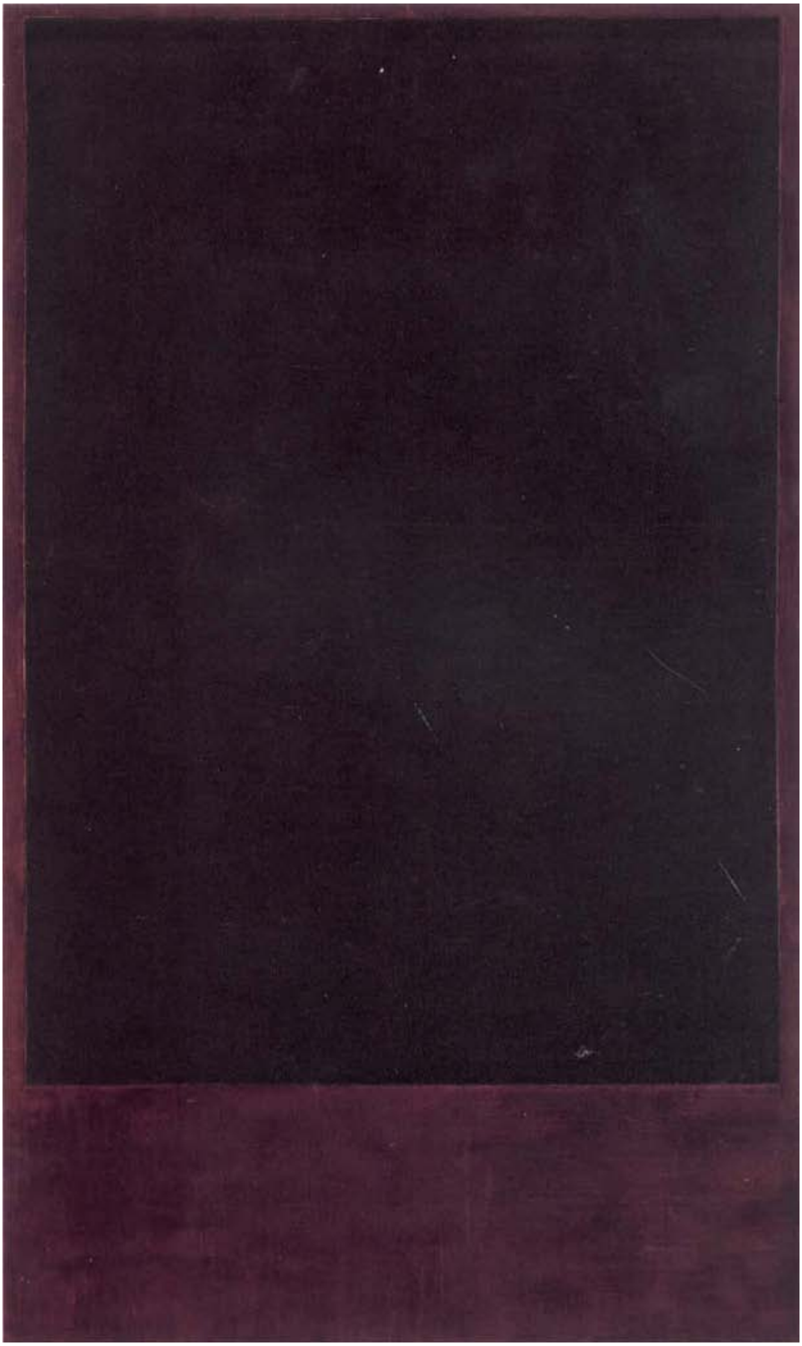

Fig. 17. Mark Rothko, The Rothko Chapel, south entrance

a dark red background.[85] If we stand there, we look directly at the triptych in the apse on the north side of the chapel. The triptych in the apse is a monochrome area that is dark purplish mauve.[86] It is also striking that the triptych hangs deep inside the apse and thus further from the centre of the chapel than the other paintings.

If we turn our gaze—still standing with our backs to the painting on the entrance wall on the south side—first to the right and then to the left, we see, on the large side walls of the chapel both left and right, virtually identical triptychs with large black rectangular forms framed by a narrow dark purplish edge.[87] There is a certain affinity regarding colour with the painting at the entrance. Unlike the triptych in the apse, the middle panel is raised. The four shorter diagonal angle walls of the chapel are completely covered with monochromes in the same colour as the triptych on the apse wall: dark purplish mauve.[88]

The independence of the paintings stands out at the first viewing. There are fourteen canvases on eight walls. Rothko described his paintings as voices in an opera, and also compared them to a drama.[89] Thus, the Chapel paintings should be viewed not only separately but also in their relationship to one another. Together they form an installation, an interactive system. It is precisely for that reason that this work is unique: the canvases on the eight walls stand in dramatic tension with one another—that was what I experienced in this chapel. Because the chapel is octogonal, various symmetries appear. There is a symmetry between both black rectangular triptychs on the long eastern and western sidewalls and also a diagonal symmetry between the four monochromes on the four shorter angle walls (fig. 18). This leads to repetition. The black triptych of the one long sidewall returns in the black triptych of the opposite wall and vice versa. The repetition of the monochromes on the shorter angle walls is even stronger because the four are circularly present.

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[85] C. 457 x 267 cm. For the types of paints used see Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings*, pp. 10-11; J. Barnes, *The Rothko Chapel: An Act of Faith* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), pp. 58-60.

[86] C. 457 x 754 cm.

[87] C. 343 x 624 cm.

[88] C. 450 x 343 cm.

[89] Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," p. 58.

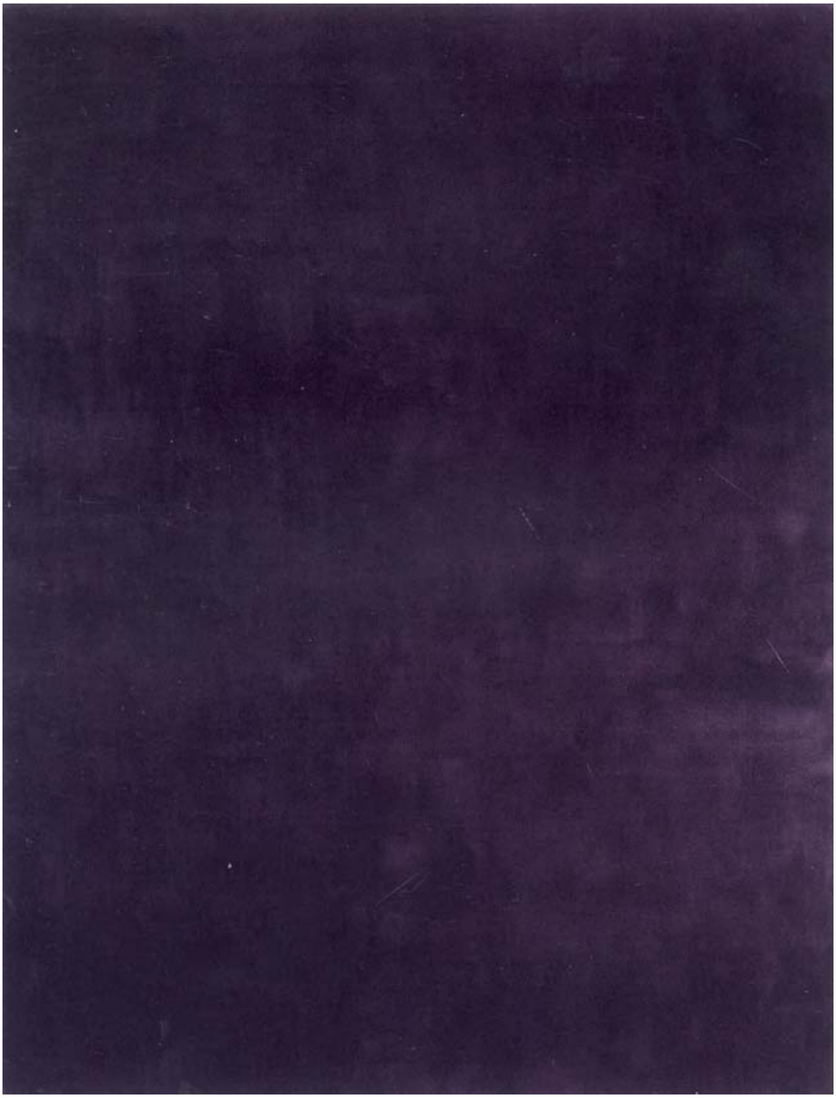

Fig. 18. Mark Rothko, The Rothko Chapel, northwest angle (1966)

The fourteen canvases are divided into two groups of seven black rectangular paintings (the two triptychs on the long sidewalls and the canvas on the entrance wall) and the seven monochromes (the triptych on the wall of the apse and the four canvases on the shorter sidewalls). As far as colour is concerned, we see the first seven canvases with black rectangles on a dark purplish background and the second seven as dark purplish mauve.

What do the Chapel paintings communicate? The form elements of the paintings, together with the colours and especially the dramatic interaction between the paintings that can occur in the process of viewing them, provide an answer.

The canvases are monumental in size. The triptych in the apse is the largest (457 x 754 cm) and larger than the triptychs on the long sidewalls (343 x 624 cm). The four monochromes are wider than the other single canvas at the entrance (343 and 267 cm respectively). For the viewer, the installation can evoke an intense sense of one's own smallness in the "actual" space. He or she can feel like a small speck in an immeasurable cosmic space.

The form elements are borrowed from the Christian tradition. The chapel has, as stated above, the octogonal form of early Eastern Orthodox churches. Rothko also chose the triptych, tripartite paintings that were often used for altars in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The middle panel was central and therefore often larger than the side panels. It is striking that the centre panels of the two triptychs on the long sidewalls are placed higher than the side panels, suggesting the form of a cross with the side panels.

The two colours on the paintings are black and dark purplish mauve. In iconography, blue represents the sky and the transcendent,[90] but dark purplish mauve is not blue. I think that the monochromes on the four shorter side walls and the monochrome triptych in the apse depict something of transcendence. Here it is not so much the colour that does so but the interplay between the paintings.

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[90] Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings*, p. 324.

The painting at the entrance is a bit taller than the four simple monochromes on the shorter diagonal angle walls (457 and 450 cm respectively), but much narrower (267 and 343 cm respectively). It hangs somewhat isolated on a large grey-white wall, whereas the other canvases cover large parts of the walls on which they hang. Furthermore, its pictorial formula differs from those of the other canvases in the chapel. The canvas at the entrance is the only one that is not a monochrome or a triptych, which also emphasizes its isolated position in the chapel. It is a large vertical black rectangular form that, from the top down, covers a large part of the canvas and hovers on a dark red background. Nodelman seeks to interpret this not only in terms of its opposition to the other paintings but also in terms of its different composition. The format of the painting, vertical, with high sidewalls and a narrow basis, was the specific format for the iconic representation of sacred persons in the late Middle Ages. Nodelman thus interprets the canvas at the entrance to the chapel as anthropomorphic, as an expression of the human individual. Rothko does, after all, recognize the importance of this anthropomorphic image for his work, as was emphasized above by Chave in particular. Nodelman refers to its composition: the internal conflict between the canvas as a whole and the contrasting black rectangular form. This meshes well with Rothko's remark that his painting is to be seen as a drama in which the forms are actors.[91] Nodelman summarizes his interpretation of the canvas as follows:

> single in its relationship to what is outside it, yet divided within, the entrance-wall panel is a fitting representation of the human individual as conceptualized in recent Western tradition…. Strongly verticalized yet compact, the painting is by far the most anthropomorphic in its proportions of any of the pictorial units of the ensemble. Its erectness is emphasized by its isolation upon its wall, the most extreme to be found within the installation, reinforcing the drama of internal conflict between the panel as a whole and the ominously suspended and proportionally contrastive black

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[91] See note 89.

> rectangle within it. One could hardly better look for a better evocation of the existential hero, cast into a lonely and alien world ….[92]

Chave's analysis of Rothko's colour fields implicitly confirms the interpretation that the vertical black rectangular form on the canvas points to a human figure. She does show that traces of human contours from Rothko's earlier figurative works continue to be used as colour fields in his works at the end of the 1940s.

Rothko wanted to introduce a tension between the painting that at the entrance and the canvas hanging opposite in the apse, a tension he himself had experienced when visiting the Byzantine basilica church of St. Maria Assunta in Torcello. Rothko told Dominique de Menil, who together with her husband commissioned the Chapel paintings, of his intense emotional experience during this visit. This came about primarily because of the mosaic at the entrance to the church depicting the Last Judgement and a Madonna with child that was hanging in the apse directly opposite. He experienced the opposition of the entirely different paintings as a tension-filled unity. The ominous feeling that the painting of the Last Judgment produced in him was superseded by the Madonna with Child against a gold background opposite.[93] Visitors to the Rothko Chapel can experience a similar tension between the partly black painting at the entrance and the triptych opposite in the apse with its dark purplish mauve colour. The triptych covers almost the whole wall, giving the triptych the appearance of having a halo. The canvas at the entrance evokes the feeling of the human being as an "existential hero, cast into a lonely and alien world" that can undergo an experience of transcendence in confrontation with the triptych in the apse.

There is yet another interaction between the paintings that emphasizes the tragedy of mortal humankind. If we continue to stand at the entrance and look left and right, we are confronted with our own finitude. The colour black in this context represents mortality and death. The black triptychs on the long sidewalls, whose black is also present in the canvas at the entrance, point to tragic human existence. The cruciform, together with the black of the canvas, also points to this. The cross is to be understood here as an indication of the suffering of the human being because of finitude. The triptychs interact with the four monochromes on the four shorter angle walls with their dark purplish mauve colour, the same colour as the triptych in the apse. They can, given their colour, evoke transcendence just as the triptych in the apse does. The presence of the monochromes is emphatically and "supportingly" present in the whole of the installation: they surround the canvas at the entrance, the lonely individual (1), but also the two black triptychs, tragic finite existence (2), and the triptych in the apse (3). In their repeated presence Nodelman sees them as the basis of contingent, finite existence.[94] I will give a different interpretation of this.

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[92] Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings*, pp. 314-15.

[93] Barnes, *The Rothko Chapel*, p. 67.

Just as the confrontation between the painting at the entrance and the triptych in the apse can evoke transcendence, so can the confrontation between finite existence (the painting at the entrance and the black triptychs with the cruciform on the sidewalls) and the four dark purplish mauve monochromes on the four shorter angle walls. Is this the same experience of transcendence as in the colour fields discussed above?

Strange and Unfamiliar Transcendence

It is apparent from the colour fields of the 1950s that the sacred has become remote, which expresses the experience of *radical transcendence*. The Chapel paintings are, in my view, just like some colour fields, sublime in the double sense of a shocking event and of a confrontation with immensity. Here we see the sublime as a contradictory concept of fear in connection with the tragedy of human existence (the seven black canvases) and the suspension of this threat through confrontation with transcendence, which can produce a feeling of enlightenment (the seven dark purplish mauve canvases). The latter is the case only if the experience of transcendence is ultimately an experience of salvation.

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[94] Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings*, p. 317.

There are differences between the colour fields and the Chapel paintings. First of all, there is the monumental size of the canvases and the use of the triptych format. The style has become minimalist through the reduction of the forms to the individual monochrome fields on the four angle walls of the chapel and to the three monochrome fields of the triptych in the apse. The triptychs on the large sidewalls are also minimalist with their black rectangular forms framed by a narrow dark purplish margin. Instead of works with frayed edges, as Rothko had made earlier, we now see works with sharp edges.

The sublime has to do with a break in ordinary existence through which the other can be sensed. But that "other" is not named here any more than it is in the colour fields. Kandinsky did name the "other." He was concerned with the inner sound of things, with spirit instead of the material world. Rothko's later work concerns a different kind of transcendence. He presents the transcendent as something strange and unfamiliar, similar to what he wrote about the Romantics in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter:

> The romantics were prompted to seek exotic subjects and to travel to far off places. They failed to realize that, though the transcendental must involve the strange and unfamiliar, not everything strange and unfamiliar is transcendental.[95]

Rothko has no symbols for this unfamiliar transcendence, as Kandinsky and Mondrian did. The dark purplish mauve monochromes of the apse and the four monochromes on the angle walls evoke radical transcendence in a world empty of signs. The transcendent remains unnameable. It concerns "the absolutely unknowable void, upon whose brink we finite beings must dizzily hover." This is J. Millbank's description of the modern transcendent. His characterization seems, in my view, to fit the Chapel paintings well.[96]

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[95] Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," p. 58.

[96] J. Millbank, "Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent," in: R. Schwartz (ed.), *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond* (New York/London: Routledge, 2004), p. 211.

There is a parallel with Newman's series of the fourteen canvases called *The Stations of the Cross* (pp. 33-36 above). Unlike Rothko, Newman gives the canvases a title as well as an extensive commentary. The agreement between both works is found in the theme, i.e. the tragic sense of human life in its finitude. We find a silent radical transcendence in Newman as well. He seeks a "solution" in the human being himself: the Jesus figure is an example for the suffering human being. In Newman's view, by asking forgiveness on the cross for those who persecuted him, a *human being* shows that there is a new beginning, even in this hopeless situation. In contrast, Rothko leaves this open and emphasizes silence. Only in its "absence" is the silence "present," only as an echo. If there is any religious experience here, it is the experience of something/someone that/who announces it-/himself or does not. But what can we expect? Does fear or terror prevail? That depends on what the gesture or voice of the transcendent entails—salvation or doom?

A Spirituality of Silence

Rothko believes that if one has a new view of the world, one should be able to find new ways to express it. He himself does that through using colour and forms in a way that painters had not done before him.[97] This obtains both for his colour fields and his Chapel paintings. Rothko did borrow elements for his installation from the Christian tradition, but he did not work out of a specific religious tradition. He had in mind a general religiosity, the "eternal symbols" of the "human drama." He translated the tragedy of human existence first into his mythical version and later into his abstract sublime colour fields and Chapel paintings. He continues with this theme: the tragic has become more unbearable now that the world is empty of gods and the human being is seen more as an individual "[reflected] subjectively in himself," through which he is no longer able to exist in an "immediate relation" with the "state, kindred, and fate." That is its difference from the archaic world full of gods from Rothko's mythical period. Instead of longing for union with the cosmos viewed in a Dionysian way, the sacred has become strange and unfamiliar. We no longer live, in a literal sense, with gods and monsters. Radical immanence has given way to radical transcendence. To describe the spirituality of Rothko's later work, I will begin with his view of what the task of art is.

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[97] Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute," p. 127.

Rothko views his calling as an artist in a spiritual way. This is affirmed by Willem de Kooning, another member of the New York school. He saw Rothko (just like Newman) as a messiah with his message of the tragic:

> Barney [Newman] and Mark I call "messiah".... Paintings have so many overtones … but the initial message, idea of the subject matter should be tragic.... For me they [Rothko's paintings] bring news.[98]

Rothko denies that he is a mystic and compares himself reluctantly to a prophet: "a prophet perhaps—but I don't prophesy the woes to come. I just paint the woes already here."[99] He sees himself in Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac as described in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Rothko is struck by the fact that Abraham's sacrifice of his son was completely unique. As far as the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is concerned, her father Agamemnon could argue that the seer Calchas had reminded him of his promise to sacrifice the most beautiful thing born in his house that day. What Abraham did is truly incomprehensible—there is no universal law covering that act. But as soon as his act was performed it became universal. Rothko sees a similarity here with his role as artist. [100] One could think here of his lonely path to do something new in painting.

For Rothko, art is a play. He did, after all, speak about his paintings as voices in an opera and compared his paintings to a drama. This drama is acted out in the Rothko Chapel in the interplay between the canvases via the eye of the beholder as a fellow player. "A picture lives by companionship, expanding and quickening in the eyes of the sensitive observer. It dies by the same token."[101] The artist should, according to Rothko, trust in his ability "to produce miracles." The painting is a revelation for the artist and the person looking at it:

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[98] Cited in Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 187.

[99] Cited in Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 192.

[100] Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute," pp. 126-27. On the issue of making Abraham's act universal, see also J. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, transl. David Wills (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

> Pictures must be miraculous: the instant one is completed, the intimacy between the creation and the creator is ended. He is an outsider. The picture must be for him, as for anyone experiencing it later, a *revelation*, an unexpected and unprecedented resolution of an eternally familiar need.[102]

Rothko uses religious language here: "religious experience," "miracles," and "revelation." He speaks about the painting as a revelation in terms similar to those used by Tillich in his theology of art. Tillich sees a parallel between a painting and the picture the Bible gives of Jesus. He distinguishes here between the original revelation to the evangelist on which basis the latter sketches the biblical portrait of Jesus as the Christ (*original revelation*) and the reaction of those who respond to it (*dependent revelation*). Tillich also applies this to the artist and his work of art (*original revelation*) and to the work in its relation to the committed viewer (*dependent revelation*). Rothko does something similar when he speaks of the relation between the work of art and the artist and then about the work and the viewer. When the painting is completed, there is, according to Rothko, no longer any difference between the maker of the painting and the viewer. He speaks in the quotation above of "revelation"—i.e. Tillich's "dependent revelation."[103] Both Rothko and Tillich speak of "miracle" in connection with the work of art. Rothko even uses the term "blasphemy" when the painting is viewed without the proper respect.[104]

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[101] M. Rothko, "The Ides of Art (1947)," in: Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 57.

[102] Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," p. 59.

[103] J. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), pp. 56ff.

An experience of strange transcendence is evoked in the colour fields and even more dramatically in the Chapel paintings: the sacred has become radically transcendent. What is unique about this spirituality emerges clearly in a comparison with the radical transcendence of Kierkegaard and the early Karl Barth. For both the latter, the world has become empty of gods and there is no point of contact for speaking about the God of Abraham and of Christ. Unlike Rothko, they do connect God with the world through the incarnation: God in Jesus. In Barth, radical transcendence entails God's love for humankind.[105] For Kierkegaard and Barth, the transcendent is also Wholly Other but not unfamiliar, not "the absolutely unknowable void, upon whose brink we finite beings must dizzily hover" (Millbank) that it is in Rothko. In his work, there is more concealment than unveiling, and the veil is not really raised in the end: it is a revelation that just will not arrive, only the sense that an answer might come. It is more like waiting for Godot in Samuel Beckett's play of that name. The transcendent is absent. The whole other interpretation of radical transcendence lies in the fact that radical transcendence in Kierkegaard and Barth functions within the Christian narrative of God, whereas Rothko wants to evoke an immediate experience separate from every "memory" of "history."[106] The latter is impossible: it turns out that Rothko is also part of a "history of effect." In his later works he depicts the tragic as stamped by "history," first by the Greek myths as presented in Nietzsche and later more from the perspective of a world empty of "monsters and gods."

In Rothko's later work we recognize the sublime as a lack by which the world is emptied of gods and monsters, and that fact is combined with Kant's sublime of the infinite that confronts the daily world with that which transcends sensory perception. Kant emphasizes negative representation, the representation of what is difficult to represent. The sublime arises whenever the imagination does not succeed in providing a visual representation of something. And that is the case with the unnameable transcendence of Rothko. Now that the world of nature is empty of signs, it can no longer be used as a symbol for the infinite as in the Romantic sublime. Only through the use of the early Christian form of the triptych, through the religious space of the chapel, and through the colours on the canvases can there be any allusion to the unrepresentable. In addition to the parallel with Abraham with respect to his role as artist, Rothko also refers to Abraham's silence to Sarah concerning his act. He sees himself in this as well and that is why he prefers to say little about his work.[107] His conviction concerning his work was that "Silence is so accurate."[108] The silence also obtains for the strange and unfamiliar transcendence that his paintings evoke. Is this silence the silence of God or fear of the transcendent as something ominous? I will return to this in the final chapter.

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[104] Chave, *Mark Rothko*, p. 188.

[105] C. van der Kooi, "Struck by an Arrow from Beyond an Impassable River: Transcendence in Karl Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*." in: Stoker and Van der Merwe, *Culture and Transcendence*, pp. 65-75.

[106] M. Rothko, "Statement on His Attitude in Painting," (1949), in Rothko, *Writings on Art*, p. 65.

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[107] Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute," p. 126.

[108] Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings*, p. 306.

CHAPTER IV

Warhol

A Spiritual Business Artist

> *Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist.*
> *After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art … making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.*[1]

Introduction

When the philosopher of art A.C. Danto saw Roy Lichtenstein's *The Kiss* for the first time, he asked: Is that art?[2] One can hardly point to a greater development in art history than what happened in the United States at the end of the 1950s. The high art of the abstract expressionists Pollock, Newman, and Rothko gave way to the low art of Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, Johns, and Warhol. Images from the popular culture of the media, advertisements from newspapers, comic-strip characters, and consumer items were the subjects in the paintings done by Pop art artists. Their art used images, such as the Coca Cola logo, that were highly recognizable. With respect to this, Warhol said that people appreciate such art because the subject is familiar to them: "It looks like something they know and see every day."[3]

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[1] Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (Orlando, etc.: Harcourt, 1975), p. 92.

[2] A.C. Danto, *Andy Warhol* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. xiii.

[3] Cited by K. Siegel, "Pop Art: An Overview," in: M. Kelley (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 37.

Everyone understands the images of this art since they are borrowed from daily life, which was not the case in the work of the abstract expressionists.

Andy Warhol (1928-1987) is known as the "King of Pop Art" because he used images of soup cans, as in *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1965), money as in *200 One Dollar Bills* (1962) or famous people as in *The Twenty-Five Marilyns* (1962). It is surprising that Warhol produced works with a religious theme, such as *Praying Hands* (1950) and a series of crosses, including *Cross (Red)* (1982). Warhol's Pop art is directed at mass culture, but he is also interested in high art. He made a number of variations of Renaissance works, such as *Details of Renaissance Paintings (Leonardo da Vinci, The Annunciation 1472*) (1984), *Details of Renaissance Paintings (Piero della Francesca, Madonna del Duca da Montefeltro, circa 1472*) (1984), and *Raphael 1-6.99*, (1985), with Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (c. 1513) as his starting point. At the end of his life he also did variations of Da Vinci's *Last Supper*. Alexandre Iolas, an art dealer and one of Warhol's friends, used this as an occasion to organize an exhibition around this theme, which was held on 22 January 1987 in Iolas' gallery in Milan. The gallery was situated opposite the refectory of the Sante Maria delle Grazie church, where Da Vinci's *Last Supper* can be seen.[4] Shortly before his death, Warhol painted several dozen versions of the *Last Supper* and also produced silk-screen versions, some very closely resembling Da Vinci's work, some with repetitions or reversals, in certain colours, or the addition of logos from the consumer industry, such as Pop Eye, Camel, Dove, and GE (General Electrics).

The responses to Warhol's work vary widely. J. Baudrillard and R. Barthes see Pop art as an expression of the consumer society in which images converge with themselves and no longer refer to anything beyond themselves. Not only has religious transcendence disappeared, but also the view of transcendence as the reference of an image to something outside itself, the image as the representation of an aspect of reality. In Pop art, the image is the reality itself: the image is a copy without an original, a simulacrum.[5] The opposition between art and non-art no longer exists, and art has become merchandise. Warhol passively and unemotionally reflects the consumer society.[6] This view is called the simulacrum explanation of Warhol's work. The "God is dead" theologian Thomas Altizer came to the same conclusion from the perspective of theology. According to him, not only is the transcendent God dead, but so is art in general and religious art in particular. The opposition between profane and holy no longer exists. Society has become aestheticized.

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[4] C. Thierolf, "All the Catholic Things," in: A. Warhol, *The Last Supper*, ed. C. Schultz-Hoffmann (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1998), pp. 22-53.

The religious character of some of Warhol's works is disputed as well, viewed as consumer articles rather than serious expressions of art. Carla Schulz-Hofmann says the following about the variations on *The Last Supper* at the Milan exhibition:

> Warhol's *Last Supper* is an easily consumed commodity and complies with the widespread desire for pictures as decoration, utility goods, and religious placebos in an "I-want-everything-right-now" society which regards works of art as a suitable and soothing backdrop against which to stage itself.[7]

Others, like the authors of the authoritative survey *Art since 1900*, reject the simulacrum interpretation and maintain that Warhol's work is referential:[8] an empathic artist was taking up social themes. Also, Thomas Crow points to, among other things, numerous works by Warhol on car and airplane accidents and other tragedies such as food poisoning, suicide, and issues like the death penalty. Warhol had a critical eye for the dark side of American society.[9] P.A.P.E. Kattenberg and J.D.

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[5] In Latin *simulacrum* means "image" but also "appearance." Baudrillard uses the term in the second sense.

[6] J. Baudrillard, "Beyond the Vanishing Point of Art," in: P. Taylor (ed.), *Post-Pop Art* (Cambridge MA: Mitt Press, 1989), pp. 178-79.

[7] C. Schultz-Hoffmann, "'Are You Serious or Delirious?' On the Last Supper and Other Things," in: Warhol, *The Last Supper*, p. 11.

[8] "1964b," in: H. Foster *et al.*, *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), pp. 486-91.

[9] T. Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 49-65.

Dillenberger also take this position, interpreting Warhol's works with religious themes as religious spiritual works.

In addition to his aura of glamour, Warhol also seems to have a more hidden spiritual side. As a child, he attended the Byzantine Catholic church in Pittsburgh and later, when he lived in New York, Catholic services. John Richardson stated in his eulogy at Warhol's funeral in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York on 1 April 1987:

> I'd like to recall a side of his character that he hid from all but his closest friends: his spiritual side. Those of you who knew him in circumstances that were the antithesis of spiritual may be surprised that such a side existed. But exist it did, and it's the key to the artist's psyche.[10]

Here I will explore the question if Warhol's works that have religious themes depict a specific spirituality and if he closely connects Christian faith and everyday life in those works. I will use his *The Last Supper (Dove)* (1986) and other works from *The Last Supper* series as examples. In the first section, I will introduce Da Vinci's *Last Supper* in connection with Warhol's *Last Supper*. I will then, in the second section, look at the simulacrum interpretation put forward by Baudrillard and others and will show that a referential reading provides a better explanation of Warhol's Pop art. In the final section, I will give my own reading of Warhol's *The Last Supper (Dove)* as a religious work and argue that his work can evoke a spirituality of the sacred in daily life.

The Last Supper: *A Preliminary Exploration*

A reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* hung in the kitchen of Warhol's childhood home and his mother had a postcard of it in her prayer book. Warhol himself, who collected folk art, bought a kitschy print of this work. That can explain why he used Da Vinci's *Last Supper* as a subject in a series of several dozen works.[11] Some were painted or drawn by hand, whereas others were silk-screen prints.[12] Warhol's model of Da Vinci's painting was not the original in Milan but a sketch in an encyclopedia of paintings (fig. 19).[13] Before we look at what Warhol does with Da Vinci's painting, I should say something about Da Vinci's work itself.

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[10] Quoted in J.D. Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol* (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 13.

[11] Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 80.

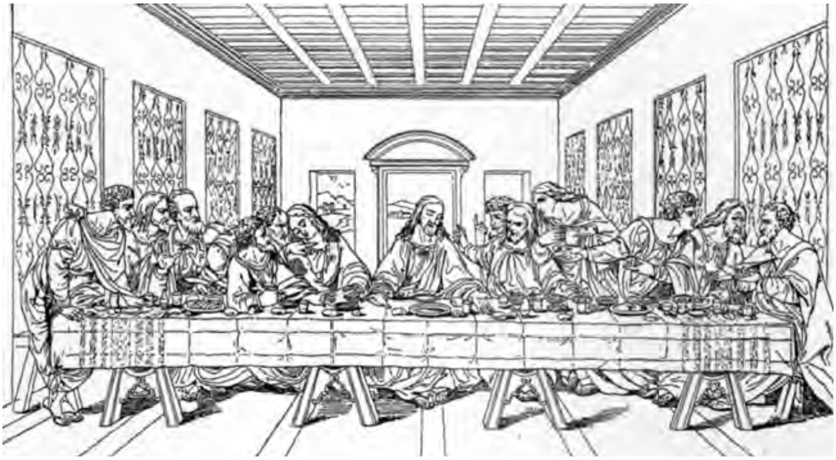

Fig. 19. The sketch of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, used by Warhol as a model; from a nineteenth-century encyclopedia

Da Vinci's *Last Supper*

If we compare Da Vinci's work with that by Cosima Rosselli in the Sistine Chapel (1481-1482), we can see that Rosselli has placed Judas in front of the table with his back to the viewer. The chalice is in front of Jesus on the table, which is otherwise empty. An important moment in the origins of the Christian faith, the institution of the Lord's Supper, is depicted in this way. In his fresco *The Last Supper* (1495-1498) (fig. 20), Da Vinci brings together two events.[14] Judas now sits with the other disciples at the table, which is covered with bowls, cups, and bread. Jesus has just said:

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[12] A silk-screen print is one where the ink is rubbed through a synthetic fabric (the form) by means of a squeegee. See Warhol on this in Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 26.

[13] For the silk-screen prints (of the exhibition in 1987 in Milan) Warhol used a photo as his model (present in the Warhol museum in Pittsburgh). Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 103.

[14] Oil and tempora on wall, 460 x 880 cm. For this work see D. Arasse, *Leonardo da Vinci* (Cologne: Dumont, 2005), pp. 362-83.

> "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me ...." (Matthew 26:21-23, [NIV])

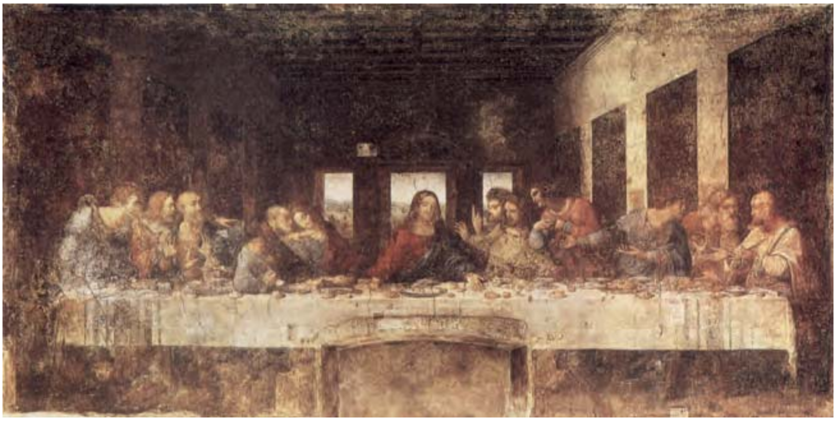

Fig. 20. Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper* (1498)

Da Vinci depicts this through Jesus' right hand, which is stretched out toward the bowl Judas is also reaching toward. Judas sits (from our point of view) on Jesus' left, next to John and in front of Peter who is standing behind the table. With his left hand open and stretched out with the palm facing up, Jesus offers bread and wine, which refer to the institution of the Lord's Supper or Eucharist.[15] There is a wide space between John and Jesus which can refer to Jesus' glorification after Judas' departure: "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him" (John 13 :31 [NIV]).

Da Vinci connects the central moment, the institution of the Eucharist, with the preceding prediction of Judas' betrayal. He gives all his attention to this by carefully and attentively painting the 130 gesturing fingers of Jesus and the twelve disciples. Da Vinci thus expands the iconographic tradition, which placed all the emphasis on the institution of the Eucharist. Matthew, Thaddeus, and Simon, who (from the viewer's perspective) are sitting on the right, are discussing among themselves who the betrayer is. Their gestures indicate dismay. Among the three sitting on the right, immediately next to Jesus, we see James (the son of Zebedee) recoiling with horror and his arms spread wide. Thomas is pointing upward, to God who knows the truth, while Philip has his hands on his chest as if to say: "It's not me."

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[15] Leo Steinberg lists seven functions of Jesus' gesturing hands. (L. Steinberg, "The Seven Functions of the Hands of Christ: Aspects of Leonardo's *Last Supper*," in: D. Apostolos-Cappadona [ed.] *Art, Creativity and the Sacred* [New York: Crossroad, 1984], pp. 37-63).

Christ forms the centre of the four groups of three disciples who are gesturing. Sitting at the centre of the painting, he dominates it, and, in contrast to the disciples, seems calm, looking downward at his expressively gesturing hands. To his left are Judas, John, and Peter. The latter, who is standing, is agitated and leans brusquely toward John, pointing piercingly with his finger, thus seeming to ask, "What did Jesus just say?" John sits crestfallen, his head on his shoulder and his hands folded. Judas seems to withdraw, shocked, and hugs the moneybag close to his chest. Of the three furthest to our left, Bartholomew listens attentively with his arms on the table. James' hand is on Peter, and Andrew raises his hands with the palms away from him, an attitude of fear and surprise that is recognizable as expressing stupor. Da Vinci's fresco is a fine example of how an image can show what cannot be stated as well in words. The gestures in the fresco are suggestive and express what the disciples are feeling.

The sketch in the encyclopedia that Warhol took as his model also shows the language of gestures the group at the table used. If we compare the sketch with the almost 10-meter long *Last Supper*[16] painted by Warhol, it is striking that Warhol simply seems to have taken over the facial expressions and especially the gestures from his model, right down to details like shadows.[17]

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[16] Acrylic on canvas, 295 x 996 cm.

In this painting from the *Last Supper* series all our attention becomes focused on the table with vegetables. Unlike the sketch in the encyclopedia, Warhol did not include the background of Da Vinci's painting. The space in which the original painting functioned is thus changed. Da Vinci's wall fresco takes up a wall of the (former) refectory of the Dominican monastery of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. The illusionistic perspective gives the impression that the dining table adjoins the three tables in the refectory. The tablecloth in the painting resembles that used in the monastery, as do the tableware and cutlery, the bowls, plates, and glasses. The impression is thus raised that Jesus and his disciples ate with the monks. In his paintings Warhol takes the table out of the sacred space of the monastery and separates it from everything. He leaves out the space seen behind the table in Da Vinci's fresco and in the model, as he does the walls that are covered with tapestries in the sketch. Christ sits in the middle, but because the perspective on Christ as the centre of the fresco and on the window behind him is no longer present, our attention is no longer focused on Jesus but also includes the disciples who are as monumental as he is.

The gestures in this painting emphasize the dramatic events. This is different in the versions to which pop logos, texts from advertisements or cultural symbols, like a motorcycle, are added. In *The Last Supper (Camel)* (1986) we see a camel between two groups of disciples on Jesus' right with the text below of Camel cigarettes.[18] Above John is a circle (a halo?) with the number 57 written in it, taken from the 57 varieties of Heinz soup.[19]

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[17] Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 81.

[18] Acrylic on canvas, 300 x 884 cm.

[19] The material for the pop logos and the advertisements is present in the Andy Warhol museum in Pittsburgh. See also Warhol, *The Last Supper*, pp. 27-29.

The Last Supper and the Pop Logos

In *The Last Supper (Wise Potato Chips)* (1986), the background is included, along with the table.[20] Jesus' and the disciples' gestures are visible, but our attention is drawn primarily to the blue-black logo with white spots that seems to revolve between the viewer and the table. John, Peter, and Jude are thus hidden from sight. The Wise Potato Chips logo shows the abstract head of an owl, the symbol for wisdom, alluding to the term "wise." It has been remarked that the logo's rotating movement could point to creation.[21] The connection between the pop logo and the content of the painting is then coincidental, for why include that logo in a depiction of the evening of the announcement of betrayal and the institution of the Eucharist? Is there perhaps a connection between potato chips and the bread of the Eucharist? The potato chip could also bring to mind the Communion wafer, which is almost as thin and fragile as a potato chip.

In *The Last Supper (the Big C)* (1985) (fig. 21) we see logos that could provoke the viewer.[22] Here the background and the table have disappeared except where Jesus is. We see the same Wise Potato Chips logo, now on the right, next to Thomas, but our attention is drawn to the large blue, white, and black motorcycle. This motorcycle is repeated twice in black and white, while a red eagle hovers above. At the centre of the painting is a large red-yellow price tag with 6.99 (dollars) on it. It is transparent, showing Jesus and the three disciples behind it. Jesus himself appears four times in the painting. The phrase *The Big C* is painted to the right of the lowest image of Jesus. This phrase is taken from the title of a newspaper article: "THE BIG C: Can the Mind Act as a Cancer Cure?" "The Big C" is surrounded by images of Jesus and has a double meaning: in addition to referring to cancer, it also points to Jesus, the Big Christ.

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[20] Acrylic on canvas, 300 x 640 cm.

[21] Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 86.

[22] Acrylic on canvas, c. 295 x 991 cm.

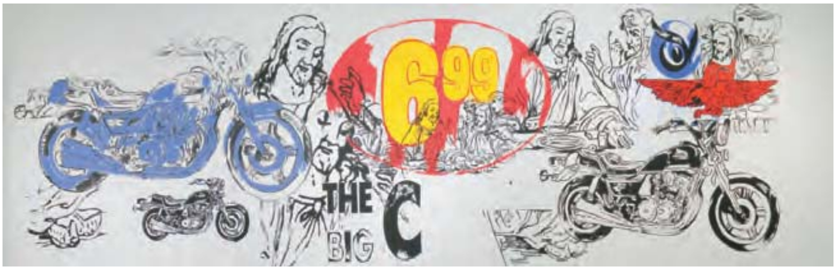

Fig. 21. Andy Warhol, *The Last Supper (the Big C)* (c. 1985)

The pop logos can invoke various associations. The motorcycle is an image of freedom and can be an attribute here for Jesus who, after all, bestows freedom on people. The large price tag could point to money and material profit standing between us and Jesus.[23] This unusual combination in the painting surprises the viewer. Dillenberger points to the unresolved tension between Warhol's piety and his use of logos from the culture in which he was so intensely involved.

> Warhol's juxtaposition here of the Christ of Leonardo with the motorcycle, our age's symbol of untrammeled freedom, power and sexuality, results in a brash and commanding painting. Two sides of Warhol, his piety and his deep involvement in the aspects of the culture that are inimical to that piety, are here asserted and held in an unresolved tension.[24]

The tension between piety and culture is, it seems to me, indeed unresolved in *The Last Supper (Camel)* and *The Last Supper (Wise Potato Chips)* (1986). I cannot indicate a connection in content between the logos and the event that *The Last Supper* represents. Does religion here degenerate into a "fun" culture? That would point to a simulacrum interpretation of Warhol's work. It is otherwise in *The Last Supper (the Big C)* and *The Last Supper/Be a Somebody with a Body* (1985-1986) (fig. 22). One can at least make a connection in these paintings between the pop logos and the event on Maundy Thursday.

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[23] Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 92.

[24] Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 92.

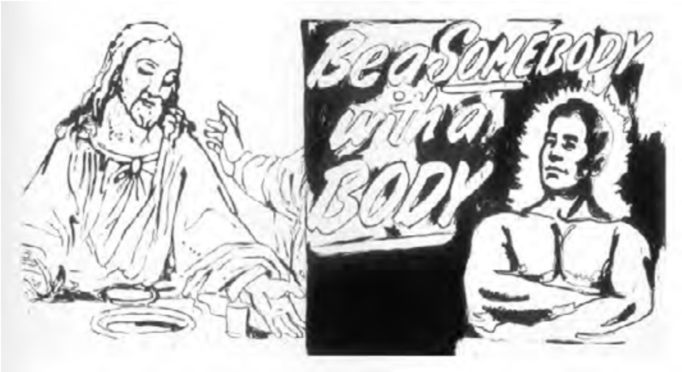
Be a SOMEBODY with a BODY

Fig. 22. Andy Warhol, *The Last Supper/Be Somebody with a Body* (c. 1985-1986)

The meaning that is attributed to Christ in *The Last Supper (the Big C)* can be explained as Christ the healer of disease: as the Big C, he is the healer of the other feared Big C. Disease and death were important themes in Warhol's life since his youth because of his own illness and because of the lengthy illness and early death of his father. This theme is also present in his *Death and Disaster* works in the 1960s.[25] This explanation gains support if we look at another work from the series. In *The Last Supper/Be a Somebody with a Body* (1986) we see a bodybuilder depicted with a halo.[26] He expresses vitality—after all, the title is *Be a Somebody with a Body*. The figure resembles a photo of Warhol himself and the image is taken from an advertisment for bodybuilding. Next to the bodybuilder with a halo against a black background, Jesus is portrayed against a white background in the same way as in other works from the *Last Supper* series. The bodybuilder's vitality is passing. But Christ is also someone "with a body" and is depicted here at the table with the bread and cup before him, offering the bread and wine with his open outstretched left hand. He sacrifices his body with the words from the epiclesis from the Eucharistic prayer: "so that we eat and drink the life that does not perish." The extent to which Warhol connects Christ with vitality is apparent from the fact that he reduced the size of this work to one in which Christ is depicted right next to the bodybuilder with the words "Be a Somebody with a Body" covering a large part of the work depicting both the bodybuilder and Christ.[27]

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[25] Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, 65-77.

[26] Acrylic on canvas, 300 x 587 cm.

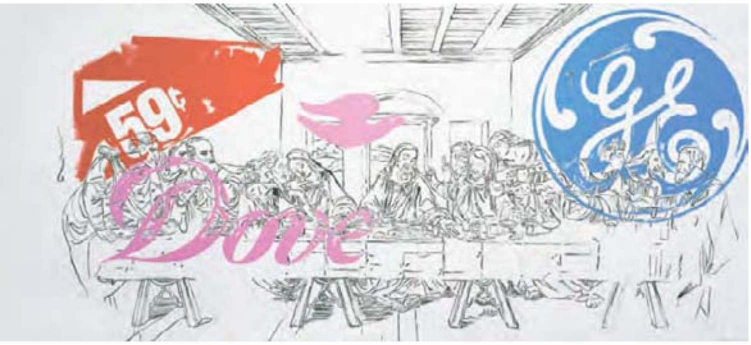

Fig. 23. Andy Warhol, *The Last Supper (Dove)* (1986)

Is there an unresolved tension between Warhol's piety and commercialism in *The Last Supper (Dove)* (1986) (fig. 23)?[28] The question if this work is an example of commercialism depends on, among other things, if a connection can be found between these logos and the event on Maundy Thursday. The canvas is more than 6.5 meters long and more than 3 meters high. The first time one looks at it the pop logos and the word "dove" in italic script are immediately apparent. Three logos dominate the painting: on the upper left, a brown-red price tag with 59 (dollar) cents on it, the letters in white, pointing at an angle upward and extending from Bartholomew to Judas. Opposite, on the upper right, are the white letters GE in a blue circle partly covering the head and hands of Matthew, Thaddeus, and Simon. Warhol has changed the third logo, taken from the soap brand Dove, in such a way that the dove, coloured light pink, flies above John and Jesus in the direction of the GE logo, a firm known for its lights and electric products. At table height, in the same light pink colour, the word "Dove" is written right across the hands of the disciples on Jesus' left up until his left hand. The table is presented with the background, although (unlike

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[27] 58.42 x 58.42 cm, in: Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 89.

[28] Acrylic on canvas, c. 302 x 668 cm.

Warhol's model) the sidewalls are left out and the ceiling above the dove is open.

The simulacrum interpretation emphasizes that the logos are taken from the world of commerce. They indicate that everything has become a matter of commerce, even this painting. Compared with the model and Da Vinci's fresco, the added commercial logos have changed a great deal in this painting. For that reason, one can no longer speak of representation because, according to Baudrillard's explanation, signs are no longer referential but self-contained. The image should no longer be seen as a religious image but as a copy without an original, as a simulacrum. The price tag of only $ 0.59 can refer to the devaluation of money and thus to the devaluation of religious images. Art and religion are said to be reduced here to the world of commerce where the logos of a soap brand and a company that makes washing machines and electrical appliances are given a quasi-religious function. Thus, the simulacrum interpretation of *The Last Supper (Dove)* entails that the painting only refers to itself and is the only (illusory) reality. The reality depicted no longer refers to a divine reality as Da Vinci's fresco does.

How can one choose here? Pop art is undeniably ambiguous, and that obtains for Pop artist Andy Warhol as well. He said that he preferred to remain a mystery and that he would never divulge his background.[29] His final interview with Paul Taylor demonstrates that well:

> Paul Taylor: Life is fantasy?
> Andy Warhol: Yeah, it is.
> Paul Taylor: What's real?
> Andy Warhol: Don't know.
> Paul Taylor: Some people would.
> Andy Warhol: Would they?
> Paul Taylor: Do you really believe it, or or [sic] tomorrow will you say the opposite?

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[29] Cited in P.A.P.E. Kattenberg, *Andy Warhol, Priest? The Last Supper Comes in Small, Medium, and Large*, Ph.D. dissertation (Leiden University, 1999), p. 13.

> Andy Warhol: I don't know. I like this idea that you can say the opposite.[30]

He was even very reserved about his work or misled his readers, trivializing his work in this same interview. To the question if the *Last Supper* theme had any particular meaning for him, he answered "No. It's a good picture."[31] During the exhibition in Milan, he asked the art critic Pierre Restany if the Italians did understand that he respected Da Vinci.[32]

The Image: Simulacrum or Referential?

Friedrich Jameson gives a simulacrum interpretation of Warhol using his *Diamond Dust Shoes*, 1980 (fig. 24). He compares this painting to Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (1887). Van Gogh's work refers to a life in poverty in the Babrant countryside in the time before Philips, Daf, and other industries arrived. The painting opens, according to Jameson (following Heidegger's well-known interpretation of this painting), up the world of the peasant woman who wore these shoes—that is the truth of the painting.[33] Warhol's painting is very different. We see a coincidental collection of dead objects, clustered together and ripped out of an earlier life. But nothing reveals the origin of the shoes. Are they from a burned-out dance hall or from Auschwitz? There is no story to tell like there is about Van Gogh's shoes. Is this a work without depth, without any personal meaning, a lack that is considered characteristic of Pop art?[34] If there is no story here, and the painting has no reference, it cannot invoke any emotion in the viewer. We are thrown upon the materiality of the painting itself; the glitter of the golden material. The image coincides with itself.

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[30] Taylor, "Andy Warhol's Final Interview." http://www.warhol-stars. org/warhol/warhol1/warhol1n/andy.html.

[31] Taylor, "Andy Warhol's Final Interview."

[32] Cited by Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 102.

[33] According to F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late* Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 6-10.

[34] T. Hecken, *Pop. Geschichte eines Konzepts 1955-2009* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009) ch. 5.

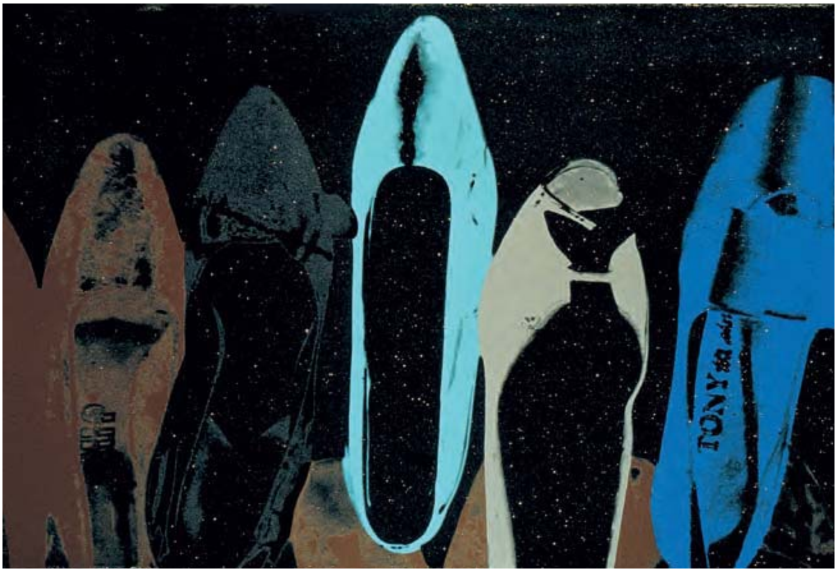

Fig. 24. Andy Warhol, *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980)

Pop art is more than a style in the visual arts or music. It is also an expression of a social vision. This type of art represents, among other things, equality thinking and complete access to the goods of society. Warhol writes:

> What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Cola-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too.[35]

Warhol chose the impersonal techniques of mechanical reproduction such as the silk-screen print or photography. As far as aesthetics is concerned, Pop art is about the surface of the painting, an aesthetics of the surface. Warhol says: "If you want to know about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it."[36] This surface-aesthetics is similar to Abstract Expressionism in exchanging perspective for the two-dimensional painting. In Pop art this also entails, according to the simulacrum interprettation, the abandonment of any narrative connection. Barthes holds that Pop art that does not ascribe any symbolic function to the object and must therefore do without any deeper meaning.[37] It is primarily Baudrillard and Barthes in philosophy and Altizer in theology who have indicated this. The image exists in itself and no longer refers to a reality; society has been aestheticized. Da Vinci's *Last Supper* can still be seen as a religious painting, but any reference to transcendence in Warhol's *Last Supper* is impossible. In late capitalist society, the image is a simulacrum, a copy without an original.

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[35] Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, pp. 100-01.

Altizer: The Aestheticizing of Society

The "God is dead" theologian Thomas Altizer shows how a certain religious development led to an aestheticizing of society. With Nietzsche, he holds that the Jewish and Christian transcendent God is dead. Belief in a radically transcendent reality as in the theology of Karl Barth has led, in his view, to the rejection of the sensory and physical life.[38] Art dematerializes because people choose a reality beyond this world.

The death of a transcendent God is still not the denial of the divine as such. As a Hegelian theologian, Thomas Altizer viewed God as a dialectical process that ends in the merging of God, world, and the human self. The death of the transcendent God thus entails the appearance of the completely immanent divine in history. The opposition of God and the world disappears. God can be talked about only in a radically immanent way.[39] It is a pantheistic view here, the view that God is all in all, albeit with a difference in degree. Altizer elaborated radical immanence in a Hegelian way, thus not in a theosophical way as we saw in Kandinsky in chapter two. This view has the following consequences for the relationship between art, religion, and society.

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[36] H. Rosenberg, *Art on the Edge* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 102; cited in Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 179.

[37] R. Barthes, "That Old Thing, Art …," in: Taylor, *Post-Pop art*, p. 26.

[38] Taylor, *Disfiguring*, p. 155; T.J.J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

The opposition between sacred and profane disappears. God is a dialectical process that ends in the "Kingdom of God" as a complete divine presence, and eternity consists in saying yes to life now. The sacred thus changes into the profane. Altizer sees a parallel here with art. Just as the current world no longer refers to transcendence, so neither does art.[40] Just as the holy becomes profane and vice versa, so art becomes non-art and non-art becomes art, which leads to an aestheticizing of society. Altizer says about modern art:

> … as in the late paintings of Barnett Newman, abstract art seems to pass into nonart, for it dissolves the frame of the easel, passing into the world beyond it, and that world is a purely and totally anonymous world.[41]

Altizer considers this process to have been completed in abstract expressionism. The disappearance of the frame from the painting led to the merging of work and world. Altizer refers here incorrectly to this school to support his view of the aestheticizing of the world. Pop art would have provided a better parallel to his own "God is dead" theology. The blurring of the distinction between of art and non-art and the aestheticizing of the world play a role precisely with respect to this school, as Mark Taylor rightly argues:

> While the death of God is the theological equivalent of the aestheticization of the commodity, the commodification of the work of art in post–abstract expressionism—and espe-

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[39] Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, pp. 62-112.

[40] T.J.J. Altizer, *Total Presence: The Language of Jesus and the Language of Today* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), p. 26.

[41] Altizer, *Total Presence*, pp. 32-33.

> cially in pop art—is the artistic translation of the death of God.[42]

Baudrillard provides an acute analysis of the phenomenon of art becoming merchandise and merchandise becoming art.

Baudrillard: The Image as Simulacrum

The point of Pop art, according to Baudrillard, is the complete integration of art into society. He speaks here of the destruction of transcendence: "[H]ere, there is an insane ambition: that of abolishing the annals (and the foundations) of a whole culture, that of transcendence."[43] By transcendence, Baudrillard means that the image no longer refers at all to something outside itself but has become reality itself. His assertion here is the result of his semiotic analysis of the economic development of society. I will briefly explain his use of semiotics.

Semiotics is the formal analysis of a work of art and views art as a system of signs. Baudrillard uses semiotics but connects this theory with the social and historical context of the work. For him, it is primarily De Saussure's distinction between signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*) that is important. The signifier is, in itself, empty; it is the linguistic form, the sound image that is the bearer of the meaning but to which no meaning has yet been attributed. As such, the signifier is the material phenomenon. The signified represents the content, the meaning. Only when a signified is added to the signifier, when content is added to the form, is there a sign. For example, the word "ton" exists first of all as an empty form, as three letters. A signified can be added to this signifier—possibly a measurement of weight. Another possible signifier of "ton" is a European unit of quantity for timber equalling 480 board feet. Yet another is its metaphorical use as "a great deal." Signifier and signified always form a sign together. The relation between them is arbitrary. The fact that we can understand word signs rests on conventions.

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[42] Taylor, *Disfiguring*, p. 158.

[43] J. Baudrillard, "Pop Art: An Art of Consumption," in: Taylor, *Post-Pop Art*, p. 35.

Baudrillard's analysis of the image in Pop art is part of his analysis of society.[44] Industrial capitalism, the social form of modernity, has given way to neo-capitalism, the consumer and media society, the social form of postmodernity. It is a society manipulated by merchandise and purchases. Consumerism leads to homogenization and levelling—and here I am reminded of Warhol's remark that everyone, rich and poor, drinks Coke.

Already in his *Pour un critique de l'économie politique du signe* (1972) Baudrillard started from a parallel between the sign and the merchandise. He pointed to a formal similarity between merchandise and the sign with which he laid the foundation for his later theory of the primacy of the signifier. This entails the following.

Like the sign, the merchandise has two elements: the use value (the content) and the trade value (the form). With respect to both the merchandise and the sign, Baudrillard points to a shift in the trade value and the signifier respectively. With that, the *content*, the use value and the signified, shifts to the *form*, the trade value and the signifier. Each piece of merchandise loses its use value because it merges into its trade value and becomes replaceable, and the sign loses its signified because it converges with the signifier and is thus no longer connected to a fixed meaning and also becomes replaceable.

Let us take Da Vinci's *Last Supper* as an example. The work originally had a religious meaning. Culturally and socially, it belonged, according to Baudrillard, to the stage of imitation (*counterfeit*), the time of the Renaissance up until the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Our current time is that of simulation, of pretending, dominated by the code.[45] Under the influence of the market, the painting has become an object of trade value and has thus lost it religious function (its use value), the representation of the Last Supper, and can now function in all kinds of contexts, outside of its original religious one. It thus functions as advertising through being printed on T-shirts to promote the city of Milan or to recommend a particular brand of jeans. The Otto Kern jeans advertisement shows a man and eleven women, all semi-naked and wearing only jeans, arranged like Jesus and his disciples in Da Vinci's painting.[46] This painting no longer has any actual reference or meaning. As Barthes says, it has been reduced to pure factuality and stripped of every symbolic reference. Its reference is the "the social absolute," what the masses see in it.[47] An implosion of meaning takes place. Referring to Warhol, Baudrillard remarks how art and industry have exchanged signs, pointing to the technology of the reproduction of art and continues:

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[44] W. van Gils, *Het obscene lot. Een kritiek van de illusie volgens Jean Baudrillard* (Meppel: Krips Repro, 1990).

[45] J. Baudrillard, "The Orders of Simulacra," in J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, Semiotext[e] (Cambridge MA: Mitt Press, 1983), p. 83.

> It's the same thing for production, which you could say is entering today this esthetic reduplication, this phase when, expelling all content and finality, it becomes somehow abstract and non-figurative. It expresses then the pure form of production, it takes upon itself, as art, the value of a finality without purpose. Art and industry can then exchange their signs. Art can become a reproducing machine (Andy Warhol), without ceasing to be art, since the machine is only a sign.… And so art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality. And so art is dead, not only because its critical transcendence is gone, but because reality itself, entirely impregnated by an aesthetic which is inseparable from its own structure, has been confused with its own image.[48]

The primacy of the signifier leads to a loss of every original meaning or authentic content. Not only is the economy no longer based on any "authentic value," but the sign itself no longer rests on a correspondence between words and things. The sign system does not present reality but produces, just like a computer, models in which reality is simulated in various ways. Reality disappears into nothing and gives way to simulation. It consists only in the images that the mass media present to us. The simulation is our only reality, in which the relation between sign and reality has been severed. An infinite multiplication of signs arises via models in which it is no longer correspondence with an original that is fundamental but the mutual differences between the signs.

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[46] Warhol, *The Last Supper*, p. 33.

[47] R. Barthes, "That Old Thing, Art …," pp. 26, 30.

[48] Baudrillard, "The Orders of Simulacra," p. 151.

Baudrillard outlines the historical development until the current age of the simulacrum. He shows this development via, among other things, a self-willed explanation of the iconoclastic controversy in church history. The iconoclasts were right in their resistance to the representation of God via an icon. If that is what happens, then God is no longer the exalted authority but disappears into a simulacrum. The iconoclasts sensed "this facility they have of effacing God from the consciousness of men, and the overwhelming, destructive truth which they suggest: that ultimately there has never been any God."[49]

Baudrillard speaks of the modern form of iconoclasm in the contemporary age of the simulacrum,

> which does not consist of destroying images but of manufacturing images, a profusing of images *in which there is nothing to see*.... But, behind each of the images, something has disappeared. That is their secret, if they have one—and that is also the secret of simulation, if it has one.[50]

For Baudrillard, Warhol represents the world of post-industrial capitalism, the aestheticization of commercial objects and the commercialization of art. Warhol makes this connection as well: "making money is art." One could think here of his *200 One Dollar Bills* (1962).[51] In the quote at the beginning of this chapter he says about his career as an artist: "I started as a commercial artist and I want to finish as a business artist." The connection is surprising because we associate artistic skill with originality and unicity and art with being exalted and mysterious. Both

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[49] J. Baudrillard, "The Procession of Simulacra," in: Baudrillard, *Simulations*, pp. 7-9.

[50] Baudrillard, "Beyond the Vanishing Point of Art," p. 187.

[51] See the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. Mark Taylor's view of Warhol is similar to Baudrillard's. See Taylor, *Disfiguring*, pp. 178-84.

Kandinsky and Rothko are examples of that view, whereas Warhol connects art with making money and with the everyday.

Pop Art and Referentiality

Baudrillard's analysis presupposes that Pop art is merely a non-critical reflection of society. Moreover, he assumes that the viewer experiences this art passively. The logos of Wise Potato Chips and Camel in the series on the Last Supper can indeed point to the commercialization of religion. Nevertheless, this interpretation of Warhol is not convincing. Warhol may have been a business artist, but he was a spiritual business artist; he was a believer and was involved in his parish,[52] and I think he establishes a connection between religion and society in a new way. I will indicate some general considerations that lead to a referential reading of Warhol's art.

Warhol does not do away with art but works with a different concept of art from that found in Kandinsky and Rothko. Art is no longer directed at an exalted, mysterious world but at the everyday world of the consumer. As an artist, Warhol does three things with that new direction of the everyday world: he depicts the everyday world in the now classical Pop art (1); he does away with the visual difference between art objects and ordinary things in the ready-mades he himself adapted (2); and in his religious art he removes the distinction between high and low art and connects art and life (3).

The Image in Pop Art

In 1960 Warhol showed the documentary filmmaker de Antonio two paintings of Coke bottles, both about 180 cm high. Bockris describes the event in his biography of Warhol:

> One was just a pristine black-and-white Coke bottle. The other has a lot of abstract expressionist marks on it. I said, "Come on, Andy, the abstract one is a piece of shit, the oth-

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[52] For the biographical details on Warhol's spirituality, see Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, pp. 15-44.

> er one is remarkable. It's our society, it's who we are, it's absolutely beautiful and naked."[53]

Warhol wanted to paint Coke bottles precisely how they looked. Thus, he made art from the everyday. He broke with the traditional technique of painting everyday objects via perspective or a certain pictorial space but did what was unprecedented in the 1950s. Technically, this had to do with the following: concentration on a specific depiction of an object like a Coke bottle, hot dog, or a Campbell soup can, magnification through projection, elimination of details, and primarily making something central as an object in itself, in a space empty of references.[54] Warhol's favourite techniques were silk-screen prints and processing photos. His machine-like works helped give the artist a different image, i.e. that of the business artist, as Kattenberg indicated:

> In turning the art world upside down by revealing all the attractions of materialism, Warhol stripped the artist of the Romantic concept of this unique and authentic individuality. With the aid of the mass media, he converted the public impression of an artist from bohemian to businessman and initiated him into society, the world of machines and of the real force that makes the world go round: money.[55]

In his art, the accent lies on the *conceptual aspect* because the creativity consists in selecting the reality that people want to portray. He therefore chose specific things from everyday life, like the Campbell's Soup cans and Coke bottles, things that the public was acquainted with. He makes an everyday object unique. Objects from the consumer society are given a new significance independent of their commercial or functional value because they have been separated from their usual context. That is precisely what allows them to be symbols of American culture. Much of Warhol's Pop art consists in the selection of the image produced for the masses as the subject of his art.

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[53] V. Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* (New York, etc.: Bantam Books, 1989), p. 98.

[54] Kattenberg, *Andy Warhol, Priest?* p. 30.

[55] Kattenberg, *Andy Warhol, Priest?* p. 26.

Art Is Not a Matter of Visual Difference

Warhol did yet something else with everyday things that led to the disappearance of the visual difference between art and ordinary objects. In April 1964, in the Stable Gallery, he exhibited hundreds of Brillo boxes that could be bought at the local grocer's.[56] The question, then, is obvious: What is the difference between art and non-art if there is no visual difference between the Brillo boxes in the exhibition and those at the grocer's? Warhol thus raises the old philosophical question of what art is: How is art related to reality? He did something similar in film. His movie *Empire* (1964) was characterized by the absence of important events. Nothing happens; the time in the film is the same as ordinary time. Warhol's art thus poses the question of how art is related to reality. It cannot simply be a matter of perception. What changes ordinary things into works of art is, according to Danto, a theoretical interpretation added to the work of art. He clarifies this by an analogy with religion. The Eucharist involves the transubstantiation of bread and wine. Just as bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ, so an everyday object can change into art in a different context.[57]

It is clear from Warhol's ready-mades that he had abandoned traditional art, but he did not see this as abandoning art as such. Although Warhol poses the philosophical question in his art of what art is, he does not become a philosopher; he remains an artist. He is, namely, not satisfied with only *thinking* about the selection from everyday life but also wants to *make* the work (in collaboration with others). He thus produced the Brillo boxes with the help of others in order to make them the same as the Brillo boxes at the grocer's.[58] I will note in passing that art is viewed here too one-sidedly as conceptual, at the expense of the aesthetic aspect of the beautiful or the sublime: the beautiful as the disinterested satisfaction that colour, form, proportion, etc. can give, and the sublime as a shocking experience or as the infinite sublime.[59] Be that as it may, in any case Warhol makes art that occasions much thought, and this obtains also for his religious art.

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[56] *Brillo Soap Pads Box* (1964/68), silk-screen and house paint on multiplex (43.5 x 43.5 x 35.6 cm). At the exhibition in 1968 in Stockholm Warhol did something similar with 500 cardboard Brillo boxes.

[57] Danto, *Andy Warhol*, pp. 136-39.

[58] Danto, *Andy Warhol*, p. 62.

Abandonment of the Distinction between High and Low Art

In connection with his religious art, Warhol does something else with the everyday world: he connects it with the tradition of high art. He does away with the distinction between high and low art in his *Last Supper* series by adapting Da Vinci's high art through the use of pop logos. In doing so, he often uses *repetitions*, which Warhol had an eye for in contemporary society. Repetition can also contain a spiritual moment. In *The Last Supper (the Big C)* we saw that Christ and the motorcycle are repeated, causing all emphasis to lie on both. In other works, the picture as such is repeated, as seen in the *repetitions* in works in the *Last Supper* series, such as *Sixty Last Suppers* (1986) or *Christ 112 Times* (1986). That can be explained as a filmic effect by presenting the scene several times, or visualizing a chant, a part of meditation.[60]

If Warhol abandons the distinction between high and low art, if he connects art and life, and if art is for everyone, what then is the difference between Warhol's *The Last Supper* and paintings from popular American religious culture, such as the very well-known painting at the time by Warner Sallman, *Head of Christ* (1940) (fig. 25)?[61] In any case, there is the difference that the one is considered art by the art world and the other not. In a spiritual respect, there is more to say. That will be done in the conclusion to this chapter.

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[59] For the aesthetic aspect see W. Stoker, *Het schone en het sublieme, de kunst van religieuze kunst*. Amsterdam: VU University Amsterdam, 2011.

[60] Kattenberg, *Andy Warhol, Priest?* p. 92; Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, p. 99.

[61] Oil on canvas, 72 x 56 cm.

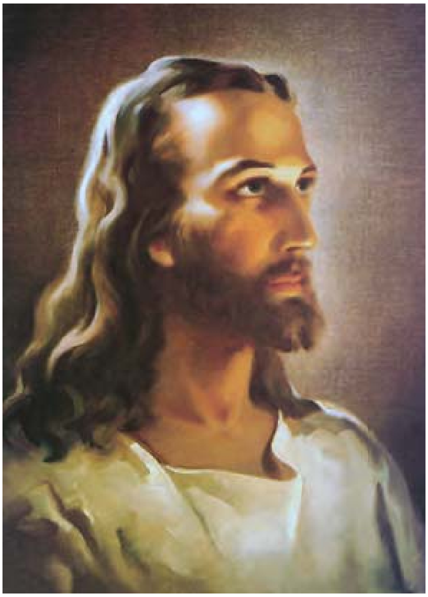

Fig. 25. Warner Sallman, *Head of Christ* (1940)[62]

Pop Art as a Revealing Mirror

Warhol holds up a mirror for society in his Pop art by showing society's dark side. His *Death and Disaster* works concerns subjects like car and airplane accidents, food poisoning, suicide, and the electric chair.

White Burning Car III (1963) (fig. 26) depicts a burned out car wreck, with a man hanging on a pole (the accident victim?) while a passerby seems not to notice anything.[63] Crow rightly rejects, in his article "Saturday Disasters," the view that Warhol's images are indifferent registrations of an artist without emotion, as Jameson remarked above about *Diamond Dust Shoes*.[64] These works not only show something to which the image refers—they also reveal an empathic artist behind such works. The interpretation requires a story, such as his *Race-Riot* (1963; and later) that depicts race riots.

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[62] Oil on canvas, 72 x56 cm.

[63] Silk-screen on canvas, c. 255 x 200 cm.

[64] Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, pp. 49-65. See Warhol on his emotion and fascination: Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*.

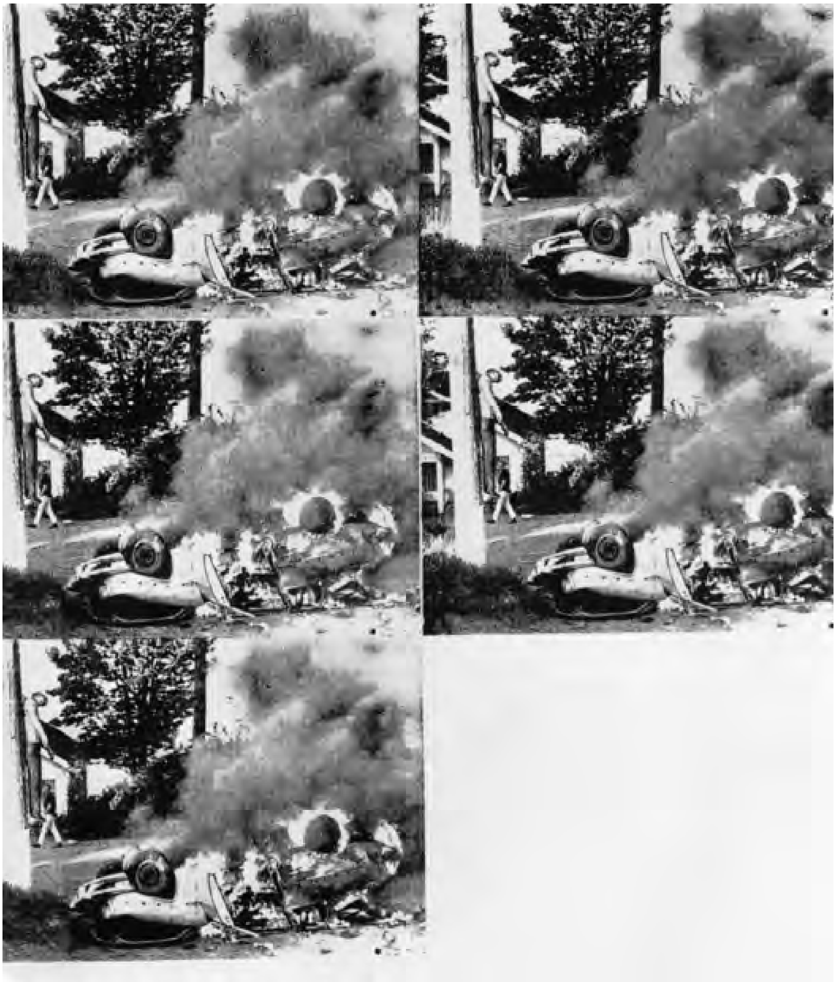

Fig. 26. Andy Warhol, *White Burning Car III* (1963)

These works have a critical function and are not simulacrum merchandise images. They reveal something about society via the brute factuality of accidents and human mortality. Warhol captured Marilyn Monroe after her suicide and Jackie Kennedy while she was mourning her husband. He is thus part of the American tradition of "telling the truth."[65] He had the right idea in painting advertisements on his canvases in which hope and lack are shown to the masses.[66]

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[65] Foster *et al.*, *Art since 1900*, p. 488.

In short, a referential interpretation does more justice to Warhol's Pop art than a simulacrum reading does. That conclusion casts another light on the relation between Pop art and religion. How can the pop logos in *The Last Supper (Dove)* be explained if they are not about the commercialization of religion?

A Spirituality of Everyday

Warhol was fascinated by the individual in mass society and wanted to depict him. He commented: "I don't think art should be only for the selected few …. I think it should be for the mass of American people."[67] He was also fascinated by the Catholic faith he had been acquainted with since childhood. In his *Last Supper* series he plays the role of a spiritual business artist. I will show that there are indications in *The Last Supper (Dove)* for interpreting this work (along with others from the *Last Supper* series) as a religious work in the Christian tradition.

The Last Supper (Dove) as a Religious Painting

Warhol's variations on Da Vinci's *Last Supper* no longer hang in a sacred space but in museums or in exhibitions, as they did in Milan opposite the church with Da Vinci's fresco. We will return to *The Last Supper (Dove)* (fig. 23, p. 138) and look at it somewhat more closely.

The price tag refers to Judas' betrayal, for which he was paid 30 silver pieces.[68] GE is the symbol for light and thus for power and can refer to God who separated the light from the darkness or, better, to Jesus who, according to John's gospel, says about himself: "I am the light of the world." The dove both as symbol and in its written form points to the Holy Spirit. In iconography, apart from the annunciation to Mary and the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is also connected with the Eucharist, one of the events in the painting. Together with Christ, the dove is central in the painting. The connection between the Holy Ghost and the Eucharist is apparent from the epiclesis of the Eucharist liturgy: "Send then, O God, your Holy Spirit, so that we eat and drink the life that does not perish."[69] The ceiling section above the dove in the painting is open. That reminds one of the dove at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. The heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove (Luke 3:21-22). The descending dove flies away from evil, the price tag, towards the light. The agitation among the disciples, expressed in their gestures in Da Vinci's fresco, are transformed by the dove flying toward the light into the expectation of a hopeful end after Jesus has just spoken about his betrayal. The title of the painting *The Last Supper (Dove)* and the word dove written in large letters confirm this reading.

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[66] Danto, "Andy Warhol," p. 16.

[67] Cited in Foster *et al.*, *Art since 1900*, p. 490.

[68] I consider the logos, i.e. the price tag, the dove, and GE, as *qualifiers* that indicate the religious character of the painting (see Stoker, *Het Schone en het sublieme*).

The painting proves to be carefully composed, as pointed out in Kattenberg's analysis. The dove flying above John is, together with Christ, the centre of the painting. Through the pop logos, Warhol changes the perspective of the model of Da Vinci's fresco in the encyclopedia (fig. 19, p. 131 above). Da Vinci had constructed the perspective in such a way that Christ's forehead is both the vanishing point and the dramatic centre of the whole event.[70] Warhol shifts the central section somewhat towards the top, to the dove above John and Jesus. Together, the dove and Jesus form the centre of the painting. Aside from the baptism of Jesus, the dove also appears in the annunciation to Mary in connection with the mystery of the virgin birth. In Ghirlandaio's *Annunciato* (1482), the dove flies high in the top part of the painting. The dove in *The Last Supper Dove* also flies at the same height.[71]

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[69] This is the text of the epiclesis prayer from a Dutch liturgy (Onze Hulp). Warhol knew the epiclesis prayer because of his Byzantine Catholic upbringing (cf. Kattenberg, *Andy Warhol, Priest?* p. 149). The idea of cleansing/purification can also play a role in use of precisely this brand of soap (Dove).

[70] Kattenberg, *Andy Warhol, Priest?* pp. 114-23.

The different elements in the painting stand in a certain relationship with one another: the dove with Christ is central, with the price tag and the GE logo on the left and right side respectively. The GE logo above Matthew, Thaddeus, and Simon is the same size, 1.98 metres, as the price tag logo of $ 0.59. The painting thus has a symmetrical composition, although the word dove is written in large letters left of the centre, rather than precisely in the middle. Part of the ceiling has been removed to suggest space. This emphasizes the vertical, and a counterbalance has been introduced through the dove flying horizontally toward the light, the GE logo.

In Da Vinci's painting, Jesus wears red and blue clothing. Blue is a sign of heaven and refers to the divine, and red is the colour of passion. With respect to Jesus, red refers to his love and blue to the fact that he belongs with God.[72] Warhol paints Jesus just like the disciples, i.e. without any colour: all have been left white like the whole painting. The colours red and blue have been separated in *The Last Supper (Dove)*. The GE logo, symbol of the God of Christ, is blue. Warhol has changed the colour red into the red-brown of the price tag and the light pink of the dove.

A Hermeneutical Interpretation

On the basis of its careful composition, *The Last Supper (Dove)* can be seen as a serious interpretation of Da Vinci's fresco using contemporary means. Warhol here applies, via Da Vinci's fresco, the gospel story of betrayal and salvation (the Eucharist) to the consumer society of his time. The relationship between Warhol's *Last Supper* and Da Vinci's has to do with their understanding of Christ in their own time. Just as Da Vinci's fresco can be viewed as his visual interpretation of the gospel story, so can Warhol's *The Last Supper*. In the work of both artists there is a fusion of horizons. The meaning horizon of the original event, the Last Supper as the institution of the Eucharist in the early church, fuses with the understanding horizon of Da Vinci who understood it in his time and showed that in his depiction of it on the fresco. He brought both scenes, the prediction of Judas' betrayal and the institution of the Eucharist together. That hermeneutical process is not an individual event but occurs via a "history of effect" (Gadamer) the church tradition within which Da Vinci stood. In its turn, Warhol's *The Last Supper (Dove)* is an interpretation of the gospel story via the history of effect of Da Vinci's fresco and its model in the encyclopedia. It is how Warhol made the gospel story his own.

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[71] See Kattenberg, *Andy Warhol, Priest?* pp. 118-19, schemas 4.18 and 4.19.

[72] For red and blue, see D. Apostolos-Cappadona, *Dictionary of Christian Art* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1995), *sub voce*. On an Eastern Orthodox icon vermillion and pale blue, among others, refer to the divine light (cf. P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* [Wheathhampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1972], p. 228).

The process of understanding in Warhol (and in Da Vinci) shows a transformation of images of Jesus in the tradition. There are different kinds of transformations of the image of Jesus from the gospels: deletion, substitution, or addition. In deletion a link is made to the Jesus figure but the religious meaning is deleted. We should recall the Otto Kern jeans advertisement cited above that shows a man and eleven women, half-naked with only jeans on, arranged according to Da Vinci's *Last Supper*. Renée Cox, in *Yo Mama's Last Supper* (1996), shows a Last Supper in which a nude African American woman takes the place of Jesus and the disciples are African Americans. That is not deletion, as claimed by some critics who view this painting as anti-Catholic.[73] It could be seen as bringing up the issue of the inequality between men and women and the inequality between races or population groups. *Substitution* entails that the Jesus figure is used in such a way that the formation of the image of the Christian tradition is criticized or unmasked. An example of this is Max Ernst's *The Holy Virgin Punishes the Christ Child in the Presence of Three Witnesses* (1926). The child Jesus lies on Mary's lap and is being spanked, while three arrogant-looking people are looking on. The Christ child is portrayed here as an ordinary child who is being spanked by his mother.

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[73] S. Brent Plate, *Blasphemy: Art that Offends* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), pp. 44-45. For deletion, substitution, and addition, see P. Claes, *Echo's, Echo's. De kunst van de Allusie* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1988).

The transformation in Warhol is not deletion or substitution but *addition*, a deepening of the Christian tradition. The starting point is still the representation of the institution of the Eucharist as in Da Vinci's fresco. The dramatic effect of Da Vinci's painting is heightened in *The Last Supper (Dove)* by the gestures of the disciples being underscored by the price tag logo as a sign of betrayal. The love of Jesus expressed in the Eucharist is underscored by both the written word "Dove" as well as by the symbol of the dove as an indication of the Holy Spirit. The dramatic tension in the painting is indicated by the logo that points to the betrayal by Judas and the GE logo that refers to Christ as the light of the world. That undeniably gives love the upper hand over the betrayal.

Following Da Vinci, Warhol takes over both the scene of the betrayal and that of the institution of the Eucharist. Clearly visible in *The Last Supper (Dove)* is Jesus' outstretched left hand offering bread and wine with the palm facing up, which refers to the institution of the Eucharist. The dramatic effect of the fresco, however, is different in Warhol. The 130 gesturing fingers are hardly visible because of the pop logos. These logos not only bring together the two scenes in Warhol's painting, i.e. the betrayal (the price tag) and the institution of the Eucharist (the dove and the GE logo). But Warhol also uses them to connect Jesus with the consumer society: in this world as well he is the redeemer.

Jesus' salvific function becomes somewhat more specific when we look at the two other paintings: *The Last Supper (the Big C)* (fig. 21) and *The Last Supper/Be Somebody with a Body* (fig. 22). The latter shows a bodybuilder with his transient vitality. Christ, depicted at the table with bread and the chalice in front of him, offers bread and wine with his outstretched left hand. He thus offers his body "so that we eat and drink the life that does not perish," as stated in the epiclesis in the Eucharist celebration. In the former painting Christ is presented as the Big C, as the healer of the other—feared—Big C. Jesus' function as the bringer of salvation also extends to this physical disease.

This interpretation confirms what was stated above with respect to Warhol's *Death and Disaster* works. The theme of disease and death was important for Warhol already before Valerie Solanas' attack on him in 1968. In Warhol, religion is closely associated with illness, physical imperfection, death, and new life. As a child, he was himself, as stated above, sickly, and the lengthy illness of his father who had tuberculosis and died of that in 1942 made a deep impression on him.[74] Danto reports that Warhol already displayed this religious view at his first exhibition in April 1961, using advertisements about help with a physical defect.[75] An advertisement from that time, for example, showed how a crooked nose could be straightened. He made his *Before and After (1)* (1961) using this advertisement, in which the nose can be seen before and after the operation. Christ in *The Last Supper* thus becomes not only the redeemer by his sacrifice but also the healer of physical defects.

Immanent Transcendence

The spirituality that Warhol evokes in *The Last Supper (Dove)* is directly connected with everyday concerns. He makes clever use of Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, an event that concerns the world of mass consumerism as well. He does that by introducing logos borrowed from the world of commerce, combined with his understanding of Jesus as redeemer and as a healer of human illnesses. Warhol's Pop art style thus depicts a spirituality of everyday life. The figurative style meshes well with the way in which Warhol gives expression to a spirituality of immanent transcendence. He connects the world of the masses, the world of consumerism and commerce closely with his Christian spirituality. The holy and the profane are closely connected with each other in everyday life by the use of pop logos to refer to the Christian drama of death and resurrection, how life comes out of death.

From the point of view of art history, there is a great difference between the work of Caspar David Friedrich and that of Warhol, but less difference in a spiritual sense (cf. above, pp. 17-20). Both provide in their work, each in his own way, interpretations of a Christian spirituality that connects heaven and earth closely together: a *spirituality of immanent transcendence*. Warhol's world is not Friedrich's. The one portrays a spirituality of immanent transcendence in the experience of nature, the other does so using the world of consumerism. Warhol sees faith immediately active in the here and now. Friedrich makes more of a distinction between this world and life after death.

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[74] Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*, pp. 19-20.

[75] Danto, *Andy Warhol*, p. 146.

A Comparision with Sallman's *Head of Christ*

Among other things, Pop art is an expression of a view of society and stands for equality thinking: art is for everyone. Warhol removes the distinction between high and low art, but differences between *The Last Supper (Dove)* and other popular religious art do remain. Just as a reproduction of Da Vinci's *Last Supper* hung in Warhol's childhood home, so Sallman's *Head of Christ* (1940) (fig. 25, p. 152) was found in many Protestant homes in the United States. David Morgan points in his studies on popular religiosity to the enormous influence in America of reproductions of Sallman's painting. The similarity between Warhol's *Last Supper* and Sallman's *Head of Christ* is that both spiritual images are connected to the everyday life of the average American. The difference is that the one belongs to what is considered art and is included in the collections of famous museums whereas the other functions devotionally. Art experts consider such devotional works to be of lesser quality aesthetically speaking. Burch Brown asserts that works by Sallman, considered by art critics to be sentimental kitsch, are not viewed at all as cheap or inferior by those who use them in their devotions.[76] Warhol's *Last Supper* is secular art with a religious theme and Sallman's *Head of Christ* is art of a religious community. The function of both images differs in at least three ways.

1. Warhol's works can be seen in a museum and occasion much thought as far as spirituality is concerned. Secular art in a museum has a public; art within an organized religious functions in a community. Along with other popular images, *Head of Christ* played an important role from 1940 to 1960 in the visual

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[76] F. Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste & Christian Taste* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), p. 11.

piety of millions of Americans. It had a function in the religious ritual of prayer. As an image of "Jesus as friend," it helped believers in their daily lives: people felt they belonged to the group of those who had such reproductions in their kitchens or bedrooms. In his study *The Sacred Gaze*, Morgan points to the "gaze" as a means of communication between image and believer. The sacred gaze is "the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance."[77] That also obtains for church icons.[78]

2. Another difference is that paintings like Sallman's are intended to confirm one's existence, rather than break it open. The effect of such art in popular culture is

> to absorb consciousness by concentrating it in the features of an object without transforming the parameters of perception—without, in other words, changing the way we see.[79]

The image is accepted as true because it expresses what the community to which one belongs wants.[80] The *Head of Christ* does not break open the perception of the believer but is focused on Christ as a friend in daily life. Faith is confirmed through seeing the reproduction repeatedly. Church icons also show in principle the same image, such as the birth icon of Jesus, the Mother of God icon (in various kinds), those of the Trinity and of the saints, etc. The icons could not be venerated and seen as part of the church ritual if the images were not *recognized* and their actions and gestures understood by the community. Because the icons constantly depict Christ, Mary, or a sacred event in similar ways, they have a preserving effect on the believer. The rules for making them have also been set down in detail.[81] Both the Eastern Orthodox icon tradition and the popular culture of Sallman, strive to represent the original Jesus.[82] Let us recall what was said above about the spiritual image of the "time before art" (cf. above, pp. 10-11). Compared with the forms of transformation discussed above, *repetition* entails that the image should be as similar as possible to the original image of Jesus. One can think here of the veil with which Veronica wiped Jesus' face on his journey to the cross and on which his face was imprinted. Or, one can think of the story of Abgar and the mandylion, an "icon not painted by human hands" with, according to legend, the face of Christ himself. That was how, it was thought, the authenticity of the image was preserved, not only through physical contact but also through the similarity in facial expression.[83] The image and the living Christ come into contact with each other through that means.

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[77] D. Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 3, 259.

[78] J.-L. Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 85-87; Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, pp. 183-88.

[79] D. Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 16.

[80] Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 77.

3. Warhol's *Last Supper* is secular art with a religious subject. Sallman's *Head of Christ* seems to be a *sacred object*, like an icon. His portrait of Jesus is, for many believers, sacred. The image has the ability to make what it represents real,[84] and its function is similar to that of an icon in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The icon not only represents Christ but is itself an expression of him. Just as there is something of the original light of the depicted object in a photo, so there is something of Christ in an icon. The icon is a symbol and shares in the reality to which it refers.[85] The truth of a religious image reflects the truth that the divine reality pours out and that penetrates tangible reality. Images bridge the distance between God and the human being but also keep the human being at a distance. The image is never the divine reality itself. If that were so, the icon would become an idol. What obtains for the icon also

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[81] Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, pp. 213-29.

[82] Morgan, *Visual Piety*, p. 40; H. Belting, *Das echte Bild. Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), pp. 45-85.

[83] Belting, *Das echte Bild*, p. 57.

[84] Morgan, *Visual Piety*, p. 8.

[85] Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, pp.165-66.

obtains for religious paintings like Sallman's *Head of Christ*. They can function as "icons" only if the religious viewer is also placed under examination by the gaze directed at him or her by the depicted Christ.

The experience of viewing Warhol's *Last Supper* is different from that of viewing Sallman's *Head of Christ*. The latter has to do with repetition, the former with addition. Warhol seeks to translate the meaning of Christ in a new context. The logos taken from the consumer society in *The Last Supper (Dove)* and *The Last Supper (The Big C)* where Jesus is surrounded by motorcycles break open our perception and challenge us to see in Jesus the bringer of salvation for the consumer society as well. What I remarked in connection with Kandinsky holds true here as well: the difference in function between secular art with a spiritual subject and art of a religious community is factual and not a matter of principle. Why should works from the *Last Supper* series not be able to hang in a church and become part of a religious practice? Then they would change from being secular objects to being sacred objects like an icon or *Head of Christ*. In the concluding chapter I will explore the spiritual image in secular art in distinction from the art of a religious community more closely.

CHAPTER V

Kiefer

Can Heaven Bear the Weight of History?

> *I discovered the spirituality of* concrete*—using earth to mould a symbol, a symbol of the imaginative and the spiritual world.*[1]

Introduction

Kandinsky's work represents a spirituality of inwardness. Against the background of World War I and in his struggle against materialism and positivism, he used his work to advance a future utopia that he saw as the time of the Spirit. Rothko's work shows the struggle of the individual with the tragedy of existence in a lonely and strange world against the background of World War II and the years following. Warhol's spiritual work in the 1980s connects the Christian faith with the American consumer society and shows Jesus to be a liberator of spirit and body. The work of the contemporary German artist Anselm Kiefer (b. 1946) shows a process of mourning as a result of the German past and is directed in a more general sense at the problems of life, but in a different way from Rothko. Kiefer's work poses the question of the why of evil, the classical question of theodicy.[2]

In Anselm Kiefer's painting *Send Forth Your Spirit* (1974) we see a dove drawn against the sky, wearing a halo, while the palette below receives divine inspiration, after which a nourishing rain falls on the earth.[3] The words "[und] wird alles neu" [everything will become new]" are written, barely legibly, beside the palette. The paintings cited here indicate undeniably that Kiefer views his artistic calling as a spiritual one. He explained his use of the palette in his works as follows:

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[1] Interview with Anselm Kiefer (2005/06) in: G. Celant, *Anselm Kiefer* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p. 337. For the interviews with Kiefer I will henceforth refer to Celant and indicate the year of the interview in parentheses.

[2] For Kiefer's works see M. Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1987), M. Auping, *Anselm Kiefer: Heaven on Earth* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2005), D. Arasse, *Anselm Kiefer* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), and Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*.

> The palette represents the idea of the artist connecting heaven and earth. He works here but he looks up there. He is always moving between the two realms … the palette can transform reality by suggesting new visions.[4]

We will see that there is a spirituality in Kiefer's works that draws from different religious sources, including esotericism. He calls the spirituality of his work a spirituality of concrete, as indicated in the quote at the head of this chapter.

Kiefer's work is primarily known for the attention it devotes to Germany's Nazi past in general and the destruction of the Jews in particular. The impressive depictions of Paul Celan's *Death Fugue,* for example, in *Your Golden Hair, Margarete* (1981) and *Your Ashen Hair, Shulamite* (1981) in which the theme is mourning the past testify to this. After 1987, the existential problem was expanded and was often separated from the German past. That does not take away from the fact that the influence of Auschwitz remains undeniably present, as in, for example, *Heaven on Earth* (1998-2004). We will look at Kiefer's work especially after 1987, particularly works that are inspired by Jewish mysticism and depict the question of the why of evil after Auschwitz in a penetrating way.

The Tear in Reality

Many of Kiefer's works borrow images of heaven and earth from the genre of landscape painting in which heaven and earth are shown in a certain mutual relationship and in changing contexts.[5] In addition to these images of heaven and earth Kiefer also makes use of Jewish mysticism, which for him is "a spiritual journey anchored by images."[6] Kiefer thinks these texts in images: the process of spiritual knowledge for him is almost purely visual.[7] He borrows from the cabbala and from Isaak Luria's (1534-1572) doctrine of creation. He also makes use of Merkawa mysticism, the mystical journey to the heavenly "chariot" that shows the transformation of the human being. How does the spirituality of concrete emerge in his depiction of Zim Zum, the "breaking of the vessels," and Merkawa mysticism?

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[3] Water colour, gouache, 95 x 125 cm.

[4] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 338 (2005/06).

Zim Zum

In Kiefer's painting *Zim Zum* (1990)[8] (fig. 27), we see the earth as a ploughed field, painted in off-white and brown as it is in many of Kiefer's landscapes. The earth is surrounded by a wide leaden frame with bars of broken lead and with orange here and there, indicating the recent presence of fire. In the midst of the field is a large grey hole that, if we look through it, shows us the emptiness above which the earth has been suspended. If we compare this work with *Zim Zum* (2000), we see that the format of the later work is vertical.[9] Kiefer's works are monumental in size. *Zim Zum* (1990) is 380 cm wide and 560 cm high, whereas *Zim Zum* (2000) resembles a high door: 950 cm high and 510 cm wide. The landscape is virtually the same, but the lead above is greatly expanded and takes up about two thirds of the work. The monumental character of both works have the effect of bringing the viewer to an unavoidable confrontation.

Here Kiefer provides a depiction from the Jewish cabbala, the doctrine of Zim Zum developed by Isaak Luria (1534-1572),

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[5] See, among others, *Heaven* (1969), *Every Man Stands under His Own Dome of* Heaven (1970), *Winter Landscape* (1970), *Heaven-Earth* (1974), *Man Lying with Branch* (1971), *The Milky Way* (1985-1987), and *Heaven on Earth* (1998-2004).

[6] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 339 (2005/06).

[7] Cited in Auping, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 46.

[8] Oil, charcoal, ash, canvas on lead.

[9] Oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac, and lead on canvas.

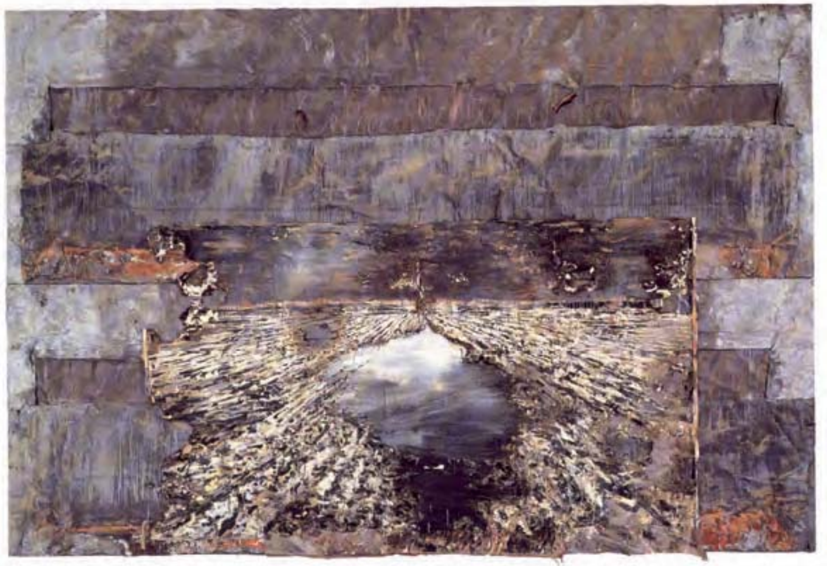

Fig. 27. Anselm Kiefer, *Zim Zum* (1990) © Anselm Kiefer

i.e. God's withdrawal. God withdraws, and as a result the world can unfold imperfectly. But how are we to interpret Kiefer's depiction of this? In his reflections on Kiefer's *Zim Zum* (1990) Mark Taylor argues that God's withdrawal in Kiefer's work can be explained as follows:

> In Kiefer's rendering, or, perhaps more precisely, rending, of Zim Zum, the withdrawal of God is an act of desertion that leaves the world lacking …. The *retrait* enacted on Kiefer's canvas inscribes a nonabsent absence that is always lacking and, thus, leaves everything incomplete. This unavoidable lack is terrifying for all who desire the presence of fulfillment on the arrival of salvation.[10]

Is it correct to see Kiefer's depiction of Zim Zum as an act of God's desertion "that leaves the world lacking"? For Kiefer as well, the world is torn, but, given his works (and his own explanation of them) it does not seem to me that he explains them explicitly in reference to God's act as Taylor does. To get a proper understanding of Kiefer's painting, let us look at Luria's doctrine of Zim Zum.

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[10] M.C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 305.

Luria holds that the process of creation consists of two acts.[11] The first act of God is not a movement outward, an emanation, but a movement inward. In this first act, God makes room in his being from which he withdraws. This act has been called God's exile into himself, his banishing of his own omnipotence. In a second act, God moves out of himself with a ray of his being and begins his revelation or unfolding as creator in the mystical primordial space that he created within himself. The movement of concentration and veiling is the first act, which is followed by another act of God's emanation and manifestation, the outpouring of the *sephirot*, the divine light through which the creation came to be.

This theistic doctrine of creation conceives of creation as *ex nihilo* in a radical way and is opposed to any pantheistic tendencies regarding God as "all in all" that are often found in emanation theories. Each thing is not only a residue of the divine manifestation but its own reality as well. On the basis of Kiefer's depiction of Zim Zum, there are two reasons why, in my view, one cannot argue that he portrays God's act of creation as an act of abandonment.

The material used also determines the meaning of a painting. Taylor does not take into account the use of lead, fire, ash and the ploughed land in *Zim Zum* (1990). Lead is associated with the god Saturn and with the planet of that name and evokes melancholy. If we look at *Tree with Palette* (1978), we then see a palette of lead fixed to a tree, evoking melancholy. Here melancholy expresses the mood of having to be a German artist after Auschwitz.[12] Moreover, lead is the material from which the alchemist attempts to make gold. Thus, as an artist, Kiefer could identify with Wayland, the mythical smith in the *Edda* who could transform material. Wayland is like artists and alchemists who make objects from base materials, purified by fire (*Wayland's Song (With Wing)* [1982]). This latter meaning seems to me to be of primary importance for a correct understanding of lead in *Zim Zum*. In this work and others by Kiefer that depict Luria's cabbalistic doctrine, lead is used as the material that can be transformed (*Sephiroth* [1990], *The Outpouring of the Sephirot* [1985-1988; 2000], *Emanation* [2000]).

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[11] For this and what follows, see G. Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), pp. 285-90.

[12] Arasse, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 231.

And what do ash and fire mean in *Zim Zum?* Taylor argues that in Kiefer's paintings ash is the trace of an immemorial disaster, referring to the desert. Looking to such works as *Zim Zum* (1990) and *Departure from Egypt* (1984-1985), he argues that it has to do with reality as rent, as torn: "to be opened by the tears of art is to suffer a wound that never heals."[13] In my view, the fire and the ploughed brown earth have a different meaning than they do in Kiefer's works on the Holocaust where they do refer to destruction. That is one meaning of ash and fire, but there is also another: rebirth. To the question of why his landscapes, such as that in *Zim Zum*, resemble battlefields, Kiefer answers:

> Ploughing and burning, like slash-and-burn agriculture, is a process of regeneration, so that the earth can be reborn and create new growth toward the sun …. The beginning of the cosmos … began with incredible heat …. Fire is the glue of the cosmos. It connects heaven and earth.[14]

The orange colour in *Zim Zum* refers to fire as the glue of the cosmos. Furthermore, *Zim Zum* should not be taken in isolation and characterized as an act of desertion. Rather, it should be viewed in conjunction with the emanation of God and the breaking of the vessels.

The Breaking of the Vessels

As stated above, Luria views the process of creation as twofold: the act of God's withdrawal is followed by his second act, that of emanation and the breaking of the vessels. The divine light of God's creational grace pours into the primordial space, out of which three-dimensional space develops only at the end of the process. Then the light unfolds in different steps and in different aspects.[15] Kiefer depicts the *sephirot*, the ten primal numbers or properties of God, in *Sephirot* (1990) by a stretched shirt with six sleeves.[16] The properties of God are written on the shirt, and above the shirt is a shape resembling a mandala that represents the Ain Soph, the cabalistic name for God (for another variant see *Sephirot* [1996]). The vessels constitute the channels through which the divine light streams into the world, the outpouring of the *sephirot* (*The Outpouring of the Sephirot* [1985-1988] [2000]).

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[13] Taylor, *Disfiguring*, p. 307.

[14] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 338 (2005/06).

The breaking of the vessels is the stage that follows the outpouring of the *sephirot*. This breaking is important primarily because here the wound in the world is clarified. The last seven vessels are broken by the power of the light within them. Kiefer depicts this in *The Breaking of the Vessels* (1990) as a vertical bookcase with a half-circle of glass on the top on which the cabbalistic name for God is written, Ain Soph.[17] The names of seven properties of God are written on lead projections. Shards of glass hang and lie between the books of lead in the case and on the ground. In the 2000 version of *Breaking of the Vessels* we see Moroccan pots fastened to a high vertical wall (950 x 510 cm), with shards of broken vessels on the ground. Kiefer is searching for an explanation for evil in the world: evil happens because the vessels have been broken—a fissure was present in the world already at its genesis. He himself commented as follows about this phase after God's withdrawal and the outpouring of his light of grace in an interview:

> Thus after the world had been allowed to unfold God poured out his mercy. At that point the world was of course not very far developed and incapable of absorbing this mercy. And at that moment the vessels were shattered. This is the source of "Schebirath ha Kelim, the shattering of the vessels"…. [The shattering of the vessels is] a catastrophe, which moves on and which happens within each and all of us at any time, something which is continually repeated.

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[15] Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik*, p. 291.

[16] Several materials, 380 x 280 cm.

[17] Acrylic, lead, glass, and copper wire, c. 380 x 350 x 160 cm.

> From then on there is a permanent fracture running through the world. And this is then healed, stuck back together again by 'Tikkun'.[18]

In Luria's doctrine, Kiefer sees the catastrophe that happens time and again. In the breaking of the vessels Kiefer depicts the question of the reason for evil. I want to nuance Arasse's interpretation by means of that depiction. Arasse connects Zim Zum in Kiefer with the withdrawal of meaning. He sees the breaking of the vessels as a cosmogonic justification of the "feeling of exile." According to him, Kiefer takes up the imagery of meaning by expressing that via its absence.[19] Kiefer is indeed looking for images for the existential problems of life via myths such as Luria's, but his depiction of Luria's doctrine is less a matter of a withdrawal of meaning as a clarification of the questions of why the world is so broken and if heaven can bear the weight of the world. Kiefer finds an answer to the question of evil in the breaking of the vessels.

Following God's withdrawal, there is the act of allowing creational grace to flow, of which there is so much that the imperfect world cannot process it; the earth cannot bear the power of the heavenly light. It is difficult to classify this imagery from Zim Zum, the emanation, and the breaking of the vessels as an act of abandonment by God, as Taylor argues. Something similar obtains for his interpretation of *Departure from Egypt* (1984-1985) (fig. 28), where we see a road through the desert with an enormous cloud of lead hanging above it from which something is dripping.[20] The title refers to the exodus of Israel from Egypt. About the road through the desert that leads into nothingness Taylor says: "No one follows this way. The desert is deserted—completely deserted. There is no resurrexit here or elsewhere. Only Ash … Ash … Ash … Night …Night-and-Night."[21] Taylor says nothing about the pillar of cloud or about the title of the work. The cloud resembles what is found in works like

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[18] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer,* p. 390 (2003).

[19] Arasse, *Anselm Kiefer,* pp. 206, 286, 306.

[20] Acrylic, charcoal, and photo, 108 x 84 cm.

[21] Taylor, *Disfiguring*, p. 305.

Heavy Cloud (1985) and *Emanation* (1984-86; 2000). In the former, there is a cloud of lead stained with gold, and golden rays shine on the earth, and in the latter we see an enormous cloud of lead descending. Here, the meaning of lead is similar to its meaning in *Zim Zum*, as material that has to do with transformation. The cloud in *Departure from Egypt* has a similar function of divine emanation that descends on the people of Israel. In Kiefer, the pillar of cloud is grey, a suitable colour for a broken world in which redemption is not self-evident.

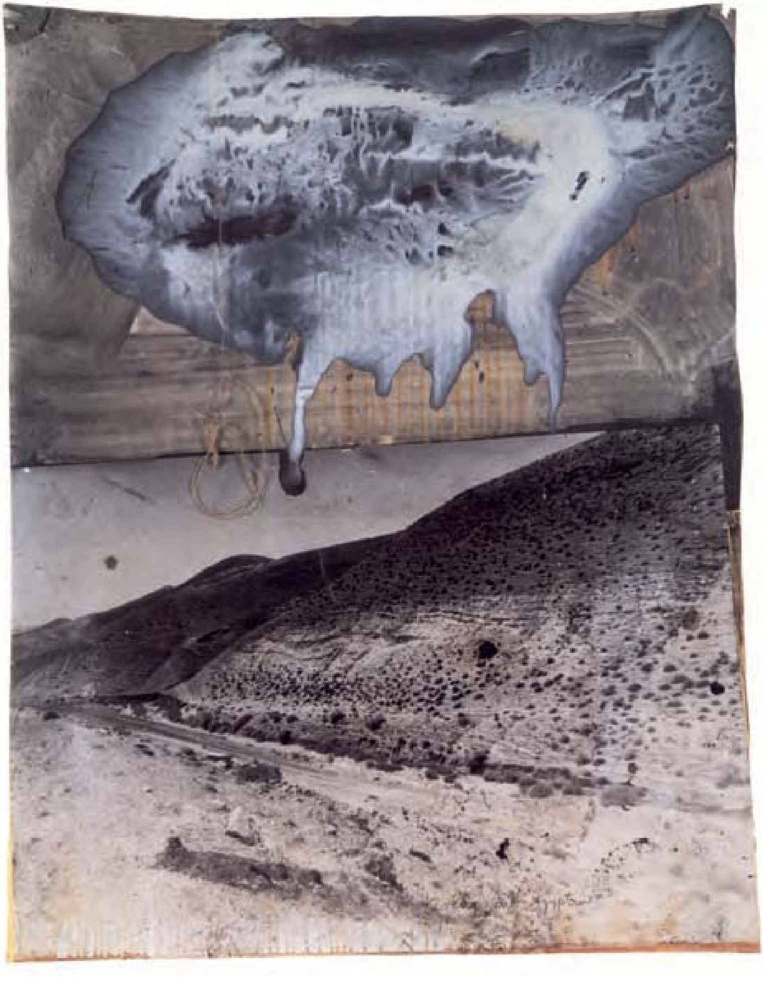

Fig. 28. Anselm Kiefer, *Departure from Egypt* (1984-1985) © Anselm Kiefer

Unlike Taylor, we cannot see Kiefer's work as an endless wandering, without hope in the sense of Nietzsche's eternal return. There is a rent in reality through the tension between heaven with the connotation of light and grace on the one hand and the imperfect world in which the catastrophe, the breaking of the vessels continues to occur on the other. An important part of Kiefer's spirituality is that *evil belongs to the structure of reality*. He does not draw the conclusion from this that existence is a endless wandering without hope. It is precisely the tension between evil on earth and the possibly gracious heaven that ensures that there is still a ray of hope. That evil belongs to the structure of reality is confirmed in Kiefer's works in which he depicts the heavenly hierarchy of angels in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

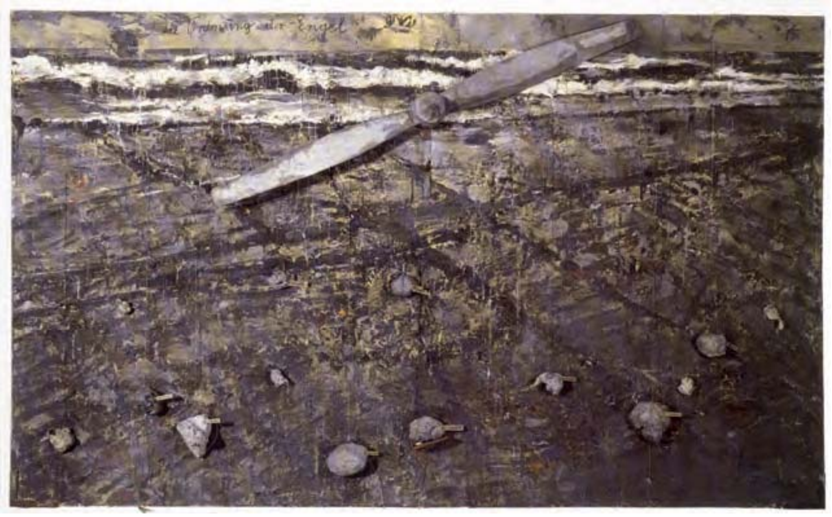

Fig. 29. Anselm Kiefer, *The Order of the Angels* (1984-1986) © Anselm Kiefer

In his *Celestial Hierarchy* Pseudo-Dionysius had divided angels into nine spheres hovering between heaven and earth: seraphim, cherubim, thrones, authorities, virtues, powers, princes, archangels, and angels. Kiefer plays with the word "areopagite," making it "aeropagite" and puts a large propellor in the sky in the work *The Order of the Angels* (1984-1986) (fig. 29).[22]

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[22] Several materials, 330 x 555 cm.

The nine rocks on the ground represent the nine spheres of angels, and a line connects them with the propellor. He depicts this more dramatically in *The Order of the Angels* (1983-1984), where rocks brighten up the black scorched earth somewhat. The seraphim and cherubim are depicted as snakes (cf. also *Seraphim* [1983-1984]).[23] According to an old tradition, this refers to their ambiguous character. Just as Kiefer is concerned with the catastrophe that keeps happening in the "breaking of the vessels," so here as well he asks that we pay attention to the why of evil. According to the myth of the breaking of the vessels, evil belongs to the structure of imperfect reality. Here evil even seems to be a part of the celestial hierarchy of the angels. Kiefer does not stop here but looks for transformation and restoration.

Transformation and Restoration

According to Jewish mysticism, there is the possibility of restoration through *tikkun*.[24] If Kiefer used the cabbala with respect to Zim Zum and the breaking of the vessels, that was not the case with respect to *tikkun*. He did not borrow his images of transformation and restoration from Luria but from Merkawa mysticism, the mystical journey through the heavenly "palaces" to the heavenly "chariot" (*merkawa*). This is found in works like the book *Merkawa* (1996), *The Heavenly Palaces* (2002; 2003; 2004), *Sefer Hechaloth* (2003; 2005).

This mysticism goes back to the visions of the prophets Isaiah (Isaiah 6) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1) and is directed at the journey through the heavenly palaces, often experienced in ecstasy, in order to see the Holy One on his throne in the seventh heaven. Newman's *Cathedra* also draws upon this mysticism (cf. pp. 31-32). This Jewish mysticism is distinguished from Gnosticism in that it does not make a clear division between heaven and earth in a dualistic way. The Jewish mystic was concerned with both heaven and earth, which also constantly emerges in Kiefer's work. He depicts Merkawa mysticism in a very concrete way. In a hangar in Milan Kiefer built seven towers (*The Seven Palaces of Heaven*, hangar Bicocca, Milan 2004), which refer to the depiction of heaven in this mysticism. He does that also in *The Heavenly Palaces* (2003), where we see a ladder going up to heaven. This does not have to do with a linear movement forward in time, as in Christian eschatology, but with a circular movement, as the airplane propellor in *The Order of the Angels* (1984-1986) also seems to suggest. The circular movement occurs here in ascending and then descending again, like the angels the patriarch Jacob saw in a dream ascending and descending on a ladder reaching to heaven (Genesis 28).[25] Kiefer takes images from the Jewish tradition but uses them for his own spirituality. He thus constructs his depiction of Merkawa mysticism as an inner journey of the human being in order to gain self-knowledge:

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[23] Several materials, 330 x 555 cm.

[24] "From then on there is a permanent fracture running through the world. And this is then healed, stuck back together again by 'Tikkun'." So Kiefer (cf. Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 390 [2003]).

> I follow the ancient tradition of going up and down. The palaces of heaven are still a mystery. The procedures and formulae surrounding this journey will always be debated. I am making my own investigation. You know this book the *Sefer Hechaloth*? Obviously, this is not just about travelling through the palaces, but travelling through yourself in order to know yourself; the old saying: *Erkenne dich selbst.*[26]

To depict transformation Kiefer also makes use of non-Jewish sources such as yoga and the idea that the macro- and microcosmos mirror each other. Yoga is a means for transformation in the Hindu tradition. It is an exercise for detaching oneself from the cosmic illusion, from the world as mere appearance. In Kiefer's works, we sometimes see a male figure in a yoga position lying flat on the ground with a sunflower above him (*Sol Invictus* [1995], *Ash Flower* [1995]) or under an open dark sky (*Falling Stars* [1995]). When Kiefer began to work with sunflowers, he saw a parallel between the black seeds in the flower and the night with its stars.[27] He borrowed this parallel from the seventeenth-century English Rosicrucian Robert Fludd (*To Robert Fludd* [1996]), who referred to the connection between the microcosm and the macrocosm and thus to a relationship between stars and plants (*The Secret Life of Plants* [1997; 1998; 2001]) and between humankind and the cosmos. According to Fludd, each plant has a corresponding star, and therefore the plants are under the influence of the stars. This has to do with a transformation, a metamorphosis:

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[25] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 412 (2005).

[26] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 339 (2005/06).

> that is what creates a state where hope is possible. If there is no metamorphosis, we have nothing to hope for after death. Spiritual understanding of the idea of metamorphosis makes it easier to die. That is what the figure is thinking about in some of my paintings. Sometimes you see the firmament all around him, sometimes flowers—for example, the sunflowers growing near him, or even in his belly. There is this primitive idea of incarnation in the ground leading to transformation. The other aspect is the transformation of humus, a transformation analogous to that of flowering plants. This is the most triumphant but also the saddest moment: after that they die and the flower becomes an urn for the seeds.[28]

The question if heaven can bear the weight of the earth arises here in the context of Rosicrucian thought than when Kiefer looks for an answer in Jewish mysticism. The word "heaven" does not refer to creation and God's creational grace but is given a different connotation: the relation to the macrocosmos, which provides hope and transformation.

All things are connected to one another, not only on earth but also in the cosmos. That is reflected in Kiefer's work as well, which is characterized by intertextuality. His work is a web of images from various traditions that refer to one another in order to evoke transformation and recovery. According to Kiefer, an artist is not a "genius" but only adds a small piece to what already is.[29] Kiefer's works are thus a reconstruction of symbols and myths to which he wants to give new meaning.

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[27] Celant *Anselm Kiefer*, pp. 294-95 (1998); T. McEvilley, *Communion and Transcendence in Kiefer's New Work: Simultaneously Entering the Body and Leaving the Body* (London: Anthony d' Offay Gallery, 1996), pp. 7-19.

[28] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 293 (1998).

In short, a spirituality emerges in these works by Kiefer that wrestles with evil and searches for liberation. But why does Kiefer call this a spirituality of concrete?

A Spirituality of Concrete

A certain imagery indicates a certain spirituality. Kandinsky and Mondrian sought a spirituality of inwardness in their abstract works, the spiritual on the inner side of the world. Newman and especially Rothko depicted more of an unfamiliar and unknowable transcendence in their later work. Kiefer chose figuration. With his figurative imagery, he evokes a spirituality of concrete, an immediate involvement of God or the divine with the world, something he shares with Friedrich and Warhol. The starting point for both Friedrich and Kiefer is the landscape, but the spirituality of Kiefer's work differs from that of Friedrich and Warhol in that Kiefer's is not Christian spirituality.

The Style: Figuration

Looking at Kiefer's works can both shock and fascinate one at the same time. The material that he uses certainly contributes to this. Paintings consisting of paint and canvas invoke an illusory world, but Kiefer's works are not paintings in the traditional sense of the word because he uses natural materials like lead, ash, sand, and straw. The use of such materials makes the confrontation with the "viewer" even more direct. As stated above, this effect is also achieved by the immense size of his works. His work has an undeniable aura. Thus, what Kiefer intends is not only authenticity and originality in distinction from technical reproducibility (Kiefer also used photographs) but also the authority and reverence that accompany them. This was an aura of the kind once defined by Walter Benjamin as a "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be."[30]

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[29] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 184 (1990).

Kiefer's style is difficult to define because he borrows from different artistic styles and schools,[31] and he himself speaks appreciatively of Duchamp and Warhol. What he appreciates in Duchamp is that the latter demolishes the wall between the art object and reality.[32] Like Warhol, Kiefer borrows a great deal of material from everyday life, such as the shirt in *Sephirot* (1990), the Moroccan pots in *The Breaking of the Vessels* (2000), or the airplane propellor in *The Order of the Angels* (1984-1986), and the towers in *The Seven Heavenly Palaces* (2004). Like Duchamp and Warhol, Kiefer stretches the limits of art.

His figurative imagery has to do with representation viewed as a fictional reference. It does not concern a reconfirmation of the reference or placing the figure against a background but the creation of a fictional reference in which the figure is the instrument for creating an illusion of naturalness.[33] Kiefer's processed landscapes (the addition of numbers, a propellor, a bathtub, a grid, lead, clay, straw, etc.) are examples of fictional representation. This imagery is extremely suited for expressing a spirituality of concrete, as we will see.

Immanent Transcendence as an Open Question

Kiefer explicitly rejects abstraction. An important reason for this is that, in his view, abstraction brings with it an incorrect spirituality, as he shows via Mondrian.

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[30] W. Benjamin (1936), *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, source: UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television; transcribed by: Andy Blunden, proofed and corrected February 2005. http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benamin.htm.

[31] M. Biro, *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ch. 4.

[32] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 159 (1990).

[33] D. Kuspit, "Flak from the 'Radicals': The American Case Against Current German Painting," in: J. Cowart (ed.), *Expressions: New Art from Germany* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1983), p. 44.

In the collage book *Piet Mondrian—Operation Sea Lion* (1975) he connects Mondrian's abstract geometric art with Hitler's plan (not carried out) for the invasion of England. Rather provocatively, he not only makes a connection between the artist and Hitler through the title but also sees an analogy between Mondrian's formal vocabulary of a grid of black lines and his own photographic representation of similar window panels. Kiefer distances himself undeniably from abstract art and, via the geometric window panels, leads it back to representational art.[34] The grid is viewed as a symbol for modernism and its search for universal truth in abstract art.[35] Kiefer distances himself from abstraction and the universal outside the world and positions himself as an artist in the historical and political situation. By associating Mondrian with Hitler, he seems to be saying that abstract art is not critical enough politically.[36] He himself wants, he says, to change the history of the world with his art.[37] One can also think of Kiefer's *Piet Mondrian—Arminius' Battle* (1976) in which he connects Mondrian's modernistic, ahistorical geometric abstraction—the grid form—with the battle that occurred in the year 9 A.D, when the German Arminius defeated the Roman general Varus.[38] This battle also contributed to German identity.[39] We should recall here Mondrian's paintings of trees, such as his *Apple Tree, Pointillistic Version* (1908-1909), with an intense light-blue and russet background, whereas the main black tree has a triangular form (cf.

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[34] Biro, *Anselm Kiefer*, pp. 114-15.

[35] J.C. Gilmour, *Fire on the Earth: Anselm Kiefer and the Postmodern World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 29-37.

[36] For the ambivalent position of Mondrian's abstract art on the ideal of purity with respect to National Socialism regarding the ideal of purity, see M.A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentalist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), ch. 4, especially pp. 129-38.

[37] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 295 (1998).

[38] Oil on canvas, 245 x 112.5 cm.

[39] Brochure from Herrmans Denkmal Naturpark Teutoburger Wald. Varus-Schlacht.

above p. 38). Whereas Mondrian had changed a tree into a geometric form of a triangle with lines as an indication of the spiritual dimension of the world, Kiefer composes his works so that these composition lines return to their narrative function, to figuration.[40] Mondrian's abstraction depicts heaven, which has no direct visible relation with the earth. Even more, according to Kiefer's *Piet Mondrian—Operation Sea Lion* and *Piet-Mondrian—Arminius' Battle*, the price of Mondrian's radical immanence is the historical situation. In other words, heaven is too much separated from earth in a spiritual sense because it has become an inwardness separate from the world.

Kiefer also rejects the spirituality of New Age, which views religion as merchandise. His criticism is that "they are selling salvation."[41] He chooses a spirituality of concrete, a spirituality in which heaven and earth are closely involved with each other and in which responsibility for history is assumed. I call that immanent transcendence: heaven and earth are closely connected. For his spirituality of concrete Kiefer refers to the monastery La Tourette, built by Le Corbusier, where he stayed for three months. Reacting to Le Corbusier's use of sand to make a spiritual space, he remarks: "I discovered the spirituality of concrete—using earth to mould a symbol, a symbol of the imaginative and the spiritual world."[42] With a style that uses natural materials, his art portrays a spirituality of concrete that searches for a more direct connection between heaven and earth. Such a spirituality is a material one, as opposed to the non-material spirituality of Kandinsky and Mondrian.

Kiefer uses the term "heaven" in various ways. He is, as he says, interested in the reconstruction of meanings of heaven in different traditions in order to discover continuity in our search for heaven. "Heaven is an idea, a piece of ancient internal knowledge. It is not a physical construction."[43] That is why Kiefer can, as we saw above, give the term "heaven" different meanings: heaven as an indication of the creation process (*Zim Zum*, *The Outpouring of the Sephirot*), evil as part of the celestial order of the angels (*The Order of the Angels* [1984-1986]), the relationship between the microcosm and macrocosm with the hope of transformation (*The Secret Life of Plants*). There is a tension between heaven and the imperfect world in which the catastrophe, the breaking of the vessels, happens again and again. Because of that, the transcendent is experienced with difficulty in and through earthly reality. An open question for transformation addressed to heaven is present in his works.

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[40] S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), pp. 81-100.

[41] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 336 (2005/06).

[42] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 337 (2005/06).

[43] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 337 (2005/06).

In his spirituality of concrete, Kiefer expresses *a spirituality of immanent transcendence* that closely connects heaven and earth. He does so in a dramatic tension between an absent God after Auschwitz and the question about God. We can see that even more clearly if we compare Kiefer's work with that of the German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich. In Friedrich as well there is a close connection between heaven and earth but in an entirely different way (cf. above, pp. 23-28).

In Friedrich's *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (c. 1819) (fig. 2) the landscape is the expression of the religious mind and at the same time refers to God. This can also be called immanent transcendence: nature proclaims the splendour of God's creation. For Kiefer, this is simply no longer the case after Auschwitz, and immanent transcendence needs to be understood in a different way. The landscape is not idyllic but is wounded by the violence of wars, as in *Winter Landscape* (1970), where a head without a body floats between an ominous sky and a winter landscape that has been stained red by the bleeding head. Kiefer's use of colour in his landscape paintings is generally dark, often brown and blackened as in *Nero Malt, 1974, Heaven-Earth* (1974) (fig. 1, p. 1) and *Heaven on Earth* (1998-2004). That seems to confirm Taylor's interpretation that Kiefer views transcendence as a rent or a tear. By that he means a heaven that does not provide grace or redemption and an earth like a desert in which humankind endlessly wanders, abandoned by God. The images of transformation and restoration discussed above argue against this interpretation, however. In Kiefer's later works, there is also a ray of light and of hope. There is scepticism and melancholy, but there is also hope, as depicted in *The Milky Way* (1985-1987) (fig. 30) and *Palm Sunday* (2007).

Grey and a Ray of Light

After Auschwitz, the problem in relating heaven to earth has to do with evil. In an early painting *Quaternity* (1973) we see three fires in a wooden room symbolizing the Trinity, i.e. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, while a snake approaches the triune God.[44] Kiefer considers the answer of Christian theology to the question of evil unsatisfactory[45] but, unfortunately, does not explain why. He himself resorts, as we saw, to Luria's doctrine of Zim Zum and the breaking of the vessels. The vessels did not have to break, but they did, he says, because the world did not function properly. The world formed after God gave it the space to do so; God sent his grace to the world, but it was too strong and, as a result, the vessels broke.

The spirituality of Kiefer's works is defined by a tension between God's grace and the fragility of a world that cannot bear the light of God's creational grace. He thus gives a different answer from that found in the creation narrative of Genesis 1 in which God's creative acts are concluded by "and it was very good."[46] In Kiefer's works, evil is inherent to reality. Angels like the seraphim and the cherubim are portrayed as snakes. Evil continued to command his attention after 1995 when he depicted Lilith from Jewish tradition as a female demon.[47] The vessels break again and again. That does not mean that this spirituality is only melancholic, as the use of lead might indicate. Like Taylor, Donald Kuspit also takes insufficient note of the fact that there is also a ray of light, in addition to lead, in Kiefer's works. In his article "The Spirit of Gray,"

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[44] Charcoal and oil on jute, 300 x 435 cm.

[45] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 473 (2006); p. 412 (2005).

[46] Kiefer's explanation of Luria's teaching that the world has formed itself (Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 472f.) differs from Moltmann's understanding of *zim zum*, which explicitly emphasizes God's creation of the world (J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, transl. M. Kohl [London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1985], pp. 86-93).

[47] Arasse, *Anselm Kiefer*, pp. 277-86.

Kuspit puts all the emphasis on the grey, on the lead, in Kiefer's work. According to him, the light is not given any room: "The light that flickers in it, the tide of stars that rises and falls in it, are hardly enough to lift—brighten—one's spirit.... There is no hope in Kiefer's works, only inevitability."[48] Aside from the fact that lead evokes not only melancholy but also transformation, there is a ray of light, especially in Kiefer's later work. Indeed, the light cannot shine at full strength, like the light of Easter in Christian iconography. "Looking for light is a tyranny we can't afford now," he says.[49] There is a distinct undertone of melancholy in Kiefer's spirituality, but it is only an undertone. The reason is that, in Kiefer, melancholy is associated primarily with his (earlier) works on Auschwitz, whereas Kiefer's work contains other themes as well. Saltzman used the term melancholy for Kiefer's work in connection with the theme of mourning because of Auschwitz.[50] One could think here of Kiefer's work *Melancholia* (1988) in which he again takes up elements from Dürer's work. But the theme of melancholy is too closely associated with the process of grief and the memory of the Holocaust to characterize Kiefer's work in general as melancholic. As we saw above, after 1987 the problem of life appears in a number of Kiefer's works but is not connected with the German past. In addition to the existential question, there is also a search for transformation and restoration.

We see both lead and a ray of light in Kiefer's *The Milky Way* (1985-1987) (fig. 30)[51] and in the installation *Palm Sunday*. In *The Milky Way* we look down at a white, brown, and black ploughed field. A large white cut runs through the field with the words "the milky way." Above the cut is a funnel of lead, with lead wires connected to the top corners of the canvas. It seems as if the funnel both gives and takes light, sucking it up from the bottom and then spreading it over the field. Conversely, however, the funnel could also be channelling light from the sky into the open ground of the cut. The funnel thus forms a connection that allows the light of heaven to pour out to renew the earth. The milky golden light over the field suggests an alchemical transformation. White stuff becomes visible whenever lead is burned in the alchemical processes. Thus, *The Milky Way* shows a transformation of a wounded earth into a land of milk and golden honey.[52] Here heaven seems to be able to bear the weight of the world.

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[48] Donald Kuspit, "The Spirit of Gray," http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/kuspit/kuspit12-19-02.asp.

[49] Quoted by Auping, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 50.

[50] L. Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 3.

[51] Several materials, 381 x 563 cm.

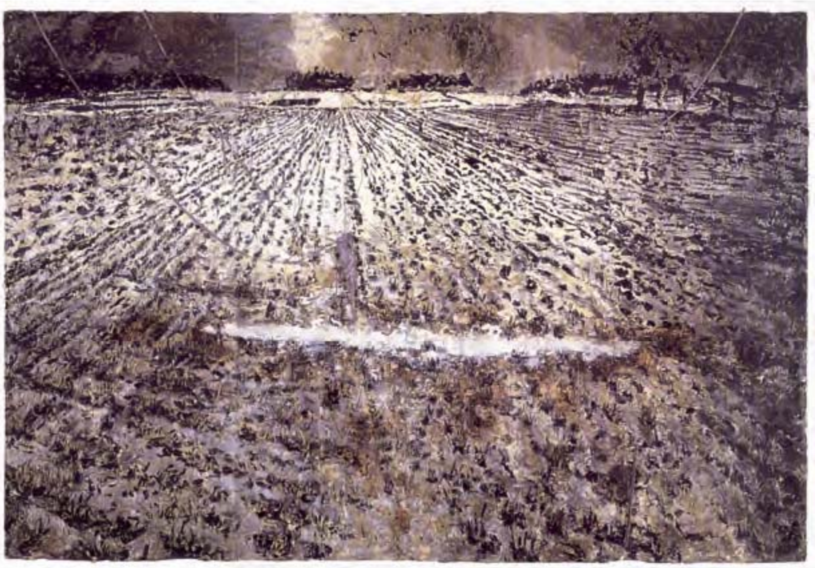

Fig. 30. Anselm Kiefer, *The Milky Way* (1985-1987) © Anselm Kiefer

We see something similar in *Palm Sunday* (an exhibition at the White Cube Gallery, London 2007), which consists of a series of 22 works hung in three rows above one another. The trunk of a palm tree lies diagonally on the ground. What is striking are the light colours. Each of the works contains a centrally placed palm leaf or branch, dipped in white wax, against a background of, among other things, cracked clay with colour patterns of white, grey, mauve, yellow, orange, and brown. A ray of light to which the title of the work refers is undeniably present. The work *Aperiatur Terra et Germinet Salvatorem* (2006) (Isaiah 45:8) is, like a landscape with flowers, not dark or white-brown (as is usual with Kiefer) but creamy yellow and light orange. These works show the expectation of salvation. Instead of a spirituality without hope, Kiefer presents a spirituality of concrete as an open question to heaven with a spark of hope.

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[52] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, pp. 338f. (2005/06).

In summary, I conclude that Kiefer's work displays intertextuality in that it contains various layers of meaning that refer to old myths and symbols that he uses and to which he thus gives new meaning. He is concerned with a "reconstructtion of symbols," with an attempt "to discover continuities in why we search for heaven."[53] He very freely used quite different sources for his spirituality of concrete, such as Jewish mysticism, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Rosicrucian ideas, and the Christian tradition of Palm Sunday. He finds "Christian mythology" too superficial and considers Jewish mythology in contrast to be more "sophisticated."[54] Kiefer draws from the Rosicrucian tradition because he can draw comfort in the idea that each plant is connected to a star. For him, that means a connection between the micro- and macrocosms.[55]

Kiefer's works undeniably show a wounded world. But it would be incorrect to say with Mark Taylor that the wound does not heal and that Kiefer depicts an "endless wandering." Arasse's interpretation of Kiefer's depiction of Luria's doctrine of Zim Zum and the "breaking of the vessels" is also incorrect because he assumes that the issue is one of a withdrawal of meaning or a "feeling of exile." Nor is melancholy or the grey of lead the main tone in his work, as Kuspit holds. "There is always hope, but that must be combined with irony, and more important, scepticism."[56] This spirituality of concrete is not transcendence as a rent or a tear but immanent transcendence as an open question to heaven for transformation.

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[53] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 336 (2005/06).

[54] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 336 (2005/06).

[55] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 413 (2005).

[56] Celant, *Anselm Kiefer*, p. 336 (2005/06).

CHAPTER VI

The Spiritual Image

Introduction

James Elkins, an art historian from Chicago, once remarked that religion is hardly ever discussed in art courses. That happens, practically, only when there is some sort of scandal involved, such as the one surrounding Ofili's *Holy Virgin Mary*, where elephant excrement was used, or Serrano's *Piss Christ*, a crucifix dotted with drops of the artist's urine. One could conclude that religious practice and religious ideas are only relevant for art when they are treated with skepticism. But Elkins finds that strange: there is, after all, a great deal of religious art outside of the official world of art.[1] Although Elkins is right to detect a gulf between contemporary art and organized religion, he does pass over the fact that many prominent artists have dealt with religious and spiritual themes in their work, as we have seen above. Elkins rightly points to the wide range of religious art outside the world of art, such as Sallman's *Head of Christ*. This work fulfilled an important spiritual function in religious rituals, as I have briefly indicated above (cf. pp. 160-63).

That raises the question of the function of the spiritual image in secular art, such as those in the four artists discussed in this book. This question is all the more pressing because, like H.-G. Gadamer and N. Wolterstorff, I want to hang on to both the aesthetic and use functions of art. The aesthetic quality of a work should not be separated from its existential content, from what it is intended to express. Viewing paintings is a matter of play in which existential truth can occur, and this playing needs to occur. That is obvious with respect to stage plays or musical performances, but it also holds true for viewing the paintings we have discussed. This viewing is not a matter of casting a quick glance at a painting but lingering, tarrying, and letting what one is shown have an effect on oneself. Viewing must become a consuming task between the painting and the viewer, as Rothko and Gottlieb remark:

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[1] J. Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York/London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 15-16.

> No possible set of notes can explain our paintings. Their explanation must come out of a consummated experience between picture and onlooker. The appreciation of art is a true marriage of minds. And in art, as in marriage, lack of consummation is ground of annulment.[2]

Looking at art as a matter of play prevents one from—incorrectly—seeing the viewer as standing over against the work of art with the purpose of analyzing it. Such an attitude, necessary in studying the history of art, or the philosophy or theology of art, can never replace the experience of art for the participant. Kandinsky pointed out that the viewer should be so involved in the play of looking that he or she has to live in the painting. Viewed as play, art resembles an event in which a process of understanding or, better, self-understanding can begin. That is why we will look in this concluding chapter at the question of the function of the spiritual image in secular art in the first section. In the second section, I will summarize the spiritual insights of the works concerned. In connection with this, I will pose an *a priori* question: Why the yearning for religious transcendence? The works of the four artists point to (religious) transcendence with respect to spirituality. Transcendence is thus obviously important to them, and we will explore the reasons for that in the first part of this section. In the second part, I will present the themes of the four artists via our search tool of the types of transcendence: the question of salvation and how the world is evaluated spiritually.

The Spiritual Image in Secular Art

Contemporary society is predominantly an image culture. Images can function as signs, such as icons in the use of the word processing program on the computer. One could call these *weak* images, images whose function is limited to computer use.

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[2] M. Rothko, *Mark Rothko*, Fondation Beyeler (ed.), (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Canz, 2001), p. 23.

Vacation photos are also usually weak images: nice for those involved but not for others. The viewing of paintings usually has to do with *strong* images: they are not images that inform or illustrate but make visible what we have not yet seen. I call church icons or popular religious works outside the art world, such as Sallman's *Head of Christ*, strong images because of their enormous effect within faith communities.[3] I pointed to three characteristics of art within the religious community (cf. pp. 160-63).

1. The image functions in a religious community, in religious practice as a medium for contact with God or a saint.
2. It is, visually speaking, not innovative and confirms the existence of the believer. It preserves the heritage of a community, just as icons preserve the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church.
3. The image makes present what is not present, but the image and the divine are not to be identified with each other. Rather, the image is a symbol that refers to the other, divine reality. Because it shares in the reality to which it refers, something of that reality shines through in the image, and therefore it is a *sacred object* and has an ontological relationship with that to which it refers.

The spiritual images in the secular art of the four artists have the following characteristics.

1. They hang in exhibitions or museums and are part of art history. They await the play of being looked at by the public, the experience that the individual viewer can undergo because of the painting.
2. Unlike the traditional image of the religious community, they open up new territory for their viewers and challenge them through their form. Kandinsky does that with his move from figuration to abstraction; Rothko with his colour fields and further erasing of all figuration from his

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[3] Boehm limits strong images to (high) art, to images that make us see reality in a new way, thus ignoring the traditional religious image (G. Boehm, *Wie Bilder Sinn Erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeichens* [Berlin: Berlin University Press, 2010], pp. 244-48, 266).

monochrome canvases in the Rothko Chapel; Warhol does it through connecting Da Vinci's *Last Supper* with pop logos, and Kiefer primarily through the use of various materials. However differently each artist makes us understand, with each of them we learn to see in other ways. The world of the work of art shows a changed world with surprising possibilities of seeing and experiencing. The work of art shows us reality more clearly than daily life does: the familiar is thus surpassed and our experience intensified.[4]

3. Secular works refer in their own way to another reality; they are symbolic in a way different from how church icons or paintings like Sallman's *Head of Christ* are. This point requires further elaboration of the symbol character of secular spiritual art.

The Epistemological Symbol in Secular Art

The word symbol can be understood in two ways: epistemologically and ontologically. I will first discuss the ontological symbol, which is characteristic of art within a religious community. For the Greeks, for example, a symbol was the piece of a potsherd that recalled previous hospitality and, if it was a match for the complementary piece, renewed one's friendship with a guest. The piece is not an abstract reference but a concrete representation of hospitality. Gadamer applies this concept of symbol in his *The Relevance of the Beautiful* to the work of art: it is not a reference but representation in which the represented is physically present. He speaks in this connection of *mimesis*, which he considers characteristic for art. The work of art provides such a close representation of human reality that we say: "That is how it is." There is a spark of recognition. The image makes the represented present and shares in the reality it represents:

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[4] H-G Gadamer, "The Festive Character of Theater," in: H.-G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, transl. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 64; H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 113-15. See also Merleau-Ponty's work on art: *The Merleau–Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. G.A. Johnson and M.B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

> In every work of art we encounter something like mimesis or *imitation*. Naturally mimesis here has nothing to do with the mere imitation of something that is already familiar to us. Rather, it implies that something is represented in such a way that it is actually present in sensuous abundance.[5]

The question is: Do we always need to view a work of art as mimesis like Gadamer does?[6] In itself, mimesis is a good indicator of the value of a secular painting.[7] A portrait of a head of state does bear resemblance to the person portrayed. But a good official portrait is something more than a mirror image. Otherwise, it would be the equivalent of a passport photo, whose purpose is nothing more than to identify an individual and does not have any intrinsic value as an object. That is its difference from a painted portrait. The term mimesis can indicate how precisely a portrait or painting differs in general from what or who is portrayed. After all, it is not intended as a copy of the original but to show the true essence of something or someone. The official portrait shows someone in his or her specific public office and official role. In general, a painting shows us reality in a way that surprises us, and that obtains for abstract works as well. The symbolic representation art offers is not specifically dependent on already existing things. Rather, what is at issue here is the self-presentation of what the artist has in mind with a work, and that can also be a non-sensory reality.

Connecting the ontological symbol with mimesis gives the former a surplus value over against that to which it refers,[8] which means that the notion of ontological symbol is not very applicable to spiritual art. Mimesis, as Gadamer describes it, i.e. as representing something "in such a way that it is actually present in sensuous abundance," is not a good term for indicating the representation of the divine or spiritual. We should recall what has been noted since late antiquity about the cultic image. The "truth" of such an image is not a matter of mimesis but of the demand that the image be an authentic archetype and be traceable to the original model of a specific icon (pp. 10-11; 160-63). With respect to icons, Evdokimov remarks that mimesis concerns a representation of nature but is not applicable to icons. "The icon of Christ gets its essential inspiration from the icon of the Holy Face, made, we might say, by God's own hand."[9] In Gadamer's view, not only does the work of art refer to something, but what it refers to is also "more actually" present. In other words, "the work of art signifies an increase in being."[10] As an increase in being, the image thus has a surplus with respect to the person depicted.[11] That also holds true for statesmen: as individuals, they should live up to the office in which they have been portrayed. But that does not, in my view, obtain for an icon of Christ or the representation of the holy in general. An image of Christ does not have any surplus value in comparison to what is represented, to Christ himself. An icon has no reality in itself. It is a piece of wood with a picture on it and functions as a representation. It is given theophanic, iconic value because of its participation in the Wholly Other.[12] As symbol, the icon is ontological: it shares in the reality of the represented entity to which it refers. It is a substitute for another reality and can function as a sacrament.

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[5] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," in: Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, p. 36.

[6] Gadamer, "Art and Imitation," in: Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, pp. 103-04; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 113-19.

[7] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 130-38.

[8] Gadamer views the term "symbol" differently in *Truth and Method*,pp. 145-48.

Aside from its *ontological* sense, the word symbol can also be viewed *epistemologically*. The epistemological symbol refers only to the analogical way of representing the object to which it refers. The epistemological view of the symbol obtains for all spiritual images—for the art of a religious community as well as for *secular spiritual art*. As stated above, the ontological view obtains only for the image in a religious community.

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[9] P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1972), p. 169.

[10] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," p. 35.

[11] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 146-48.

[12] Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, p. 179.

I will point, in connection with the epistemological symbol, to a parallel between image and word concerning the (im)possible representation of the articulation of the holy. Thomas Aquinas refers to this in the context of speaking about God. Our words for God, such as father, etc., are to be understood analogically rather than univocally. Images do not express the divine univocally either. The abstract art of Kandinsky and Rothko are already examples of iconoclasm and the explanation of that should also be iconoclastic: the other reality can only be depicted analogically. Kant repeats this insight when he refers to the symbol in connection with what we cannot immediately intuit. Symbols express concepts not via direct intuition but only through analogy: "the transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond."[13]

That is why Kant considers the knowledge of God symbolic. Whatever obtains for language also obtains for images with respect to the evocation of the divine or the spiritual. I view the works of the four artists discussed in this volume as symbolic in the epistemological sense. The images express spiritual reality not by means of direct intuition but analogically. In Kant's view, we will never know if an intuition corresponds to that concept or that image.[14] The apostle Paul refers to the same thing, although he imagines the future somewhat differently than Kant does: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12 [NIV]).

Artists put lines and colours on a canvas analogically in order to evoke the religious-transcendent, the divine. No more than words do our images represent heaven directly. They function as epistemological symbols and represent spiritual reality not univocally but analogically. The reality to which they refer escapes us. Warhol and Kiefer use figuration to refer to spiritual reality in an analogical way. Kandinsky uses circles, triangles, etc. for this. Rothko is the most radical: in his work, there is almost no intuition left that could refer to the O/other analogically. He limits the reference first to colour fields and later even more radically to the dark purplish mauve monochrome paintings from which the lines also disappear.

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[13] I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* transl. Paul Guyer (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), § 59, pp. 226-27.

[14] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, § 59.

The symbolic aspect of the work of art also indicates that there are no means for establishing which spiritual reality is the true one—no criterion exists to verify it. The works of the artists discussed here point to religious transcendence in very different ways. These artists have given several different meanings to the word "heaven" used in the title of this book. For Kandinsky, this is the inner sound of things; for Warhol it is Christ as healer. In Kiefer the meaning of heaven changes, and Rothko's work depicts a silent radical transcendence. In short, the works of these artists can be called symbolic not in the ontological sense but only in the epistemological sense.

The Difference between Secular and Religious Art: A Matter of Fact, Not of Principle

There are undeniable differences between the art of a religious community and secular spiritual art. The differences started to emerge already in the Romantic period (Friedrich) (pp. 23-28). Kandinsky's view of art raised the question if this secular spiritual art is more suitable for initiates and therefore better described as art of a religious community (pp. 75-86). I asked a similar question in connection with Warhol's *Last Supper* (p. 163). Kandinsky's paintings could function within the theosophical community, Warhol's within the Christian, and Rothko's could be given a liturgical role in an interreligious setting. The distinction mentioned above between secular spiritual art and the art of a religious community should therefore not be viewed as a matter of principle but as one of *fact* and thus as changeable, depending on the context.

Practical examples of how secular art can become spiritual art within a religious community are works that are now found in English cathedrals, such as Glynn Williams' *Pietà*.[15] This sculpture was first done as a memorial to the civilian victims of the war in Lebanon, the shocking images of which had been broadcast on TV. But the artist changed the original work, which had been called *Shout* (1982). That work depicted a mother and boy in the form of a *pietà*, the mother kneeling with a wide open mouth resembling a gaping wound, screaming loudly with fear and sorrow. Williams changed this into the sculpture that can be seen in the cathedral. Unlike the *pietà*, the mother is now depicted with her left arm under her dead son, holding him. The sculptor's removal of the mother's head and her lower legs changes the meaning of the image. Instead of the pain of the mother, all attention is now centred on the dead boy, the tragedy of an untimely violent death. In a dramatic fashion, the image displays the horror of violent death. In the context of the church, it thus takes on the function of making the violent death of Christ on the cross visual, and with that all absurd human suffering. What began as a secular sculpture of a young victim of war became a religious image that can function liturgically.

If secular art with a spiritual subject can become art that functions within a religious community, then the three characteristics of secular art are replaced by those of art within the religious community. The museum is replaced by the church or temple. That does not constitute a problem for the second characteristic, i.e. the power of art to open up new perspectives. It is the same here as with metaphors. New metaphors are surprising and can yield insights, but metaphors can lose their ability to yield new insights and thus become dead metaphors, common expressions whose meaning is set. The images in the four artists studied here that open up new perspectives can be viewed as less innovative over the course of time. The third characteristic, i.e. concerning the symbol, also changes. The epistemological symbol in secular art can become an ontological symbol in a religious community. It can acquire a sacramental function and thus share in the reality to which it refers.

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[15] G. Pattison, *Art, Modernity and Faith* (London: SCM Press, 1991), pp. 180-82.

> Even though the difference between secular spiritual art and that of a religious community is only a matter of fact, this does not deny the fact that that difference does exist. This is a given of the development of Western culture (pp. 8-14).

This view of the difference between the secular spiritual image in museum art and the spiritual image in a religious community allows me to give full weight to the uniqueness of the various cultural spheres. Religion or spirituality has to do with all of reality, but in Western secularized society the function of religion or spirituality should be distinguished, depending on the specific cultural sphere, such as a museum or a church. Religion functions differently in the public sphere than it does in a religious community. That is why Tillich views religion in a broad sense as ultimate concern in all cultural spheres in distinction from religion as organized religion. I thus have a different view of art in contemporary secular culture than Gordon Graham does. He holds that art and religion are mutually opposed: "Art versus Religion," as the subtitle of his *The Re-Enchantment of the World* reads. "Painting alone will never let us see the sacred."[16] Graham rightly argues that art cannot take over the function of religion. But, unlike him, I have not argued for any opposition between art and religion but have emphasized precisely what is unique about spiritual art in the public sphere. My view also differs from that of Marion and Siedell, who use the church icon tradition as a hermeneutical key to analyze the (spiritual) image in modern art.[17] That does not do enough justice to the distinct character of the spiritual image in secular art in distinction from art in a religious community. In contemporary secular society, there is spiritual art in the public sphere that functions *in a way different* from how art within a religious community does, as we will now see.

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[16] G. Graham, *The Re-Enchantment of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 186.

[17] J.-L. Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 87; D.A. Siedell, *God in the Gallery: A Christian Embrace of Modern Art* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). Marion sees an opposition whereas Siedell sees precisely an analogy between modern expressive arts and the icon tradition.

Providing Spiritual Insights

The function of images within a religious community is clear, but what is the function of the subject of this study, i.e. secular art with a spiritual theme? Given that this art causes the viewer to gain new perspectives, it provides primarily *spiritual insights*. In addition to our being addressed by these works affectively, they also occasion much thought. The latter, by the way, does not occur apart from our affectivity. Knowledge and affectivity are closely connected in art and spirituality.[18] Secular spiritual art in a museum has an important function for the public because it can provide spiritual insights.

It could be objected that this turns art into theology, philosophy, or science. Does this not promote an intellectualistic spirituality, whereby insights take the place of symbolic actions, such as those performed by an icon? The Belgian philosopher, P. Moyaert from Leuven, opposes an intellectualistic theory of symbols that views symbolic actions as something connected with an underdeveloped conscious, a relic of a primitive culture.[19] But this criticism does not affect my argument for the function of art as providing spiritual insights. After all, I distinguish between church images with their symbolic practice and spiritual images in secular art. Nor does art become theology or philosophy. Insights are communicated in a different way than in the language of theology, philosophy, or science. We discussed that point already when discussing the communicability of art in the chapter on Kandinsky (pp. 75-86).

There is a difference between image and word, between depiction and description. Goodman holds that density is part of the image, both in syntactic and semantic respects.[20] The syntax of the image refers to the composition, and the semantic to the meaning of the image for the viewer. Goodman compares the image with a thermometer on which no degrees are indicated: the mercury does not indicate any specific degree. We read a painting like we would a thermometer. Each marking is equally important, has density, and coheres with other elements; there are no distinct units. Differentiating factors that are articulated separately are missing; the image is a whole of parts connected to one another. A linguistic description, in contrast, is characterized by differentiation, matters are expressed separately, each word in a sentence has its own formal characteristics and thus also its own meaning. Only when the sentences are put together in the process of reading does meaning arise for the reader.

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[18] W. Stoker, *Is Faith Rational? A Hermeneutical-Philosophical Accounting for Faith* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006) ch. 5. See also the preface to this present study.

[19] P. Moyaert, *Iconen en beeldverering. Godsdienst als symbolische praktijk* (Amsterdam: Sun, 2007), pp. 21-22, 178-84.

Spiritual insights communicated in images differ from insights via language in another respect as well. The 130 gesturing fingers in Da Vinci's *Last Supper* are more expressive than words. J.M. Peters rightly points out that words cannot provide all the details of the visible world. Our vocabulary is far too limited to describe all nuances of the colour, form, and substance of things in a way that does justice to reality. It is almost impossible to describe the colours of the paintings in the Rothko Chapel. In principle, our vocabulary can be expanded to meet that need. An Inuit has more words at her disposal to indicate the various shades of white than the average West European does. Nevertheless, there is still a difference between word and image: words are always abstractions of what specifically appears, whereas images and colours can show the concrete in its distinctness.[21]

The difference between image and word can also be explained in another way. Spiritual expressive art can have to do with "embodied" or material spirituality, as we saw in Kiefer. Materials like paint, canvas, wood, stone, lead, etc. can be used in significantly symbolic ways to connect heaven and earth with each other in one way or another. We saw Kiefer's tendency to use *all kinds of* materials, and this occurs even more in contemporary installation art. One can thus speak of material spirituality as far as spiritual art is concerned.[22] This development confirms that communication via art differs from communication via theology, philosophy, or science. Content and form are inseparably connected in art. One cannot peel the form from the message. And that obtains for a poem as much as it does for a painting. Art makes an appeal to all our senses.

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[20] For this and what follows, see N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis/New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), ch. 6; W.T.J. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), ch. 2.

[21] J.M. Peters, *Het Beeld. Bouwstenen voor een algemene iconologie* (Antwerpen/Baarn: Hadewych, 1996), p. 22.

The image shows what cannot be adequately expressed in words. That insight also determines the place of the verbal analysis indicated above in the play of viewing the paintings discussed. There are three phases in looking at art. The first is that of looking at a painting candidly and opening oneself up to it. Such a first acquaintance can involve various gradations of "It doesn't say or do anything for me" to "I'm fascinated by it." The how of the fascination is difficult to put into words; precisely therein lies the power of the image. In the second phase, one takes a step back and looks at explanations from the perspective of art history or interpretations such as those above. The second phase does not detract from the mystery of the fascination, for what the image shows is always different from the (analytical) interpretation of it. In the third phase, one returns to the painting, opening oneself up to it as in the first phase but now accompanied by the orientation done in the second phase. The interpretation can deepen the experience from the first phase so that the viewing experience can be intensified. Spiritual art is thus able to occasion much thought in its own way. In the end, the process of viewing is a matter of play.

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[22] Siedell, *God in the Gallery*, ch. 4.

Spiritual Insights

Before I summarize the spiritual insights from the works discussed in this book, I will first pose an *a priori* question: Why does that longing for religious transcendence that emerges in the works of the four artists exist?

Why the Longing for Transcendence?

The question of transcendence in the artists' works we have looked at came up in different ways: 1) as a longing for transcendence that can be explained in both a religious way and a secular way, 2) as a longing for a transcendent meaning whole, and 3) as destructive transcendence.

Religious or Secular Transcendence?

The longing for transcendence in the artists discussed here is religious in nature, at least according to my interpretation. It concerns religious spirituality in which a concern with the holy in one way or another can be detected. In itself, the longing for transcendence as a longing for meaning in life does not have to be religious. There is also secular spirituality, which also includes transcendence but does not refer to any religious source. One example of this is Jan Bor's experience when seeing Mondrian's *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* (pp. 42-43 above). Some explain the work of Rothko and Newman as non-religious.[23] I will give an example of how a painting like Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950-1951) can be interpreted spiritually in both a secular way and a religious way.

This painting is an immensely large painting in cadmium red with five zips spread over the canvas.[24] It evokes a sensory experience of space and colour. In an interview, Newman said that one should stand close to his paintings to experience the space: "Anyone standing in front of my painting must feel the vertical domelike vaults encompass him to awaken awareness of his being alive in the sensation of complete space."[25] The term "sublime" is already present in the title of the painting, the "sublime heroic man." Newman says that the title evoked emotions he himself had had to the effect that "man can be sublime or is sublime in his relation to his sense of being aware."[26] In Ohio in 1949 Newman had an intense experience in which space and time came together in an intense feeling of presence, and he wanted to evoke that feeling in those who viewed his work. In his view, the painting pointed to the self-experience of the human being of a sublime feeling of place. If one stands in front of his painting, in my experience, this painting can indeed call up a feeling of power like such a feeling of place, the intense understanding of the here and now that Newman called "a sense of your own presence."[27]

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[23] D. Anfam, "The World in a Frame," in: A. Borchardt-Hume (ed.), *Rothko: The Late Series* (London: Tate Modern, 2008), p. 57; D. Antin, "The Existential Allegory of the Rothko Chapel," in: G. Phillips and T. Crow (eds.), *Seeing Rothko: Issues and Debates* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2005), pp. 123-34.

[24] Oil on canvas, c. 242 x 541 cm.

The sublime does not, as such, need to refer to something higher in a religious sense. Understanding that "feeling of place" as religious in nature also depends on the assessment of the viewer of *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*. For R. van de Vall, it is a secular experience. She considers the white zip to be an orientation point in the "glowing chaos of unlimited space"; the white zip protects the viewer from "the wave of red" by returning him to real space.[28] It is the general human experience of a feeling of place. Understood this way, it has to do with a secular experience of transcendence. Elsewhere I have called that "transcendence as alterity,"[29] a type of transcendence in which the Wholly Other can appear in every other without being interpreted in a religious sense. A sublime feeling of place is experienced as a gift from somewhere else.

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[25] Newman, "Frontiers of Space: Interview with D.G. Seckler (1962)," in: B. Newman, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. P.O. Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 250.

[26] Newman, "Interview with D. Sylvester (1965)," in: Newman, *Selected Writings*, p. 258.

[27] Newman, "Ohio (1949)," in: Newman, *Selected Writings*, p. 174.

[28] R. van de Vall, *Een subliem gevoel van plaats. Een filosofische interpretatie van het werk van Barnett Newman* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1994), pp. 311-13, 424-25.

[29] An example of this can be found in Derrida and in Irigaray; see W. Stoker, "Culture and Transcendence: A Typology," pp. 18-24 and A. van Halsema, "Luce Irigaray's Transcendence as Alterity,", pp.

This sense of place can also be understood as referring to religious transcendence. Jews, Christians, and Muslims draw their sense of being, of living, and thus the courage to live from their faith in God the creator.

In short, the longing for transcendence is not always explained in a religious way. There is also secular spirituality. The hermeneutical space in the interpretation of modern painting makes it possible to come to both a religious and a secular understanding of secular spiritual art.

Transcendence as Longing for a Whole of Meaning

The longing for transcendence can be an expression of meaning in people's lives, of wanting to be part of a larger meaning whole. Let us take the case of someone has just buried a loved one and is riding in the funeral car back from the cemetery. What strikes him is that life on the street simply goes on, as if there is no loved one to mourn. The world outside seems indifferent to what one person experiences as very important. Apparently, we look for a connection between what is meaningful for us personally and the world outside us. It seems terrible that the world or nature is indifferent to what is very important to us. The Dutch artist and poet Armando talks about this dramatically. He calls the landscape guilty for being the unmoved witness to murder. In an interview with Martijn Sanders he responds to people who do not understand this:

> It is, of course, a very irrational way of thinking, for a landscape is never guilty. It is an anthropomorphism, a humanizing of the landscape from which I can't escape. People who do not understand this always say: "Now, that's just what's so nice about the landscape, right? Whatever hap-

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121-35, both in: W. Stoker and W.L. van der Merwe, (eds.), *Culture and Transcendence: A Typology of Transcendence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

> pens, it just keeps on growing!" Then I say, "That is precisely what I have against the landscape."[30]

In the second last poem of *Het gevecht* (The Battle), he speaks of the struggle between the lyrical subject and the soldier (both referred to in the poem as "fighting gods"). The landscape is the indifferent witness to this struggle:

> The sun found the winter,
> a knowing landscape,
> a forest, which confesses guilt, it saw the fighting gods;
> guilt is like scant power.[31]

We encountered three examples of this need for a transcendent meaning in the previous chapters. Kandinsky makes a connection between what is personally important for the individual and the world outside him. For Kandinsky, that is the spiritual inner side of things, a world that lies deep within the inner being of the human individual. Kiefer also provides an example with his paintings of a man on the ground with the starry sky above him or lying on the ground while the seeds of a large sunflower are scattered over him. Kiefer thus searches for a meaningful connection between the human individual and the world. He thus shows in these works that the world is not indifferent to what is meaningful for the human being. Warhol gives the Christian variant of the relation to a larger meaning whole: God and Christ. Meaning is here derived from Christ as the healer of body and spirit.

Longing to be part of a larger whole appears both in the spirituality of immanent transcendence (Warhol and Kiefer) and in that of radical immanence (Kandinsky).

Destructive Transcendence

For most of the artists discussed in this book, the longing for transcendence is a longing for meaning or salvation. But that does not always have to be the case. The longing for transcendence can also be ambivalent in character, and that is the case in Rothko. This type of transcendence, which A. Burms calls destructive transcendence, emerges in experiences like the following. A person can experience daily work as very important, but suddenly something shocking happens that leads that person to have an entirely different perspective on what he does. Confronted with the dissonance of life and the plurality of completely different perspectives, he wants to escape from his limited personal perspective and searches for an existential truth for his orientation in life. Burms argues that this drive to see things from a wider perspective in order to be liberated from a limited egocentric point of view does not lead to the vision of a coherent, harmonious world. This urge "seems to confront us with the vulnerability of significance and with a kind of destructive transcendence from which we have to recoil."[32] It is the experience that our limited perspective that bestows meaning on our everyday activities is transcended by an infinity of perspectives that cannot be controlled. "Radical transcendence can not be contemplated, not because it is too rich or too complicated, but because it is chaotic."[33] As an example, Burms cites Borges' description of such an experience of this infinity in his story "The Aleph:" the transcendent is experienced in a chaotic infinity that cannot be captured in an image or a concept. Should we thus attempt to forget such a terrifying experience? It escapes us simply because it is "too much" for us.

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[30] Cited in: T. Favié, *Mijn schuld is niet van hier. Het poëtische oeuvre van Armando* (Amsterdam: VU Boekhandel/Uitgeverij, 2006), p. 149.

[31] Armando, *Het gevecht*. For the theme of the guilty landscape in Armando, see Favié, *Mijn schuld is niet van hier*, pp. 149-52.

Nevertheless, there are moments when we can remember that we forget and are thus indirectly connected with the transcendence that escapes us. Such a moment can arise, according to Burms, by looking at a work of art in addition to a prayer or religious ritual. I already referred to *White Band (Number 27)*. One can have a similar experience of ambivalent transcendence when looking at *White and Greens in Blue* (1957) (fig. 31), as I discovered in the National Gallery of Art in Washington.[34]

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[32] A. Burms, "Transcendence and Chaos," in: Stoker and van der Merwe, *Culture and Transcendence*, p. 203.

[33] Burms, "Transcendence and Chaos," p. 204.

[34] Oil on canvas, 258.5 x 208.5 cm.

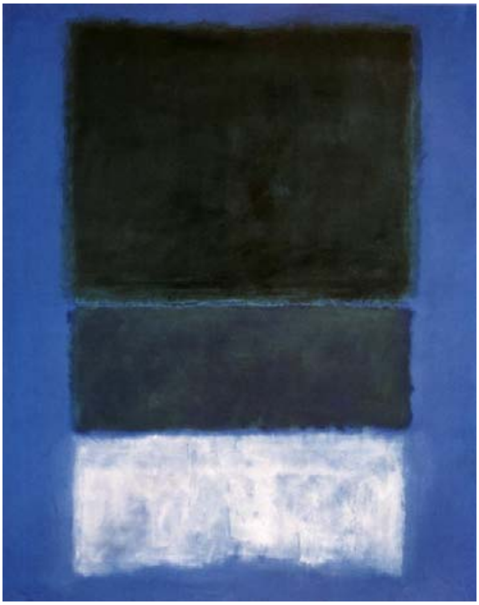

Fig. 31. Mark Rothko, *White and Greens in Blue* (1957)

Against a dark blue background, three long rectangular fields are hovering under one another. The largest field seems to be very dark at first, but gradually one sees that it is dark green. Of the two smaller areas below, the one in the middle is dark green, but more recognizable as green than the large field above. The one below is cloudy white because the blue of the background shows through somewhat, and the field is frayed on the bottom. The visual orientation point seems to be the large dark field, but one's gaze is divided because the small white field, which contrasts with the very dark green one, draws one's attention away somewhat from the large dark area. The field in the centre forms, with respect to colour, a transition between the top field and the bottom one. It is undeniably a spiritual painting, given the blue colour as background: in iconography blue refers to "heaven." The cloudy white is radiant and makes one think of Friedrich's empty sky. Transcendence is ambivalent here. Through the large dark field the painting evokes a distance that it does not give and shows in the white field a light that is subdued by the large field. The painting is dazzling because of the blue and the white, but melancholy because of the large, very dark field above.

The ambivalent character of transcendence in Rothko's later work can be explained as a recoiling from radical transcendence as infinite chaos. There is something in Rothko's colour fields that is expectant, and no breakthrough appears to be imminent.

Themes

The Question of Salvation

If we look at the spiritual works of the four artists, the differences and similarities cut across styles and schools in the history of art. Despite all differences in content, the works of Kandinsky, Warhol, and Kiefer all centre around the theme of *death and rebirth*, of a *rent and restoration*. That is the most prominent theme to which religions seek an answer. But death and rebirth are depicted in very different ways in the works of these artists. Kandinsky sometimes depicts them in terms of Christian apocalyptic, as in *Composition 6*. He deals repeatedly with the struggle between good and evil, between light and dark. Central to his work is the way in which, in theosophical fashion, spirit is opposed to matter that must be overcome. Warhol gives Christian content to the theme and sees Jesus as the bringer of salvation. He sees evil primarily in the physical sense as disease and death and portrays Jesus as the healer of those afflictions. Via the Jewish cabbala, Kiefer delves into evil as a rent or tear in reality. The world cannot endure too much of divine light—this causes the vessels to break, something that happens again and again.

It is striking that, aside from Warhol, the artists deal with the theme of guilt but not with that of forgiveness and reconciliation. Guilt, forgiveness, and reconciliation require interaction, a succession of scenes, and involve the passage of time. They take the form of story. Is the lack of this theme connected to the fact of the medium of painting being less suited to giving expression to a story, to placing scenes in an ordered temporal relationship? Or can an explanation be found in the religious views of the artists?

In his *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), G.E. Lessing drew a distinction between painting and poetry. The former has to do with "figures and colours in space," and the latter with articulating "sounds in time."[35] Guilt and forgiveness, with their temporal relation, are less suited to visual arts like painting than poetry or narrative art or, in our time, other media like film or video.[36] It is doubtful that the line between painting and poetry can be drawn as sharply as Lessing argued.[37] Paintings can have a narrative character, and the stations of the cross are strongly present in the Catholic tradition of the visual arts. One can also see this in the variation on this tradition in Newman's *The Stations of the Cross.* There is also interaction and the passage of time in Rothko's chapel installation.

The reason for the lack of forgiveness and guilt in the four artists is religious in nature. They differ in this respect from Judaism or Christianity where forgiveness and reconciliation are central. One could have expected Kiefer to have dealt with this theme, given that he portrayed the German war past in such dramatic ways. But he did that more in the sense of not allowing us to forget, in the sense of mourning and melancholy. Kiefer depicts rebirth, as we saw, by means of different traditions, such as those of the Rosicrucians in *Falling Stars* (1995) and of Christianity as in *Palm Sunday* (2007), where the theme is only implicit. Rothko treats guilt primarily in the tragic sense, as does Newman. Only in Newman's *The Stations of the Cross* does Jesus' forgiveness of those who crucified him play an important role with respect to a new beginning for people. The theme of rebirth is absent from Rothko's colour fields and his chapel installation: his spirituality revolves more around the tear in reality, tragic human existence, than it does around any kind of possible restoration. The Wholly Other is evoked, but how—in a salvific way, ominously, or as destructive transcendence?

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[35] G.E. Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, transl. Robert Phillimore (London: Macmillan and Co., 1874), p. 149.

[36] M.E. Brinkman, *Jesus Incognito*: *The Hidden Christ in Art since 1960*, transl. H. Jansen (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2012).

[37] For a discussion on this see: Mitchell, *Iconology*, ch. 4.

Kandinsky's spirituality of radical immanence searches for salvation in the insight and experience of the spiritual inner side of reality. In contrast, Warhol's and Kiefer's spirituality of immanent transcendence does not expect salvation to come from something within this world. Warhol expects it to come from Christ, whereas Kiefer's work shows different ways to salvation. Rothko's radical transcendence shows no relief or breakthrough.

Spirituality and the World

We have looked at two examples each of figurative and abstract work. The figurative work of Warhol and Kiefer depicts a religious spirituality involved with the world; the abstract work of Kandinsky and Rothko gives expression to a spirituality that is removed from the world.

Warhol and Kiefer connect reality that they consider holy or sacred, with the everyday world. In that respect, their spiritualities agree in a formal way, and that is why I used them as examples immanent transcendence. The types of transcendence indicate the various relationships between the holy and the profane in a formal way, and the artists give concrete shape to them. The type of transcendence (here immanent transcendence) becomes concrete only through the content. The work of Warhol and Kiefer shows how this type of transcendence receives different content via its varying cultural and religious settings. For Warhol, that is the American world of the consumer with its dark side of sickness and death. Jesus' task is that of healer. For Kiefer, the context is his spirituality of concrete in the world that is violently ravaged by political powers. It is no longer the German landscapes of Friedrich where the horizon evokes the infinite, but they now show traces of blood, as in *Winter Landscape*. The dark brown landscapes can also have a ray of white because of the connection with heaven, as in *Milky Way*. The techniques chosen are in line with the spirituality present in the work. Warhol depicts transcendence in the world differently from how Kiefer does. In Warhol's *Last Supper (Dove)* or *Last Supper (the Big C)*, Christ is present in the consumer society, indicated by the pop logos. For this society as well, he is the healer of spirit and body. Kiefer depicts the connection between heaven and earth very concretely by his use of tangible materials like lead, straw, and ash, whereby the transcendent is more undetermined, sometimes indicated by a white stripe and sometimes by (palm) leaves as in *Palm Sunday*.

Kandinsky's abstract work and that of the late Rothko depict transcendent reality as more turned away from this world. Kandinsky has a utopian view of the future of the world, the dawn of the age of spirituality. Within that framework, his art, unlike Kiefer's, is not a political response to the circumstances of the time. He views the holy as the spiritual inner side of human beings and the world: the material world is transcended through its spiritual inner side. Rothko's colour fields and chapel installation present a different view. They show the transcendent as Wholly Other, without specifying it any further. Rothko's later view of the tragic is no longer that of his mythical phase: now the tragic human being is subjectively reflected in himself and no longer stands in an immediate relation with the state, kindred, and fate. He lives in a strange and lonely world without any signs that could point to transcendence; even Kandinsky's line, triangle, and circle can no longer evoke another reality. He depicts the transcendent in his later work as unknown and silent. Communication with the paintings in the chapel arises through the interaction between the paintings, through the religious symbolism and colours used. That is why I called the transcendence that can be evoked by this work an example of radical transcendence. This is very different from the radical transcendence in Kierkegaard and Barth, for whom it is connected with the incarnation, with Christ. There is a closer affinity in the chapel paintings with the silent transcendence of Newman's *Stations of the Cross*.

The analysis of the works of art in the previous chapters and the description of the spiritual insights does not make viewing these paintings superfluous. Communication via an image differs from that via language. Looking at a painting is an event whereby the verbal analyses function only as an aid, as instruction, so that one can view them in an informed way. The meaning of paintings is found on the level of looking at the painting, an act that can lead to an experience. Looking at paintings is a lingering at the painting, a sensory, affective, and mental movement. It is a matter of contemplation, an experience in the true sense of the word, i.e. abandoning one's self, being confronted with the other outside of oneself (here a work of art), and then connecting it with one's own lifeworld.[38] Looking at a painting can be an experience because the world that is shown becomes part of one's own world.

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[38] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 58-61, 84-87; H.-G. Gadamer, *Ästhetik und Poetik, vol. 1, Kunst als Aussage*, Gesammelte Werke 8 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), pp. 5-7.

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