

# PHILIPPE SERS

## KANDINSKY: ARTISTIC THOUGHT AND MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

Kandinsky remained a lifelong thinker whose thinking was based on an exploratory practice in the field of art. His intellectual training prepared him for a university professorship, which he was offered in 1896, at the age of thirty. He turned it down, however, to devote himself to artistic creation, but he remained a scholar and teacher throughout his life, notably at the University of Moscow, publishing many texts that attest to the rigor of his thought.

A poet since childhood, Kandinsky also wrote stage compositions, using a very rich language, both in Russian and in German, without shrinking from the unexpected use of the existing vocabulary, or from the invention of new words. In the theoretical field, he proposed a set of rules, principles, a vocabulary and a grammar for the art: a theory of color, a theory of form and a theory of composition. This theoretical reflection is based on his experience of the language of the pure means of art and of principles of composition. Kandinsky approached art in its striving towards truth: for him, there is an artistic way of knowledge [artistic way of gaining knowledge], which leads to an individual and collective betterment. But his theory is above all related to an artistic practice that comes first, from which it emerges.

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the French original by *Sergey Dzikevich* and *Evgeny Dobrov* (AU) with consulting assistance by *Céline Surprenant* (Associate Researcher with the Chair of Modern and Contemporary French Literature, Collège de France)

Kandinsky's thinking also concerns the theology of art: artistic creation involves the artist in the creative gesture of the Lord and calls him to contribute to the harmony of the world.

### **Keywords**

Wassily Kandinsky, psychology of artistic creation, artistic practice, creative act, mystical experience, theological understanding of artistic creation.

### ***Principle of internal necessity***

At the heart of Kandinsky's thought we find the principle of internal necessity, which he defined as the «principle of purposefully touching the human soul».<sup>1</sup> The internal necessity is linked to the knowledge of the heart, knowledge that, without giving up rigor, is the result of an emotional and non-conceptual approach. His notions are in general not so much concepts as rather percepts or affects, which are reports of experience. They identify the course of a realized progression, the starting points<sup>2</sup> and the steps of which

<sup>1</sup> *Kandinsky, V., On the Spiritual in Art, in: Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art, Edited by Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, Boston, Mass, G. K. Hall & Co, 1982, p. 160.*

<sup>2</sup> Identification of the starting point takes on great importance in Kandinsky's theoretical thought. The three basic starting points are the theory of colors, the theory of forms and the theory of composition. For Kandinsky, each time, «this starting point consists in the weighing-up of the inner value of one's materials on an objective scale, i. e. the examination — in our case — of color, which by and large must affect every man» (*ibid.*, 177). Let us recall that in color theory, the starting point is the observation of the contrasts between hot and cold and between light and dark, in the theory of shapes, it is the point, the contact between the instrument and the basic plane, which contains in itself all *folded* forms, and in the theory of composition, it is a point in the center of a square. In each case, it is a path (chromogenetic,

Kandinsky wanted to indicate with them. Its knowledge is inseparable from life, and all the more so that one can say that its very object is life. Mindful of this particular which exceeds it — the reality of life — its goal is not understanding (*comprehendere*), because to understand implies an appropriation and requires us to make of this datum an object. Its purpose is not analysis either, because analysis proceeds by dissection, and thus reflects on the living from precisely isolated elements of life. For Kandinsky, as in the tradition of icon painting, of which he claims the inheritance, this knowledge is linked to a personal ethics, *neptic*<sup>3</sup> and charitable. It is an *ontological ethos*, a life project before the absolute. This knowledge of the heart is characterized by personal experience, the vital experience, which does not proceed from the concept, but from the *contemplative idea*. It is about seeing the meaning of life revealed in the spectacle of the world. This tasting of the poetic and iconographic flavor of life is truth itself, and truth is life — that is the meaning of the Russian word *istina* (truth), according to the philosopher Pavel Florensky, whom Kandinsky was close to, and who was also close to Sergei Bulgakov, Kandinsky's cousin.<sup>4</sup> The meeting of truth therefore goes through this visual

morphogenetic or compositional) that characterizes the deployment of all creative possibilities. On this subject, cf. *Sers, Ph.* Kandinsky, *Philosophie de l'art abstrait*, Paris: Hazan, 1995, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> This *nepsis* is the renunciation that the Fathers of the *Philokalia* advocate. The fruit of this renunciation is the emptiness of the heart which allows the reception of divine inspiration. See note 38.

<sup>4</sup> Florensky analyzes the variation of the word truth in the Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Russian languages. The Slavs, observing the successive cycles of nature (the destruction of winter, and resurrection of spring) consider that it is not phenomena that are true, but life. Thus, *istina* means: what exists, what breathes. To know the truth is to come into contact with a living reality. See *Florensky, P.* La Colonne

and poetic fruition. In this way, the idea — a term whose Greek etymology is the same as the verb to see — is what I perceive and which affects me. This *vibration* in the face of a proven truth is found in Alyosha Karamazov's «trembling soul» as in the burning hearts of the disciples of Emmaus. The contemplation of the mystery, first intended for the heart, is expressed in the image, but fades in the explanatory discourse. Kandinsky's favored instrument is *the metaphysical image*, which is one of the modes of the *contemplative idea*. We can define the metaphysical image as the visual actualization of a hidden reality, which is observable in the mystical experience and which involves a passage beyond appearances through the transgression of human limits, for example spatio-temporal ones, and through the reconciliation of opposed categories: material/spiritual, particular/universal, etc. The term metaphysical image covers a paradox, since it is a question of giving to see what is beyond the visible. But what gives it relevance is that this beyond is given to see in the visible realm. Florensky starts from the experience of light to demonstrate the metaphysical capacity of the visual. The experience of the metaphysical image is attested in as heterogeneous foci as those of prehistory, of the Far Eastern tradition, the Byzantine-Slavonic icon or contemporary culture, through primitive cultures, such as Kandinsky will show.<sup>5</sup>

et le fondement de la vérité / Transl. by C. Andronikof. Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1975. P. 17 sq.

<sup>5</sup> This is Kandinsky and Franz Marc's great intuition, who stood behind the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter*. The Spiritual inspires all great works of art, whatever their origin and whatever their time, whether they belong to popular or educated culture. For the first time, the almanac combines reproductions of modern works and woodcuts together with Ancient documents, Ancient works and primitive art, Japanese prints, Chinese paintings, Gothic sculptures, drawings of children, and

### *The inspiration notion and the great Kandinsky's springs*

With Kandinsky, inspiration, which Spinozist thought or critical philosophy had considerably devalued, resumed its place in artistic creation. Kandinsky believed in a dictation from the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> He was aware of several sources of inspiration that connected him both to East and West. The principle of internal necessity, as we saw, holds the conditions of artistic inspiration, while guaranteeing the purposefully touching the human soul.<sup>7</sup> The internal necessity comes from «three mystical sources»<sup>8</sup>: the artist is *naturally* led to express his own, what is peculiar to his era and to art in general. The quality of artistic creation is measured by the " purposefully touching the human soul», which is not based on virtuosity, and even less on the ego of the artist, but on the inspiration that flows through it and that unites all humanity. The first origin of inspiration lies in the personality of the artist. Each soul being endowed, so to speak, with a particular mission in the world, the artist is the one who accomplishes this mission through his work. His originality is thus not linked to his formal «way» (*manière*) but to his vocation as a witness to a personal spiritual experience. The second

paintings by Henri Rousseau. A work by Delaunay faces Greco's, Gauguin's meets an antique relief, Picasso's meets children's drawings, Cézanne's meets a 14th century's, Van Gogh's meets Japanese prints. The illustration focuses on folk art productions, such as puppets and Bavarian glass films, and important works by contemporary painters, such as Picasso and, of course, Matisse, who, according to Kandinsky, played a key and capital role, for color and form.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Kandinsky wrote in the 1914: «The birth of a work is of cosmic character. The originator of the work is thus the Spirit» «Cologne Lecture», in: Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art, op. cit., P. 394.

<sup>7</sup> See: *Kandinsky, V., On the Spiritual in Art, op. cit., P. 165.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* P. 173.

origin of inspiration is in the language of the time or the cultural milieu, the nation. This contribution is characterized less as a «style» than as an inner value of wisdom, not only with respect to the identity of the time or the nation, but to its own message. This implies that humanity progresses spiritually through the ages and that every era and every nation plays its role in this march. Finally, the third origin of internal necessity escapes the personal peculiarity of the time or of the nation. It is the spiritual inspiration that nourishes the message of art in so far as it is universal: the «element of the pure and eternally artistic [*rein und ewig künstlerisch*]».<sup>1</sup> Different cultural sources have enriched Kandinsky's course. The first is the philocalic source. *Philokalia* literally means «the love of beauty», or «the beauty of love». It is called as such in the 1782 anthology published in Venice by St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite (St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain).<sup>2</sup> This anthology, translated into Russian under the title *Dobrotoloubiye*, was a huge success. There is in it the mystical experience of the Eastern Fathers for whom the sixth Beatitude pronounced by Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount: «Blessed are the pure hearts, for they will see God»<sup>3</sup> is not to be taken in the metaphorical sense, but literally, for God is light and it is as light that He manifests Himself. Thus the Eastern mystics attest to the meeting of God not so much in the form of his essence, but rather in that of his energy, in an intense light, which is revealed to man. This tradition, which goes up to St. Seraphim of Sarov in the 19th century, founded the «theology of light», in which Kandinsky

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> The full title: *Philokalia of the Neptical Fathers, Composed from the Writings of the Holy Fathers who Bore God and in Which, by a Wisdom of Life, Made of Asceticism and Contemplation, the Intelligence is Purified, Illuminated and Attained Perfection.*

<sup>3</sup> Mt., 5, 8.

and Florensky's preoccupations are manifestly inscribed, as well as those of Mikhail Larionov with Rayonnism and Natalia Goncharova, and even, in a certain sense, those of Kazimir Malevich in Suprematism. Kandinsky also draws from this tradition a theology of the creative gesture as one that is analogous to the divine gesture. The philosopher Alexandre Kojève, nephew of Kandinsky, speaks of the absolute picture:

In a general way, the «total» table, not being the «representation» of an object, *is* itself an object. Kandinsky's paintings are not paintings of objects, but painted *objects*: they are objects in the same way as trees, mountains, chairs, states... are «objects»; only they are pictorial objects, «objective» paintings. The «total» table is as are the objects, that is to say, it is *absolutely* and not relative; he is independently of his relations with anything other than himself; he *is*, as *is* the Universe. And that is why the «total» table is also an «absolute» table.<sup>1</sup>

For Kandinsky, cosmogony is the model of artistic creation: «Technically every work of art comes into being in the same way as the cosmos — by means of catastrophes, which ultimately create out of the cacophony of the various instruments that symphony we call the music of the spheres. The creation of a work of art is the creation of the world.»<sup>2</sup> Artistic creation implies a neptical renunciation and a loving reception close to the withdrawal attitude by which the Almighty authorizes worldly causality and human free will.<sup>3</sup> For Kandinsky, the most

<sup>1</sup> Kojève, A. Les peintures concrètes de Kandinsky // Revue de métaphysique et de morale. Avril–Juin. 1985. We refer here to the text under the same title and published in *La lettre volée* (coll. Palimpsestes), Bruxelles, 2001. P. 35. (the author's emphasis).

<sup>2</sup> Kandinsky, V. *Reminiscences*, in: *Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art*, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

<sup>3</sup> We must here evoke Simone Weil's beautiful text on the love of the world order: «The love of the order of the world, of the beauty of the

striking feature of the Revelation of the Spirit is the appearance of the Inner Law, which replaces the external law given to Moses. Moral rigor is no longer imposed on me from the outside, rather it becomes my personal project. Now, there is a kinship between the discovery of the Inner Law and what is called the «prayer of the heart» in the Byzantine-Slavonic tradition of the *Philokalia*. This is the inner prayer practiced by the spiritual masters of the hesychast tradition, which is also called «permanent prayer» and which replaces for many mystics, especially hermits of the desert, the traditional external liturgy. The transition to the spiritual age is marked by this passage from externally manifested prayer to inner prayer or prayer of the heart. How could a Russian like Kandinsky not be tempted by the rapprochement with the question of the image? In fact, the liturgy of Orthodox Christianity is a *double* liturgy, based both on the word and the image. The holy image, the icon, is liturgy as much as the Word.<sup>4</sup> The revolution of the Spirit can

world is [...] the complement of the love of one's neighbor. It proceeds from the same renunciation, the image of the creative renunciation of God. God makes this universe exist by consenting not to command it, although he would have the power to do so, but to let instead command in his place, on the one hand, the mechanical necessity attached to matter, including the psychic matter of the soul, and, on the other, the autonomy which is essential to thinking persons. Through the love of one's neighbor, we imitate the divine love that created us and all our fellow men. By the love of the world order we imitate the divine love that created the universe of which we are part. Man does not have to give up ordering matter and souls, since he does not have the power to do so. But God has given him an imaginary image of this power, an imaginary deity, so that he too, although a creature, can be drained of his divinity.» (*Weil, S. Attente de Dieu*. Paris: La Colombe, 1950. P. 161—162).

<sup>4</sup> The Council of Nicaea II, to which the Councils of Trent (Mansi 13,



to perform as well in the field of the image, since the liturgy of speech gives the example of it. Pictorial abstraction is an evidence of the prayer of the heart. In addition to his philocalic inspiration, Kandinsky is animated by what he calls a «new Romanticism». He confessed it himself when writing to Will Grohmann:

You once dropped the word romanticism, and I rejoiced [...] Today we have a *Neue Sachlichkeit*<sup>5</sup> — well, there is also one (or the new Romanticism. The urge took me one day to write something about it and I thought about devoting a new chapter to Romanticism in *The Spiritual's* new edition. Since then, the outline of my book has changed, and it appears in the form of separate monographs — *Point and Line to Plane* is the beginning [...] it is the nostalgia of Romanticism that inhabits without his knowledge today's man [...] The meaning, the content of art is Romanticism. [...] I think I painted, in 1910, a Romantic landscape that had nothing to do with the first

378–379) and Vatican II (Lumen Gentium 67) refer explicitly, affirms the agreement and interdependence of the re-presentation of mystery and evangelical proclamation, both based on Revelation. The representation of painted images and evangelical preaching are in agreement, mutually indicated, and signified by each other: «We keep, without introducing anything new, all the ecclesiastical traditions, written or unwritten, that have been established for us. One of them is the representation of painted images, because it agrees with the history of evangelical preaching, in view of the belief in the true and not illusory incarnation of God the Word and for our utility. *For the things that are capable to be understood themselves throughh one another unequivocally also have their explanation one by the other*» (Lamberz, E., *Uphus J.B. Concilium Nicaenum II-787 // The œcumenical Councils From Nicaea I to Nicaea II. Turnhout: Brepols (Corpus Christianorum). 2006. P. 317–345*). We can see here the mystical, catechetical and sacramental vocation of the text-image set in the encounter with Christ and in the evangelical witness.

<sup>5</sup> This is the direction of the *Nouvelle Objectivité*, which ties political and social imperatives to art.

Like the representatives of Romanticism, Kandinsky looked at nature as he looked at great works of art; as they did, he considered the work as an organic totality flourishing through the synthesis of the arts; and with them, he saw art as the paradigm of human activity. A pictorial representation has the capacity to reach the thing in itself, as Schopenhauer already foresaw for music, while it remains forbidden to the theoretical philosophical discourse, that Kantian criticism confines to the simple role of providing the *a priori* conditions of the phenomenal world. This is what Heidegger felt when he expressed the idea that art is called to take over from metaphysics. That is why Kandinsky added: «I would really like that what is *behind* my painting be finally understood (for that is what and precisely this alone interests me exclusively; „the question of form“ has never played for me but a subordinate role [...] for me form merely a mean to an end and [...] if I am so minutely and extremely concerned, including in theory, with form, it is because I want to get inside it.»<sup>2</sup> In this quest, it is less the formal innovations that matter, than the unveiling of meaning. Kandinsky fully agreed with Florensky, when he wrote: «The life of art depends on the degree of fusion between impressions and modes of expression. True art is the unity of the content and modes of expression of this content.»<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Romantische Landschaft*, 1911. The painting remained in the hands of Gabriele Münter, which explains Kandinsky's dating error. We see three horsemen descend from a height. The landscape, just sketched, is dominated by a bright red sun which corresponds to a large black spot down to the right. On the left is an erect rock, very similar to that of *Composition II*, 1910. The example given by Kandinsky is therefore a work whose theme is apocalyptic.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of November 21, 1925, quoted in: Grohman, W. *Wassily Kandinsky, Life and Work*, New York, Abrams, 1958. P. 180–181.

In addition, this ability to re-present Being in its truth, to presentify it, that is to say, to make it *present*, to summon its presence, ends up erasing the dualism between interiority, which would be subjective, and the exteriority of the world of objects. But it is not abolished through the imagination, as was the case with Romantic authors or the defiance of Baudelaire, who considered that «pure art» was able to «create a suggestive magic containing both the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself.»<sup>4</sup> Kandinsky spoke of new Romanticism, because whereas Romanticism saw the spiritual eye (*das Geistige Auge*) in the painter's *imagination*, he saw it in the meeting with *Sophia*, the Divine Wisdom, dear to Father Sergey Bulgakov. The difference is fundamental and it is the perfume of this wisdom, manifested in the order of the world, which he looked for in his geometrical period. His inspiration is also nourished by the Chinese tradition. His relationship to the behavior of scholars of this great tradition is reflected in his pictorial gesture and in his reflection on form, which are reminiscent of those of Chinese painters attached to the search for the «constant internal principle» (*li*). This notion, central to the philosophy of art in China, refers to the internal principle that governs the formation and becoming of all that exists. Literally, the word means «vein in the jade»: it is the vein in the rocks, the spurt of the waterfall or the tree structure of plants. The Chinese artist seeks to transcribe the spirit of the universe in the making, well away from the fixed appearance of things, or «constant form». The dynamics of *the constant internal principle*,

<sup>3</sup> Florensky, P. La liturgie comme synthèse des arts // Père Paul Florensky. La perspective inversée suivi de L'Iconostase / Transl. by F. Lhoest). Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1992. P. 57.

<sup>4</sup> Baudelaire, Ch. L'art philosophique // Baudelaire, Ch. Écrits sur l'art. Paris: LP, 1971. T. 2. P. 119.

which is found in the growth of bamboo, it has the capacity to bring out all possible forms, as can be observed in moving clouds which draw successively a profile, an animal or a mountain. The artist escapes the banality of the «constant form», letting himself be inhabited by this dynamic of creation. Kandinsky's free forms and his theory of form are based on the dynamics of thrusts and contrasts, rather than on established forms. This is the radical originality and relevance of his work.

Another key concepts of Kandinsky's thought, the «inner resonance» almost literally translates, moreover, the Chinese word *qiyun*, which also means the resonance of breaths. In Kandinsky, the inner resonance of art's basic elements, for example colors, forms, sounds, words, etc., are their perfume, their action on the soul of the spectator or the listener, their psychic function and their profound meaning. This inner resonance is the vital dynamic of the element. Thus, painting, poetry or music are much less about describing the outward aspects of reality than about grasping the internal principles that structure and connect things. The essence of art, in other words, is not the mere mechanical reproduction of formal appearances, which is the matter of the craftsman, but the grasping of the inner nature of reality that only an attentive mind can accomplish. Such proximity is felt in Kandinsky's poetic work. In China, the Chinese painter and philosopher Su Dongpo claims about Wang Wei, who lived in the eighth century and is considered to be the first Chinese scholar: «In each of his poems, we can see a painting, and in each of his paintings, we can read a poem.»<sup>1</sup> Such a sentence is close to what Kandinsky writes when he describes the community of nature between painting and poetry that makes the transition from one to the

<sup>1</sup> *Sers, Ph., Escande, Y. Résonance intérieure, dialogue sur l'expérience artistique et l'expérience spirituelle en Chine et en Occident. Paris: Klincksieck, 2003. P. 11.*

other very natural:

Every true painting is poetry. For poetry is not done only through the use of words, but also through organized, composed colors; thus painting is a pictorial poetic creation. It has its own ways of being «pure poetry». It is the so-called abstract painting that «speaks» (or «recite») by its exclusively pictorial forms — which is an advantage over the poetry made with words. The source of these two languages is the same, the root is common: intuition = soul.<sup>1</sup>

The wisdom of the people, whom he discovers with his nurse, is also an important source of inspiration for Kandinsky, who is attached to popular myths and traditions. Kandinsky's pictorial, poetic and even scenographic work is thus inhabited by legendary figures. He collects *loubki*, that is, images of popular devotion, naive prints illustrating Russian tales and legends: those of the semi-benevolent witch Baba Yaga, who lives in an *isba* mounted on chicken legs; those of the evil dragon who demands his ration of fresh flesh in the form of pretty princesses and which is defeated by the simple young man with a pure heart; the three brave knights Aliocha Popovich, Dobrynia Nikitich, and especially Ilya Muromets, the archery, who represent courage, knowledge, and strength; those of St. Nil, who leaves his monastery by boat for the mystical desert, etc.

Peasant houses have also struck him: they are entirely variegated and the objects they contain, such as tables or coffers, disappear as objects to merge into color. These houses themselves lead him to a new and decisive discovery:

I still remember how I entered the living room for the first time and stood rooted to the spot before this unexpected scene. The table, the benches, the great stove (indispensable in Russian farmhouses), the cupboards, and every other object were covered with brightly colored,

<sup>1</sup> *Kandinsky, V. L'esprit poétique // Journal des poètes. 1.1933.*

elaborate ornaments. the buffets, all were painted with ample and variegated ornaments. Folk pictures (*loubki*) on the walls: a symbolic representation of a hero, a battle, a painted folk song; The «red» corner (red is the same as beautiful in old Russian) completely covered with painted and printed pictures of the saints, burning in front of it, the red flame of a small pendant lamp, glowing and blowing like a knowing, discreetly murmuring, modest and triumphant star, existing in and for itself. When I finally entered the room, I felt surrounded on all sides by painting, into which I had thus penetrated.<sup>1</sup>

The route to the Russian peasant house leads from the material to the spiritual, furniture painted with popular engravings, which are images of heroes or saints, from the latter to the icon or icons of the «red corner», and from there, to the light of the little suspended lamp that burns like a silent oration. Upon entering these houses, which he describes as «magical», Kandinsky feels surrounded with painting; he has entered into painting. He discovers that it is possible to inhabit painting. He realizes that it is the same feeling that animated him when he was in Moscow's churches, especially in the Dormition Cathedral in the Kremlin. «It was probably through these impressions, rather than in any other way, that my further wishes and aims as regards my own art formed themselves within me. For many years I have sought the possibility of letting the viewer „stroll“ within the picture, forcing him to become absorbed in the picture, forgetful of himself.<sup>2</sup>»

But Kandinsky's most important source of inspiration is in dreams, the prophetic vision, and sometimes even delirium, like the one he experienced when typhus struck him, and which gave him a glimpse of the theme of *Composition II*, devoted to the mystery of the salvation of men. Pictorial art, heir to the tradition of the icon, has a prophetic vocation according

<sup>1</sup> *Kandinsky, V. Reminiscences, op. cit. P. 368—369.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* It is the author who emphasizes.

to Kandinsky, who believes in *visionary* prophetism, a fundamental fact of the biblical tradition in which God manifests itself in the form of dreams or visions. He therefore pays particular attention to these dreams and visions, which he transcribes into his poems or puts into form in his pictorial work. For him, the artistic creation has the function of putting things in order, of deciphering the vision through this exercise of wisdom, which is the composition. Kandinsky's main vision, that of the end of time, is that on which St. Isaac the Syrian, one of the greatest masters of the philocalic tradition, recommends one to concentrate his or her meditation after meditating on nature. It is thus the twilight on the city of Moscow, the metaphysical image of the Last Judgment, which is the dominant theme of his work, as the 1913 book of his spiritual autobiography, the album *Resonances/Sounds (Klänge / Zvuki)*<sup>1</sup> or the cover of *On the Spiritual in Art* two years later.

***Elements and Instruments of Artistic Creation: The Synthesis of Art and Science***

Initially, the book *Point and Line to Plane, a Contribution to the Analysis of the Pictorial Elements*, published by Kandinsky in 1926 at the Bauhaus, was to be entitled: «Treatise on Harmony in Painting» with the subtitle: «Treatise of the Composition». The objective Kandinsky sets himself in this book is to study the materials of artistic creation, the nature of which is different for each art, but whose resonances are identified from the contrasts of the vital tensions that define them and which lead to Trinitarian systems. The resonances of the

<sup>1</sup> Also translated «Sounds», see Complete Writings on Art, P. 291–339. Kandinsky had planned a Russian version of this album under the title *Zvouki*, but this project could not succeed. We must salute the fine work of Boris Sokolov who has managed to produce this Russian version: *Kandinskij, V. Zvuki [Résonances]*. Moskva: Kučkovo pole, 2016.

elements in the various forms of art, painting, music, and poetry are in correspondence. This study allows us to identify the different modes of construction and composition of the work. Kandinsky reaches in it the peak of his theoretical thinking:

One of the most important tasks for the incipient science of art would be a penetrating analysis of the whole history of art. On the one hand, it should examine the elements of art, the methods of construction and composition employed at different times by different peoples. On the other, it should seek to determine the nature of growth in each of these three areas — the path by which enrichment was achieved, at what pace, and the necessity of its attainment — as well as how the development of art probably occurs in fits and starts, representing perhaps in the whole history of art a definite line of development — possibly an undulating line. The first part of this task — the analytic part — verges on the tasks of «positive» science. The second part — the manner of development — verges on the tasks of philosophy. Here is tied the thread of order that runs through human development generally.<sup>1</sup>

In this statement, Kandinsky confirms the idea that art is not only the paradigm of human action, but that, as it were, it plays a role at the scientific level in the field of anthropology, which is equivalent to that of mathematics in the natural sciences. The explanation of this astonishing privilege lies in the fact that artistic creation is the privileged place of a radical shift. The qualitative evaluation, which is the register of the absolute, replaces the quantitative one, which is the register of the relative. This qualitative evaluation is guaranteed in its relation to the absolute of truth, justice and beauty, by the fact that it is based on the knowledge of the heart, a kind of knowledge that opens to the infinite source of things and beings. We can then leave the limits of art and reach fundamental unicity:

<sup>1</sup> *Kandinsky, V. Point and Line to Plane, in: Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art, op. cit., P. 535.*



The examination should proceed with painful, pedantic precision. This «tedious» path should be measured pace by pace — not the tiniest change in the substance, in the qualities, or in the effects of each individual element should be allowed to escape the attentive eye. Only by a process of microscopic analysis will the science of art lead an all-embracing synthesis, which will ultimately extend far beyond the boundaries of art, into the realm of «union» of the «human» and the «divine».<sup>1</sup>

The initial task of the science of art is to identify the resonance of the elements. Kandinsky found the double nature of the elements.<sup>2</sup> The element materializes the interior content to which it is precisely related through its own nature. If the content of art were external, the element would only contribute to the mimetic illusion: it would amount to a boring repetition of external reality, of the objects of the world. It would be a dangerous repetition too, because it would obscure the true content, it would prevent it from finding its external form. It is

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. P. 537.

<sup>2</sup> We know that the elements of art have a double nature. Thus, colors, shapes or sounds have an external nature associated with the appearances of things. Yellow can evoke the acidity of the lemon or the heat of the sun, a shrill sound, a warning signal, etc. But these same elements also have an inner nature, which is accessible to us when we open ourselves to the spiritual capacities of our own senses. At that moment, a vital dynamic emerges, *the inner resonance* of the elements, which constitutes *the language of the soul*, which the artist uses. In his theoretical observations, Kandinsky thus releases the inner resonances of colors, point, lines and shapes, as well as those of the «basic plane» (*Grundfläche*), which is the support of the image. He also relates them to the elements related to the other senses, in particular the musical elements. In his pictorial, poetic and scenographic work, as well as in his work as a teacher, he never stops to explore these inner resonances and their relationships, putting them to the test of his experience, that of his pupils and that of the public.

not external coherence that can account for the resonance of the elements for the soul, but inner necessity. The pure element of art materializes the pure and eternal Artistic, in the same way that the objects of the world beyond themselves refer to a single common principle: Creative Divine Wisdom. The resonance of the elements is based on the internal and vital dynamic, which connects them. This dynamic, which turns out to be Trinitarian,<sup>1</sup> is the leading thread of color theory, point and form theory, and basic plane theory (plane-person, two-dimensionality, and diagonal structuring).<sup>2</sup> This true ontogeny of the basic elements of painting lays the foundation for the correspondence of the elements, the basis for the synthesis of the arts. This correspondence shows the genetic unity of the elements and the link between artistic creation and Trinitarian Wisdom, which defines the laws of life.

The next task of the science of art is to define the construction of the work. Construction is the organic combination of elements. It makes the different parts become alive through the whole. In fact, if the artistic creation was limited to the internal resonance of the elements alone, art would remain at the stage of mere delight. But construction makes of the work a whole that is not a mere addition of resonances, but one which takes its meaning in the confrontation of the elements. Thus, the resonances meet either in a unified, or in a contrasted way. In the first case, the construction of the work is a *lyrical* harmony; in the second

<sup>1</sup> Thus the theory of colors brings together two ternaries: blue, yellow, green; red, orange, purple. The theory of forms, all derived from the point, opens on the square ternary, triangle, circle. For each element, a spiritual resonance emerges from the observation of the tensions or the internal dynamics of the element itself. In this regard, cf. *Sers, Ph. Kandinsky, philosophie de l'art abstrait. Op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

case, it is a *dramatic* harmony. Construction thus juxtaposes the elements in their *vital tensions*.

The achievement of the science of art is composition. In Kandinsky's theory of harmony, composition plays an essential role.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the construction itself can lock the work into the vertigo of systematization, from simple postulates. And Kandinsky has repeatedly expressed his fear of falling into the «decorative». As for composition, which is inspired by inner necessity, it completes the work: it forms the «all that one names painting (*tableau*)». Starting from the common life of the elements simply confronted to one another in construction, composition establishes harmony through the «conformity with spiritual laws». Thus, while construction is a combination of living elements, composition is a search for their internal logic, which aims to bring together isolated forms into a harmonic unity that reveals their meaning, which makes sense. In composition, artistic creation comes close to Divine Wisdom, it joins it in the best case.<sup>2</sup> Kandinsky writes in *On the*

<sup>1</sup> The term «composition» has two different meanings in Kandinsky. He uses it first when he distributes his paintings into *Impressions*, *Improvisations* and *Compositions*: *Impressions* are notations from the outside world, *Improvisations* come from the inner world and *Compositions* combine both. In a broader sense, to compose for him is to unite, in a set organized according to meaning, what human experience otherwise presents as a disorganized succession. Composition is thus an instrument of the unveiling of meaning: it is the reordering of the elements according to the meaning aimed at offering the viewer or the listener a decisive and sensitive experience of the truth.

<sup>2</sup> This is the reason why the artist has only painted ten «compositions» (in the first sense of the term). Composition manifests the logic of the creation of the world. In his «brilliant» period, from 1908 to 1912, Kandinsky created his apocalyptic compositions. In his non-narrative

*Spiritual in Art*: «Color, which itself gives materiality to a counterpoint and contains infinite possibilities, will lead, together with drawing, to the great pictorial counterpoint, will be completed by reaching the composition and, having truly become an art, will serve the Divine.<sup>3</sup>

*Spiritual experience as epistemology*

In *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky cites the Gospel parable of talents.<sup>4</sup> This parable is given by Jesus to make his disciples understand the need to bear fruit from the gifts of grace.<sup>5</sup> In the St. Jerome's commentary, talents take on a very rich meaning. The unique talent, buried or put in a cloth by the lazy servant who refuses to make it fructify, represents the solitary, necrotic or self-glorified reason, and thus remains unproductive. The two talents, which the second servant redoubles, represent the intelligence of faith and works, which are doubled between the old and the new Covenant. The five talents given to the first servant and who brings back five others are identified as man's five senses, whose power is redoubled by their spiritual opening. The spiritual opening of the senses is a familiar theme in the Fathers of the Church. Thus, the bodily eye opens to the visual revelation of spiritual realities.

Eastern Christianity, and in particular the monachism of the philophilic tradition, which has considerably influenced Russian thought, bears witness to the mystics who attain this type of vision, by literally taking the sixth Beatitude of Matthew's Gospel: «Happy are the pure hearts, for they will see God.»<sup>6</sup> For

period, after 1914, he tells us about possible worlds and beings, what science cannot show us, but that art is capable of imaging.

<sup>3</sup> *Kandinsky, V., On the Spiritual in Art, op. cit., P. 173.*

<sup>4</sup> Cf.: *Ibid.*, P. 177.

<sup>5</sup> Mt. 25, 15; Lc. 19, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 5, 8.

the Fathers, this announcement is not metaphorical, it is an indication of the experience to be realised because it is possible to reach the vision of God in the form of light, when the heart is pure and the soul in peace. Like Florensky, Kandinsky remains in a scientific state of mind in the face of the question of the metaphysical image and the spiritual experience. His writings show that he advances in a very methodical way. He explores things in two stages: first, he notes the *occasional* experience that led him to discover unsuspected possibilities. As a result, he conducts a *verification* experiment to confirm the possibilities that have been identified and to define the conditions that allow them to be open to artistic creation.

This is how he explores, for example, the resonance of the elements. He underwent early (occasional) experience whereby he felt that the colors coming out of the tube were like living beings. In *Reminiscences* Kandinsky says that after saving for a long time at the age of thirteen or fourteen, he had managed to buy a box of paint. He had then felt, by opening the tubes and seeing the colors coming out of them, that the latter were real beings available for «necessary incarnations» on the canvas. Colors have a mysterious existence: they are «beings», «living in themselves and for themselves». This experience is fundamental: interiority can be represented in painting because the very element of painting has a personal existence and an inner resonance: the color is not only required in the painting to simulate the appearance of things, it has a life of its own and speaks to the soul independently of any definition, which is demonstrated by this episode of «playful» colors coming out of the tube.

The occasional experience in this case is an event, a coincidence<sup>1</sup>, and which makes one aware of an unexplored

<sup>1</sup> Chance plays a large role in Kandinsky's philosophical and creative journey, and he welcomes it as «that nothing from which everything

reality. Here, Kandinsky discovers that there is a being of colors that connects them to the Being of the world. But this could remain a fleeting impression that would quickly forgotten without the continuation of the auditory experiments, which will confirmed the discovery by establishing the character of the life of the elements. These observations are presented in his great theoretical texts, in particular *On the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line on Plane*.

Kandinsky's theory of art is by no means an intellectual construction. The story of his accumulated experiences confirms this basic discovery. He describes the tension of the elements as he experienced it. He submits them to an inner evaluation, fruit of a special attention, *neptic attention*<sup>2</sup>, which is in the great tradition of hesychasm. Thus the vital tensions of heat and cold will animate the theory of colors, accompanied by the

can come out» according to Kierkegaard's formula, which considered it a «wink from eternity to time». Various episodes of his life attest to Kandinsky's interest in a meaningful kairos, as evidenced by his poems and his own testimony, for example when he is confronted by a picture of him lying on its side, which he does not recognize, and to which he suddenly find a strange beauty (Cf.: *Kandinsky, V. Reminiscences*, op. cit., p. 369). This welcoming of chance makes the artist a precursor of Dada, whose foundation by Hugo Ball in Zurich in 1916 is marked by a tribute to Kandinsky.

<sup>2</sup> Neptic attention is an attention based on sobriety, conceived both as purification and as mastery of the senses towards the Spiritual. The neptic paradigm can be defined as the shift that opens the soul to new dimensions of existence as a result of this purification, of this renouncement that separates man from the illusions of the world. The neptic paradigm is at the basis of *On the Spiritual in Art* because it is the condition of all spiritual experience. It is a movement that leads to the release of circumstantial elements to welcome and live the event, the meeting of the Being.

movement of black to light. In the same way, the observations on the point, the origin of all the forms, are visibly enriched by a meditation on the Planck era, as the rumination of the birth of life in his Parisian compositions relates to the observation of nature's micro-organisms.<sup>1</sup>

The second example of the transition from an occasional to a verifying experience concerns the question of the synthesis of the arts. Initially, Kandinsky recounts a synesthetic experience he experienced during a performance of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*.<sup>2</sup> The music made him see mentally «his» colors, those of «his hour» (that of the sunset over the city of Moscow). The colors were «in front of his eyes», while «Wild, almost crazy lines» were outlined in front of him. He finds that achieving «one's time»<sup>3</sup> is possible in music and concludes that it must be possible in painting. Art is able to make the whole being vibrate, because it is a place of communication with the soul, as soon as it begins to speak the same language through the elements — as here, the sounds.

The verifying experience will see *the correspondence of the elements* confirmed. Recall that for Kandinsky, the yellow — red — blue ternary, which is at the core of color theory, comes close to that of the acute — right — obtuse angles, which leads directly to the ternary of the basic surfaces. This kinship is important to Kandinsky's thinking. The ternary of colors is a kind of hidden model of human sensitivity in terms of inner resonance. The action of Creative Wisdom, for Kandinsky as for Florensky, unfolds in a Trinitarian way. And this is certainly what allows Kandinsky to affirm that, as a corollary to the

<sup>1</sup> Kandinsky's library contains several illustrated scientific works on the subject which have obviously served as a basis for this meditation, or in any case, have confirmed it.

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: Kandinsky, V. *Reminiscences*. Op. cit., p. 364.

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

principle of the correspondence of the elements, there exists a principle of transposition, which allows any phenomenon of the external or inner world to find its linear expression. Art thus acquires its status as an instrument of knowledge that flourishes in the synthesis of the arts as an organic whole. It is important to note that, like Florensky, Kandinsky sees the model of the synthesis of the arts in Christian liturgy, more particularly, in that of the Orthodox tradition.

Kandinsky's solution is revolutionary.<sup>1</sup> His conception of the synthesis of arts, and the notion of metaphysical art are based upon it, because the *ternary* structuring of the elements he proposes makes it a deployment of the Trinitarian Wisdom announced by the Russian mystical tradition as the structure of Creation.<sup>2</sup> This is how the creation of a work is truly analogous to the creation of the world.

A third example concerns a qualitative shift, that is, the transformation from a quantitative appreciation of reality to a qualitative approach, a transition from the relative to the absolute, which is the real artistic *metanoia*. Kandinsky's casual experience takes place during a study trip to Northern Russia. He meets peasant houses of the province of Vologda, in which

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible in this presentation to develop the richness of the Kandinskian solution in all its magnitude. For the relevance of Kandinsky's correspondence of the arts, we refer to our edition Kandinsky W. *Point et ligne sur plan*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991 P. 89–90 (in particular our notes 18 and 19).

<sup>2</sup> For Florensky, the number three, which characterizes the absolute of God, is peculiar to beings as a fundamental category of life, it is the most general characteristic of being. The triune number of divine hypostases can not be deduced. It is an « infinite fact ». It is not a consequence of our conception of God, but a content of the very experience of divinity in its reality superior to reason. It is given as an element, an aspect of the infinite fact that structures reality.



he enters with great emotion. The young man has the impression of entering painting. The variegation of painted furniture erases their materiality and attenuates their functional character to form a pure pictorial universe. The popular images, the *loubki*, which cover the walls, remind him of the legendary myths and tales of his childhood, his eyes are attracted to the icons of the «red corner», the *beautiful* corner. They attest to the veneration of a divine presence manifested by the light of the little traditional lamp, lit in front of the holy representations. The pictorial world becomes a habitable place, oriented towards the «divine». This experience is fundamental. The very architecture of these peasant houses, which he calls «magical homes»<sup>1</sup> becomes immaterial, fails in front of the pictorial motley that encircles it, in which he immerses himself and opens his mind to another journey, a passage to the Kingdom of God. It is a route that leads to the light through a reordering, a hierarchisation of things and life. The material world is rocking and unveiling the path to the absolute and this shift is effected in and through the pictorial universe.

The verifying experience in Kandinsky occurs through the creative process, of which he finds the fulfillment in *Composition*. In the account he gives of the genesis of his *Composition VI*, carried out in 1913,<sup>2</sup> the shift is made explicit. The painting deals with the deluge. At first, he paints a somewhat anecdotal picture under glass 1, in which he enjoys representing some popular or fanciful forms, close to what he did in the *Bagatelles* series, and which accompany the serious elements: men and animals engulfed in turmoil. Then, dissatisfied, he creates an oil on canvas in which the motif disappears in favor of its «inner essence». The vision of the Flood becomes a vertigo experienced when faced with a whirling

<sup>1</sup> *Kandinsky, V. Reminiscences, op. cit., p. 369.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

movement of sorts that sucks the viewer into the abyssal depths of an agonizing void.<sup>1</sup>

But he is still not satisfied, and that is when the final composition emerges in his mind. In *Composition VI*, we observe the unleashing of cosmic forces, with an accentuation of the abyss that transpires in three or four places on the periphery, but also and especially, in the center of the painting. It becomes a frightening abyss, of a depth that one feels unfathomable and formidable. Above the abyss and the snake, whose figure is preserved in the composition, the painter installs a zone of divine protection, which is like a kind of reassuring luminous flotation (what he calls the atmosphere of the Russian steam bath), from which one can read in a very subtle way the shape of the ark, which is transported there. The shift then occurs from the circumstance to the event, from everyday experience to the senses, and from time to eternity.

The lines of construction of the *Composition VI* work carry everything in a concentric movement that ends at the point marked by a lightning above and to the right of the serpent-dragon's head. This is the concluding point of the centripetal dynamics of the painting, in this precise place where the characters and the animals drowned by the Flood will sink into the abyss, like the lion and the man who overhangs it. The dynamic, very attenuated in *Improvisation*, is, on the other hand, very powerful in the fixed under glass, which is an *Impression*, and especially in *Composition*. At this point, bifurcating toward the center, the ark of the righteous will be able to enjoy rest in God. This place, where the ultimate eschatological shift is made, is thus the place of meaning: man's choice between vertigo and salvation, abyss and confidence, nihilism and inner law. *Impression* thus represents the spectacle of heavy material appearances, of circumstances surrounding

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. P. 385 sq.

the event. *Improvisation* represents the inner, vital experience that takes the viewer beyond himself. As for *Composition*, its challenge is to show meaning through appearances. It is the latter that properly speaking constitutes the metaphysical image whose relevance is based on the experience of a shift: that of from appearances to the senses.

By way of concluding, let us quote Kandinsky's most determining discovery. It is provoked by his synaesthetic experience, which we have already mentioned, and it gives the keys to the synthesis of the arts. This experience is that of the *vibration of the soul*. Kandinsky noted in his experience as a painter and musician that the soul is receptive to certain resonances, which makes it vibrate. Such a vibration brings certainty that the means of nature or art have attained their goal, which is to say, the human soul. The resonances in question here are harmonics developed from certain basic sensory tones. These tones, which are visual, auditory or may still concern the other senses, are emitted by nature or by artistic activity (in the broad sense), of which «the means are equivalent», «so great, so strong».<sup>1</sup>

These resonances of the elements of nature and art are the material of a «language of the soul», whose mode is intuition and which leads to the knowledge of the heart. Thanks to these resonances, there is a very special encounter with the life of beings and the world. Through the spectacle of nature and everyday life appears the primordial and benevolent Wisdom, the organizer of the world, which artistic composition can express, even outside of any figuration. In art, the inner structure of this reality is manifested through elements, colors, shapes, sounds, etc., animated by tensions and vital dynamics.

The occasional experience of the vibration of the soul is therefore good for him in front of the sunset over the city

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, P. 360.

of Moscow:

The sun dissolves the whole of Moscow into a single spot, which, like a wild tuba, sets all one's soul vibrating. No, this red fusion is not the most beautiful hour. It is only the final chord of the symphony, which brings every color vividly to life, which allows and forces the whole of Moscow to resound like the *fff* of a giant orchestra. Pink, lilac, yellow, white, blue, pistachio green, flame red houses, churches, each an independent song — the garish green of the grass, the deeper tremolo of the trees, the singing snow with its thousand voices, or the *allegretto* of the bare branches, the red, stiff, silent ring of the Kremlin walls, and above, towering over everything, like a shout of triumph, like a self-oblivious hallelujah, the long, white, graceful, serious line of the Bell Tower of Ivan the Great. And upon its tall, tense neck, stretched up toward heaven in eternal yearning, the golden head of the cupola, witch among the golden and colored stars of the other cupolas, is Moscow's sun.

To paint this hour, I thought, must be for an artist the most impossible, the greatest joy.<sup>1</sup>

The verifying experience is of the order of the «*transfer of evidence*».<sup>2</sup> Kandinsky shows its development in the only

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> We define this process of transfer of evidence as follows: «A complex, paradoxical and elusive reality — since it is of the order of vital experience — can be brought to light by a process of transfer. This transfer proceeds from representation, that is to say, that the reality of the phenomenon in question is made to unfold itself, to present itself anew to experience, but in another form, which presupposes that it is brought back to its essential features. The reduction of a complex reality to its simple elements and its redeployment in a directly accessible form — because freed from the scrambling of the emotional — are the basis of the process of testing the truth in the transfer of evidence. It is the very principle of composition that leads to the system of the transfer of evidence. The composition as a reordering is intended to lead to an unveiling of meaning. From there springs the idea of moving from a composition imitating reality to an

synthetic work by him, to which we have access, the 1913 album *Resonances (Klänge)*.<sup>3</sup> This transfer is equivalent to a reordering of vision, made possible through spiritual likeness. It is the culmination of the spiritual opening of the senses. Concretely, as during the elaboration of *Composition VI*, the artist's gaze is initially focused on the elements of the world and the events of its existence and seeks to discover their spiritual resonance. They are then the object of a real transfiguration. We see it in his poetic as in his pictorial writing, since the album confronts Kandinsky's poems and his woodcuts to one another. These latter are not illustrative. There bear all the major themes of his pictorial meditation on human destiny: the Flood and the story of the people of God, the fulfillment of the figures of holiness through baptism, the collapse of the City of Men and its replacement by the heavenly Jerusalem, the unveiling of the mystery of salvation with the central and omnipresent theme of the Great Resurrection. Kandinsky's engravings popularize the themes of his large paintings.<sup>4</sup>

Together with these, the artist's poems present us with everyday experiences, dreams, or short fables, narratives that correspond to an uninterrupted meditation. The leading thread of this writing is the unveiling of meaning through inner

organization that would function in a similar way to it. Effectively, and thanks to this displacement, it becomes possible to focus on the essentials» (Sers, Ph. *La Révolution des avant-gardes, l'expérience de la Vérité en art*. Paris: Hazan, 2012. P. 163).

<sup>3</sup> Cf.: Sers, Ph. *Résonances: Kandinsky et la nécessité intérieure*, Paris, Hazan, 2015 (accompanied by a facsimile reprint of the album *Klänge* of 1913 and with the unpublished translation of the poems by Philippe Soupault). See also the english translation: «Sounds» in *Kandinsky, V. Complete Writings on art*, op. cit. P. 291—339.

<sup>4</sup> The reader will find the demonstration of all these points in the quoted text, which accompanies the facsimile.

experience, the exercise of attention and the discernment of signs up to the ultimate revelation. Poems feed on tales or mythical elements. For Kandinsky, the meeting of poems and engraved woods, therefore, responds to the need to live completely the raw dream and the confused life of men in poems, and to live the image as a clarification, an instrument of discernment.

Kandinsky's account is based on a *transfer of evidence*: the experience of life, arising from the flow of circumstances, appears to him as difficult to grasp in its real meaning. It can become so through a transfer made in the composition. It is the transfer from one kind of concrete to another, from a material experience to another analogically identical material experience. But the artistic composition allows access to meaning because it reorders. It is a transfer by representation, that is to say that the reality of the first phenomenon is made to unfold, to present itself again to sensible experience, albeit in another form. When the sunset over Moscow becomes an artistic composition, this presupposes that the elements that constitute its spectacle are reduced to their essential resonances so as to find a place in the composition. It is the root of abstraction, which is a call for interiority. The pictorial abstraction is not *abstractio ab*, but *abstractio ad*. This is why Kandinsky, Doesburg and Kojève prefer the term *concrete art*. Abstraction is not a forgetting of the real, but the opening to Being, this opening to which art, taking over from metaphysics, is called. The reduction of a complex (vital) reality to its simple elements and its redeployment in a directly accessible form — because freed from the scrambling of the emotional — are the basis of the process of testing the truth, of this opening to Being, in the artistic composition. Kandinsky's meditation on the Last Judgment provides the best example of this, since it makes his whole soul vibrate.

Kandinsky's main vision is that of the end of time, the one

on which St. Isaac the Syrian, as we have seen, recommends to concentrate one's attention after contemplating nature. For Kandinsky the sunset over Moscow is *the metaphysical image* that opens the passage between the contemplation of the works of Wisdom and the prophetic or apocalyptic vision. In this, he validates all his theory of inspiration, formulated in terms of «inner necessity». In fact, the recurrent criticism of the prophetic inspiration, which goes from Spinoza to Freud, focuses on the idea that the prophet is the victim of a misguidance, of a hallucination that feeds on the subjective imagination of the Prophet. Now, the prophetic dream or vision are radically different from the hallucination in view of *the coherence of their object*.

Kandinsky's childhood was marked by a dream that accompanied him all his life. He told it:

What is a dream? Neither positive science, nor that which deals with supra-sensible things, can offer a definitive answer to this question. *As far as I'm concerned, I know that a dream can shed light on the rest of a life and constitute in this or for that reason a determining force in life [...]* At four or five years old, I had a dream that showed me the sky and which, even today, as a mere memory, captures me with a force that has lost none of its intensity. It seems to me that this dream has given me over time the faculty of distinguishing between the physical and the spiritual, of feeling the difference (= autonomy of two elements in existence) and of living it effectively, and now to feel the spirit as a nucleus in the body envelope which is partially foreign to it, partly determined by it for another inhibited by it.<sup>1</sup>

Kandinsky returns several times to the question of dreams or even of delirium.<sup>2</sup> For him, two elements are indissolubly

<sup>1</sup> *Kandinsky, W. Die gesammelten Schriften / Bern: Benteli, 1980. P. 166. It is we who emphasize.*

<sup>2</sup> As we saw, he recounted that the delirium brought about by typhus inspired him for the series of paintings which led him to the apocalyptic representation in *Composition II*, 1910.

linked in the artist, the first is «an inner world, that is to say, the ideal, the dream of the artist and the call of the dream that wants to be concrete reality», and the second «the form required to answer this call, only to him and the instruments of this realization: lines and colors of personal inspiration». And he writes that he lived in his childhood «hours of inner thrill, of confused nostalgia, which imperiously requires from you something incomprehensible, which during the day oppresses the heart and makes the breath superficial, fills the soul with worry and at night makes us live fantastic dreams, full of terror and joy. Like many children and adolescents, I tried to write poems that I tore up sooner or later. I still remember that drawing put an end to this state of affairs, that is to say, that I lived out of time and space, so that I also lost the feeling of myself.»<sup>1</sup>

In his testimony can be read the strength of the dream and the prophetic, mystical or even delirious vision. But the most important is the relationship between these sources of inspiration and his poetic or pictorial creation. The composition puts an end to its distressing anxiety because it is a reordering according to meaning, that is to say that it checks the coherence of the vision. Kandinsky attaches extreme importance to composition, because in so doing, it eliminates the Spinoza's and Freud's suspicion, when they considered the prophetic vision as a hallucinated perception; indeed, what characterizes the hallucination is that it is purely imaginative and that there is no reality at its source.<sup>2</sup> All the work

<sup>1</sup> *Kandinsky, V. Reminiscences, op. cit., P. 364.*

<sup>2</sup> In this search for the verification of the prophetic vision, it is possible that Kandinsky is driven by a kind of personal urgency: to avoid the temptation of suicide that his older cousin Viktor Kandinsky gave up at the age of forty (1849—1889), which helped to define the Kandinsky-Clérambault syndrome. Viktor Kandinsky, a victim of hallucinations,



of composition is to determine the order of meaning, that is to say the coherence of an organized whole, as *a revelation* resulting from *transcendence*.

If poetry and painting are of the same nature, they have different functions. Kandinsky's soon destroyed his first poems, because they were only the witness of his confused nostalgia, probably revolving around his teenage ego, while the drawing put an end to this confusion, helped him to overcome the inner turmoil of restlessness, rendered even more unbearable through the demand that accompanied it, and which had no object, no identifiable purpose. The drawing offered him a solution, he says, allowing him an exit «out of time and space» and a discovery of the universal. Kandinsky describes here the movement of inner necessity, which he will define in *On the Spiritual in Art* as a dynamic leading, through the person of the artist, beyond space and time, towards an artistic universal. The place of communication of the soul, the inner necessity being «the principle of effective contact with the human soul». And if drawing represents the solution, it is good that it is a reordering, which operates through composition. He writes that the image «is not a literary narrative, but the sum of the indescribable lived realities, from which the work originates. This experience belongs to a world inaccessible to literary „means“. It can only see the light of the day thanks to art without words, that is to say, through the means of expression proper to this kind of art.»<sup>3</sup>

Art is therefore considered to carry a theurgical mission, it

had published a book in German to distinguish them from pseudo-hallucinations based on real content. But, suffering more and more and fearing madness, he ended up by putting an end to his life by taking a massive dose of morphine.

<sup>3</sup> Kandinsky, V. «On the Artist», Stockholm. Février. 1916, in: *Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art*, op. cit., P. 407.

is a form of the *Logos*. Kandinsky remains imbued with these ideas when he wants to create «an art that will serve the Divine.»<sup>1</sup> If for Heidegger, artistic activity is called upon to relay metaphysics, it is because the latter has sunk into an oblivion of being, in a movement that ends in technique of boarding and appropriation of the world. We can therefore say that it is for two reasons that art takes over, on the one hand, in a process of vital experience of the Origin of things on the basis of the traces and signs that are given by It or even in relation to the manifestation of this Origin of things, on the other hand, as we shall see in the specific process of composition, in its shift from exteriority to interiority, and from appearance to meaning. It is this *qualitative shift* that allows the jump out of the metaphysical impasse of the forgetfulness of being.

Kandinsky admirably embodies this type of concern and research. At home, in the process of composition, the verifying vocation of art is established. Since the hypothesis of hallucination is discarded, the spiritual reality of inspiration is imposed, and art intervenes as a verifying instance. As for pictorial abstraction, it is a withdrawal of external appearances that allows a *neptic kind of attention*, focused on the meaning of things, that is to say, their link to the origin: the fruition of the gifts of God in the nature and the unfolding of His benevolent self, which is revealed in the Promise of Salvation. Thus Kandinsky's central theme is the beauty of nature and the announcement of the Great Resurrection, summed up for him in the decisive sensory experience of the revealed Truth, that of the Salvation of Humanity that he experienced from the sunset over the city of Moscow.

<sup>1</sup> *Kandinsky, V., On the Spiritual in Art, op. cit., p. 173.*