ABSTRACT

The Beauty of Nothing: A Personal Experiment on Wassily Kandinsky's Color Theory and Search Toward Pure Abstraction

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The work of Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky produced at the start of the 20th century has long been regarded as the turning point in the history of artistic abstraction. He took known principles and dissected them into purity, in the process giving rise to spiritual doctrines that still guide perception today. These principles were put into practice by my own work that aimed to demonstrate and experience similar relationships between visual and auditory artistic modalities. This paper argues that Kandinsky's work as an abstract artist reached new success because of his innate synesthetic point of view, which allowed him to see the inner spiritual overlap between color and form. This relationship is manifested through my personal process of mirroring his techniques, although drastically different conclusions are reached.
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THE BEAUTY OF NOTHING: A PERSONAL EXPERIMENT ON WASSILY
KANDINSKY'S COLOR THEORY AND SEARCH TOWARD PURE ABSTRACTION

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Creators of all kinds, from painters and sculptors, writers and potters, to musicians and dancers and chefs are shaped by their environment. Because no one is free from the influence of their environment, dedicated creators must have a strong understanding of where the creation of their craft comes from. Anyone can take a few moments and replicate what they see in the world. But that is not art. Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) is the first artist to push forward to the intellectual notion that art exists not simply to replicate the world through different perspectives but through the manipulation of natural elements to form a new creation. Kandinsky’s intrigue with the biology of human perception paired with the spirituality of his own mind and conscious lead him to a new abstraction of art. This paper argues that Kandinsky's work as an abstract artist reached new success because of his innate synesthetic point of view, which allowed him to see the inner spiritual overlap between color and form. This relationship is manifested through my own personal process of mirroring his techniques, although drastically different conclusions are reached.

The uncovering of this spirituality begins with Kandinsky’s childhood experiences. The first twenty years of his life are seen as a formative time period because of his lengthy exploration in different spheres of academia and thought. Although a Russian from birth and fundamental levels, his mantras of symbolic thought and social and cultural implications strongly moved away from the standard thought at the time. His mind
wandered from place to place, seeking to find significance in anything in his surroundings. This significance would eventually be found outside of the standard perceptual environment in spiritual theories of pure color and sound. In a mirrored manner to his holistic point of view, the development of his personalized theories occurred only through the separation and subsequent culmination of multiple practices, namely color and music. Kandinsky discovered a new spiritual realm when these two modalities were given interplay, and meaning became multiplied in the context of his first paintings.

After many years of experimentation, which became a basis and example for his opinions of art development, he reached the cognitive pinnacle around 1910, publishing *On the Spiritual in Art*, an essay explaining thought patterns that had been developing for over 20 years. The carefully examined principles expressed not only in this essay, but throughout his paintings, studies, and conversations, are marked by synesthetic experiences that Kandinsky had experienced since childhood. Synesthesia, the overlapping of sensory experiences from one area to another, acted as the guide for the weaving of a new tapestry of ideas. This work is culminated through my own experience in applying some of the foundational elements that he refined. While we differ in several systems of thought, the overarching principles that Kandinsky developed still deliver exceptional insight into human sensation and perception. He guides the viewer into new revelations, breaking off past assumptions and opening up the door to the possibility of groundbreaking inspiration.
CHAPTER TWO

History and Beginnings

Born to Lidia Ticheeva and Vasily Silvestrovich Kandinsky in 1866, Wassily Kandinsky would probably be the last person expected to become a figurehead of the abstract style of painting. As the son of a tea merchant, Kandinsky was exposed to outside cultures and ideals more than other children in his sphere. Although he had artistic inclination from a young age, his journey as an artist took a circuitous route that wound through the worlds of science and academia from his childhood and into adulthood. The wealth of his parents was an important contributor, helping lay a foundation of musical appreciation and travel. These experiences would extend far into his adult life and impact later development of his artistic theories. Kandinsky serves as a case study of childhood cognitive development being critical for later growth and intellect. As he grew taller and wiser, his love of logic and reasoning, paired with a kindled exploration for knowledge, led to studies of law and economics at the University of Moscow. At this point in his life, his trajectory was more or less that of a typical upper class Russian son. But it would not stay that way. The world of art took a first grasp on Kandinsky when at age thirty he decidedly turned away from academia and chose to become a painter. This decisive move, although shockingly unconventional for the time, would take Kandinsky deep into the world of color and form as he fought for exploration of a new normal in terms of artistic theory.
From the very beginning, Kandinsky had a critical connection to his mother. That is, Mother Russia. His writings often speak of the inspiration she served, from the landscape to the churches “with their colourful, mysterious atmosphere, and the magical art of the icons.”

His university studies in ethnography and interest in peasantry took him on a trip in 1889 to the outskirts of the Russian landscape, where sights of rural huts seized his attention. His rich intellectual upbringing gave him a uniquely sophisticated view, one that stood out from other contemporary painters. But this also caused a specific upper-class bias on his view of the world. Art shifted his internal perception, moving from a pure observational, one-dimensional approach to the world to an active “revolv[ing] in the picture.”

Early visits to Russian churches and Baroque chapels sparked his resolution that the goal of an artist is “to let the viewer stroll around within the picture, to force him to forget himself, and so to become part of the picture.” After being raised to see art at arm’s length, Kandinsky stepped into full immersion. Above all else, Kandinsky was simply a hungry learner. His rejection of materialism despite his own upbringing would surface later in life as he traveled all around Europe, gathering experiences. Russia was never too far away, and continued to play a role as influential inspiration throughout his life. Kandinsky took academic principles of jurisprudence, economic thought and law history from his time in the university as answers to his inner need for an endeavor that was able to have distinct boundaries, unlike art. It is through the foundational teachings


3 Ibid., 2.

of his academic career that he was able to build a sophisticated and complex theory of art. Without this initial mindset, significant experiences would have never achieved the same impact.

It was not until 1895 when Kandinsky was 29 years old and teaching in Moscow that he started seriously entering the world of art. The perspectives that had been stirring since his trip to the country were beginning to break the surface. After attending a French exhibition featuring Claude Monet's *Haystacks* (Fig. 1), he commented “I saw all my colors in my mind...wild, almost crazy lines were sketched in front of me”. The comfort and safety from Moscow no longer served as a fallback, and a new environment caused him to leap forward. He mentions later that *Haystacks* (Fig. 1) caused him to have a moment of seeing one of his own paintings lying on its side, the representation now totally irrelevant. Some might say this one chance encounter was divine inspiration. Viewing the paintings helped him to understand that mere pigment and oils have the capacity to portray color and form independent of the subject of the painting. To Kandinsky, the purpose of the artist is to show these characteristics at the forefront, making the color itself the focus of the painting while only hinted at the subject. Kandinsky argues that different elements will always come together because of the natural forces instilled in them, but the true magic of the artist appears when each piece holds its own and is crafted to become a piece of art that comes together in a unique way. When this happens, it makes the onlooker step forward and enter the heart of the

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piece. Kandinsky believed that a true work of art is simple in its elements but complex in its composition. It’s surprising and unexpected. It captures eyes and captures hearts. Monet’s impressionism translated and solidified the thoughts Kandinsky had been wrestling with over several years. He realized that art neither has to resemble nor represent a haystack in order to invoke the emotion and essential being of the haystack. This initial experience helped turn the key in Kandinsky’s mind to the door of pure abstraction.

Kandinsky became enamored with Monet, who was one of the first to bring the subconscious themes of singular composition, form, and color to the forefront of the art community. He helped the viewer to sense with his or her conscious mind while becoming immersed in the work of art. As a result of his contemplation of Monet’s works, Kandinsky arrived at the notion that the traditional subjects of paintings were simply tools, modes of transportation from one place to another, with the ultimate goal of reaching color and form investigation. He subsequently packed up his bags and left Russia, symbolically stepping out from under the arms of his mother and taking first steps into the unknown reaches of art. He explored the mystery of symbolism and unconventional thought, developing his perspective of viewer immersion into the dichotomy of what is hidden and what is revealed to the audience.\(^8\) The move to Munich in 1896 was instrumental for several reasons. Firstly, it gave Kandinsky a stronger insight into German ideals, notably the concept of “synthetisme,” which was popular at the time.\(^9\) Defined as “the interrelationship between the arts”, synthetisme was perfect

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\(^8\) Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, 82.

\(^9\) Ibid., 83
territory for Kandinsky to impress his ideals of artistic combinations. Much of the literature from Kandinsky’s life concerns the unity of the arts, and he recognized that different disciplines are simply manipulations of very similar subsets of tools. A large portion of his goal as a developing artist was to take the most diverse of phenomena and experiences possible and bring them together, synthesized into a unity that still allows individual differences and diversity to be sustained.\(^{10}\) This separation became the second half of the Munich puzzle. Later, however, a highly competitive attitude in Munich put a bad taste in Kandinsky’s mouth, stating that the art in Munich was too narrow-minded and “dominated by doctrines of academic mediocrity.”\(^{11}\) He began spending considerable amounts of time in Paris, cooperating with other artists and teachers to hone his craft.

In keeping with his academic background, Kandinsky began his exploration into art through education. While in Munich he attended a private art school as well as the Academy of Fine Arts. He was a strong external processor, keeping records, journals and musings about his artwork, all of which help paint a more accurate view of his journey towards abstraction. Numerous of these journals demonstrate his attachment to and pride in Russia. His systematic approach to art reflects his upbringing: his “Russian intellect may be recognized from his inborn ability to think things out logically to the utmost limits of the abstract.”\(^{12}\) Despite his love of the academic approach to learning, he had an insatiable appetite to explore outside the confines of the studio or classroom. He loved to


\(^{12}\) Doelman, \textit{Wassily Kandinsky}, 11.
travel, which was planted in him from his parents, and frequently went to the Netherlands, Italy, Tunisia, France and Switzerland. These travels come to life in the color family variations among works such as *Amsterdam* (Fig. 2), *Couple Riding* (Fig. 3) and *Blue Mountain* (Fig. 4), painted around this time. Despite the clearly identifiable subjects of these early pieces, many later described Kandinsky as “an artist with a philosophic mind, who completely rejected rationalism.”\(^\text{13}\) While some painters maintained a specific set of tones or marks, he broke the cultural expectations of this view, and instead continued to experiment with whatever he pleased.

Kandinsky's specific artistic journey had a very broad range of subjects and media. Interestingly, he began working with woodcuts, staying close to the “art nouveau” of the time period in 1900. He later transitioned to impressionism, taking inspiration from Cezanne's simplified forms, displayed in his painting *Old Town* (Fig. 5). In 1908 he moved to the village of Murnau, working between this small town and Munich. His paintings took on the environment they were being processed in and developed them further, having stronger colors that were not fully representational of the realistic landscape of the German countryside. Kandinsky's mantra throughout this time period was experimentation and investigation. In order to understand the nature of color and the personality of the paint itself, he had to practice, practice, practice. His deep involvement with the media he was using, not taking any small mark or element for granted, is one of his greatest strengths as a prominent artist. Some of the most memorable paintings of his career were created in 1910, a pivotal year. The group of “Improvisations,” holding similar color tones and gradually leading to an end that is fully abstract in nature are

\(^{13}\) Doelman, *Wassily Kandinsky*, 12.
physical examples of the thought processes swirling in Kandinsky’s mind. Beginning in 1909 with *Improvisation 3* (Fig. 6), which involves clear representational figures, although simplistic, and moving through *Improvisation 35* (Fig. 7), which displays a remarkable mixture of color and shape interaction, Kandinsky follows a purposeful and very well-planned experience.

After numerous discoveries and installations toward the cumulative work of abstraction, Kandinsky reached what some may consider the pinnacle of his time: the 1910 watercolor, *Untitled* (Fig. 8). This iconic painting helped him to begin the conversation that he would have with abstraction over the next couple years. It created a benchmark for comparison, and has been a classic example of his artistic process. Within the lines and swatches of color, Kandinsky searched for a mode to express the overlapping sensory experiences that were a function of his synesthesia. He had been searching for “an absolute art,” and found abstraction as a tool to use on his journey, “based solely upon the plastic values of line, colour and composition.”\(^{14}\) However, abstraction was still not the end-all-be-all of what he had set out to do. As Kandinsky was growing independently in his own search for a true representation of his perceptions in abstraction, there were several other artists following parallel pursuits. Men such as Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian found their own way toward the common goal of absolute abstraction. Unlike the others, however, Kandinsky had a style of his own. He used the influence of the other contemporary artists as a backboard to know how to divert and create something completely unique, using previous artists as a counter inspiration. He looked to them to know what not to do. Previous styles led him through “independent

\(^{14}\) Doelman, *Wassily Kandinsky*, 3.
significance” of color, form and motif. Unconventionally, his work is set apart as an experience for his viewers, who must use their own experimentation and searching throughout the painting in order to reach their own conclusions and thoughts. He has strong mark-making qualities, and strategic use of color.

The completion of the 1910 watercolor, following numerous studies and experiments with each line and curve, gave him a new vocabulary to use in subsequent works. Characteristic of Kandinsky's style is the sense of mobility and rhythm that he naturally but methodically develops. Although the forms, color, and style play an important role, there is still something deeper that he was trying to accomplish. At an association that he had formed in 1909, the Neue Künstler-vereinigung or New Artist's Association, Kandinsky inserted a new and thought-provoking statement in the catalogue of the exhibition. The statement read “to discuss mysteries by means of the mysterious - is that not the meaning?” This at its core is one of the keys into Kandinsky's mindset. His goal throughout the first decade of being an artist became the notion of experiencing the stimuli all around him in a deliberate way, from the town of Murnau to exhibitions in Munich. He stretched into understanding every piece of the natural composition.

15 Ibid., 16.
CHAPTER THREE
Color and Music

His early experiences around Europe shaped Kandinsky’s platform and are critical in the future development of his theories because they are such a seminal element in the birth of pure abstraction. Without these, the leaps that were made would be significantly smaller steps, and discoveries would only have reached a stage of hypothesis. The formative ideas of abstract art resulted from a stage of the multiplication and division of his multiple creative pursuits. Within the overlap of sensory experiences, Kandinsky found music to be the key to unlock the true abstract spirituality at the core of two-dimensional art.

Significantly, the musical influence of the environment became something that was impossible to ignore. Kandinsky absolutely had to address it in his paintings. At the beginning of his abstract career, a critic noted the similarities and differences the paintings had with music. The critic stated that “unlike the art of music, which had at its disposal means which are exclusively its own property, the art of painting can only exist in relation to the things of the visible world.” In opposition to this statement, Kandinsky would argue that painting and nearly all studio art forms have the same ownership over specific means. While music has notes, melody, and harmony, art (and especially noted through abstraction) uses form, color, shape, line and texture in similar ways. The disciplines are not identical in structure, but have complementary components. He states

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1 Doelman, Wassily Kandinsky, 18.
that “just as sounds and rhythms combine in music, so must forms and colours be united in painting by the play of their manifold relationships.”\(^2\) This statement is one of the most important reasons why Kandinsky is critical in the history of artistic theory. He was not only a pioneer of a new style, but initiated a new mindset when it comes to observation and creation of art. The true purpose of the art goes beyond the form. Elements of music and color interweave to reach a new dimension. The purposeful elements in each composition play a critical role, gently leading the viewer to seek and discover the real message that the creator is writing through abstraction. Kandinsky was one of the first authors of this story.

In order to understand the relationship that Kandinsky heard between color and sound, one has to begin with a baseline understanding of how he perceived color visually. Kandinsky describes the first color he could recall as the “lush bright green, white, carmine red, black and ochre,” mirroring his rich formative years full of travel and exploration. Strong dark colors can be seen in some of his early compositions, including *Couple Riding* (Fig. 3) and *Colourful Life* (Fig. 9).\(^3\) Once again, he draws from the rich visual impact of Moscow, describing seeing the “feminine” city in “lyrical pictures”.\(^4\) Düchting describes Kandinsky as painting nature's “chorus of colour,” weaving synesthetic words throughout his history of the artist. The combination of exposure to both the urban and rural atmospheres drives a balance in Kandinsky's compositions that naturally elicits high and low tones. These tones took a sharp transition from the visual


\(^3\) Düchting, *Wassily Kandinsky*, 7.

\(^4\) Ibid., 7.
realm to the auditory realm during a specific occurrence at a Richard Wagner’s opera "Lohengrin" at the Moscow Royal Theatre. His 1913 essay entitled Reminiscences describes this encounter in a very similar way. He recalls seeing “all my colours in my mind’s eye. Wild lines verging on the insane formed drawing before my very eyes.” In this moment he realized the expansive impact that he could explore when music and color collided in perfect harmony.

At this point, any academic career that he had once considered was completely disregarded, and he was gripped by the cry from the artistic world. The foundation in academia, however, was still critical and continued to shape his theory development. The connection to the scientific community instilled in Kandinsky wonder of the concept of newness. New historical scientific discoveries inspired him once again at the prospect of invention. The combination of specific tools and principles is an invention of new perception, and Kandinsky developed this experimentation in the same way he connected "Lohengrin" as similar to “mysterious kitchens of the arcane alchemists”. These accounts of the musical experience dramatically underscore ideas of synesthesia. The literal cross-wiring of multiple disciplines and interests led him to a greater picture of humanity and creativity, and through this he chose the outlet of art in order to quantify his search toward the goal of pure abstraction and communication of his perspective.

“Generally speaking, colour is a power which directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with the string. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.”

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6 Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, Kandinsky: Complete Writings On Art (Da Capo Press, 1994), 372.

7 Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 15.
This quote, from Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art* encompasses much of the basis of Kandinsky's artistic theory. Although the evidence for a scientific diagnosis of synesthesia can be argued one way or another, there is enough language from Kandinsky himself to understand that even if it were not clinically diagnosed, he had a dynamic understanding of the relationship between art and music, of visual and auditory experiences. It is clear, however, that he had physiological experiences, and also benefited from his analytical knowledge of form through his upbringing which allowed him to decipher more of the basis for abstraction theory relative to synesthesia. The definition of synesthesia is the phenomena in which stimulation of one sense modality gives rise to sensation in a different sense modality. Generally speaking, one sense will experience what a different sense perceives. For Kandinsky, the mental attribution of the senses coming together after a physiological and emotional experience was enticing, and his love for innovation helped to stoke this activity.

Notably, many of Kandinsky’s theories came out of a communal love of artistic experimentation. Involved in a group of artists, including painters, composers, dancers and theater producers, he experimented and analyzed with other creators the emotional and dynamic aspects of synesthetic perceptions. This group, called "Der Blaue Reiter" regarded Kandinsky’s writings in his essay *On the Spiritual in Art* as the cornerstone to their investigations. One of the mantras of the group was unity between different interfaces. Synesthetic colors and values are a connection between two worlds that are

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sometimes considered exclusive, but Kandinsky carefully used specific colors to engage with familiar aspects of the viewer, and by doing so gained their trust of his brush. Kandinsky exhibits a unique simplicity in the transitional phase. In one such painting in this period, *Picture with a Black Arch* (Fig. 10), which is similar in color to later work but unique in its dimensional character and flow, the painting takes on that simplistic view. The forms and marks are cumulative, and in the three separate sections that exist within the composition, develop a story and personality together. The arch, as the unifying piece and title object, links the triad together. Although he has arguably had some of the natural experience of synesthesia, he is skilled enough to conjure the synesthetic experiences of seeing color through sound and the theories alongside these himself. The above quote relates not just to the practicality of the senses in combination, but the spiritual nature regarding the soul's role in the experience of each unique element.

When applied to the direct knowledge of color, synesthetic thought was not a novel concept. The combination of elements and moving things around into new and different patterns and schema is part of the basis of painting and color theory, even before Kandinsky applied it in a different manner. The key in combining factors, however, is gaining a full understanding of each element before its manipulation. This is Kandinsky’s notion of separation. In true color thought, an artist must be familiar with the colors of blue and red before combining them into the shade violet. Kandinsky fully understood this elemental idea, and it is part of the reason for his intense study of form, shape, value, and color expressed through numerous styles in his early artistic career. One of the main influences for Kandinsky's departure from tradition was inspired by the folklore of the Middle Ages, which “facilitated the free use of color and form and a gradual
emancipation from the object."\textsuperscript{10} In paintings such as \textit{Colourful Life} (Fig. 9), one can see the deliberate use of color. Highlights and shadows are addressed subtly, as each shape has distinct outlines and contour. This demonstrates Kandinsky's forward use of form and color. In contrast, \textit{Old Town} (Fig. 5), an earlier painting, employs more dramatic shadowing and use of three-dimensional form depicted in the landscape. A close study and comparison of these two paintings reveals the similar way Kandinsky uses color in its pure form in both small and large areas to create a full picture of the subjects.

Kandinsky’s eventual assertion that art is not required to have symbolic thought or reasoning in motifs behind it was not his original idea: he consciously adopted the theory from art historian Wilhelm Worringer's paper entitled \textit{Abstraction and Sensitivity}. Once again, however, Kandinsky demonstrates his uncanny way of grasping an idea at stage one and developing it into stage ten, down the path toward pure, unobstructed thought. He saw other artists and their unconscious mechanisms behind the art, and was able to unveil and extract their true goal of moving beyond this symbolic thought. In this way, Kandinsky can be considered a pioneer in his own field, but also a champion of other artists, showcasing their best thoughts and helping them reach an even deeper place of accomplishment in art. Kandinsky fled from purely selfish motives not just because he believed in the power of other artists, but in the higher power of the media that were being manipulated to create art.

In the same way that a musician must learn the basic musical theories of rhythm, tone and dynamics, a painter must understand elements of shape, line and form. When overlap and relationships naturally form between color and music, the underlying

\textsuperscript{10} Düchting, \textit{Wassily Kandinsky}, 20.
connection is always supported by these basic, but separate characteristics. One of the hallmarks of Kandinsky’s *On the Spiritual In Art* is the analysis of each artistic means in order to reach proper harmony and unity between them. As a unit, this work of art can “contribute to the turn from the materialist to the spiritual world-view.”¹¹ Natural human perception is to see things in groups of similarity and unity, and Kandinsky clearly studied and applied these principles to his art theory and paintings. These thought patterns precede now-common Gestalt principles of design grouping and perception that were developed around the 1930s and 1940s.¹² Kandinsky’s notion of separation expressed in his paintings allowed viewers to start experiencing and admiring each note and tone in the work, instead of being swept away by the melody as a whole.

Returning to the idea of synesthesia, it is necessary to consider music from the standpoint of two-dimensional art as well as two-dimensional art from the standpoint of music, especially in terms of harmony. Music dominated much of Kandinsky’s early years as he played several musical instruments in childhood, instilling a love of the auditory arts, which carried on into adulthood. It is a great task for any artist to have multi-disciplinary interests, and Kandinsky is commended for having such deep insight and intrigue into the worlds of science, math, law, and music as well as art. He truly was an intellectual artist. It is because of this that he had such great strength in creativity and insight. In *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky reflects:

> “Perhaps with envy and a mournful sympathy we listen to the music of Mozart. It acts as a welcome pause in the turmoil of our inner life, as a consolation and as hope, but we hear it as the echo of something from another age long past and fundamentally strange to us. The strife of color, the sense of balance we have lost,


¹² van Campen, "Early Abstract Art and Experimental Gestalt Psychology," 134.
tottering principles, unexpected assaults, great questions, apparently useless striving, storm and tempest, broken chains, antithesis and contradictions, these make up our harmony.”

He obviously has a sophisticated view of music. Notably, he makes statements that deviate from the norm that reflect an inner emotionality that harmonizes with the outer rationale. The inclusion of the phrase “strife of color” to describe a musical experience reveals the overlap of the sensory experience of a synesthete. The main message of this statement is, however, to recognize the balance that exists in using different tools. The form of notes and sound are powerful tools that can create that “pause in the turmoil” of life and create a balance that is included in the music of color. The balance of life where everything falls into place is not in some extreme of one side of the continuity but through everything that opposes and creates tension. True humanity resides in this tension and contrast. Kandinsky believes in harmony between an inner and outer sound of his paintings. The inner sound reflects the psychological view and emotion of the artist, and the outer sound is the embodiment of a material form. The prowess of the painter is dependent on the harmony created between these two sounds, which in its best form pulls the reader into the painting, as described previously.

Color is no exception to this harmony, and it must be considered in order to yield an effective painting. Pure elements of pigment are molded and mixed together to develop into a masterpiece of shade, tint, and form in themselves. Studies confirm that

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13 Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 29.

color has a dramatic impact on one's mood, even in those who do not have synesthesia.\textsuperscript{15} Color theory is a psychological attribute, involving the relative warmth and coolness of different spectrums of color. Colors have attitudes, which some associate with anger or envy, and others with friendship and trust. Within these attitudes personalities arise, with different colors interacting together in harmony or disharmony. It is interesting to note the neurological underpinnings that our perceptual system exhibits as it considers complementary colors to have wonderful harmony together, even though they are on complete opposite sides of the color wheel. Music, in this manner, should never be a surprising mix into the world of color. Kandinsky spoke frequently of the association between the worlds, noting on one occasion that “keen lemon-yellow hurts the eye in time as a prolonged and shrill trumpet-note the ear, and the gazer turns away to seek relief in blue or green”.\textsuperscript{16} The relationships of music, color and emotion have underlying relationships that can be strengthened or weakened in further associations. Both music and color use artistic tools that can be broken down into very small pieces, such as one brush stroke or one note, and have different combinations of this simple building block, creating tone and dynamic sound. The hands of an artist and musician alike take small elements and take them into a new spectrum of expression.

The weaving together of sensory experiences extends beyond the simple “seeing colors” notion, but the language and system of how notes and melodies are developed in musical compositions served inspiration for Kandinsky as a challenge to the definition of

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\textsuperscript{16} Kandinsky, \textit{Concerning the Spiritual in Art}, 22.
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painterly color and form. Colors can absolutely be used in a rhythmic quality, creating the sense of a melody, and not necessarily replicating one that already exists. One of the mantras of the *Der Blaue Reiter* symbolist artist group was to use dynamic contrast, constructing melodies and rhythms within a painting. A review of the group stated that “the artists are in love with the music of colour and line. They are heralds of primitivism, to which modern painting has come in search of rebirth at its source - in spontaneous creation, unburdened by the ballast of historical experience.”

Kandinsky’s exceptional ability to divert from the norm and unveil another use of color, such as in *Sketch for Composition II* (Fig. 1) is a testament to his influence on the artistic community.

Recognizing his synesthetic point of view, Kandinsky systematically began to introduce these new principles into the artistic community. From personal experience he knew that critics and painters alike abhor the idea of change. He took great care to include in his work lines and forms that could be representational, such as a line that resembles an oar or the hull of a boat, and subtle use of figures within an abstract composition. He understood the challenges existing in jumping right into the abstract world of autonomy of form and color, but he cared much further than just the purpose of one individual painting being perceived as unique. Criticism was particularly strong at the release of *Sketch for Composition II* (Fig. 11), probably in part to its dramatic diversion from color use by other contemporary paintings. Art critics in Munich stated that the painting was “the work of a madman" or "someone under the effects of morphine or hashish.”

Like any strong experimental work, rejection was strong toward

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Kandinsky’s new direction. Encouragement from other artists, however, showed Kandinsky that those who had already been listening to the melody of the community had a stronger understanding of his work. Franz Marc, an artist who would eventually experiment himself with color abstraction, said the work was “incredibly strong. At first I felt the great joy of his strong, pure, fiery colors, and then my mind began to work. You cannot get those pictures out of your mind.” This was exactly the kind of impact that Kandinsky was trying to accomplish. Learning from this experience, he slowed down for the sake of the viewer while continuing his strides in small groups of companions. The paintbrush, the paint, the imagery and symbolism are all tools for the underlying foundation of reaching into something deeper and more spiritual than anyone had considered before. Kandinsky started to peel off the layers of old lacquer and reveal what none had seen before in the spiritual essence of sensory experience. Instead of moving forward into a new sphere of artistic culture, he took a step back through returning to the roots of his childhood and original admonitions as an artist: to see things in purity. His slow culmination of ideas, although inevitably receiving harsh criticism at multiple points, eventually helped shift the perspective of the audience. A viewer of Painting with a Black Arch (Fig. 10) piece will have an understanding, even if subtle, of the shapes and nature of the painting. It is in this way that Kandinsky gradually allowed his art to slip into the veins of those paying attention, so that his true theories of abstraction could come to the surface.

Color theory as a whole is a unique concept. Nothing is changed in its form, except in perhaps perceptions of the object, because of the color it inherits. It is simply a

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19 Ibid., 30.
gift given to our visual nature in order to more fully experience creation. Kandinsky, despite his spiritual nature, was a lover of color and music, and it is this pure love and curiosity that propelled him through each season of painting and perception, despite the critiques of many and praise of few. He listened to the feelings inside of his mind, leading toward a new evidence of how color can be used and brought new associations into the art community that would have a lasting impact. His thoughts on the process and development of the artist are notable in their simplistic application but groundbreaking purpose.
CHAPTER FOUR

Color and Artist

The art theory Kandinsky developed over his lifetime in art is extraordinary because of its universal, but also novel qualities. His ideas and theories stand out as strong stepping stones at their time of new and exciting, although highly complex, methods of understanding. He became a teacher in the artistic community for those who did not know how to communicate their inner sound as an the artist and shared extensive ideas to the world. His new methodology in creating art involved focus on the preparation of each idea, motivation behind it, and the perspective of the culture at the time of presentation. These three methods are held together and encompassed by spirituality that sings through every piece, giving the colors and forms in each painting true merit and meaning.

One of the most striking features of Kandinsky as an artist is the extensive amount of writing and information about his theories that remains to this day. Because of this, current artists are able to experience full immersion into his thought processes while creating a painting. In the same way that dozens and dozens of ideas and sketches exist for each artistic piece, the words and thought behind those pieces exist in autobiographies and essays. Kandinsky's essay Reminiscens demonstrates some of his original theories of the background and developmental qualities of his life that began to influence how art influenced his upbringing and further career. He was a metaphorical and Romantic writer, and interpreted experience in a perceptually different manner than the average observer.
Kandinsky experienced the world through a different lens, seeing color in multiple dimensions. He sees a “blue” stroke in a painting holding its own in shape and form, but it is paired with underlying identities in other senses and connections that add to its physical richness. Kandinsky calls this the “objective shell” of the color.¹ As a conceptual entity, “blue” is multi-dimensional, but when it is realized in physical form in a painting, it takes hold of the subjective characteristics it has in the painting. A beautiful balance occurs between holding the association of its color singularity, and its role within the painting as a whole. However, despite this identity, the other influences and connections have not been lost entirely.

“The feeling I had at the time - or better: the experience of the color coming out of the tube - is with me to this day. A pressure of the fingers and jubilant, joyous, thoughtful, dreamy, self-absorbed, with deep seriousness, with bubbling roguishness, with the sigh of liberation, with the profound resonance of sorrow, with defiant power and resistance, with yielding softness and devotion, with stubborn self-control, with sensitive unstableness of balance came one after another these unique beings we call colors.”²

Every step of the process, from the initial thought to the preliminary sketches to the squeezing out of the tube evokes emotional response. Kandinsky gives life to the concept of color, understanding that every single little moment in the process has individualized significance. At the memory of this first experience with oil paints, Kandinsky knew that there was something unique about his perspective on the world. He unveils the beauty and ugliness, the majestic yet subtle dichotomy; a dance and fight between every element in each colors. He is one of the first recorded to have seen color in this way; something that artists have the joy of not just perceiving but also manipulating and protecting to

¹ Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 26.
describe their inner thoughts and feelings as subjects. Kandinsky entered the art world with his hands full of notions and ambitious changes in mind, ready to “break through these ‘walls around art’” that he saw. The art world at the time was characterized by strong unspoken rules and boundaries of human cognition, and Kandinsky saw that even though some artists were going up to the line and seeking out the walls around them, they were bound in their own cells. Diving into abstraction still meant taking a naturalistic view of the world and gaining insight and inspiration from the world around the artist.

The artist guided the observer. Kandinsky wanted to shift this paradigm, breaking down the walls and allowing the colors and forms themselves be the guide. His intent was for the artist to follow the journey they provided. Kandinsky said that his secret of making art “purely and simply [is] that I have over the years acquired...they happy ability to rid myself (and therefore my painting) of background noise’. For those that do not have this innate ability, intentionality in each movement and step is required. Making exploratory sketches and investigations of how each line and color interact with one another aids in this process, allowing the composer of the painting to move, manipulate and scrutinize each piece and the emotion it evokes. Subsequent changes are then a result of what the elements have communicated. Painting with White Border is one of the best examples in terms of Kandinsky’s artistic process. It has over 15 sketches or “studies” that examined line relationships, many final forms of which are seen in the final composition. Several of Kandinsky’s word are entitled “compositions” which were

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3 Lipsey, An Art of Our Own, 41.
4 Golding, Paths to the Absolute, 111.
5 Smithgall, Kandinsky and the Harmony of Silence, 21.
generally the first step after the preliminary sketches. They garnered more slow attention, pedantically working out the expression of the elements.\(^6\) The spiritual goal in these preparations is to, in Smithgall’s words, “dissolve or veil his motifs to rid them of their association with the material world and release their spiritual, inner sounds.”\(^7\) After all, this is the ultimate goal of abstraction. It is found by an artist only when harmony between the sensations and perceptions of their environment have been forged together. With freed inner sounds, the artist needs to merely place them in the composition in a manner to showcase and support the sound that is resonating from each element.

The new, outer space after perception is characterized by the personal spirituality, and what Kandinsky called the artist's “inner necessity.”\(^8\) Lipsey says of Kandinsky that he was able “in one scoop” to “recognize how to think about forms in art that modify or depart altogether from forms in Nature.”\(^9\) He focused more on the structure and elements whether natural or unnatural, patterned or un-patterned, geometric or non-geometric, that when chosen together create the sense of structure. The inner necessity is what guides the artist into the proper method for the piece they are creating, and is the ultimate motivator.

The artist is still considered a master, but has to still stay open in his senses, his eyes and ears, to the purpose and voice of the elements, namely color. The inner necessity is described within human beings and an “inner sound” and is the “complementary realities

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\(^7\) Smithgall, *Kandinsky and the Harmony of Silence*, 23.

\(^8\) Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own*, 44.

\(^9\) Ibid., 45.
that showed [Kandinsky] the way to abstract art.”\textsuperscript{10} The inner sound is a classic concept in Chinese traditional literature about the way artists should perform their craft. It is one of the first canons about “spirit resonance,” which is classically linked with vitality, called \textit{ch'i-yün}.\textsuperscript{11} The principle not only involves the perception, but the sensory mechanisms used, “mak[ing] use of eyes as if they were ears.”\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Chi‘i-yun} resonance is formed from a purposeful distinction from environmental elements, similar to Kandinsky’s theory of separation. Resonance is captured in painting when these elements represent the “universal dynamism” that exists in the world.\textsuperscript{13} The artist must take a moment outside of human natural perceptions and interests on the outer surface to look and listen more deeply within to the spirit inside. This ability can be developed through practice and discipline, teaching one’s perception to not look past any detail, but find “the fine intrinsic signature of each phenomenon” or element.\textsuperscript{14} There is a step into art that does depend on the outer perceptions, such as the first notion that someone sees as they step out into a new environment, or the thing that catches their attention at the forefront. Kandinsky wisely saw that human sensation and perception can be led beyond their first instincts and notions and into the insightful. For proper motivation and purpose behind each artist’s piece, the inner necessity of reaching resonance must be unveiled.

\textsuperscript{10} Lipsey, \textit{An Art of Our Own}, 42.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 43.


\textsuperscript{14} Lipsey, \textit{An Art of Our Own}, 43.
Kandinsky writes in *On the Spiritual In Art* that the “nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, senseless game, is not yet passed; it holds the awakening soul still in its grip,” speaking of the demographic in the culture to not have the insight into spirituality in any form, not just art.\(^\text{15}\) This nightmare was the audience that Kandinsky spoke to through his paintings. Many people, he would argue, are stuck in the walls of their own mind without any personal insight, their eyes fixed only on the practical use of things. Ignorance is truly one of the greatest downfalls of humanity. Materialism is certainly not just a problem in the time of Kandinsky, but an overall problem of society. Kandinsky recognized that the European culture in his time was particularly plagued with possessions, and he considered it a moral conviction to use his means to instill change. He believed that the power of art was one of the only things strong enough to bring alteration and reform to the current mindset.\(^\text{16}\) Materialism is still a fundamental and defining characteristic of humanity, and art can still be used to help shift perceptions. Many are consumed by the physical value of things instead of the emotional or spiritual resonance they bring, especially artistic measures. Kandinsky wanted his art to push people to turn away from the standard, cultural view and focus instead on this spiritual influence that the world, through art, has to offer. Different areas of art work to highlight different aspects of humanity. This theory was a natural development from Kandinsky’s view of music as a standard companion of color. The emotional capacity behind music and sound can be clearer than visual perception. The spiritual atmosphere that is created when these multiple artistic elements are added

\(^{15}\) Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 30.

\(^{16}\) Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, 81.
together heightens the emotional enrichment of the viewer, and will eventually lead to a
shift in values.\textsuperscript{17} Minimal amounts of feedback showed an understanding of this
motivation, but some caught a glimpse of it. In 1914, Edward Wadsworth, an English
painter, commented that Kandinsky wrote “as an artist to whom form and colour are as
much the vital and integral parts of the cosmic organization as they are his means of
expression.”\textsuperscript{18} This understanding of Kandinsky’s expression is the very foundation and
basis of the spiritual makeup he strived for.

Although it can seem that Kandinsky was somewhat of an egotist, he did not exalt
only his own ideas, but continued to show his support for other artists. He had a particular
interest in Cézanne, whom Kandinsky viewed as understanding a special internal sphere
of influence that all art should exhibit. There is a dramatic difference between their
artistic points of view, but this is because the inner necessity is different for each
individual. The spirituality of artistic communication played a thematic component
throughout his studies as the pinnacle of expression. He described the spiritual, inner
power of art as providing stepping stones toward its own expression. The driving force
behind this forward movement is the inner necessity.\textsuperscript{19} Kandinsky’s idea of inner
spirituality was not one of tradition, but of intrinsic views. Kandinsky was by all means a
synesthetic, and experienced his senses in a new way. That is not to say that current
perception is wrong or under an influence, but that Kandinsky understood the scope of
perception beyond physical bodies, and his changes in the relationship between sensation

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\textsuperscript{17} Short, \textit{The Art Theory of Wassily Kandinsky, 1909-1928}, 41.
\textsuperscript{18} Long, \textit{Kandinsky, the Development of an Abstract Style}, 43.
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and perception are certainly one of the biggest indicators of the occurrence of some unique cognitive processes.

The spiritual network that exists between the inner and outer sound of auditory colorizations is the end to the theoretical means Kandinsky’s color theories were aimed at. Because of its dynamic existence, he struggled more in the area of color compared to other compositional and structural ideas such as line and shape. The notion of color is naturally very hard-pressed and does not conform well to new thought and theory. He is said to have “extreme sensitivity to color,” and because this is a rare trait, it took time to finish the spiritual definitions of color. He turned to poetic and metaphorical terms to express his ideas and tried to create a grammar for which none existed. He was a teacher at heart, wanting to unite people in the perceptions that he had. Art and composition is one of the greatest communicators beyond words, and observation of Kandinsky's work demonstrates the broad range of thought and purposeful exploration that he conducted. *Sketch for Composition II* (Fig. 11) can further be emphasized in its spirituality through the free use of color, letting each unit express spiritual depth, creating layered texture within the seemingly flat plane. In observance of these aims, the sight of *Sketch for Composition II* (Fig. 11) makes “our eyes penetrate into individual areas, compartments of visual activity” and “swim out to the periphery or sides of our field of vision.” In addition to his compositional view of color is his freedom of expression. Many of Kandinsky's views on color proceeded from his sketches and compositions that worked toward the goal to codify a new treatment of color. Kandinsky said that an artist “must

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21 Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, 90.
train not only his eye but his soul, so that it can weigh colors in its own scale and thus become a determinant in artistic creation.”

There is a great deal of complexity that is involved in surrendering oneself to the process of art and color. The typical cognitive processes and perceptions of color must be taken for what they are, which are simply physiological notions that portray a greater means to an end. That end is not a simple goal or notion but an entirely new perspective that activates the human mind and soul. The intrinsic spiritual quality of color and sound is heightened by non-objective creation, but is not defined by it. Kandinsky is known for these principles of spirituality, and it is both the final and cumulative consideration in his artistic process.

22 Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 30.
CHAPTER FIVE

Application of Techniques

I believe that the intent and purpose of Kandinsky's work cannot be realized until it is looked at under a personal experimental lens. More specifically, I explored to what degree a non-synesthetic artist could perform the same degree of interplay between sight and sound. Through the association with his childhood, development of initial color theories, and eventually distilling art into its absolute form, developed a formula for his art that codified the blending of music and color into an aesthetic whole. A study on his life work and personal revelations and theories culminate through personal experimentation and application of his principles. As I now consider myself a pupil of Kandinsky's methods and work, I set about to create a painting inspired and directed by his techniques. In the process I achieved a stronger understanding of the spiritual inspirations and meditative strokes that he applied with every step of the process as I followed the same specific steps of preparation, motivation, recognition of audience, and cumulative spirituality. As a musician myself, I intentionally drew on my experience of sound to attempt a musical lyric in my painting.

The earliest stages of Kandinsky's career were underpinnings of his childhood that rose to the surface. He expressed a broad range of interests and explored each of them thoroughly and wholeheartedly. There is not a moment while listening to the great work of Mozart that Kandinsky wished that he was painting. He was completely engaged every single time he had the opportunity to absorb the arts. While I cannot put that same
amount of caliber on my own experience, I relate in other small ways, such as the notion that broad exploration in the field of arts will always strengthen your own creative desires. Finding new inspiration does not simply come from pushing harder in one direction, but spreading out the limbs of curiosity and discovering what comes to pass. The process that Kandinsky used can be easily misrepresented as a passive state of simply going about daily life and waiting for inspiration to strike, while in reality the opposite is true. Kandinsky provided the framework for seeking a muse. He intentionally sought inspiration as a fully active practice. A participant in the same process becomes fully immersed in the practices of a discipline either by action or observation, and continues to draw deeper knowledge and admiration for that piece of work. Although his physiological synesthetic perceptions helped form the foundation of this process, I maintain that following his processes without a comparable condition is possible. As an initial step, the subject or idea behind the work needs to be explored and investigated through preliminary research and sketches. Kandinsky never explicitly asked to see the connection between the world of music and color. This occurred because of his unlimited sense of expectancy, which did not involve giving boundaries to the modern framework or colloquial definition of that particular medium. The overlap results from a purely unrestricted investigation.

My own upbringing was saturated with artistic thought. I learned musical theory on the piano starting at the age of 5, continuing for nearly 10 years. I had a highly influential grandfather who practiced in watercolor, ceramics, construction and sculpture. Although I didn't consciously realize the depth of his spirituality in those young years, I was unconsciously soaking in the methods and meaning behind each piece he created.
Similar to Kandinsky, my childhood was additionally highly saturated with academics and travel, giving me the foundational perspective that cultivated artistic thought in a distinctive manner. However, the fundamental difference between our foundations is a combination of familial and physical differences. While Kandinsky's Russian background focused on the world and inward spirituality, my moral basis was focused on God and outward spirituality. This, tied to the major distinction of someone with synesthesia and someone without, creates a unique experiment that can eliminate some confounding variables, while highlighting others.

To incorporate more of Kandinsky's experiences in my painting prior to my initial sketches, I immersed in classic musical works, listening and focusing on Mozart's *Symphony No. 41* and Chopin's *Revolutionary Etude*. These established a baseline for my own experience, and while I did not receive any specific divine revelation, it helped me to envision further what Kandinsky describes in his opinions of color theory and its relationship to musical artistry. If replicated, I think one of the most critical aspects of the process is not approach the exercise with the goal of discovery. Again, the work must be appreciated for itself, not its relationship with other works in order to actually gain symbolic insight into their connection. Kandinsky listened and encountered music for the simple pleasure of the music itself and this purity in intention is one of the major things that sets him apart as a painter.

In classical Kandinsky formation, the preparatory and sketching process was in some ways even more important than the painting of the work itself. I did an intensive of study of some of Kandinsky's sketches from the specific work that I was drawing inspiration from: *Painting with White Border* (Fig. 12). I was attracted to the three-
dimensional quality of this painting and how the soft edges of each shape weave in and out of the others. Kandinsky pulls some lines forward and pushes others back without the direct use of shadow, but merely by the specific placement of color. I am intrigued by the emotion delivered by this painting, and each time I examine it, my eye follows a different trail and hears a different melody. There are wide variations in the color palette, differences in the type of line being made, and differences in brushstroke and mark-making qualities. Despite the wide array that these distinctive elements provide individually or in relationship with each other, a sound of harmony still resonates from the canvas. Moreover, I love the way this painting sounds.

In order to attempt the creation of my own similar composition, I began by examining Kandinsky's sketches, finding continuous themes throughout them, and drawing out my own vision of the painting by lining out elements that grabbed my attention (Fig. 21). This initial sketch based off of Painting with White Border served as a baseline to help get my mind and hand in the mood and environment of Kandinsky's style. When looking at the development of Painting with White Border in his preliminary sketches, I noticed multiple elements. He held some areas constant and more grounded and let others move around and take different forms. In the first sketch (Fig. 14), the four triangular humps near the top of the page begin with a sketched "zig-zag" pattern on the interior. The second sketch (Fig. 15) continues this element, while adding significant noise to the central circular design. In the two subsequent of Kandinsky's sketches (Fig. 16 & 17), the sketched pattern has turned to the exterior of the triangular humps. He retains this configuration in the final painting (Fig. 12). Furthermore, the final sketch showcases the addition of contrast that he was planning. The difference between the final,
white sketched exterior and the magenta triangular elements is prepared through light and
dark pencil marks within the sketch. The existence of these sketches, still only four of a
great many more for this painting, guides the viewer deeper into the final masterpiece.

My first preparatory sketch began instead by investigating different relationships
between color and line. I made slight variations to the proportions and elements within
five different forms (Fig. 18 & 19) in order to ensure that the final product would yield a
result that had gone through development on the page, instead of simply internal
processing. The initial inspirational sketch (Fig. 21) that I completed eventually led to
continuing and incorporating similar forms into my own final composition. For example,
a shape in the lower right area of the composition caught my attention (Fig. 12.5), and I
utilized the form and color relationship in my own painting (Fig. 13.5). In this way I
incorporated some of the spirituality within Kandinsky's painting, using it to catalyze a
stronger spiritual sound in my own painting. When these two ideas combined, I did two
more sketches: a lighter composition that continued to explore the relationship between
the forms together (Fig. 20) and a final sketch (Fig. 22) used to guide my composition,
entitled Experiment 1 (Fig. 13). Throughout the sketching and painting process, I took
specific time to separate some of the shapes and lines that are incorporated in this work,
sketching them in different variations and color tones. I focused on the differing thickness
and contour of the lines, manipulating their angle and size not in order to find the perfect
match for my composition but to learn more about the properties of the materials and
tools that I was working with. I understand that this painting is the first step into the
world of abstraction for my own artistic journey, and the careful placement of each piece
was necessary in order to begin learning the language Kandinsky used. If I had simply
launched straight into attempting to replicate every stylistic element he had, the end result would not have the same spiritual effect, or represent my personal authenticity.

As an observer of Kandinsky's work, I can now have a more thorough understanding of preparations behind nearly every work on display. This knowledge of the foundational processes enlightens the viewer on the purpose of the final product. It is this balance between a meticulous, perfectionist nature alongside of a natural, unconscious perception of every element that makes people stop and stare when exposed to his work. The dichotomy is uplifted and encouraged through experiences of synesthesia that Kandinsky had, either consciously or not. There are patches of color all throughout his compositions that seem to sway and breathe together in a unique way, and other patches that have crisp and stark transitions where the painting sings an exclamation. For my own representation, I understood this multi-layered concept and visual design and made a purposeful decision to separate out the elements in order to let them breathe. As an inexperienced painter I cannot intrinsically know the organization and layering principles that were going on in Kandinsky's mind. For this purpose, I stretched out their contiguous nature in order to both showcase the way in which I had decisively laid out each element, but to also avoid overcrowding by the hand of an amateur.

Within the stage of exploring fundamental relationships between color and form, I began to muse about my own inner necessity. I focused on what my driving force was, and examined my emotional processes while in the forward movements of my mind and hand on the canvas. Generally speaking, I see the defining factor of my own motivation not as expressing the pure qualities within art itself, but as seeking out the expression of
God that has been demonstrated in my own being. Kandinsky’s motivation is rooted in the exploration of abstracting a static, defined form, but my own stems from the thrill of new discoveries in a dynamic, undefined space. While I am not a proponent of the Chinese concept of spirit resonance, I appreciate the concept of coming to a full appreciation of the vitality in a thing itself. To me, however, that vitality stems from a Creator. Each thing speaks of its origins in the mind of a living God who has created it for His own delight. I experience the resonance of each element through digging in to the intentional design He has layered and developed into it while simultaneously seeking its pure enjoyment. Kandinsky assists in this experience through unveiling more of the dynamic layers, reminding me of the power of subconscious perceptions.

My composition gives the reader a story to walk through, skipping along the short lines and then sweeping along the slide of a brush stroke across the canvas. Sharp, blue lines exit from the smooth, organic border form in the lower right. The composition is unlike things others have seen, and even an experienced viewer of Kandinsky's work may not recognize the subtle details that interplay between the mother inspiration and its child. It is dynamic, but simple. Specific, but organic. I chose deliberate formation of these lines because of my current view of the world’s haste. My experience throughout the painting of the forms, lines, strokes, colors and shapes was an attempt at that beautiful dichotomy Kandinsky achieved. Through his balance, he hoped to move those stuck in materialist mindsets, but through my balance, I hope to capture those moving too quickly through daily experience. Time has become such a great commodity to the current culture because of its insecurity with stillness and reflection. I hint at recognizable forms to capture attention, and further dynamic lines in order to gently lead the viewer’s eye. With only
one compositional attempt at diving into Kandinsky’s world of thought, I am certainly only scratching the surface in terms of understanding his mindset and placement of purpose. The one thing that I am certain of is his dedication to craft and his identity as a maker. He was not just a painter, but someone who witnessed the world multidimensionally, joining connections from the spiritual and emotional worlds through his path. His insight never took the form of arrogance or pursuit of worldly knowledge but of a specifically reverent and active heart-song. I would even argue that he was to some degree heedless of his own discoveries. The relationship between his mind and heart poured itself onto the page and canvas, convincing people for many periods of time that color does not have to be put in a box, or even a circle.

The recognition of the spirit of the form revealing itself in other sensory means is the height of discovery that Kandinsky had in painting, and I would not have seen his journey in the same light had I not attempted to walk a few steps in his path. However, this final and most important element of the compositional experience proved to be the most difficult. While it seems that Kandinsky’s spiritual theories on color and music interaction came naturally, I had a much different experience. Admittedly, I do not experience the world from a synesthetic viewpoint, so I wrestled with not wanting to rush past proper motivation tactics to create my own philosophy while straining away from reusing and manipulating his own iconic spiritual revelations. The conclusion that I eventually reached was to seek clarity of the inner and outer sounds. I aimed to create hints of the same depth and texture that he instilled in *Painting with White Border* (Fig. 12), which is in my opinion of the same caliber as the famous *Sketch for Composition II* (Fig. 11). The inner sound evolved from my innate fear, and therefore motivation, of
significance. The outer sound that then reflects this perspective is realized through contrast in each shape and form. I picture the storyboard of my painting, as the culmination of each element seeking significance within its own world. Because of their non-objective formation, each line and swatch of color evokes its own cry of significance. Each one wants to stand out. Each one want to play its note the loudest. But within the whole composition, the combination of each of these elements attempt to drown each other out, creating resonance in the process. The outer sound of the painting reflects my inner reality, showcasing my necessity for seeing pieces on their own, in a complementary relationship with the environment around them. This first experimentation with Kandinsky’s techniques helped to mold my inner resonance and peeled at least one of the veils that I had over my eyes. As Kandinsky noted, the purpose of one individual painting is not the main goal. In the end, nearly everything is a tool. The paintbrush, the paint, the imagery are all tools for reaching into something deeper and more spiritual than anyone had considered before. Kandinsky started to peel off the layers of familiar representational art and reveal what none had seen before in the spiritual essence of sensory experience. That encompasses my own purpose in this process: to recognize more clearly these tools and use them properly to achieve a significant end.

At the end of this experiment, my realizations are twofold. Firstly, the overall experience of plunging myself into the world and thought of another painter and artist has given me appreciation for my the process behind others' work. I can delight in the sketches that were once thought unnecessary, and will continue to use preparation more often before completing a project. Second, I now know with near certainty that Kandinsky truly had clinical synesthesia. Even despite the dramatic difference between
his vast span of experience and my small area of knowledge, the level of communion between color, form, sound and line that he accomplished is unmatched.

Wassily Kandinsky's methodology, while informative and inspirational, is impossible to replicate without outside spiritual influence. Replication, however, was never truly his goal. He unveiled the tools that people had been using for years, bringing them into a purer dimension. Kandinsky stripped physical objects of their typical associations and found new connections and nuances. Aside from the meanings and prominence his paintings received and still receive, the most critical and prized possession he had was his perspective. I too hold my individualized perspective on the world in high regard, not placing it as the forefront or correct view, but protecting and cultivating its thoughts and wisdom, being careful to move purposefully and carefully through life, continuing to pull the veils off of others' eyes.
CHAPTER SIX
Concluding Remarks

The vision of new worlds, memory of past pain, and introspection of inner qualities are all ends to the means of Kandinsky’s work. He created emotional masterpieces that are enveloped by meticulously placed lines that ebb and flow around the canvas, weaving dimension and meaning into each small area of color, bringing associations and motivations to the surface of the viewer. The dynamic between his own inner spirituality and the outer spirituality that he attempted, and successfully completed, of elements of color, form and composition created new dialogue in the artistic community. After every sketch was completed, every opera listened to, and every theory explained, the basic purpose that Kandinsky sought through his life was to move forward. The complacency and materialism of the world bothered him to action and created a social contrast to the essence of his paintings.

While the clinical presence of synesthesia can be debated for years to come, after going through this process I fully trust that he had synesthetic experiences that allowed him to see color in a fresh way. My movement and learning process through his life and application of its ideologies is further evidence to this end. However, with or without it, his perspective on color modalities and their relationship to other senses helped explain the layers of color theory that he unearthed. He was able to make strong strides into ethereal perspectives in part because of his informed childhood and in part because of his intrinsic willingness to take slow risks that were out of the ordinary. As an observer, I
acknowledge and appreciate the manipulation of my conscious and subconscious processes in view of his paintings. He painted with purpose, and helped to redefine my own significance.

Golding gives perfect summation of Kandinsky’s calculated manipulation of human perception, and his ultimate communication to the earth:

“He felt that the residual perfume of his abstracted images would engage the viewer, but ideally only at a subconscious level, and thus help each viewer to recognize in this painting not a particular subject, but the fact that he or she was being transported by it into a transcendental world, into a sphere of a higher spiritual order.”

The work of Kandinsky does not inspire because it is Kandinsky’s work, but inspires because it allows the pure form and spirituality of elements to capture and overwhelm people’s own spirits.

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1 Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, 98.
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