

THE PRESENCE OF SAND  
IN WASSILY KANDINSKY'S  
PARISIAN PAINTINGS

by

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the extensive research that has been done on Wassily Kandinsky, little has been said about his use of sand during the decade that he spent in Paris. During this time, Kandinsky's work shows a significant shift in both style and technique. One particular innovation was the addition of sand, and I find it interesting that this aspect of Kandinsky's career has not been fully explored.

I saw Kandinsky's use of sand as an interesting addition to his work, and I questioned his use of this material. The lack of research in this area gave me the opportunity to formulate a theory as to why Kandinsky used sand and no other extraneous material. This examination of Kandinsky's use of sand will contribute to the overall understanding that we have of his work by providing us with a theory and a purpose behind his use of sand. The purpose was to underscore the spirituality that can be found in his artworks.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to everyone who helped me in both my research and my writing. I would especially like to dedicate this thesis to The Kreeger Museum in Washington, D.C. and to Dr. Erich Keel, Head of Education at The Kreeger Museum and Mrs. Eloise Pelton, Museum Archivist at The Kreeger Museum. Both individuals inspired me and helped me along the way.

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER I: A Brief Review of Wassily Kandinsky's Work Leading up to His Years in Paris .....	7
I. Munich Period (1896-1911) .....	7
II. Russian Period (1914-1921).....	14
III. Bauhaus Period (1921-1933) .....	15
IV. Parisian Period (1934-1944).....	17
CHAPTER II: The History of Sand in Modern European Art and Kandinsky's Sand Paintings.....	20
I. History of Sand in Modern European Art .....	21
II. Kandinsky's Sand Paintings.....	29
CHAPTER III: The Meaning Behind Kandinsky's Sand Paintings .....	40
CONCLUSION.....	58
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	60
WORKS CITED .....	75

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Twilight</i> , 1901 .....	60
2. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Sunday (Old Russia)</i> , 1904 .....	60
3. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Colourful Life</i> , 1907.....	61
4. Henri Matisse, <i>Joy of Life</i> , 1905-06.....	61
5. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Autumn in Bavaria</i> , 1908.....	62
6. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Impression V</i> , 1911 .....	62
7. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Composition IV</i> , 1911 .....	63
8. Kazimir Malevich, <i>The Aviator</i> , 1914 .....	63
9. Vladimir Tatlin, <i>Board Number 1</i> , 1916.....	64
10. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Red Oval</i> , 1920 .....	64
11. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Multicolored Circle</i> , 1912 .....	65
12. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Red Spot II</i> , 1921 .....	65
13. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Composition VIII</i> , 1912 .....	66
14. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Each for Itself</i> , 1934 .....	66
15. Joan Miró, <i>Harlequin's Carnival</i> , 1924-25 .....	67
16. Vincent van Gogh, <i>Fishing Boats at Sea</i> and detail, 1888 .....	67
17. Georges Braque, <i>The Clarinet (La Clarinette)</i> , 1912 .....	68
18. Pablo Picasso, <i>Verre et Pipe</i> , 1918 .....	68
19. André Masson, <i>Battle of Fishes</i> , 1926 .....	69
20. Joan Miró, <i>Deux Personnages</i> , 1935 .....	69

21. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Blue World</i> , 1934.....	70
22. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Dominant Violet</i> , 1934.....	70
23. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Relations</i> , 1934 .....	71
24. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Division-Unity</i> , 1934.....	71
25. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Striped</i> , 1934.....	72
26. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Accompanied Contrast</i> , 1935.....	72
27. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Balancing Act</i> , 1935.....	73
28. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Two Green Points</i> , 1935 .....	73
29. Wassily Kandinsky, <i>Black Forms on White</i> , 1934 .....	74

## INTRODUCTION

Russian-born artist Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) was a prominent figure in the development of twentieth-century art and specifically in the shift from objective or representational art to abstract art (abstract art was a new concept in the early twentieth century). In his early years, Kandinsky was well on his way to becoming a scholar though not yet an artist. From 1886 to 1893 he studied economics, ethnography, and law in Moscow. It was not until 1896 that Kandinsky decided that he wanted to paint.<sup>1</sup> This decision, I argue, made him one of the most significant and interesting artists within the Modern art movement.

Today, historians divide Kandinsky's life and work into four principal phases: the Munich, Russian, Bauhaus, and Parisian periods.<sup>2</sup> Of particular interest to my research is Kandinsky's Parisian period that lasted from 1934 until his death in 1944. In 1933, the upsurge of Nazi power in Germany forced the Bauhaus to close, thus pushing Kandinsky and his wife to leave Germany for good. After his exile, Kandinsky specifically chose to settle in the Parisian suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine. Why Paris? Because of its cultural significance and its place as forerunner in the art world. In a letter written to Will Grohmann, longtime friend of Kandinsky's, Kandinsky spoke about why he and his wife, Nina, had chosen to settle in Paris. He states that Paris "was the art center of the world and offered the greatest opportunities to make a living by selling one's paintings."<sup>3</sup> In Paris, Kandinsky's artworks drastically changed from what he had

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<sup>1</sup> Hajo Düchting, *Wassily Kandinsky: A Revolution in Painting* (Germany: Taschen, 2007), 9.

<sup>2</sup> A few of the many historians that do so include: Vivian Endicott Barnett, Will Grohmann, and Hajo Düchting.

<sup>3</sup> As referenced in footnote 102 by Christian Derouet, "Kandinsky in Paris: 1934 – 1944," in *Kandinsky in Paris* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim, 1985) 42.

previously done in Munich, Russia, and at the Bauhaus. In this new setting, he implemented fresh visual imagery including biomorphic forms and cool, pastel colors. He also utilized sand for the first time in his paintings, which has become the main topic of my research presented here.

In the following chapters, I will focus on Kandinsky's Parisian period and more specifically on his use of sand during this time. This material is not usually associated with Kandinsky, but rather, with Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963). Critic and essayist Hilton Kramer states:

Vasily Kandinsky is certainly not the first name that comes to mind when we think of art in Paris in the 1930s. This is a decade we tend to identify with Picasso and González, with Miró, Giacometti, and the Surrealists, with Bonnard and the young Balthus. We may be aware of the struggle waged by certain groups to establish the authority of abstract art in Paris in the Thirties, but even in that movement, which met with much resistance, Kandinsky's role cannot be said to have been a major one. He came to Paris as a refugee from Hitler's Germany, and he did not have an easy time establishing himself in the French art world.<sup>4</sup>

Even though Kandinsky is not the first name that we think of when we think of the 1930s Paris art world, it is certainly not too late to make him a part of this elite group that we associate with Paris at this time. Kandinsky only used sand between 1934 and 1936, but here I will bring this small piece of information to the foreground.

Saying that abundant research has been done on the life and work of Kandinsky is an understatement. He is one of the best-known German Expressionists, and his canvases and watercolors have captivated audiences on an international level. Art historians who have done and do research on Kandinsky tend to focus on his art's abstract quality and vibrant color, as well as, the artist's views on spirituality. However, most scholars have either completely avoided the topic of Kandinsky's use of sand or have only said very few words about this subject. For

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<sup>4</sup> Hilton Kramer, "Kandinsky in Paris," *The New Criterion* 3 (April 1985): 1  
<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Kandinsky-in-Paris-6878> (accessed August 23, 2012).

example, leading Kandinsky specialists such as Vivian Endicott Barnett and Will Grohmann acknowledge and admire Kandinsky's use of sand in his early Parisian works, but do not offer us an interpretation of the paintings. This very reason prompted my research. Kandinsky's use of sand is equally as important as his theories on color, form, and spirituality. Actually, as I will demonstrate, it has everything to do with each one of these topics, and can even enhance our understanding of them.

Kandinsky's use of sand during his decade in Paris can be interpreted on multiple levels. First, the sand can be seen as a formal element that not only adds texture to the work, but also reinforces the underlying theories and ideas he explored during his years at the Bauhaus. These theories include the importance of geometric shapes and how they can be connected to nature, as well as his theories that include the investigation of formal elements such as point, line, and surface, which are all discussed in his book *Point and Line to Plane* (1926). In this formal treatise on the elements of drawing, Kandinsky shows a preoccupation with scientific and natural aspects of the world, giving meaning to the basic elements found in art and emphasizing in particular how they are all fundamentally connected to nature. For my research purposes, I will only focus on Kandinsky's theoretical interpretation of the point in order to understand the meaning behind his use of the material (sand), which is largely made up of tiny points.

Second, the sand can be interpreted metaphorically. This material can be viewed as symbolizing a connection with the Earth, which further underscores Kandinsky's spiritual beliefs that he expresses in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911). If we combine this idea with the new biomorphic motifs that he displays in his Parisian works, we can clearly see that Kandinsky's use of finely grained sand emphasizes an organic and spiritual meaning. The organic meaning can be seen through the sand as a symbol of the Earth, the source of life that provides us with water,

food, and air. The spiritual meaning can be seen through the sand as a symbol of the nonmaterial. I will explain more about Kandinsky's concept of the nonmaterial later. Kandinsky makes an argument against materiality and the use of sand strengthens his argument by looking past material objects and connecting with the spirit and the Earth.

In this paper, I will explore the possible reasons that Kandinsky chose to add sand to his artworks, and the discussion of Kandinsky's views on spirituality will aid in our discussion. I will address the question of whether Kandinsky was conforming to the popular aesthetics of his time or whether his style was innovative and new. Historians have often dismissed Kandinsky's use of sand as either a simple addition of texture or as a means to assimilate into the Paris art world. For example, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, André Masson (1896-1987), Joan Miró (1893-1983) all worked with sand in their paintings and collages. Yet, I will bring this small piece of information regarding Kandinsky's use of sand to the foreground and show the intentionality behind it through his theoretical interpretation of the point and his ideas on spirituality, as well as this material's significance to the overall discussion of Kandinsky's oeuvre. My research will show that Kandinsky's use of sand is not *just* an addition of texture as previously believed, but that it is also an addition of spiritual and theoretical elements that have always been present in his work.

In this introduction I would like to explain the meaning of the term *spiritual*. It is difficult to define exactly what the spiritual means or what Kandinsky intended as its meaning. Art Historian Mike King discusses spirituality in Modern art and believes that it is important to distinguish between the religious, the occult and the transcendent. He states:

The 'religious' is intended to convey traditional and organized religious spirituality such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism; the 'occult,' an esoteric preoccupation with such matters as the paranormal, reincarnation, clairvoyance and disembodied beings; and

finally the 'transcendent' as dealing with a shift in personal identity from the physical and temporal to the infinite and eternal, with mystical union or with *nirvana*.<sup>5</sup>

King uses the term *spiritual* as a comprehensive term to cover each of these three areas. Art historian Patricia McDonnell takes the term *spiritual* and refers to Kandinsky's work saying:

Kandinsky articulated his fundamental notion that art was spiritual communication between the artist and the observer in his landmark treatise of 1912, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Although he acknowledged that this conception of art was alien to the prevailing materialism of his time, Kandinsky nevertheless saw 'spiritualized art' as the promise of the future. For Kandinsky the artist articulated spiritual forces which are manifest in him. A work of art was born, therefore, of 'internal necessity' and comprised a spiritual message. Kandinsky believed that 'the spiritual value seeks its materialization' as art is created. His precise description of aesthetic experience and of the means by which art functions on a spiritual level clarifies his unique understanding of art and art making.<sup>6</sup>

I believe that Kandinsky uses the term *spiritual* to refer to both the *occult* and the *transcendent*, and this largely includes the human soul. Later I will discuss how Theosophy heavily influenced Kandinsky's art and thought process and how Theosophy incorporates both the occult and the transcendent.

Furthermore, Kandinsky's use of the word *spiritual* refers to the personal or inner cosmology that he explores through his art. Evidence of this inner cosmology can be found in the following statement made by Kandinsky:

Only just now awakening after years of materialism, our soul is infected with the despair born of unbelief, of lack of purpose and aim . . . When religion, science and morality are shaken (the last by the strong hand of Nietzsche) and when outer supports threaten to fall, man withdraws his gaze from externals and turns it inward. Literature, music and art are the most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mike King, "Concerning the Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art and Science," *Leonardo* 31 (1998): 22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/156543> (accessed March 22, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Patricia McDonnell, "'Dictated by Life': Spirituality in the Art of Marsden Hartley and Wassily Kandinsky, 1910-1915," *Archives of American Art Journal* 29, no.1/2 (1989): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1557587.pdf> (accessed on January 9, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans Michael T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), 1.

An inner cosmology is the universe of the imagination, and this also incorporates the human soul. When Kandinsky wrote his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* he yearned to explore and express his soul on canvas. I will therefore use the term “spiritual” to refer to anything having to do with the inner soul of the artist, and I will discuss this concept of the inner soul in more depth later, but for now, let us return to Kandinsky’s sand paintings.

To better comprehend Kandinsky’s addition of sand in his artworks, we must first take a look back at what brought him to Paris and how his work changed drastically between the years of 1896, which was the start of his art career, and his death in 1944. As stated earlier, Kandinsky’s work is divided into four major periods based on location. Each phase in his career is slightly different from the one preceding it, resulting in periods of transition between the Munich, the Russian, and the Bauhaus periods. However, as we will see in his Parisian works, there is a dramatic shift that takes place in both their formal and technical qualities. Chapter One will explore Kandinsky’s early work and thus reinforce the discussion of Kandinsky’s Parisian period in Chapters Two and Three.

## CHAPTER I

### A BRIEF REVIEW OF WASSILY KANDINSKY'S WORK LEADING UP TO HIS YEARS IN PARIS

As mentioned in the introduction, Kandinsky's career is divided into four major periods. I want to start by offering a brief overview of Kandinsky's first artworks in Munich and how they progressed and changed throughout his years in Russia and at the Bauhaus School. It is important to understand the development of Kandinsky's early art career in order to better grasp his later paintings in Paris, which are the main focus of my research. In this chapter, I will lay the foundation for the discussion of Kandinsky's Parisian period and, specifically, his use of sand during this time. I will navigate this conversation by introducing Kandinsky's early career, which gives us an abundance of insight to his view on art, spirituality, and theory. This is important to our discussion because Kandinsky developed important theories during his early career that have characterized and influenced his works produced during the Parisian years. Therefore, in order to truly understand his Parisian works we must first look back to the source of many of his thoughts on art.

#### I. Munich Period (1896-1911)

Munich was where Kandinsky's creative career began. He decided to leave behind his studies (economics, ethnography and law) and pursue a career in art after seeing an exhibition of the French Impressionists. Kandinsky was first exposed to the Impressionists in 1895 at a Moscow exhibit and seeing Monet's *Haystack*, in particular, moved him. Kandinsky states, "I

had the impression that here painting itself comes into the foreground; I wondered if it would not be possible to go further in this direction.”<sup>8</sup> In 1896, at the age of 29, Kandinsky left his birthplace in Moscow, and went to Munich to study at the art school of Anton Ažbe (1862-1905). Kandinsky spent two years studying anatomical drawing with Ažbe, but did not produce any major works. However, he did learn an Impressionistic style during Ažbe’s painting lessons.<sup>9</sup> During this time Kandinsky realized that he was extremely intrigued by color. He states, “I really felt far more at home in the world of color than the world of drawing. And I didn’t know how I should confront the problem facing me.”<sup>10</sup> Later, Kandinsky studied under Franz von Stuck (1863-1928), German Symbolist and a follower of Art Nouveau. At this time, Munich was the epicenter of Art Nouveau, also called *Jugendstil*, a style of decorative art that flourished from 1890 until the First World War.<sup>11</sup> Architect August Endell (1871-1925) embraced this new art style and summarized the fundamental idea of *Jugendstil* by saying: “The greatest mistake one can make is to believe that Art is the precise reproduction of nature,” and Endell’s Art Nouveau style had a “direct influence on Kandinsky with the expressive use of colour and line.”<sup>12</sup> To followers of *Jugendstil*, art could be something other than a mere reproduction of reality.

Kandinsky’s earliest work drew from this style as well as from the nostalgia he felt for Russian art.<sup>13</sup> Russia was where Kandinsky first began to paint, and much of his creative motivation was based on his experience there. He adored the landscape of Moscow and his observations inspired much of his artwork. Vivian Endicott Barnett states:

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<sup>8</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, as quoted by Richard Stratton, “Preface to the Dover Edition,” in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans Michael T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), v.

<sup>9</sup> Düchting, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Düchting, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Vivian Endicott Barnett, *Grove’s Dictionary of Art*, s.v. “Vassily Kandinsky,” ed. Jane Turner (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 761.

<sup>12</sup> Düchting, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Barnett, *Grove’s Dictionary of Art*, s.v. “Vassily Kandinsky,” 761.

Kandinsky's early work consisted of figure studies, scenes of knights and riders, romantic fairytale subjects and other rather fanciful reminiscences of Russia, such as *Twilight* (1901). After 1902, his prints (mostly colour woodcuts) acquired both a technical proficiency and a stylistic identity and cohesiveness (see figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

From this we can see that Russia was the first place where Kandinsky was able to conjure up his enchanted subjects and landscapes, and this motif of Russian life can be seen in some of his later works, such as *Sunday (Old Russia)* (1904) and *Colourful Life* (1907) (respectively figures 2 and 3). The point of his *Colourful Life* is to show "all the worldly and spiritual aspects of Russian life past and present, aspects that touch upon death and resurrection, as well as strife and the small joys of everyday life."<sup>15</sup> Even at a very early stage in his art career, Kandinsky was interested in the spiritual aspects of life, a topic that would soon encompass his entire oeuvre.

While in Munich, Kandinsky spent much of his time traveling through Europe. Because of his travels his artworks began to show the influence of prevalent art movements. For example, Kandinsky visited Paris in June of 1906 and stayed there until May or June the next year.<sup>16</sup> While in Paris, he saw an exhibition of the Fauves that took place during the Salon d'Automne (Fall Salon) of 1906.<sup>17</sup> Fauvism was short-lived and only lasted a few years. The Fauvists were less concerned with objective forms and more focused on emphasizing bold, vibrant, and arbitrary colors. For example, Henri Matisse's *Joy of Life* (1905-1906), which was exhibited at the 1906 Salon d'Automne, shows green tree trunks and lemon-yellow grass accentuating a brilliant scene of multi-colored nudes (figure 4). Fauvism's main concern was to use color as an expression in itself, not as a tool for representing reality. After seeing the Fauvists' exhibition,

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<sup>14</sup> Barnett, *Grove's Dictionary of Art*, s.v. "Vassily Kandinsky," 761.

<sup>15</sup> Düchting, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Düchting, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Radford University, "The Spaces of Spirituality and Absolute Abstraction: Kandinsky," Radford University, <http://www.radford.edu/~rbarris/art428/kandinskys%20abstraction.html> (accessed October 8, 2012).

Kandinsky's own colors became more intense and more vibrant.<sup>18</sup> Kandinsky was less concerned with arbitrary colors. Rather, he was intrigued by color in general and what emotions different colors could evoke from the viewer. An example of Kandinsky's new fascination with color can be seen in his oil painting, *Autumn in Bavaria* (1908) (figure 5). This work shows a brilliant display of color and excitement, and color begins to take center-stage in Kandinsky's paintings.

After being exposed to a world full of color, Kandinsky began to creatively experiment with his art and, in particular, with his figures. In the last few years of Kandinsky's Munich period the figures in his artworks became less and less recognizable, and in 1911 his paintings and watercolors "no longer represented objects in nature."<sup>19</sup> This was a major innovation in Kandinsky's work and paved the way for him to explore color and spirituality in art in more depth. Kandinsky continued his study of the abstract for the rest of his art career.

The public did not take well to his new style of painting. Munich's art scene was very conservative and focused more on the academic aspects of painting.<sup>20</sup> But this did not dissuade Kandinsky from following his emotions and interests in color and line. Kandinsky's *Impression V* (1911) shows the newfound abstraction that he sought (figure 6). In this artwork there are no familiar objects; that is, there is nothing that can be associated with reality. This was exactly Kandinsky's intention. He knew that in order to present a world that was devoid of materialism, he had to do away with figural art. I want to take a minute to define what Kandinsky meant by materialism. Materialism, for Kandinsky, refers to anything not associated with the spiritual (the inner soul), or the intellectual. Kandinsky firmly believed that art must express the spiritual and

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<sup>18</sup> Barnett, *Grove's Dictionary of Art*, s.v. "Vassily Kandinsky," 762.

<sup>19</sup> Barnett, *Grove's Dictionary of Art*, s.v. "Vassily Kandinsky," 763.

<sup>20</sup> Düring, 17.

in order for art to do so it must completely turn away from materiality.<sup>21</sup> Kandinsky rejected a material reality and “he lost faith in the rational scientific method and felt that reality could be fully comprehended only by means of creative intuition.”<sup>22</sup> For Kandinsky, materialism got in the way of the spiritual. In his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* Kandinsky states:

At such a time art ministers to lower needs, and is used for material ends, she seeks her substance in hard realities because she knows of nothing nobler. Objects, the reproduction of which is considered her sole aim, remain monotonously the same. The question “what?” disappears from art; only the question “how?” remains. By what method are these material objects to be reproduced? The word becomes a creed. Art has lost her soul.<sup>23</sup>

Kandinsky believed that art had succumbed to materialism and become monotonous and meaningless. Because art had become meaningless and repetitive, it had also ultimately lost its soul. From this point on, Kandinsky was in search of art’s soul and its communion with the artist’s soul. This is where the search for spirituality enters into his artworks.

In 1911, Kandinsky and fellow artist Franz Marc (1880-1916) founded *Der Blaue Reiter*. The group was active between the years of 1911 and 1914, and members included Kandinsky, Marc, Gabriele Münter (1877-1962), Alfred Kubin (1877-1959), Paul Klee (1879-1940), and August Macke (1887-1914). Their first exhibition was held on December 18, 1911, and the group as a whole desired self-expression through art.<sup>24</sup> Kandinsky was responsible for writing the forward to *Der Blaue Reiter’s* first exhibition catalogue. In it, he tried to prepare the visitors for the somewhat shocking arrangement of art in the exhibition. He stated:

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Selz, “The Aesthetic Theories of Wassily Kandinsky and their Relationship to the Origin of Non-Objective Painting,” *The Art Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (Jun 1957): 129, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3047696> (accessed March 21, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Selz, 128.

<sup>23</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Düchting, 37.

We are not seeking to propagate any precise or special form in this small exhibition. Our purpose is to show, in the variety of the forms here represented, how the inner wish of the artist takes shape in manifold forms.<sup>25</sup>

In keeping with the group's purpose to express its inner desires, Kandinsky's artwork moved into the spiritual realm of abstraction by focusing on music and the visual inspiration that it gave him. For example, Kandinsky was able to see colors when he listened to music and assigned each instrument and tone a unique color of its own. Kandinsky was said to experience synesthesia and "Kandinsky felt that beyond the sensory impressions made by color: . . . 'to a more sensitive soul the effect of colours is deeper and intensely moving. . . They produce a corresponding spiritual vibration.'"<sup>26</sup> Peter Selz states:

Kandinsky was always strongly predisposed toward sense impressions. In his autobiography he indicates that he experienced objects, events, even music primarily in terms of color, and he did not conceive color in its physical and material aspects but rather in its emotional effect. During his scientific studies he lost faith in the rational scientific method and felt that reality could be fully comprehended only by means of creative intuition.<sup>27</sup>

Synesthesia played a major role in Kandinsky's early work through the emotional display of color, and his goal was to experiment with the different emotions that each color could evoke from the viewer.

Kandinsky equates color and music in his book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, by saying, "Generally speaking, color is a power which directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul."<sup>28</sup> Kandinsky assigned each color a unique corresponding emotional personality. For instance, "yellow is the

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<sup>25</sup> Dichtung, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Dyane N. Sherwood, "Inner Cosmologies: Exhibits of Works by C. G. Jung and Wassily Kandinsky, New York 2009," *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jung.2010.2.1.11> (accessed March 22, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Selz, 128.

<sup>28</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 25.

typically earthly colour, blue is the typically heavenly colour, the ultimate feeling it creates is one of rest. Green is the most restful colour that exists, and pictures painted in green are passive and tend to be wearisome. White is pregnant with possibilities, while black is a dead silence.”<sup>29</sup> All of his theories on the emotional impact of colors and the similarities between music and art can be found in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art. Composition IV* (1911) shows Kandinsky’s interest in the visual representation of music and color and how it conveys his inner desires (figure 7). Besides the title containing musical vernacular, the painting itself reveals lyrical movement throughout the entire composition. I use the term lyrical just as Kandinsky would. The lines flow like a song; they are elongated and smooth like the tune of a violin. Movement can be seen in the fluid arches and vibrant colors. Even though *Composition IV* is an abstract artwork, it still shows cohesiveness and fluidity.

According to Kandinsky, art had a new purpose and, as mentioned in his book, art’s purpose was to satisfy the human soul in a spiritual manner and to do away with materialism. He believed that “the nightmare of materialism oppressed the soul of modern man.”<sup>30</sup> I will discuss *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* in more depth in Chapter Three and show how it shaped Kandinsky’s entire art career. Even though *Der Blaue Reiter* was the starting point and foundation for the theories and ideals that Kandinsky expressed in his book, the group was short-lived and came to an end in 1914 at the outbreak of World War I. However, as we will see later, Kandinsky’s art continued to show a concern with the spiritual, or rather the artist’s soul.

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<sup>29</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 38-39.

<sup>30</sup> Düring, 37.

## II. Russian Period (1914-1921)

Because Kandinsky was a Russian citizen he was forced to leave Germany for Russia at the outbreak of World War I. Kandinsky's Russian period lasted from 1914 until 1921. Between 1915 and 1919, his work gradually began to incorporate more and more geometric shapes due to his encounters with Suprematist Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935) and Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953) (see figures 8 and 9 for examples of their work).<sup>31</sup> Kandinsky met Tatlin on January 29, 1918, but it is uncertain when or where Kandinsky met Malevich. Yet we do know that Kandinsky became the head of a studio in July of 1918 at Free State Art Studios in Moscow, where Malevich was teaching at the time.<sup>32</sup> This may or may not have been the first time these two artists crossed paths, but Malevich's influence on Kandinsky is very evident and can be seen in many of Kandinsky's Russian works such as *Red Oval* (1920) (figure 10). Malevich believed "that the supreme reality in the world is pure feeling, which attaches to no object."<sup>33</sup> Kandinsky's painting bears the mark of Malevich's influence through its display of non-objective forms in art, as well as the strict use of geometric shapes. Malevich "created non-objective compositions of elemental forms floating in white unstructured space, he strove to achieve 'the absolute,' the higher spiritual reality that he called the 'fourth dimension.'"<sup>34</sup> Kandinsky, too, strove to achieve a higher spiritual reality.

By the end of Kandinsky's time in Russia, his work could be seen as "cool and balanced, after the surging chaos of colour and form of his years in Munich and the restlessness of his exile in Russia."<sup>35</sup> Kandinsky began to utilize the circle in many of his creations such as *Multicolored*

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<sup>31</sup> Barnett, *Grove's Dictionary of Art*, s.v. "Vassily Kandinsky," 761-768.

<sup>32</sup> Vivian Endicott Barnett, *Kandinsky at the Guggenheim* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 297-298.

<sup>33</sup> Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: A Global History*, 13<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2009), 948.

<sup>34</sup> Magdalena Dabrowski, "Geometric Abstraction," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geab/hd\\_geab.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/geab/hd_geab.htm) (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Düchting, 92.

*Circle* (1921) and *Red Spot II* (1921) (respectively figures 11 and 12). This was only the beginning of Kandinsky's analysis of geometric forms. During the next phase of his life, geometric forms began to overtake the foreground of his artworks and geometric shapes also became the focus of his teachings. When we arrive later at the discussion of Kandinsky's Parisian period and his sand paintings, the circle's importance to him becomes even more pertinent to the overall discussion of his sand paintings. The connection of geometric shapes – specifically the circle – to Kandinsky's sand paintings will show that these artworks are essentially linked to his earlier work through theory and spirituality.

### III. Bauhaus Period (1921 – 1933)

In the fall of 1921, Walter Gropius (1883-1969), founder of the Bauhaus School, requested that Kandinsky come to Berlin. Once there, he was offered the position of professor at the Bauhaus in Weimar, which Kandinsky accepted. He moved there in June of 1922. In Berlin at this time the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and Dada dominated the art scene. These were trends that generally opposed abstraction.<sup>36</sup> The New Objectivity focused, in the main, on objective reality, and the Dadaists created artworks that played up the irrational and chaotic nature of life through found objects, photcollage, and nonsensical word poetry. It is significant to point out the artistic environment in Berlin at this time because it shows that Kandinsky – despite going against the convention – wanted to adhere to the abstract qualities of his art, as well as continue to explore a spiritual nonmaterial existence. Kandinsky rejected these styles as being either “formalist” or “ideological,” which made “the offer from Walter Gropius . . . all the more welcome.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Düchting, 65.

<sup>37</sup> Düchting, 65.

Throughout his time teaching at the Bauhaus, Kandinsky's use of geometric shapes became more apparent than ever. Color was still on his mind, but during this time Kandinsky became much more interested in form, resulting in geometric compositions. In his canvases Kandinsky focused on the circle through which he made a spiritual connection to the shape. If we look at *Composition VIII* (1923), his almost obsessive use of the circle is evident (figure 13). For Kandinsky, "the circle is the synthesis of the greatest oppositions. It combines the concentric and the eccentric in a single form, and in equilibrium. Of the three primary forms, it points most clearly to the fourth dimension."<sup>38</sup> In this statement the "concentric" refers to the shape itself and "eccentric" refers to the spiritual. In essence, the circle contains both shape and spirit, thus making it the perfect form. The shape was perfect because it had no beginning or end, and it represented the spirit. Kandinsky saw the circle as having symbolic meaning, as well as immense cosmic significance. Again, this can be seen as an example of introducing a spiritual element to his art.

In 1925, the Bauhaus moved from Weimar to Dessau and Kandinsky remained teaching there until the Nazis closed the Bauhaus in Dessau in 1932. After this, Kandinsky moved to Berlin where he and several others tried to revive the school.<sup>39</sup> He remained in Berlin until the Bauhaus was officially closed in 1933.

During his time at the Bauhaus, Kandinsky wrote his famous theoretical book, *Point and Line to Plane*. As stated earlier, Kandinsky's formal treatise on the elements of drawing shows that he had a preoccupation with scientific and natural aspects of the world. This important piece of information will later be used to show how Kandinsky used the basic element of the point to

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<sup>38</sup> Nancy Spector, "Vassily Kandinsky," The Guggenheim Museum, <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/show-full/piece/?search=Vasily%20Kandinsky&page=2&f=People&cr=12> (accessed on March 1, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Barnett, *Grove's Dictionary of Art*, s.v. "Vassily Kandinsky," 765-766.

show a connection with the earth. This book, *Point and Line to Plane*, along with Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, are two key documents that I will use in Chapter Three in order to discuss the logic behind Kandinsky's use of sand.

#### IV. Parisian Period (1934-1944)

In 1933, Kandinsky left Germany because the Nazis had forced the closure of the Bauhaus school. He and his wife, Nina, settled in the Parisian suburb of Neuilly – sur – Seine. In the first few months of being in Paris, Kandinsky did not produce any artworks. It was not until February of 1934 that Kandinsky resumed painting.<sup>40</sup> Kandinsky's work drastically changed throughout his years in Paris. During this time he implemented many formal and technical elements not seen in any of his earlier works, including biomorphic forms, pastel colors, and – of greatest significance to my research – sand.

Kandinsky preferred “new images that derived from biology, zoology, and embryology.”<sup>41</sup> Kandinsky favored biological images perhaps because they show an influence of Surrealism, but also because he was more intrigued with science in general. *Each for Itself* (1934) shows these new images that appear to be almost amoeba-like (figure 14). During his time in Paris, Kandinsky again responded to the major art movements. Before Kandinsky moved to Paris, he was familiar with the work of the Surrealists and especially admired the work of both Yves Tanguy (1900-1955) and Max Ernst (1891-1976).<sup>42</sup> The Surrealists knew of his work too. Spanish painter Joan Miró, closely associated with the Surrealist movement, recalls:

I remember, before he came to Paris, his little exhibitions at Mme Zack's and Mme Bucher's galleries. At our meetings at the café Cyrano, place Blanche, Breton would

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<sup>40</sup> Barnett, *Kandinsky at the Guggenheim*, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Barnett, *Grove's Dictionary of Art*, s.v. “Vassily Kandinsky,” 766.

<sup>42</sup> Elza Adamowicz, “Surrealizing Kandinsky,” in *Frankreich und der deutsche Expressionismus*, ed. Frank Krause (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2008), 65.

always say: “You must buy these marvels by Kandinsky.” Although they were being sold very cheap, none of us had any money.<sup>43</sup>

Kandinsky was very fond of the Surrealists and vice versa, and soon his Parisian works began to take on a more Biomorphically Surrealist aesthetic. This information is significant because it shows that the Surrealists may have influenced Kandinsky’s artworks in some aspects. As I will later show, however, they are not the main reason Kandinsky chose to use biomorphic forms or sand for that matter. Nevertheless, a discussion of Surrealism is still needed in order to show the development of Kandinsky’s artwork in Paris as well as the art environment of Paris at this time.

Surrealism developed out of the Dada movement in the early 1920s, and artists such as Hans Arp (1886-1966), Ernst, André Breton (1896-1966), and Miró led this development.<sup>44</sup> Kandinsky’s biomorphic shapes show the influence of Biomorphically Surrealism and Miró’s work in particular. Kandinsky met Miró shortly after he arrived in Paris in March of 1934. He admired Miró’s work and was familiar with the journal *Cahiers d’Art*, which had illustrated Miró’s famous *Harlequin’s Carnival* (1924-1925) and other of his influential works (figure 15). This issue came immediately before an issue that was devoted to the work of Kandinsky. Kandinsky continued to visit several Miró and other Surrealist exhibitions throughout his decade in Paris, which shows just how much Kandinsky appreciated the work of the Surrealists.<sup>45</sup>

Even though Biomorphically Surrealism inspired and influenced Kandinsky, he did not completely adhere to this style. This is significant because previous research has shown that Kandinsky’s Parisian style came about because he was highly influenced by younger Parisian artists of the time. My research does not deny this significance, but offers another interpretation

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<sup>43</sup> Adamowicz, 66.

<sup>44</sup> Kleiner, 943.

<sup>45</sup> Barnett, *Kandinsky at the Guggenheim*, 49.

of why Kandinsky's Parisian works incorporate sand in them (a topic to be discussed in Chapter Three). Kandinsky was not just a product of his Parisian environment. Will Grohmann states:

The works of the Parisian years have been described as expressing a superior synthesis; in Kandinsky's language, this would mean that they reflect a union of head and heart, of compositional technique and intuition, but also a branching out toward other sensory experiences, particularly towards music, and even a symbiotic relationship with scientific thinking.<sup>46</sup>

In essence, Kandinsky was fervently searching for other sensory experiences he could utilize to express himself in his art. This key information is important because his search for a new experience for the viewer plays a major role in his conscious decision to add sand to his canvases. The sand allows for a different type of experience for the viewer, one that involves not only texture, but also a new type of spiritual experience that I will explain later in Chapter Three. But, before I do so, it is important to contextualize Kandinsky's sand paintings within the landscape of other artists working in Paris who used the same medium. This discussion will include artists such as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, André Masson, and Joan Miró.

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<sup>46</sup> Will Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky: Life and Work* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), 227.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORY OF SAND PAINTINGS IN MODERN EUROPEAN ART AND KANDINSKY'S SAND PAINTINGS

Chapter Two will focus on the history of sand paintings in Modern European art and Kandinsky's sand paintings, in particular. As such, I will discuss several artists who used sand in their paintings in Paris, as well as how the use of sand was a prevalent technique at this time. One theory as to why Kandinsky chose to use sand is because other artists heavily influenced him. Historian Christian Derouet claims that while Kandinsky was painting and trying to sell his work in Paris he wanted to broaden his market; in other words, he wanted to paint what he knew would sell.<sup>47</sup> Could this be the reason he began to use sand in his paintings? I firmly believe that there is a connection between Kandinsky's fascination with the spiritual, his interest in geometry, and his subsequent use of sand while in Paris. Indeed, the theories that Kandinsky expressed about spirituality and basic aspects of geometry can be tied to his sand paintings in Paris. This connection can be seen through an investigation of his books *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line to Plane*. Both of these books show a motive for Kandinsky's use of sand in Paris, and I will explain this more in depth in Chapter Three.

However, in order to show the significance and intentionality of Kandinsky's use of sand, I will first discuss the history of sand paintings in Modern European art and how prevalent sand painting was in Paris during this time. This discussion will include references to Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, André Masson, and Joan Miró. Did Kandinsky have a relationship with these artists and essentially learn the sand technique from them? We know that Picasso, Braque,

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<sup>47</sup> Derouet, "Kandinsky in Paris," 39.

Masson and Miró were all recognized artists in the early twentieth century who used sand to add texture and meaning to their paintings and collages. Both Braque and Picasso were a part of the Cubist movement that began around 1911. Picasso later joined Miró, who was a member of the Surrealist group that dominated the Parisian art scene throughout the 1930s. Did Kandinsky implement sand in his paintings in order to keep up with the prevalent techniques of that time and boost his own reputation by doing so? Ultimately I hope to show that his use of the material was very different than the artists working in Paris. The discussion will continue in Chapter Three when I demonstrate that the significance and intentionality of Kandinsky's use of sand can not only be found in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, but also in his theories explored at the Bauhaus and expressed in *Point and Line to Plane*.

## I. History of Sand in Modern European Art

In the late nineteenth century, sand was “accidentally” added to many artworks. For example, some of Vincent van Gogh's (1853-1890) canvases, including *Fishing Boats at Sea* (1888), have small traces of sand in them due to the fact that he painted them *en plein air* (figure 16).<sup>48</sup> To van Gogh, then, sand was an unexpected addition to his artworks. However, within a few years, the inclusion of sand in art went from being accidental to intentional. The artist would use sand to add an extra element to his artwork, and this extra element – for many artists – was that of texture.

In the early twentieth century many French artists, in particular, began to deliberately add sand to their artworks, including Braque and Picasso. Both of these artists were interested in

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<sup>48</sup> Kathrin Pilz, “Painting on the Beach,” Van Gogh Museum, <http://www.vangoghsstudiopractice.com/2011/05/painting-on-the-beach/#more-4934> (accessed on March 17, 2012). I would like to add that this website is the Vincent van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, thus giving it adequate credibility.

Cubism, an art form very different from Kandinsky's Expressionism. Cubism can be defined as an "art movement that rejected naturalistic depictions, preferring compositions of shapes and forms abstracted from the conventionally perceived world."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, art critic and French poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) defines Cubism as follows:

Authentic Cubism [is] that art of depicting new wholes with formal elements borrowed not from the reality of vision, but from that of conception. This tendency leads to a poetic kind of painting which stands outside the world of observation; for, even in a simple cubism, the geometrical surfaces of an object must be opened out in order to give a complete representation of it . . . everyone must agree that a chair, from whichever side it is viewed, never ceases to have four legs, a seat and a back, and that, if it is robbed of one of these elements, it is robbed of an important part.<sup>50</sup>

Cubism, in general, sought to represent an object based on multiple viewpoints in order to fully present the object to the viewer. Cubism was divided into two categories: Analytic and Synthetic. Both aspects of Cubism maintained traditional subject matter, but Analytic Cubism consisted of the artist's analysis of a form from various vantage points. The artist would then present all possible views in one pictorial entity.<sup>51</sup> Analytic Cubists sought, in short, to explore an entire object (which was typically some sort of musical instrument, chair, or pipe) on a flat surface (i.e. the canvas). What resulted were artworks that broke the object down onto a flattened plane.

Synthetic Cubism, a late phase of Cubism, sought to create artworks with "objects cut from paper or other material to represent parts of a subject."<sup>52</sup> Both Braque and Picasso moved into Synthetic Cubism and explored the world of collage. This is where sand enters into their artworks. Even though in the 1930s Picasso became a part of the Surrealist group and Braque's artwork changed, it is still important to discuss the Cubists' use of sand because Cubism was a

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<sup>49</sup> Kleiner, 1031.

<sup>50</sup> As quoted in Edward F. Fry, *Cubism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 112-113.

<sup>51</sup> Kleiner, 1029.

<sup>52</sup> Kleiner, 922.

technique that was used in Paris a short time before Kandinsky arrived. This will guide our conversation to both Masson and Miró, who used sand during the 1930s alongside Kandinsky.

1911 is the year that we see the prevalence of extraneous materials, including sand, in both the works of Braque and Picasso. I am not concerned with the question of who used sand first; I am only concerned with the motives behind their use of sand.

Braque was interested in imitating material elements in his artworks such as “wood, marble, paneling, and mosaics. These techniques would later be implemented in the famous “papier collés that Braque would create in 1912.”<sup>53</sup> Braque’s interest in using extraneous materials in his work resulted from an apprenticeship he held in La Berthe. There he “learned that ‘all manner of things can be mixed with paint, such as oil, ash, tobacco and coffee grounds.’<sup>54</sup> Such physicality in Braque’s work shaped his art,” and he is quoted saying “I work with matter and not ideas.”<sup>55</sup> He was much more concerned with the substances that he was working with and how they worked against the canvas. Sand was one of these materials that Braque worked with in order to experiment with texture and the surface of the canvas.

Braque used sand as a way to connect his art with reality and to avoid rendering it in a traditionally illusionistic way.<sup>56</sup> The importance of this information lies in the purpose of the sand. Braque believed that concrete qualities define space, once again making the use of sand important to his work by serving a spatial purpose.<sup>57</sup> In other words, the sand acted in a purely textural manner in order to distinguish between different planes. Let’s take a look at Braque’s

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<sup>53</sup> Colleen Fasone, “Georges Braque: More Than Just a Cubist,” *Adelphia Honors College Journal of Ideas* 12 (2012): 162, <http://academics.adelphi.edu/honors-college/pdfs/symposium1213.pdf#page=163> (accessed January 4, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Colleen Fasone, 162.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Fasone, 162.

<sup>56</sup> Edith Hoffmann, “Braque in Paris,” *The Burlington Magazine* 116, no. 850 (Jan. 1974): 64.

<sup>57</sup> Lucy Flint, “Georges Braque,” The Guggenheim Museum, <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/show-full/piece/?search=The%20Clarinet&page=&f=Title&object=76.2553.7> (accessed March 15, 2012).

*The Clarinet* (1912) (figure 17). Lucy Flint, associated with The Guggenheim Museum, discusses *The Clarinet* and Braque's use of sand saying:

The planes, because they are more consistently parallel to the picture plane than before, suggest the flat surfaces of papier collé. Braque's incorporation of sand into certain areas of his pigment, an innovation of this transitional period, enhances the differentiation of surfaces created by the variations of brushstrokes and increases the subtleties of coloration. The use of sand accords with Braque's conviction that tactile qualities define space. Despite this emphasis on materiality the image remains evanescent.<sup>58</sup>

Essentially Braque wanted to use the sand to define certain areas of his painting and to add a textural element to it as well. He emphasized materiality in order to do so. We will later see that this is very different from the way that Kandinsky chose to use sand in his artworks.

Picasso also used sand in order to establish a new notion of the visual image. That is to say, by adding an element from reality (sand) and juxtaposing it against unrealistic views of an object, he essentially challenges our notion of what is real. Sand allowed him to introduce texture and dimensionality into his paintings. For example, in *Verre et Pipe* (1918) we can see that Picasso has added sand to the background of this work (see figure 18). This is significant because we will later see that Kandinsky never used sand for the background of his paintings. Picasso emphasized the canvas by adding a textural element to the background instead of to the objects in the foreground. Through the addition of this material in the background, Picasso made the viewer aware of the surface of the canvas. Concerning this aspect of Picasso's work, Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) states:

It was toward the same end that Picasso and Braque began, in 1912, to mix sand and other foreign substances with their paint; the granular surface achieved thereby called direct attention to the tactile reality of the picture . . . Cubist space had by this time become even shallower, and the actual picture surface had to be identified more emphatically than before if the illusion was to be detached from it.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Flint, <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/show-full/piece/?search=The%20Clarinet&page=&f=Title&object=76.2553.7>.

<sup>59</sup> Clement Greenberg, "The Pasted Paper Revolution," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance*, ed. Clement Greenberg (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 62.

Both Braque and Picasso wanted to call attention to the surface of the canvas and to make us aware that it is a painting. This is important to keep in mind when we discuss Kandinsky's sand paintings later in this chapter.

Braque and Picasso utilized sand during the early part of the twentieth century, before Kandinsky came to Paris. By the time Kandinsky arrived, Braque and Picasso had ventured away from Cubism and their sand techniques. The Paris art world had changed as well and Kandinsky had a hard time fitting into this world. In the 1930s, the Paris art world was apprehensive about giving recognition to abstract painting.<sup>60</sup> Figurative art was favored above any other style and Paris wanted to return to a more traditional manner of painting. Hilton Kramer discusses the Paris art world in the 1930s and Kandinsky's role in it as follows:

He [Kandinsky] did not have an easy time establishing himself in the French art world. He had little connection with the School of Paris, and Paris in those days took scant notice of artists who lived outside the orbit of its influence. To the modernist art of Germany, where Kandinsky had made his reputation, the French were especially disinclined to grant critical recognition. Kandinsky himself was acknowledged to be an avant-garde eminence, of course, but he was nonetheless obliged to tread his way very carefully in a milieu in which he could take nothing for granted and which was in many ways deeply alien to his outlook. He had no interest in the figurative art, which was then winning so much acclaim. He was opposed to the influence of the Communist Party, which was considerable, and he was scarcely more sympathetic to the doctrines of the Surrealists (even though they accorded him a certain welcome). He seemed, in fact, to fit comfortably into none of the factions, which governed the Paris art world at that time.<sup>61</sup>

We know that Paris as a cultural center could not acknowledge abstraction as an acceptable form of painting. So the statement brought up earlier about how Kandinsky picked up on this aspect of modern art, the addition of sand, in order to fit in with this select group of artists and to sell more paintings, seems to be untrue. This would not have helped Kandinsky sell more of his artworks because Cubism was not well received in Paris. The public thought that Cubism was an attack on tradition and "many critics in the French press consistently equated Cubism with anarchism and

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<sup>60</sup> Düchting, 79.

<sup>61</sup> Kramer, <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Kandinsky-in-Paris-6878>.

revolution.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, there must be a more feasible reason that Kandinsky chose to use sand, and this will be explored in Chapter Three.

André Masson also chose to utilize sand in his paintings. He did so in order to add an element of texture as well as chaos. By using the term chaos I mean that the way Masson applied the sand was not orderly. Concerning Masson’s technique, Michael Welland states, “Masson would pour and dribble glue or gesso freely onto the canvas and then coat the glue shapes with sand, brush away the excess, and use these forms to guide the rest of the work.”<sup>63</sup> In essence, Masson used automatism to apply sand to his paintings. Automatism is “the creation of art without conscious control.”<sup>64</sup> An example of Masson’s utilization of sand can be seen in his *Battle of Fishes* (1926) (figure 19). In it we can noticeably see the areas of sand and how they shaped the rest of the composition. The placement of sand was not a conscious decision, nor was it carefully planned. Rather, it was left up to chance.

While in Paris, Miró used sand around the same time that Kandinsky did. However, I believe that Miró influenced Kandinsky more through his use of biomorphic forms than through his use of sand, which is a topic that will be discussed later. Regardless, a discussion of Miró’s use of sand is still necessary in order to show the progression of the history of sand in modern art and how the cultural environment of Paris played a role in this during the 1930s.

Miró arrived in Paris in March of 1920 at a time when artists tried to revive Cubism and save it from its “prewar associations with an anarchic, bohemian avant-garde and to bring it into the fold of the French tradition.”<sup>65</sup> Miró was not interested in Cubism, so he chose to explore the notion of painting, as well as ways to destroy it. During this time, Miró:

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<sup>62</sup> Kleiner, 923.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Welland, *Sand: The Never-Ending Story* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 226.

<sup>64</sup> Kleiner, 943.

<sup>65</sup> Robert S. Lubar, “Miró’s Defiance of Painting,” *Art in America* 82, no. 9 (September 1994): 88.

questioned paint as a medium and began to search for new vehicles of expression. Later, while working on his paintings on masonite, he grew aware of certain poetic qualities inherent in the material and sensed their aesthetic potential. Miró was in pursuit of the interpenetration of materials, which often appears imposed by force. The contrast of the materials (casein, black shoe polish, tar and sand, in addition to oil colours) and the rough support of the “masonite” express the violence of the execution.<sup>66</sup>

Miró used sand, as well as other materials, as a way to express more clearly the aesthetic potential of the material. The sand adds an element of “filth” to the canvas, which helps to in turn, destroy the traditional sense of painting (see figure 20 for an example of Miró’s work). This was his goal: he wanted to destroy painting with painting. Miró described his painting process saying:

Rather than setting out to paint something, I begin painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush. The form becomes a sign for a woman or a bird as I work... the first stage is free, unconscious.... the second stage is carefully calculated.<sup>67</sup>

If we relate this back to sand, then we can see that Miró used sand in a way similar to Masson. Miró used sand in conjunction with automatism in order to create a work of art. The sand allowed Miró to destroy art in the traditional manner and to create a work that incorporated materiality. He destroyed painting, in short, by challenging the very notion of it. When asked about his work in 1931, Miró stated, “The only thing that’s clear to me is that I intend to destroy, destroy everything that exists in painting. I have an utter contempt for painting. The only thing that interests me is the spirit itself.”<sup>68</sup> Despite the fact that both Kandinsky and Miró used sand, there is a significant difference that can be seen in their paintings. Miró was also interested in fetishism and distorting the human body and he constantly transformed found materials into

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<sup>66</sup> The Miró Foundation, “Works by Joan Miró,” The Miró Foundation, [http://www.fundaciomiro-bcn.org/coleccio\\_obra.php?idioma=2&obra=702](http://www.fundaciomiro-bcn.org/coleccio_obra.php?idioma=2&obra=702) (accessed January 2, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> Joan Miró, as quoted in Kleiner, 947.

<sup>68</sup> As quoted in Lubar, 91.

erotic signs and incorporated extraneous materials to emphasize sexuality in his paintings.<sup>69</sup> This is important to note because it shows a distinction between Miró and Kandinsky's works.

The historical relevance of the discussion of the previous artists who used sand in Paris plays an important part in discussing Kandinsky's use of sand. I want to show that Kandinsky did not simply follow the trends upon his arrival in Paris, and in order to do so, I needed to first discuss a few artists who used sand and worked in Paris. I believe that Kandinsky admired these artists, but did not just incorporate their technical innovations in order to sell paintings in Paris. I came to this conclusion by analyzing Kandinsky's own words. Though they are not directly related to Kandinsky's Parisian works, they give us insight into what was important to him. In general, Kandinsky was against following trends in art. He states:

The artist must be blind to distinctions between 'recognized' or 'unrecognized' conventions of form, deaf to the transitory teaching and demands of his particular age. He must watch only the trend of the inner need, and hearken to its words alone. Then he will safely employ means both sanctioned and forbidden by his contemporaries. All means are sacred which are called for by the inner need. All means are sinful which obscure the inner need.<sup>70</sup>

This quote leads me to believe that when Kandinsky says, "the artist must be deaf to the demands of his particular age," he means that the artist should not be distracted by his environment or concerned with what other artists are doing. Rather, Kandinsky thought the artist should paint in order to satisfy his *inner need*, a concept to which I will later return. Michael T. H. Sadler, translator of Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, explains:

The phrase 'inner need' means primarily the impulse felt by the artist for spiritual expression. Kandinsky is apt, however, to use the phrase to sometimes mean not only the hunger for spiritual expression, but also the actual expression itself.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Lubar, 91.

<sup>70</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 35.

<sup>71</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 26.

Even though other artists in Paris used sand, this does not mean that Kandinsky did so because of these artists' popularity. Kandinsky utilized sand because it satisfied him as a method to express his inner soul, or rather his inner cosmology. The sand acted as a tool to help him with this goal, and I will explain exactly how sand does this in Chapter Three. We will later see that color becomes less of a focus for him, but spirituality still remains as a main priority. If Kandinsky does not use color in Paris to express spirituality then how does he express spirituality? He explores spirituality through the addition of sand in his artworks.

## II. Kandinsky's Sand Paintings

Now let us turn to Kandinsky's sand paintings. When it came to art, Kandinsky was not a follower, but a leader. Although, one popular technique Kandinsky did follow suit in was the use of sand, making "sand painting the only technical innovation Kandinsky embraced upon his arrival in Paris."<sup>72</sup> This is significant in and of itself. Why is this the one technical component that he desired to adopt? This question will be answered much later in our discussion.

Before Kandinsky experimented with sand, his Parisian works were already very distinct from his other paintings. His forms changed drastically from sharp geometric forms to softer, organic shapes. This is important to note because in Chapter Three I will discuss that the presence of these forms works in conjunction with Kandinsky's use of sand and ultimately allows him to show spirituality in his paintings.

During the last decade of his life, which he spent in Paris, Kandinsky completed 144 oil paintings, more than 200 watercolors and gouaches, and about 300 drawings.<sup>73</sup> Of these more than 600 artworks, less than ten of them contain sand. I do not believe this small number makes

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<sup>72</sup> Derouet, 29.

<sup>73</sup> Grohmann, 227.

them insignificant and unworthy of research. I believe it makes my research all the more important because there is significant rationale behind the use of sand and why he only utilized it for a short period of time. I will briefly discuss each of these works in order to see how each one relates to the other, as well as to his Parisian works as a whole.

It can be difficult to understand Kandinsky's Paris years because he rarely wrote about his own paintings. Yet, I have found one quote by Kandinsky where he mentions the use of sand in Paris, which can give us some insight into his work and his motives.<sup>74</sup> Kandinsky does not directly say why he used sand, but he does discuss his expressive reasoning. Kandinsky states:

In the majority of the compositions on canvas I used a sand technique more or less consistently, but I usually don't distinguish between traditional oil paintings, gouache, tempera and watercolor, and I even simultaneously use the various techniques in the same work. What is essential for me is to be able to clearly convey what I want, to recount my dream. I consider both technique and form to be mere instruments of expression.<sup>75</sup>

This quote by Kandinsky shows us that there is an underlying meaning behind his sand technique, one that encompasses his desire for expression in his artworks, and I believe that his expression can be seen as a spiritual expression. He uses the sand technique as an instrument of expression, not just as an added element of texture or as a way to keep up with modern art techniques. The most important thing for him was to be able to convey his desire for spiritual expression, or rather an expression of his soul, on the canvas. After discussing each of Kandinsky's sand paintings, I will show exactly how Kandinsky used sand to express spirituality.

Concerning Kandinsky's Parisian works, Will Grohmann states:

The works of the Paris years have been described as expressing a superior synthesis; in Kandinsky's language, this would mean that they reflect a union of head and heart, of

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<sup>74</sup> Kandinsky does not provide us with many writings about the technical aspects of his own paintings, but rather, provides us with his thoughts on other techniques and artists, as well as his theories on art in general. Therefore, it is difficult to find Kandinsky's opinions or explanations of his own work.

<sup>75</sup> Derouet, 29.

compositional technique and intuition, but also a branching out toward other sensory experiences, particularly toward music, and even a symbiotic relationship with scientific thinking – the latter, after all, originates in the ‘central organ of all spatio-temporal movement.’<sup>76</sup>

In other words, these works show maturity in his style of painting, as well as a synthesis of all his thoughts on the spiritual and art. As such, a discussion of each artwork using sand will lead us into a conversation about why Kandinsky chose to use sand and how the decision to do so relates to the notion of both texture and spirituality.

*Blue World* (1934) is the first work in which Kandinsky added sand to the oil paint (figure 21). This abstract work shows the influence of his Bauhaus years, with its strong rectangular shapes intertwined with smaller circles, triangles, and squares. The colors are very soft, creating a calming effect over the entire canvas. The sand accentuates the large rectangular figures, clearly distinguishing each shape from the next. The way that Kandinsky applies the sand is much different from Miró and Masson in that the sand is clearly and neatly contained within each shape. There does not appear to be any sand in the background or any that appears to be unconsciously applied. The sand has been carefully added to each shape and the sand remains within the borders of each form. Miró and Masson both applied their sand without putting a limit on its location within the painting. That is to say that Masson applied it according to chance and Miró was more concerned with destroying painting than he was with keeping the sand or dirt looking neat.

Executed shortly thereafter was *Dominant Violet* (1934) (figure 22). This painting shows a small break from the mostly geometric forms that Kandinsky used in *Blue World*. The color palette remains soft and muted, which is something that we will see throughout his Parisian period. However, the biomorphic forms are clearly bolded in dark pigments in order to make

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<sup>76</sup> Grohmann, 227.

them stand out from the other figures. It is almost as if Kandinsky wants to draw our attention to the fact that he has incorporated this new style of figures. The sand allows for different shapes to be pushed into the foreground, creating a dimensional piece of work. Because of its materiality, the sand naturally lays on the surface of the painting and anything that is mixed with the sand also does so. This gives Kandinsky's paintings a sense of dimensionality. This is pertinent to my entire discussion of Kandinsky's use of sand for two reasons. First, it is important because we do not find the use of any extraneous materials in any of his other paintings besides the select few in Paris that I discuss here. This observation is important because it shows that there must be significance in Kandinsky's use of sand. Second, the presence of dimensionality (created by the sand) shows that Kandinsky explored new ways to express spirituality in his art. I will later show how texture and dimensionality aid in his exploration of the spiritual. The topic of dimensionality also requires a brief discussion of Expressionism in general, because "expressionists sought to explore the formal qualities of painting, sculpture, and other media. Expressionism refers to art that is the result of the artist's unique inner or personal vision and that often has an emotional dimension."<sup>77</sup> As far as the canvas is concerned, expressionists sought to not only express themselves thematically in their works, but they also used technique and medium in order to work with the canvas to express emotion.

Even though Kandinsky still incorporated some geometric shapes, they start to fade into the background and the new biomorphic forms that characterize his Parisian period start to take center stage. Kandinsky's biomorphic forms will be discussed later in Chapter Three. This topic will be relevant to our overall discussion of Kandinsky's use of sand because if we look at the biomorphic forms in conjunction with his use of sand then we can understand that an expression of spirituality was the motive behind them. For now, though I only want to acknowledge the

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<sup>77</sup> Kleiner, 911.

appearance of these new forms in Kandinsky's sand paintings and briefly talk about their formal qualities.

In *Relations* (1934), Kandinsky chose to work with biomorphic forms, sand, and mainly primary colors in order to create this purposely well-balanced environment (figure 23). Although the canvas is large and comprised of many shapes and colors, there is still a great area of the canvas that is left blank. Actually, blank is not the correct term to use here because the artist painted a pale pink backdrop to accentuate his floating objects. The blue organic shape in the upper middle of the canvas immediately captures our attention and draws our eye into the composition. The most important aspect of this painting, as well as the other paintings, is the presence of sand. The sand boldly accentuates each color and shape. Here, not only do the shapes stand out due to the contrast of the bright colors on the pale background, but also because the sand pushes the objects out from the surface of the painting. This is significant to Expressionism in general because, as mentioned earlier, Expressionist painters were concerned with the surface of the canvas, the property of the brushstrokes, and the texture of the paint. Being aware of the canvas is important to my research because it shows that Kandinsky's use of sand was different than that of other artists. Most of the other painters who used sand wanted to add an element of texture to their paintings. I do not deny that Kandinsky, too, used sand to create a textural effect. However, this textural effect is the result of the exploration of his inner soul. We will return to this topic later in Chapter Three.

*Division-Unity* (1934) shows Kandinsky's mastery of organic shapes, but here he has neatly organized them by utilizing strong diagonals that frame each shape or group of shapes (figure 24). Kandinsky used the sand in this painting to emphasize the small biomorphic shapes. This is significant because these biomorphic forms can be seen throughout the last decade of his

life, and, as mentioned earlier, I will later show how these forms, paired with the use of sand, emphasize Kandinsky's long-term interest in spirituality. Going back to the use of sand in *Division-Unity*, color and sand appear to be dissociated because the colors are less pastel than they are in *Dominant Violet*.<sup>78</sup> In essence, what I want to convey here is that Kandinsky did not use sand in conjunction with certain colors in a painting. This is not to say that Kandinsky did not carefully choose the colors that he wanted to work with in each painting. However, from one painting to the next, color and sand appear to be dissociated. He applied the to sand to each colorful form, thus leading me to believe that Kandinsky's placement of sand is related more to the overall canvas than to just color. This will be helpful later in our discussion of Chapter Three.

*Striped* (1934) turns the strong diagonals seen in the previous painting into dominant vertical lines (figure 25). These strong, rigid lines contrast the swirling objects in the foreground.

Concerning these forms in the foreground, Grohmann states:

*Striped* might well have been painted after a stay at the seaside, for it has star fish, sea horses, snails, creeping plants and the colors which have been mixed with sand run from ocher tones, through red brown and orange to dull blue and blue-green."<sup>79</sup>

*Striped* resulted from Kandinsky's "search for variety of forms and at the same time for a firm unifying order."<sup>80</sup> Kandinsky carefully and neatly added sand to what now appear to be completely organic forms. He used the sand in conjunction with many different shapes and colors, which is something that will be discussed more below.

*Accompanied Contrast* (1935) shows something slightly new that occurs in the sand paintings: the number of objects, or rather forms that he uses, is lessened (figure 26). Kandinsky had a tendency to make each artwork drastically different from the one before it, which is

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<sup>78</sup> In his Paris years, Kandinsky's color palette changed drastically in that the colors were less bold and vibrant than in his earlier works of his Munich, Russian, and Bauhaus Periods.

<sup>79</sup> Grohmann, 232.

<sup>80</sup> Grohmann, 232.

evident in his Parisian works. This is important to note because we will later see that the only constant in the paintings discussed here is the prevalence of sand. In *Accompanied Contrast*, the forms still appear to be floating in space, but they seem to be more controlled than in the previous painting. The shapes return to the larger size as seen in *Blue World*. The canvas is simplified in both color and composition. If we look at the simplification of the composition in reference to the discussion of sand in Kandinsky's work, it appears that the sand takes center stage in this, as well as his other artworks. Although color remained important to Kandinsky until the end, it was not his main focus while he was in Paris. The main goal was to find new ways to express spirituality and for the viewer to experience spirituality. Kandinsky achieved this goal through the application of sand, a topic that will be contextualized in Chapter Three.

In *Balancing Act* (1935), the canvas is even more simplified, and we get a sense of the biomorphic forms that exemplify Kandinsky's Parisian period (figure 27). Just as the title suggests, the composition is eloquently balanced and simple. Even the colors that Kandinsky used are greatly simplified. He only used red, black, brown, purple and shades of orange. This is significant because it shows a shift in his color usage. I believe that color was still important to Kandinsky at this time however, I feel as though in his Paris years, and especially in his sand paintings, he uses composition, new biomorphic forms, and sand in order to express spirituality. Again, I will explain in the next chapter exactly how these aspects of Kandinsky's work aided him in his spiritual expression.

In this painting, we can see the possible influence of Hans Arp. Arp was a member of the Dadaists, but his later work shows the influence of Biomorphic Surrealism, not least of all because his forms suggest "plants, exotic vegetables, crustaceans, or swarming amoebae,

strongly implying life, growth, and metamorphosis.”<sup>81</sup> The two Arp-like shapes in *Balancing Act* appear quite frequently in subsequent works. Here, the simplification of the canvas presents us with a very important piece of information about Kandinsky’s use of sand, which is that it is not synonymous with form. This is significant because it shows that his use of sand was not limited to certain colors or shapes. He used sand where it was needed in order to emphasize the composition and make the shapes more distinguishable.

In *Two Green Points* (1935) Kandinsky once again filled the canvas with both organic and geometric shapes (figure 28). Figures overlap one another and he added an element of transparency that makes the objects indistinguishable from one another. The colors are softly muted, and possess a more earthy texture with the brown and green tones and the sand mixed throughout. The sand is added to objects in both the foreground and the background creating an illusion of one plane. I use the terms foreground and background lightly when speaking of Kandinsky’s sand paintings because he creates a divide between objects by overlapping them, but at the same time there is a lack of depth by using the sand in each shape. I do not want to spend time discussing this element of Kandinsky’s work because I feel as though it will deter us from the main focus, which his use of sand. I do, however, want to focus on the fact that the sand, because of its very nature, distinguishes the forms from the surface of the canvas.

After discussing each of Kandinsky’s artworks that contain sand in them, let us now return to the previous artists that were discussed earlier in order to compare how Kandinsky’s paintings are visually different from those artists who worked with sand. In the beginning of this chapter, I discussed Braque, Picasso, Miró and Masson and how they utilized sand. But, how is Kandinsky’s use of this material different from these artists? Grohmann states that Kandinsky’s

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<sup>81</sup> H.H. Arnason and Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *History of Modern Art*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2010), 239-240.

use of sand was a “procedure employed to differentiate between color planes and individual forms.”<sup>82</sup> If we remember, this is also how the other artists employed sand, especially Braque and Picasso. However, I believe that there is more to Kandinsky’s sand paintings than just texture or a differentiation of color. Nevertheless, texture is still important to Kandinsky, and thus this topic deserves consideration and will be explored in Chapter Three.

Braque and Picasso both used sand in their Cubist artworks in order to show an element of texture and to replicate the world that they viewed using different perspectives. I believe that Kandinsky, too, was concerned with texture. However, for Kandinsky, texture was a way to express his inner need, or rather his desire for spiritual expression and to connect himself and his artworks with the spiritual world.

Picasso’s paintings in general were different from Kandinsky’s. Michael Sadler, translator of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, writes:

Picasso (during his early Cubist career) makes little use of color, and confines himself only to one series of line effects – those caused by conflicting angles. So his aim is smaller and more limited than Kandinsky’s even if it is as reasonable. But because it has not wholly abandoned realism but uses for the painting of feeling a structural vision dependent for its value on the association of reality, because in so doing it tries to make the best of two worlds, there seems little hope for it of redemption either.<sup>83</sup>

This quote shows that Picasso’s goal in his artworks was different than Kandinsky’s. Picasso was not concerned with color, but Kandinsky was, as we saw earlier. Picasso was more concerned with reality, despite the fact that it was a distorted view of reality. These facts alone show that Kandinsky and Picasso’s work was very different, except for the use of sand. So, why would Kandinsky chose to only take this element of Picasso’s work if he was just trying to sell artworks? This question is essential to my thesis because I argue that Kandinsky did not add sand

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<sup>82</sup> Grohmann, 228

<sup>83</sup> Michael T.H. Sadler, “Introduction.” in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. Michael T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), xx.

to his paintings because it was a prevalent Modern art technique. He did so because he saw it as a way to communicate spirituality through his artworks.

Masson's sand paintings were driven by chance. He would let the artwork determine where the sand would be applied. For example, if we take a look at Masson's *Battle of Fishes* (look back to figure 19), we can see the irregularly shaped areas that contain sand. Masson's method of sand application is very different from the way that Kandinsky applied the sand to his artworks. Kandinsky carefully planned out the placement of the sand as well as carefully applied it so that the sand would be contained in each form by the boundaries of the shape itself. Kandinsky was concerned with spirituality and Masson was concerned with automatism and the subconscious. These two approaches signify that Kandinsky and Masson were very different when it came to the use of sand. Kandinsky and Masson's art had different goals. The historical importance of the difference between not only Kandinsky and Masson, but Kandinsky and the other artists mentioned, will help us to understand Kandinsky's use of sand. Braque and Picasso used sand to make us question reality. Masson used sand to explore automatism and the subconscious, and Miró used sand in order to destroy painting also through the use of automatism.

Miró's work had much in common with Kandinsky's. For example, Miró, too, was concerned with the spiritual. However, as stated earlier, Miró linked spirituality with physical, sexual acts, and he used extraneous materials, such as sand, to achieve this connection between spirituality and fetishism on canvas. The sand that Miró used was not refined or neatly placed on the canvas. In contrast, Kandinsky's use of sand was very neat and organized and appeared to be very well thought out. I am not saying that Miró's was not well thought out, it is just that his use of sand appears to be placed more haphazardly.

When we look at Kandinsky's sand paintings, we can see that he was less concerned with color, which is the tool that he used in his earlier career to express spirituality in his artworks. However, he still yearned to express spirituality in his paintings. I argue that the sand paired with his biomorphic forms allowed him to achieve his goal. Kandinsky utilized this sand technique in order to connect his art with the spiritual, and as mentioned previously, I will use Chapter Three to discuss this topic more clearly and show how spirituality plays a major role in Kandinsky's sand paintings. I believe that it is now clear that Kandinsky's use of sand was visually different than the other artists mentioned above in that he carefully planned out the placement of the sand. On a deeper level, Kandinsky used this material in order to connect his artworks with the spiritual, or rather to connect his art with his soul. This topic leads us into the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MEANING BEHIND KANDINSKY'S SAND PAINTINGS

After discussing each artwork that contains sand, it is important to now turn to why Kandinsky used this particular material. I do not deny that Kandinsky may have gotten the idea to add sand to his artworks from other artists who worked in Paris. However, I do not believe that this was the only reason for his addition of sand. The remainder of my research will show two major reasons why Kandinsky utilized sand in an artistic manner. One reason can be found in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and the other can be found in *Point and Line to Plane*.

When discussing Kandinsky's work, one should not leave out the notion of the spiritual. After he wrote his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, the name Kandinsky and the term *spiritual* have almost become synonymous. For Kandinsky, abstract painting was a way to express spirituality in his paintings. He believed that "all the arts, not just painting, were in a state of spiritual renewal and were beginning to come closer to their objective (of conveying spirituality and turning away from materialism) by turning to the abstract, the elemental."<sup>84</sup> When discussing Kandinsky's sand paintings I firmly believe that spirituality, as defined in the introduction, played a major role in his decision to utilize the element of sand in his artworks.

In this chapter, I will discuss Kandinsky's use of sand and how it relates to his thoughts on spirituality. I will show that sand, paired with the new biological forms Kandinsky used in Paris, can be seen as a final quest for spiritual fulfillment and the desire to express the inner need

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<sup>84</sup> Düchting, 38.

of the artist. The phrase *inner need* was defined in Chapter Two, but it will be further discussed in this chapter through the analysis of Kandinsky's book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Examining this book will aid me in proving that Kandinsky's sand paintings contain deep spiritual meaning. By doing so, I will prove that Kandinsky's sand paintings are an important aspect of his Paris years. Previously, when discussing Kandinsky's Parisian period, scholars have focused on his use of biomorphic forms, but I believe that the use of sand underscores the spirituality in his artworks and thus that it was a tool to aid in the expression of his inner self.

In order to show that Kandinsky's use of sand is directly connected to his exploration of the spiritual world, I will first discuss Kandinsky's book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* in more depth and show how his thoughts on the spiritual affected his earlier works. This information is important to our discussion because it explains Kandinsky's thoughts and theories on spirituality, and that this theme of spirituality was the basis for all of his work. Then, I will discuss how his search for spiritual expression followed him throughout his entire art career, affected his overall oeuvre, and ultimately became the reason for introducing sand into his paintings in Paris.

In chapter one, I briefly examined Kandinsky's famous treatise, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, published during his years associated with *Der Blaue Reiter*. In this section, I would like to examine more closely the theories that Kandinsky expressed in this book, which will, in turn, aid in our discussion of how spirituality affected Kandinsky's work generally and, in particular, his sand paintings. Kandinsky produced this book as a result of his yearning to find the relationship between art and music, and he found himself in a world immersed in the spiritual. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* presents us with Kandinsky's ideas pertaining to the role that spirituality plays in art and the influence it has on the artist. This can be connected back to his use of sand because I firmly believe that sand was a tool that Kandinsky used in order to explore

spirituality through his Parisian works. This topic will be discussed in full later. But first, it is important to examine the beginnings of his search for spiritual expression. Then, and only then, will we be able to see a connection between spirituality and Kandinsky's use of sand.

In 1911, Kandinsky began his spiritual journey by closely focusing on theosophy. Scholar Peter Fingesten describes theosophy as follows:

A self-styled universal religion founded in New York in 1875, which aimed at a spiritual revitalization of the West. Its anti-rationalism had a certain appeal for those dissatisfied with the intense materialism and scientism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Theosophy offered instead a mystic, oriental interpretation of life and evolution. Theosophy taught the ancient Hindu doctrines of the interpenetration of the spiritual and physical realms; that the material appearance of nature is but an illusion (*maya*) and that there are several sheaths or bodies of progressively more spiritual matter within every individual.<sup>85</sup>

Kandinsky closely followed the ideas of Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891), who essentially started the theosophical movement, and even references her in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. He says, "The theory of Theosophy which serves as the basis to this movement (spiritual revolution) was set out by Blavatsky in the form of a catechism in which the pupil receives definite answers to his questions from the theosophical point of view."<sup>86</sup> Theosophy asked its followers to look beyond the physical world and, in so doing, to question their very being. Kandinsky was deeply influenced by this school of thought, and this influence can be seen in the following statement:

He maintained that abstract art represents the inner side of reality rather than the outer form, the esoteric rather than the exoteric. And he also maintained that because abstract art is concerned with the inner side, it could be a means for self-transformation.<sup>87</sup>

This quote shows that Kandinsky began to see a world other than the physical one that surrounded him. That is to say, he began to question reality and life, and wanted to explore the

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<sup>85</sup> Peter Fingesten, "Spirituality, Mysticism and Non-Objective Art," *Art Journal* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1961): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/774289?uid=3739808&uid=2134&uid=321414433&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3&uid=321414423&uid=3739256&uid=60&sid=21101593984633> (accessed January 14, 2013).

<sup>86</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 13.

<sup>87</sup> Dr. John Algeo, "Art, Kandinsky, and Self-Transformation," The Theosophical Society of England, <http://www.theosophical-society.org.uk/html/theosophy%20theosophist.html> (accessed January 11, 2013).

inner meaning of the world around him. He became very introspective and intellectual, which is essentially connected to spirituality.

Kandinsky wanted to use art to explore spirituality, or rather the non-material, and ultimately hoped that it would lead to a transformation within himself. Kandinsky's interest in theosophy went hand-in-hand with his realization that materialism, or rather worldly concerns, was holding humanity back. Kandinsky believed that materialism confined the soul and restricted the artist. He states, "The nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, useless game, is not yet past; it holds the awakening soul still in its grips." His disdain for materialism is clearly expressed throughout *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, as well as his opinions against *art for art's sake*. Materialism and art for art's sake are connected because they both focus on the physical world. For example, materiality is closely associated with figurative art. It shows reality for what it really is. Art for art's sake pertains to a piece of artwork simply created out of the desire to create art, not out of a desire to produce a meaningful piece of work or out of the desires of the artist's inner need. Kandinsky believed that art for art's sake is produced out of a neglect of the artist's inner need and showed a lack of artistic abilities.<sup>88</sup>

*Concerning the Spiritual in Art* is one of Kandinsky's most important written works, for it contains his in-depth look at how spirituality and art are intertwined. Kandinsky did not just produce this manuscript out of a desire to share his thoughts on spirituality. He had a very specific reason for writing it. When discussing the purpose of his book, Kandinsky states:

The purpose of my book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, as well as of *Der Blaue Reiter*, was to awaken the ability to experience the spiritual in material and abstract things. This ability is absolutely necessary for the future, and makes infinite variety of experiences

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<sup>88</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 3.

possible. The desire to bring out this joyful ability in people who don't have it was the main purpose of both publications.<sup>89</sup>

Kandinsky believed that the ability to see spirituality in everything was essential for growth of one's soul. For Kandinsky, spiritual expression in art meant that the artist's soul justified the work of art.

In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky centers everything on what he calls the "inner need." He first introduces this concept when discussing color harmony. He says that "it is evident therefore that colour harmony must rest only on a corresponding vibration in the human soul; and this is one of the guiding principles of the inner need."<sup>90</sup> Kandinsky never fully defines the inner need for us, but tells us that it is important to an artist and his or her art. I would like to go back to the definition of inner need that I gave in Chapter Two as defined by Sadler:

The phrase 'inner need' means primarily the impulse felt by the artist for spiritual expression. Kandinsky is apt, however, to use the phrase sometimes to mean not only the hunger for spiritual expression, but also the actual expression itself.<sup>91</sup>

I agree with Sadler that this is what Kandinsky meant by the phrase the inner need. However, I think that this quote can be elaborated upon. To spiritually express oneself in art means to completely turn away from a material existence and to think about the world in terms of the artist's soul. The impulse felt by the artist is the inner need. Kandinsky believed that an artist's inner need is pertinent to any art production and that art and spirituality cannot survive without each other. He states, "The spiritual life, to which art belongs and of which she is one of the mightiest elements, is a complicated but definite and easily definable movement forwards and upwards."<sup>92</sup> In other words, the spiritual life was a movement forward, away from materiality, and towards a more intellectual way of thinking. The whole point of Kandinsky's work during

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<sup>89</sup> Kandinsky, as quoted in Düchting, 40.

<sup>90</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 26.

<sup>91</sup> Sadler, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 26.

<sup>92</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 4.

this time was to turn away from materiality, which he believed was destroying the human soul. Materialism, for Kandinsky meant the opposite of the spiritual. In other words, materialism was concerned with humanistic concerns and not with the well-being of the soul. Kandinsky thought that the soul desired a more spiritual way of thinking. This pull towards a more spiritual way of thinking is considered a part of the inner need of the artist. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky discusses this desire to express one's inner need throughout his entire book, and he explains how music, color and form are important tools to accomplish this goal. I will discuss each of these here.

Music was always important to Kandinsky, even at a very early age. Kandinsky was an accomplished musician and played the cello and the piano.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, he claimed that music allowed for the self to connect with the spiritual. We can see the evidence of an interest in music in his early career due to the fact that most of his first abstract paintings were named using musical terms such as *composition, improvisation and lyrical*. The realization that music and spirituality were synonymous opened his world to the idea that everything could be linked to the spiritual. This is important to our discussion of sand because if Kandinsky realized that everything could be linked to the spiritual, then why could it not be linked to extraneous materials also?

The second topic that I want to focus on in Kandinsky's treatise is the topic of color. Color was extremely important to Kandinsky, especially during his time in Munich, and I touched upon this in Chapter One. But, here I would like to explore this topic in more depth. For Kandinsky, color held the key to the spiritual world, and each color had its own spiritual significance. Color, much like music, was a tool that enabled him to express his inner need. Concerning color, Kandinsky states:

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<sup>93</sup> Sadler, "Introduction," in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, v.

To let the eye stray over a palette, splashed with many colours, produces a dual result. In the first place one receives a purely physical impression, one of pleasure and contentment at the varied and beautiful colours. The eye is either warmed or else soothed and cooled. But these physical sensations can only be of short duration. They are merely superficial and leave no lasting impression, for the soul is unaffected. But although the effect of the colours is forgotten when the eye is turned away, the superficial impression of varied colour may be the starting point of a whole chain of related sensations.<sup>94</sup>

This quote by Kandinsky reaffirms that color was an instrument that he used in order to express his inner need and to connect with the spiritual world. Color can evoke various different sensations from the viewer. If we look back to Kandinsky's Munich paintings, it is easy to see that he was obsessed with bold and vibrant colors (look back to figure 7). For Kandinsky, color was the aspect of a painting that was able to leave a lasting impression on the viewer. Furthermore, Kandinsky believed that each color had its own meaning and significance, and he explains this in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. A psychic effect can be found within each color and each color produces a related spiritual vibration in the soul.<sup>95</sup> In his book, Kandinsky broke down each color into different emotional responses and states:

yellow is the typically earthly colour. It can never have profound meaning. The power of profound meaning is found in blue. Blue is the typically heavenly colour. The ultimate feeling it creates is one of rest. Green is the most restful colour that exists. On exhausted men this restfulness has beneficial effect, but after a time it becomes wearisome. The varied powers of red are very striking. By a skillful use of it in its different shades, its fundamental tone may be made warm or cold.<sup>96</sup>

Color allowed Kandinsky to represent each of these emotions on canvas and it allowed him to provoke these emotions in the viewer, thus creating a spiritual experience between the viewer and the art. He wanted the viewer to connect with art through the soul. We will later see that Kandinsky used sand in a similar fashion. However, Kandinsky did not intend for the sand to

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<sup>94</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 23.

<sup>95</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 24.

<sup>96</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 38-40.

provoke a specific emotion in the viewer, like he used color. Rather, Kandinsky used sand as a way to give the viewer a spiritual experience, which I will discuss later.

*Form* is the third aspect that I would like to explore in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. The discussion of form is pertinent to Kandinsky's use of sand because, as stated earlier, it was a tool that Kandinsky used for spiritual expression in his artworks. Later, we will see that in Paris Kandinsky used the pairing of forms and sand to achieve his goal of spiritual expression.

Returning to form, Kandinsky states: "Painting has two weapons at her disposal: Colour and Form. Form can stand alone as representing an object (either real or otherwise) or as a purely abstract limit to a space or a surface. Colour cannot stand alone; it cannot dispense with boundaries of some kind."<sup>97</sup> The purpose of form is to bestow a boundary for color to exist within, and according to Kandinsky, form also contains dual meaning. He says that "form in the narrow sense, is nothing but the separating line between surfaces of colour. That is its outer meaning. But it also has an inner meaning, and, properly speaking, form is the outward expression of this inner meaning."<sup>98</sup> Form and color, according to Kandinsky are essentially dependent upon on each other. This is significant to note because later I will show how Kandinsky's use of sand is dependent on his use of biomorphic forms. The forms emphasize his use of sand as well as underscore the spirituality of his paintings. To return to color and form, when discussing these two entities and their relationship to one another, Kandinsky states:

This essential connection between colour and form brings us to the questions of influences of form on colour. Form alone, even though totally abstract and geometrical, has a power of inner suggestion. A triangle (without the accessory consideration of its being acute- or obtuse-angled or equilateral) has a spiritual value of its own. In connection with other forms, this value may be somewhat modified, but remains in quality the same. The case is similar with a circle, a square, or any conceivable geometrical figure. As above, with the red, we have here a subjective substance in an objective shell. The mutual influence of form and colour now becomes clear. A yellow

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<sup>97</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 28.

<sup>98</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 29.

triangle, a blue circle, a green square, or a green triangle, a yellow circle, a blue square – all these are different and have different spiritual values.<sup>99</sup>

So, in essence, Kandinsky sees that form can evoke emotion on the viewer, just like color does. However, color depends greatly on form to give it meaning, and furthermore, when form and color work together, they have the ability to create immense spiritual meaning and the ability to free the artist from a material existence that once held him in its chains.

Kandinsky's thoughts on spirituality deeply affected his artwork not only during his years in Munich, but throughout his entire career. For example, during his years at the Bauhaus, he used geometric forms, especially the circle, and simplified compositions express spirituality in his artworks. Therefore, in order to fully understand the spirituality that can be found in his sand paintings it is important to first discuss how spirituality affected his overall work in Paris. This connection will show that the sand emphasizes the spirituality found in his work. If we look at his paintings during this decade, it is undeniable that he was partial to forms in nature and biology. Let us take a look at his painting titled *Black Forms on White* (1934). Here we can see that he has begun to incorporate biological shapes into his work (see figure 29). Each form takes on animalistic characteristics and shows the influence of Surrealism. I do not want to overlook the possibility that the prevalence of Surrealism could be a reason for Kandinsky's use of biological forms. However I believe that there is a larger purpose behind his use of these new forms, which was a desire to produce paintings through spiritual expression. Through the discussion of the presence of biological forms in his work, we can link his Parisian paintings, and ultimately his sand paintings, to the notion of the spiritual. I see this as a logical way to discuss Kandinsky's sand paintings because he first produced paintings that incorporated the biomorphic forms and later he added the sand to them. The sand emphasized the spirituality of the painting

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<sup>99</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 28-29.

by its juxtaposition with the biomorphic forms. Historian Christian Zervos believes that Kandinsky's Paris works show an undeniable influence of nature, which can be seen in the forms and the lightness of his work. I believe that Zervos is correct in assuming that nature and organic forms influenced Kandinsky, and I believe that this is further underscored with his use of sand. The sand represents nature because of its very being. It is a part of nature and Kandinsky used this aspect of nature in a very clean, precise manner in order to express spirituality in his work.<sup>100</sup>

Kandinsky was particularly interested in the human sciences. Kandinsky was familiar with *Die Kultur der Gegenwart* (The Culture of the Present), which was a human encyclopedia and, many of the images that he saw in the encyclopedia show up in his paintings during the Paris years.<sup>101</sup>

Yet, upon his arrival in Paris, Kandinsky became obsessed with a new goal in painting: to make the invisible visible. However, I believe that this theme does not make spirituality less important to him, but rather, it only underscores his desire for deeper spiritual meaning. Making the invisible visible can be seen as Kandinsky bringing the spiritual to a more tangible level and making it accessible to all. Hilton Kramer discusses Kandinsky's new goals saying:

It was to be the paradoxical function of abstract painting, as Kandinsky envisioned it, to make the invisible visible. (Paul Klee once said something similar about his own aims as an artist.) But now the realm of the invisible to which painting addressed itself was no longer to be discovered exclusively in the world of mind or spirit. Nature, too— or at least those aspects of nature which scientists studied with the camera and the microscope—was found to harbor a vast repository of images which are more or less invisible to the naked eye and thus lie well beyond the world of material appearances which Kandinsky had long before banished from his painting. And it was very largely upon this repository of hidden images in nature—which, in the use he made of them in

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<sup>100</sup> I would like to note that I am not making nature synonymous with the spiritual. Nature itself is not spiritual, but I do feel as though making a connection with nature can produce a spiritual experience with the human soul and cause someone to become introspective and contemplate life.

<sup>101</sup> Vivian Endicott Barnett, "Kandinsky and Science: The Introduction of Biological Images in the Paris Period," in *Biocentrism and Modernism*, ed. Oliver Arpad Istvan Botar and Isabel Vünsche (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2011), 207-219.

his painting, came to signify for Kandinsky a new synthesis of art, life, and spirit— that the work of his final years was based.<sup>102</sup>

I would like to note that here I equate the realm of the invisible with the spiritual. The spiritual refers to anything beyond the world of material appearances. Kandinsky's quest to make the invisible visible led him to explore nature and how it can be incorporated into his paintings. This exploration ultimately led to his use of a technical innovation that became the focus of this thesis: his addition of sand.

Spirituality should be considered in order to understand Kandinsky's use of sand. For him, painting was seen as "a power, which must be directed to the development and refinement of the human soul, to raising of the spiritual triangle."<sup>103</sup> Through the discussion of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, we know that spirituality was important to Kandinsky, throughout his career and was a reoccurring theme that stayed with him until his death. In a letter written in Berlin in 1932 shortly before his first sand painting Kandinsky states:

Art is never produced by the head alone. We know of great paintings that came solely from the heart. In general, the ideal balance between the head (conscious moment) and the heart (unconscious moment – intuition) is a law of creation, a law as old as humanity.<sup>104</sup>

Kandinsky believed that every work of art an artist produced came from the soul. If Kandinsky believed that art was never produced by the head alone, then that means that all aspects of a painting (materials, composition, and color) were also not produced by the head alone, but by a balance of both head and soul. Therefore, sand was an instrument Kandinsky used to dispense out his inner desires onto the canvas and express his soul. It allowed him to once again make a

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<sup>102</sup> Kramer, <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Kandinsky-in-Paris-6878>.

<sup>103</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 54.

<sup>104</sup> Kandinsky, "Art Today," in *Kandinsky: The Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (Boston, Mass: G.K. Hall Co., 1982), 771.

spiritual connection with his art, and it was a decision that was made by exploring his inner soul just like he used the elements of music, color and form as instruments of spiritual expression.

Although Kandinsky does not discuss sand in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and the use of it would not come until two decades later, there are many statements that Kandinsky makes in his book that lead me to believe that sand was a tool that Kandinsky used in order to express spirituality in his paintings. For example, Kandinsky states:

Colours are used not because they are true to nature, but because they are necessary to the particular picture. In fact, the artist is not only justified in using, but it is his duty to use only those forms which fulfill his *own need*. Absolute freedom, whether from autonomy or anything of the kind, must be given the artist in his choice of material. Such spiritual freedom is as necessary in art as it is in life.<sup>105</sup>

Kandinsky expressed absolute freedom in his paintings by taking advantage of the idea that he had a free choice of materials. Sand was a necessary addition to the select paintings that were discussed in Chapter Two in that they allowed him spiritual freedom.<sup>106</sup> Kandinsky was justified in using sand because this particular material spoke to his inner need and satisfied his desire to express his inner need on the canvas, which is what he believed was the true purpose of the artist. Now, the question remains, why sand? I will discuss two possible answers (although there may be more) in what remains of this thesis. The first deals with the idea that sand symbolizes the Earth and its connection to the human soul, and the second deals with the idea that sand is comprised of tiny *points*, which, as we will see, was a very significant form to Kandinsky.

I believe that Kandinsky used sand to literally symbolize the Earth, after sand *is* earth. Furthermore, the new visual imagery Kandinsky explored in his Parisian works suggests the human body, animals and nature. Together these two entities suggest human life and how it relates to the spiritual, something that Kandinsky always looked for. In short, the influence of

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<sup>105</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 53.

<sup>106</sup> We may never know why sand was the only extraneous material that he chose to work with in Paris, and this question would require a more extensive analysis.

nature on Kandinsky directly reflects his views on spirituality. By making the connection with Kandinsky's use of sand and his thoughts on spirituality I show that, despite their clear difference from his earlier works, his sand paintings reaffirm all of his thoughts on the spiritual and connect all of his work together. It is imperative to make this connection because it shows that Kandinsky's theory on the spiritual aspects of art, as well as his theory concerning the point discussed in Chapter Two, gives meaning to his sand paintings that has been previously overlooked.

*Point and Line to Plane* establishes Kandinsky's interest in scientific and natural phenomena, which can be viewed as an extension of his earlier book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. This latter book focuses on Kandinsky's color theory as it pertained to the significance of each color and each color's level of spirituality. But, when Kandinsky took up his position at the Bauhaus School in 1922, he focused his efforts on theory pertaining to geometry and the basic elements of art. Through the discussion of Kandinsky's book *Point and Line to Plane*, published during his Bauhaus years, I will further shed light on the meaning and importance of his use of sand during his Parisian years. While at the Bauhaus, Kandinsky examined the basic elements of drawing such as line, point, and surface, and I will show that his use of sand is rooted in his theory of the point, a topic that has never been discussed by historians of Kandinsky's work, and this theory alone makes my research important.

Kandinsky's interest in science began early in his Bauhaus career. This interest followed him to Paris, where Kandinsky became even more concerned with the biological sciences. Vivian Endicott Barnett has written an essay that explains the significance of biology to Kandinsky during his Parisian years and how it affected his artworks. When discussing Kandinsky's use of biomorphic forms, she states:

The artist contrasts circular, square, and rectangular forms with four distinctly amoeboid shapes whose amorphousness is immediately remarkable and innovative. In fact, Kandinsky introduced images of amoebas – a simple unicellular form of life – into his paintings in 1934. It is especially significant that this most elemental stage of life depicted in a work of art titled *Start*. The concurrence of image and meaning cannot be accidental.<sup>107</sup>

This quote is important because even though *Start* is not one of his sand paintings, it shows that Kandinsky started his Paris paintings with a concern for biological forms and nature.

In 1934, Kandinsky created his first artwork that incorporated sand. His use of sand stemmed from not only a growing interest in biology and nature but also from his continued interest in geometry. The latter can be found in Kandinsky's book *Point and Line to Plane*. This book shows that Kandinsky's use of sand is more than just an added element of texture, but rather a tool that allowed him to further explore geometry and its connection with nature and the spiritual.

In *Point and Line to Plane*, Kandinsky examines the purpose of a *point* and its significance in art. He states:

Purely theoretical, the point, which is a complex (of size and shape) and a sharply circumscribed unity should in certain cases constitute a sufficient means of expression by being juxtaposed with the surface. Considered quite schematically, a work of art can consist ultimately of one point. This should not be regarded as just an idle assertion.<sup>108</sup>

For him, the point represents an appropriate way to express the inner need, or rather the desire to express the immaterial, by being juxtaposed with the surface. Alone, the point may not have much significance. But, when intertwined with form, color, and composition, the point then adds to the overall spirituality of the painting. It does this because of what the point symbolizes, which is something I will discuss later.

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<sup>107</sup> Barnett, "Kandinsky and Science: The Introduction of Biological Images in the Paris Period," 208.

<sup>108</sup> Kandinsky, "Point and Line to Plane," in *Kandinsky: The Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vero (Boston, Mass: G.K. Hall Co., 1982), 554.

Kandinsky explains how the point is the most concise form, which means that regardless of its size or relation to other objects on the canvas, this form contains immense meaning, an idea to which I will later return. Not only is the point the most concise form, but this form can be found in everything from art and music to dance and nature, which is significant because it shows that Kandinsky saw how prevalent it was in nature and deemed it important and gave it value. He writes:

In another, undifferentiated realm – that of nature – accumulations of points often occur, and they are invariably purposive and organically necessary. The forms of nature are in reality tiny particles in space and bear the same relation to the abstract (geometrical) point as does the pictorial point. Admittedly, the entire “world” can, on the other hand, be regarded as a self-contained, cosmic composition, which itself consists of innumerable, independent, hermetic compositions, getting smaller and smaller, and which – large or small – were ultimately created from points. Many seeds look like this, and if we open the handsome, smoothly polished, ivory seed-case of the poppy (which is ultimately a large, spherical point), we find within this warm sphere an accumulation of cold blue-gray dots, organized into a compositional structure and carrying within themselves their latent, reproductive force, just like the pictorial point. When one considers the desert is a sea of sand, composed exclusively of points, then it’s not surprising that the indomitable, storm-driven mobility of these “dead” points produces a frightening affect. In nature, too, the point is an introverted entity pregnant with possibilities.<sup>109</sup>

Here, Kandinsky makes reference to the point and how it manifests itself in nature. Kandinsky, in turn, used the idea that the point can be found in nature and applied it to his paintings (i.e. he used sand because it represents ‘points’ in nature). By its very physical nature, the sand represents the point, or rather several points. Each tiny grain of sand takes the form of a point. For Kandinsky, the point has a special significance to the artist. He explains that each point has an “inner force” and that it is undeniable that this force directly influences the consciousness of the artist.<sup>110</sup> I would like to discuss the idea of an “inner force” here. When Kandinsky uses this phrase, I believe he means that this form has the ability to draw the artist’s inner need out on to the canvas. Kandinsky states:

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<sup>109</sup> Kandinsky, “Point and Line to Plane,” in *Kandinsky: The Complete Writings on Art*, 554.

<sup>110</sup> Kandinsky, “Point and Line to Plane,” in *Kandinsky: The Complete Writings on Art*, 556.

The artist must have something to say, for mastery over form is not his goal but rather the adapting of form to its inner meaning. Naturally this does not mean that the artist is to instill forcibly into his work some deliberate meaning. As has been said the generation of a work of art is a mystery. So long as artistry exists there is no need of theory or logic to direct the painter's action. The inner voice of the soul tells him what form he needs, whether inside or outside nature. Every artist knows, who works with feeling, how suddenly the right form flashes upon him. The true work of art must be like an inspiration; that actual painting, composition, etc., are not the steps by which the artist reaches self-expression.<sup>111</sup>

Now, let us apply this quote to the idea that the form of the point has an inner force. The inner force of the form is what connects to the inner soul of the artist. This connection appears suddenly to an artist, just like sand appeared suddenly in Kandinsky's work in 1934 and disappeared by 1936. The only way to explain this phenomenon is to say that the point was a form that caused vibrations in his soul during these few years. If each point has an inner force, and the sand represents several tiny points, then by default sand contains an inner force as well. The inner force of the sand and the sand itself is used by Kandinsky as a way to further express his inner need, or rather his longing for spiritual expression, as an artist. This idea makes his use of sand an important aspect of his career, and shows that a very specific purpose lies behind his use of sand. The sand was a tool that Kandinsky used to further connect his paintings to the spiritual realm. Through the discussion of the history of sand in modern European art and the discussion of both *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line to Plane*, we can see that – in other words – there was a theory behind Kandinsky's use of sand. The theory can be found in the significance of the point as well as the significance of spirituality to Kandinsky.

In essence, Kandinsky's sand is more than just an added element of texture. By stating this, I am not saying that Picasso, Braque, Masson, or Miró's addition of sand was insignificant, I am simply saying that the way Kandinsky treated sand was much different, as we saw in Chapter Two. The addition of sand to Kandinsky's paintings adds an element of theory that

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<sup>111</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 54.

demonstrates the point as being a basic unit of life (i.e. arts, nature, etc.). Even though his book *Point and Line to Plane* discusses geometry and theory it still contains an element of the spiritual. In *Point and Line to Plane* Kandinsky divides artists into two categories: “Those people who recognize, apart from the material, the nonmaterial or spiritual, and those who are not prepared to recognize anything other than the material. For the second category, art cannot exist.”<sup>112</sup> This quote shows that everything that Kandinsky does is rooted in the spiritual.

This theory paired with Kandinsky’s biomorphic forms that he introduced to his paintings in Paris makes it hard to deny an underlying message in Kandinsky’s use of sand. He explored life and the universe, as well as the inner desires of the artist. The addition of this material made it possible for Kandinsky to explore his theory of the point on a whole new level and implement it into his paintings, and finally to achieve a different level of spirituality.

On a theoretical level sand symbolized the point. On a spiritual level, sand signified the Earth, and Kandinsky became very in tune with the Earth in his quest for the rejection of materiality. As stated earlier, Kandinsky leaned towards forms that resembled biology, which is an important piece of the puzzle. His use of sand shows the spiritual connection between the Earth and the human life. This seems like a far-fetched idea, but when we look at Kandinsky’s Parisian works, it is all very clear that sand plays a much larger role in Kandinsky’s work than previously believed. The amoeba-like forms of his Paris works can be seen as a representation of biology, and essentially the human life. When these two things (sand and biomorphic forms) are juxtaposed, then and only then, are we able to see that Kandinsky’s quest for the spiritual manifests itself once again during his years in Paris. For Kandinsky, “a work of art was always born, therefore of ‘internal necessity’ and comprised a spiritual message.”<sup>113</sup> Art always has a

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<sup>112</sup> Kandinsky, “Point and Line to Plane,” in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, 548.

<sup>113</sup> McDonnell, 27.

spiritual message and sand allowed him to express this message at this particular time in his career.

Kandinsky desired to achieve a greater spiritual meaning in his art. This desire followed him throughout his career. For example, we see in his Munich years he experimented with colors and explored their spiritual significance. At the Bauhaus, he focused more closely on geometric forms in order to achieve his goal of finding ways to express spiritual meaning in his art. Upon his arrival in Paris, he looked for more ways to achieve this goal, and sand allowed him to do so. Through the exploration of biomorphic forms and the addition of sand in his paintings, I believe that Kandinsky achieved a greater spiritual resonance in his work. As such, the Paris years should be viewed as the apex of his career and a final display of spirituality that he explored for most of his life.

## CONCLUSION

The previous chapters have shown that Kandinsky's use of sand was rooted in both his theory of the point found in *Point and Line to Plane* and his thoughts on spirituality found in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Spirituality played a major role in Kandinsky's Parisian works and spirituality was responsible for his abstract works and the addition of sand.

Frank Stella believes that the paintings in Kandinsky's Paris period attempt to go beyond the two-dimensional universe of abstract art. He finds that Kandinsky managed to create a new type of pictorial space without, however, reverting to traditional perspective and three-dimensional illusionism.<sup>114</sup> This quote by Stella can be applied to Kandinsky's sand paintings and shows that these paintings are not only a display of his technical abilities, but also the idea that they are tied to his other works through the spiritual, or more specifically the artist's soul.

Kandinsky's use of sand shows us that he was constantly searching for new ways to explore spirituality in art. His sand paintings are only a tiny sliver of his long art career, but they are important to understanding Kandinsky's overall work. These artworks show that there was a theory behind his use of sand. Because theory lies in his decision to utilize sand, weight is given to the importance of it and why this research was and is necessary. Kandinsky was not the first artist to add this element to his art, but nonetheless it is important to discuss this aspect of Kandinsky's work because it was uncharacteristic of him.

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<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Derouet, 33.

In 1931, artist Diego Rivera, admirer of Kandinsky's work stated, "Kandinsky's art is not a reflection of life, but life itself."<sup>115</sup> For Kandinsky, sand was another way to bring his paintings to life and to further explore spirituality through his art. By using sand, Kandinsky added an important pictorial component to his newfound style in Paris. This component further emphasized his quest for the spiritual. Perhaps, other historians will be able to take this research and further explore Kandinsky's sand paintings in order to truly understand his Parisian years and make Kandinsky's final years an important aspect of the art history curriculum.

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<sup>115</sup> Grohmann, 242.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

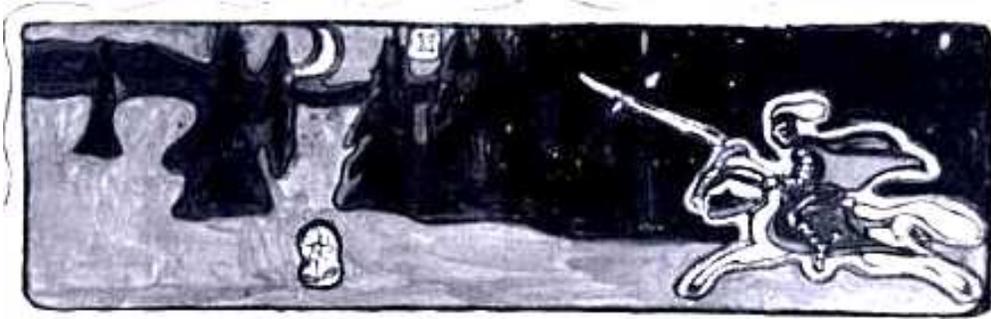


Figure 1. Wassily Kandinsky, *Twilight*, tempera with color crayon, silver and bronze on cardboard, 1901. private collection.



Figure 2. Wassily Kandinsky, *Sunday (Old Russia)*, oil on canvas, 1904. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam



Figure 3. Wassily Kandinsky *Colourful Life*, tempera on canvas, 1907. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany.

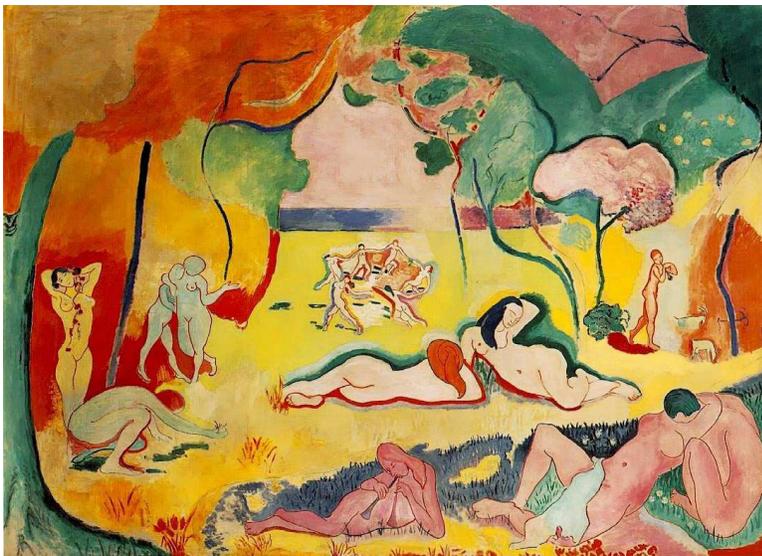


Figure 4. Henri Matisse, *Joy of Life*, oil on canvas, 1905-06. The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

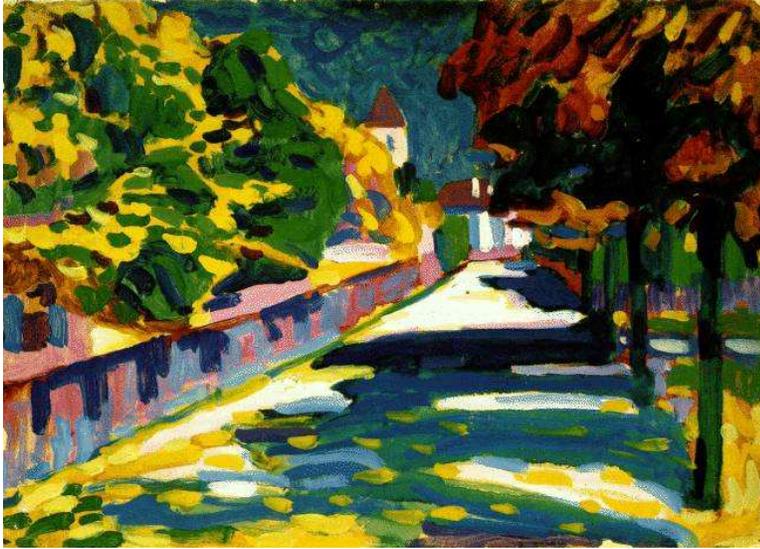


Figure 5. Wassily Kandinsky, *Autumn in Bavaria*, oil on cardboard, 1908. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 6. Wassily Kandinsky, *Impression V*, oil on canvas, 1911. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 7. Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition IV*, oil on canvas, 1911. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf.



Figure 8. Kazimir Malevich, *The Aviator*, oil on canvas, 1914. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 9. Vladimir Tatlin, *Board Number 1*, oil on canvas, 1916. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



Figure 10. Wassily Kandinsky, *Red Oval*, oil on canvas, 1920. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Figure 11. Wassily Kandinsky, *Multicolored Circle*, oil on canvas, 1912. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.



Figure 12. Wassily Kandinsky, *Red Spot II*, oil on canvas, 1921, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.

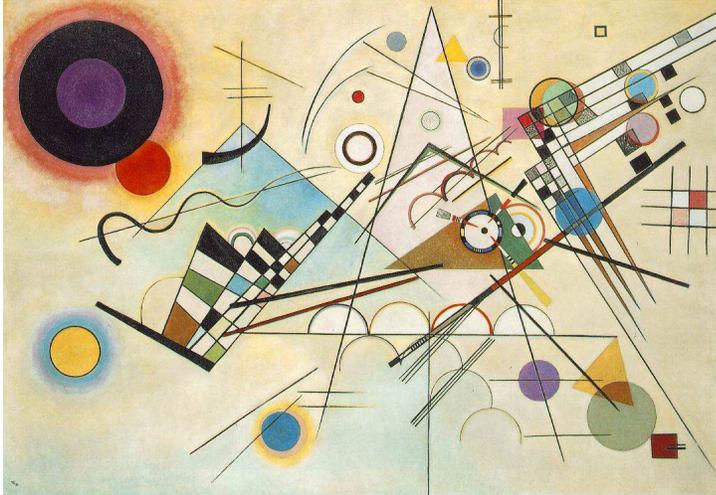


Figure 13. Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VIII*, oil on canvas, 1912. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Figure 14. Wassily Kandinsky, *Each for Itself*, mixed media, 1934). Private Collection.



Figure 15. Joan Miró, *Harlequin's Carnival*, oil on canvas 1924 -25. Albright-Knox Gallery, New York.



Figure 16. Vincent van Gogh, *Fishing Boats at Sea* (right) and detail (left), oil on canvas, 1888. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

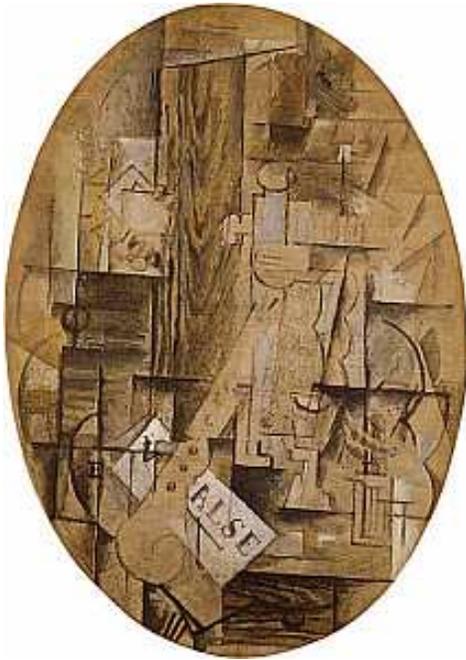


Figure 17. Georges Braque, *The Clarinet* (*La Clarinette*), oil with sand on fine linen canvas, 1912. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Figure 18. Pablo Picasso, *Verre et Pipe*, oil, sand and India Ink on canvas, 1918. Private Collection.



Figure 19. André Masson, *Battle of Fishes*, sand, gesso, oil, pencil and charcoal on canvas, 1926. Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 20. Joan Miró, *Deux Personnages*, oil, enamel, nails, ball bearings, cheesecloth, string, and sand on cardboard, 1935. The Kreeger Museum, Washington, D. C.

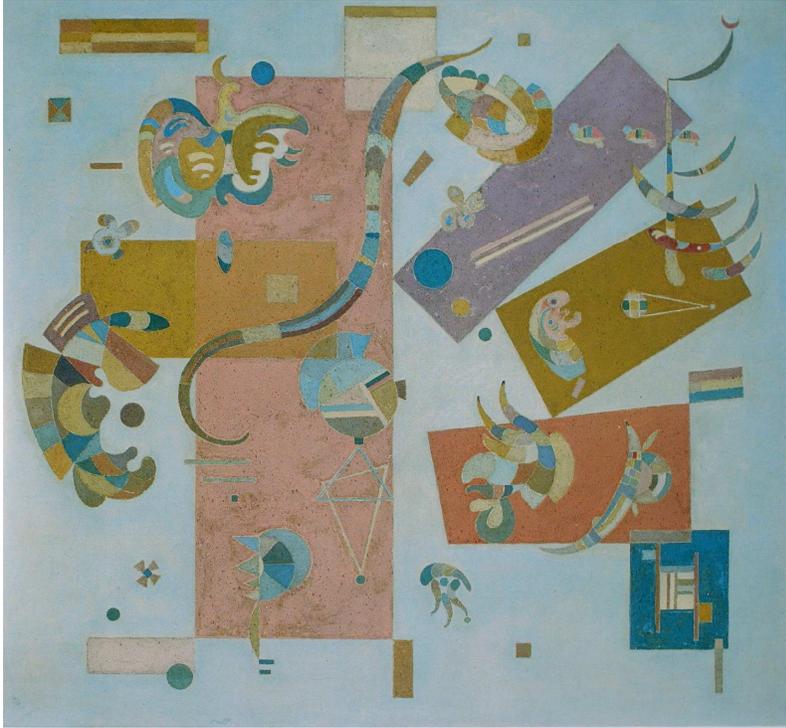


Figure 21. Wassily Kandinsky, *Blue World*, oil and sand on canvas. 1934. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Figure 22. Kandinsky, *Dominant Violet*, oil and sand on canvas, 1934. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Figure 23. Wassily Kandinsky, *Relations* oil and sand on canvas, 1934. The Kreeger Museum, Washington, D.C.

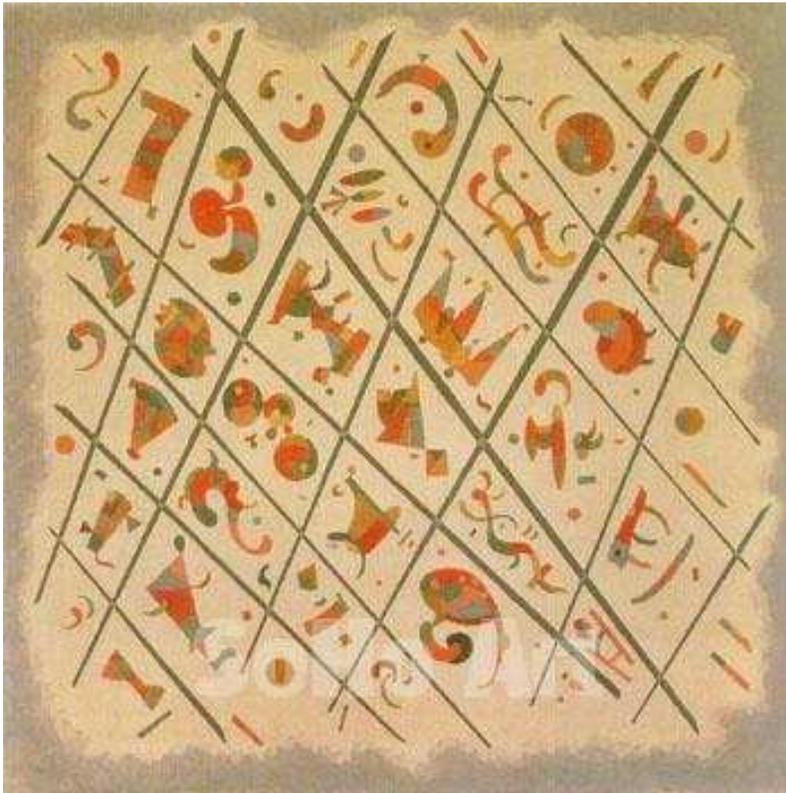


Figure 24. Wassily Kandinsky, *Division-Unity*, oil and sand on canvas, 1934. Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo.



Figure 25. Kandinsky, *Striped*, oil and sand on canvas, 1934. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Figure 26. Wassily Kandinsky, *Accompanied Contrast*, oil and sand on canvas, 1935. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Figure 27. Wassily Kandinsky, *Balancing Act*, oil and sand on canvas, 1935. Private Collection.

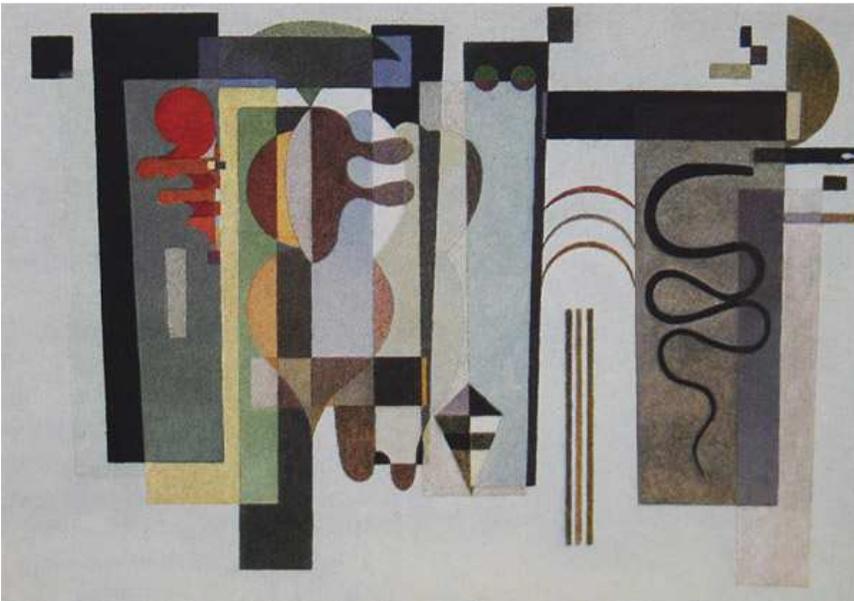


Figure 28. Wassily Kandinsky, *Two Green Points*, oil and sand on canvas, 1935. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Figure 29. Wassily Kandinsky, *White Forms on Black*, oil on canvas, 1934. Private Collection.

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