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Kandinsky and I go back a long way. My mother was an artist and an avid reader, and she had an extensive library of art books. I started delving into them while I was still really young—around 8 or 9, I think—and Kandinsky was one of the first artists whose works struck an inarticulate chord somewhere deep inside me. (Immediately after writing that last sentence, I realized how strangely “Kandinskian” it is. It plays off two of his more important ideas: the mysteries of internal necessity, and the deep connection between art and music.)

At the time and for many years after, I was most interested in his later, more geometric works. I was impressed by what I saw as their rationality, and blissfully unaware of his ideas on art and spirit. To me those works looked like tomorrow’s illuminated manuscripts, quietly intoning the secret language of a mysterious future technology. I wasn’t a fan of his looser paintings, and tended to ignore them or dismiss them as early fumbling. I’m pretty sure that this take on his work was shaped by a strong childhood love for the fiddly geometric textures I saw in a lot of science fiction art during the late 1970s, particularly the starship illustrations of Angus McKie, the film design sketches of Ralph McQuarrie, and the matte paintings of Harrison and Peter Ellenshaw.

I didn’t discover Kandinsky’s writings until college. At first, I strongly preferred *Point and Line to Plane*, because its sharp-edged illustrations and fussiness over fine points of detail (how is *this* angle qualitatively different from *this* slightly wider angle?) fit well with my earlier appraisal of his works. Eventually, though, I warmed up to *On the Spiritual in Art*, in the old translation by M.T.H. Sadler. This happened right around the time I first became interested in comparative religion and philosophy (and the common late-adolescent tagalongs, occultism and fringe thought). At that point, I was ripe to let his ideas on internal necessity and the secret language of the soul do their work on me. In the end, I didn’t accept his arguments as being broadly applicable to either art or spirit; many of his assertions on the meaning of shape and color fall apart the second you look at art from anywhere outside the world of post-classical European culture that formed the tunnel for his particular vision.

Still, Kandinsky has always kept murmuring somewhere in the back of my head, and his ideas form a small but important part of my conceptual tool kit. At SVA, I teach a course about the influence of magical and meditative traditions on artmaking throughout history. Kandinsky is the cornerstone of a session on the role played by Theosophy and Anthroposophy in the rise of abstract painting, a topic once ignored almost completely by most academics.

Although many people probably think of Kandinsky's ideas as quaint and charming in a nostalgic, old-timey Modernist way, they still have a lot of life left in them, and they have a way of popping up in unexpected places. A few months ago, I discovered an illustrated Indian edition of Sadler's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, in which a critic from Delhi named Rajesh Kumar Shukla presents his own comments on the book, and then interprets the works of thirteen modern and contemporary Indian painters and sculptors in light of Kandinsky's beliefs. I also know of at least one self-professed Western avatar (Adi Da Samraj, a.k.a. Franklin Jones) whose abstract paintings and digital images of divine awareness have been discussed in relation to Kandinsky's theories. Da's inclusion in the 2007 Venice Biennale and a recent exhibition of his works at Sundaram Tagore Gallery in Chelsea say a lot about the surprising vigor and adaptability of Kandinsky's century-old arguments. I suspect we'll have them to kick around for a long time to come.