

## Concerning the Pleasure in Art

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My academic training is primarily in philosophy, especially aesthetic theory and German philosophy.

In returning to Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* I find that I cannot help but think of pleasure. I certainly don't mean the pleasure of reading the text, which is too strident and didactic, not to mention urgent, to afford much of that. And so I think pleasure in relation to the spiritual [*das Geistige*] not as some argument in favor of, or as an addendum to spirit—something pleasant heaped atop something else—but rather I'm convinced that pleasure has an absolutely emphatic identity with spirit. I take spirit in the same vein as Kandinsky, as referring to whatever it is that animates a thing, and by extension, what is best and most alive in it. Regardless what other names we use to identify the liveliest feature of a live thing, call it soul, mind, heart, etc., the thing we are most after is that which is and makes a thing alive. Thinkers as diverse as Edmund Burke and Friedrich Nietzsche acknowledged that life, in the forms it takes among human beings, cannot feel its own aliveness. Put differently: spirit cannot know itself, indeed it may not even have much of a sense of itself, let alone a grip on it. The urgency of Kandinsky's *Spiritual* text is thus for me the urgency of spirit itself. In other words, I read him symptomatically, or one what might just as well say: spirit reads itself sympathetically.

Kandinsky makes urgent the demand that spirit take its rightful place in the work of art, and by extension in human life. He wants art not only to be alive but for spirit to become the primary and pervasive feature of every new work of art. His call is for the reanimation of art and life. What else matters in the face of that need?

Pleasure is the feeling of spirit as well as what spirit feels like. Pleasure *feels* not so much like the state of merely being alive as it is instead the feeling of something more than existence. That more, which is what might also be called aesthetic pleasure, is the feeling of life acknowledging its own existence as something beyond mere life, as spirit, as that which inheres in and makes human life possible. Kandinsky's call for an embrace of abstraction in art is premised upon the acknowledgement that heretofore existing works of representational art could no longer sufficiently nourish contemporary spirit. But so too is abstraction an especially apt vehicle for spirit since it too shies away from the mistaken identification of life with any static, recognizable form.