Introduction: why does Der Blaue Reiter still matter?

Dorothy Price and Christopher Short

It is well over a hundred years since the editors of the *Blaue Reiter* (Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc) curated their first group exhibition in December 1911 in Munich and published what turned out to be their only group 'manifesto', the almanac of Der Blaue Reiter. Yet the legacy and impact of what the small group of artists in the circle of Kandinsky, Münter, Marc, Klee and Macke achieved in the few years preceding the outbreak of war in 1914 is immense. As a major artistic grouping of modernism, the artists associated with Der Blaue Reiter were pioneers of abstraction and it is worth outlining in some detail how they began, what they achieved, and why their almanac is central to the significance of what they stood for, before considering what this particular book contributes to their understanding, legacies and impact – and why this volume is based on the premise that Der Blaue Reiter still matters.

The origins of Der Blaue Reiter

On 2 December 1911, the selection jury of the Munich New Artists' Association (Neue Künstlervereinigung München, NKVM) rejected an artwork by Kandinsky (figure 1.1). *Composition V* was turned down for exhibition by the artist's own organization for the professed reason that the painting exceeded the size limits that were written into the association's statutes. However, as many scholars have observed, there was also a clear feeling among NKVM members that *Composition V* had veered too far towards abstraction (misunderstood by the jury as decoration), and that painting should maintain a closer, material connection to the visible world. As Leah Dickerman has commented, '*Komposition V* presented a radically new picture type and initiated the assault on referential form that would occur over the next year' in Kandinsky's practice as both painter and theorist: '*Concerning the Spiritual in Art* was published in the same month that *Komposition V* was unveiled' and 'the combination had extraordinary impact, far greater than is generally recognized today'.[1]

The NKVM had been established in January 1909 by Kandinsky, Alexei von Jawlensky, Marianne Werefkin, Gabriele Münter, Adolf Erbslöh and Alexander Kanoldt, among others.[2] Initially there were twenty-one members, and while numbers fluctuated, the range of disciplines represented would expand to include not just painting but also sculpture, dance and art theory.[3] From the outset Kandinsky was elected to head the association. The foreword to the *Catalogue of the First Exhibition of the NKVM* (held in the gallery of the Munich dealer Heinrich Thannhauser from 1 December 1909 for two weeks), makes clear how Kandinsky mapped the association's aims directly onto this own:

> Our point of departure is the belief that the artist, apart from those impressions that he received from the world of external appearances, continually accumulates experiences within his own inner world. We see artistic forms that should express the reciprocal permeation of all these experiences – forms that must be freed from everything incidental, in order to powerfully pronounce only that which is necessary – in short, artistic synthesis.[4]

Kandinsky was also keen to ensure that the 'membership list included international names – Germany, France, Austria, Russia, Italy', a 'union of various countries to serve one purpose'.[5] His writings had already called attention to the importance of the international reach of what he saw as a new movement in art, whose purpose was to reveal the spiritual, inner rather than material, outer aspects of the world. Inevitably, when faced with something unfamiliar, public reaction to the exhibitions organized by the NKVM were overwhelmingly negative and it was the more abstract works on display in particular that caused much of the indignation. Yet it was also those works which elicited one enthusiastic convert, the Bavarian painter Franz Marc, who wrote a sympathetic review praising the 'fully spiritualised and dematerialised inwardness of feeling' of the paintings on display. Marc then joined the association in February 1911, shortly after Kandinsky had resigned his presidency due to on-going differences of opinion with other members. These differences centred on a clear animosity on the part of other members of NKVM towards the burgeoning abstraction evident in Kandinsky's practice.[6] In particular it was the artists Adolf Erbslöh and Alexander Kanoldt, representing the majority of members, who rejected the move towards greater abstraction. Differences between Kandinsky and the association continued to intensify through 1911 and came to a head in December when the selection committee for their third exhibition rejected *Composition V*.

As a result of the rejection, Kandinsky, Marc and Münter resigned from the association and developed plans to organize an exhibition of their own. It would be held beside the NKVM's exhibition in the Moderne Gallery Thannhauser, opening on 18 December 1911, and its title would be *The First Exhibition of the Editors of the Blaue Reiter* – a truly strange title for an exhibition. Yet it was as early as 19 June 1911, in a letter to Franz Marc, that Kandinsky had outlined plans for an almanac or yearbook, which was eventually to be called *Der Blaue Reiter*.[7] From the moment of Kandinsky's initial letter, the

editors – Kandinsky and Marc – worked feverishly to bring the volume together, ready for its publication by Reinhard Piper in May 1912. The clumsy title of their NKVM rival exhibition in December 1911 suggests the apparently 'ad hoc' circumstance that brought it about.[8] As Kandinsky subsequently recalled, 'we invented the name Blaue Reiter whilst sitting around a coffee table in the Marcs' garden at Sindelsdorf … we both loved blue, Marc liked horses, and I liked riders, so the name came of its own accord'.[9] Thus, the title of a book also became the basis of the title for an exhibition that, apparently, pursued the same aims and could act as advance publicity for the impending publication of the almanac.

The editors invited artists with whose work they felt an affinity to contribute to the exhibition, including works by Albert Bloch, David Burliuk, Vladimir Burliuk, Heinrich Campendonck, Robert Delaunay, Elizabeth Epstein, Eugen Kahler, August Macke, Gabriele Münter, Jean Niestlé, Henri Rousseau and Arnold Schoenberg. Marc included four paintings, and, among the six works he exhibited, Kandinsky included *Composition V*. About 50 works in total were exhibited.[10] As the list of included names would suggest, the works on display were stylistically very diverse; the statement that Kandinsky wrote for the accompanying catalogue calls attention to this, in its 'aim to show by means of the *variety* of forms represented, how the *inner wishes* of the artist are embodied in manifold ways'.[11]

During 1912 the exhibition travelled to Cologne, Bremen, Zurich, Hagen and Frankfurt, and an exhibition of works by the artists was used to open Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm* gallery in Berlin in early spring.[12] But while the exhibition was still in Munich, Marc and Kandinsky started to plan a second exhibition – the *Second Exhibition of the Editors of the Blaue Reiter* – which was held at the Munich gallery, *Neue Kunst*, opening on 12 February, and running until April 1912. Whilst this second exhibition, subtitled *Schwarz-Weiß* (Black and White) was limited to prints, drawings and watercolours, a far broader range of artists and works were included than the first one. A total of 315 works by a thoroughly international array of artists were on display: from France were Georges Braque, Robert Delaunay, André Derain, Roger de la Fresnaye, Robert Lotiron, Maurice de Vlaminck, and the Spaniard, Pablo Picasso; from Russia were Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova and Kasimir Malevich; from Germany were Maria Franck-Marc, Kandinsky, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Paul Klee, Alfred Kubin, Franz Marc, Moriz Melzer, Willhelm Morgner, Otto Müller, Münter, Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein and Georg Tappert; and from Switzerland were Hans Arp, Walter Helbig, Wilhelm Gimmi and Oscar Lüthy, plus the American, Albert Bloch.[13] Also included in the exhibition were eight Russian folk prints (known as *lubki*).

In the statement that accompanied the second exhibition, Kandinsky compared the diversity of artistic form to 'the "infinite" variety, the "unlimited" richness of natural forms: elephant, ant, fir, rose, mountain, pebble'.[14] He wrote that just as natural forms had, according to Darwinian theory, adapted in the most diverse ways to purpose, so artistic forms had evolved in the most diverse ways in order to adapt to their purpose. The exhibition sought to show 'examples of the inexhaustible wealth of forms that,

unceasingly, the world of art creates by the operation of law'.[15] Once again, Kandinsky makes a virtue of the diversity of artistic styles on display, asserting the necessity of such diversity, and establishing that a 'law' lies behind, and thus unites, all instances of it.

Der Blaue Reiter almanac

The almanac itself would be no different from the exhibition in its principles of diversity of form – indeed, it would make the point still more forcefully. In the original letter sent from Kandinsky to Marc in June 1911, in which Kandinsky outlines his idea for the publication, he writes:

> Well, I have a new plan. Piper must be the publisher and the two of us the editors. A kind of almanac (yearbook) with reproductions and articles … and a *chronicle*!! that is, reports on exhibitions reviewed by artists, and artists alone. In the book, the entire year must be reflected; and a link to the past as well as a ray to the future must give this mirror its full life […] We will put an Egyptian work beside a small Zeh, a Chinese work beside a Rousseau, a folk print beside a Picasso, and the like! Eventually we will attract poets and musicians.[16]

The content of the *Blaue Reiter* was, for 1912, extraordinary in its diversity. The volume contains thirteen full-length articles on various aspects of the arts, ranging from August Macke's essay on masks, to Thomas von Hartmann's essay on anarchy in music and Kandinsky's essay on stage composition, interspersed with poetry and citations from diverse authors; a total of 141 reproductions of artworks and artifacts; a stage play by Kandinsky; an untitled section containing three musical scores by Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton von Webern; and finally, at the back, a series of full and half-page advertisements for exhibitions of, and publications on, art sympathetic to that seen in the volume (principally, modern and non-western). In their typescript preface Kandinsky and Marc wrote that 'the reader will find works in our volumes that … show an *inner* relationship although they may appear unrelated on the surface', works that are born of what the editors refer to as an 'inner necessity'.[17]

Three different editions of the book (the word 'almanac' was removed from the title shortly before publication) were published in 1912. The standard edition (hardcover or cloth bound) was printed in a run of 1,200 circulation copies; the deluxe edition (linen bound, with two hand-signed woodcuts by Kandinsky and Marc) consisted of fifty copies; and the museum edition, which was limited to ten copies, was bound in blue Morocco, and contained the two hand-signed woodcuts as in the deluxe edition as well as an original work by one of the two editors enclosed. Discussion of plans for a second volume of *Der Blaue Reiter* began immediately after publication of the first, but these were never realized, not least because of the outbreak of war in 1914 and Marc's subsequent death. A second edition of *Der Blaue Reiter* was published in 1914, with forewords by each editor added.

To have brought together in a single publication works from such a variety of sources in so limited a time was surely an extraordinary feat. But rather than dwell upon the logistics of the production of the book and of the exhibitions, it is useful instead to consider the terms on which such diversity of content, in both the exhibitions and the publication, was purposeful to the editors.[18] In this, it is important to note that it is the publication, rather than the exhibition, that most consistently offers information for understanding the ambitions of the overall project. Further, while it is clear that Marc's input to the development of the exhibitions and almanac was essential, the philosophical position of the projects was underwritten first and foremost by Kandinsky. Not only was it Kandinsky's letter to Marc that first outlined the very idea of *Der Blaue Reiter* in June 1911, but also the statements relating to both the exhibitions and the publication are unmistakably couched in language that relates directly to Kandinsky's earlier and concurrent writings. It seems quite likely that Marc's engagement with historical and (more so) philosophical texts was at least as thorough as Kandinsky's but it was Kandinsky's interpretation of such sources – most likely mediated by others – that seems to have driven Der Blaue Reiter's key ambitions.

Perhaps most striking was the extraordinary variety of styles present in both the exhibitions and the publication. What was the viewer to make of the inclusion in the same exhibition of Kandinsky's *Composition V* (1911), for example, and Schoenberg's *Self-Portrait, Walking* (1911)? Convention might have led the viewer of important art exhibitions – whether academic or avant-garde – to expect to see works that were at least stylistically related; such expectation was denied. On the one hand, a highly abstract, complex, esoteric set of marks and images; on the other, the untrained handling of paint and seemingly naïve depiction of a man walking a spatially incoherent pavement. In the former, no recognizable things seem to be depicted; in the latter, all-too-easily recognizable things appear. In the former, an extraordinary array of colour and shapes suggesting energy; in the latter, muted colour and a melancholic lack of energy. Apparently, they have next to nothing in common – and these are but two of the 'modern' works included in the first exhibition. A brief look at the almanac and things become still less clear. Those same two works are now joined, for example, by a fifteenth-century Biblical woodcut from Germany, depicting the Whore of Babylon and a 'Japanese Drawing, origin questionable' of what appears to be a cucumber and perhaps a tomato.[19] Is this not just a jumble of images, in which works from radically different cultural sources with very different purposes are thrown together haphazardly?

August Macke, who had made a significant contribution to the almanac by assisting in its preparation for publication, opens his essay, simply entitled *Masks*, by listing 'a Persian spear, a holy vessel, a pagan idol … a Gothic cathedral and Chinese junk'.[20] He continues to write that 'form is a mystery to us for it is the expression of mysterious powers … the "invisible God"'.[21] Here, Macke echoes Kandinsky's list of unconnected things cited above in the statement that accompanied the second exhibition of the editors of *Der Blaue Reiter*, and points towards a key argument that Kandinsky articulates in the almanac. In 'On the Question of Form', he suggests that if the reader of *Der Blaue Reiter*

banishes preconceptions 'and then leafs through the book, passing from a votive picture to Delaunay, from Cézanne to a Russian folk-print, from a mask to Picasso, from a glass picture to Kubin, etc. etc'. he will begin to enter the realm of art.[22] For Kandinsky, the only determinant of form should be 'internal necessity', a kind of imperative or drive felt within the artist as a result of the action on him of what Kandinsky calls the 'abstract spirit'; artists responding to this imperative will produce, he writes, 'living' works of art.[23] Thus, the works of trained European avant-garde artists can sit beside the works of untrained artists, medieval art, popular folk prints, glass paintings and the art of children, so long as the source of their work is understood to be the same 'internal necessity', underwritten by the transcendent spirit. What is more, in the art of the 'primitive' – in all the diverse forms in which it is present in the almanac – this internal necessity made itself heard most clearly and, in this sense, those who have been subjected to academic training must learn from those who have not.

The national, the international and Der Blaue Reiter

Less obvious, perhaps, than the diversity of styles, is that the works presented in the exhibitions and the publication are from an array of different international sources. Whilst we may recognize signs that the works represented originate from very different cultures, it is perhaps not until we read the labels that we fully appreciate the extent of the internationalism at the heart of the project.[24] The variety of international contacts that Kandinsky cultivated in the years before Der Blaue Reiter had facilitated the exhibition of his work not only in Germany but throughout Europe. Indeed, the complete list of venues in which his work was shown is impressive in its reach, 'St. Petersburg (1904), Rome (1904, 1905, 1907), Moscow (1904, 1905), Hamburg (1904, 1905), Dresden (1904, 1905, 1907), Paris (1904–9), Prague (1906), Warsaw (1905), Vienna (1905)'.[25] To this, we should add Kandinsky's own travels, which, after 1904, became extensive. In 1905 Kandinsky visited Tunisia with Gabriele Münter, was caught up in the events of the Russian Revolution in Odessa and spent December in Italy; in May1906 he moved to Paris where he stayed for a little over a year and returned to Berlin in autumn 1907; in autumn 1910, he stayed in Moscow; spring and summer of 1911 were spent back in Murnau where he and Münter had bought a house in 1909. From October to December of 1912 he was in Odessa, Moscow (where he returned in 1913) and St. Petersburg. At the outbreak of war in 1914 he moved first to Switzerland, then to Odessa and then to Moscow. His practical involvement in an international forum is clear.

It was in his 'Letters from Munich', which Kandinsky wrote for *Apollon* from 1909–10, that he began to describe his opposition to the nationalism he perceived in the German art world and his support for internationalism most clearly. Thus, for example, the third 'Letter' (April 1910) ridicules the circular accompanying the Deutsche Künstler Verband's newly opened exhibition for its 'outrageously anti-international principle' and the fifth 'Letter' runs through a list of subjects for paintings included in the Glaspalast, which were on display that year 'without the French – indeed, without any

foreigners at all'.[26] He also despairs that the same type of large-scale compositions have been 'trotted out' over the last forty years at exhibitions: 'cuirassiers ride, cannons roar, stricken horses and Frenchmen collapse, and the whole proclaims the valor of German arms'.[27] These 'heaps of rubbish' include a 'mountain of German graphics, born ten years ago and now … already dead'.[28] It is against this background, then, that in the preface to the almanac, the editors declare:

> It should be almost superfluous to emphasise specifically that in our case the principle of internationalism is the only one possible … in the last resort … national coloration is merely incidental. The whole work, called art, knows no borders or nations, only humanity.[29]

In the first of his 'Letters from Munich', Kandinsky had written that it is an 'inner tone', '*one* universal sound', 'the sound of the spirit of *man*' that unites all important work from both east and west.[30] This 'spirit of man' is itself transcended by what he came to call in 'On the Question of Form' the 'abstract' or 'creative spirit', which, as we have already seen, determines all living art through the internal necessity that it creates in the artist. Here, this principle is applied to all true artists of all nations. Thus, Kandinsky clearly makes the case for international unity grounded, once more, in a transcendent spirit.[31]

The almanac as *Gesamtkunstwerk*

A further key aspect of diversity in *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac was the range of media it embraced. This isn't necessarily immediately apparent on leafing through the book, as all works are reproduced in print. Drawings, paintings, statues, prose, shadow puppets, poetry, masks and so on are rendered similar on initial inspection, but very soon the diversity of the depicted makes itself felt. As this happens, the book becomes heavily 'textured' by the radically different objects it now contains: it becomes an extraordinary, apparently discontinuous bricolage of objects and materials. The almanac, then, was conceived as a kind of synthetic artwork, on the model of the romantic notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, particularly as developed by Richard Wagner.[32] In his early writings Kandinsky turned to Wagner in his efforts to lay the ground for his version of a multi-media art form, a form he called 'the monumental art'. He devised an account of mutual support for the different art forms that would lead to an overall expression greater than the sum of the parts, such that the arts would identify their common 'sounds' allowing mutual reinforcement, as well as each of the arts identifying its own particular colouration, which it would add to the overall sound. But as early as 1911, the additions made to *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* shortly before publication demonstrate a strong assertion of a somewhat different, more complex principle. Kandinsky writes that apart from the concordance of the elements of stage composition, lies the possibility of their discordance, alternation of their individual effects, and the emancipation of each individual element.[33] Thus, he goes on to suggest the creation of a monumental art by

means of 'juxtaposition (= opposition)' as well as parallel movement of its elements.[34] The essay 'On Stage Composition' in *Der Blaue Reiter* expands on this.[35] Kandinsky writes that Wagner's efforts to strengthen resources by repetition of the same 'external sound' could remain only at that level – a consequence of external, not internal necessity. Now, the realm of contrast, the antithesis of duplication, as well as the series of possibilities that lie between contrast and duplication, becomes the essential basis of the synthesis of the different art forms. In this way, writes Kandinsky, art would develop to reflect the contradictions of its age: 'The incompatibility of certain forms … should be regarded not as something 'disharmonious', but conversely as offering new possibilities' and thus a form of 'harmony'.[36] In the almanac, it is Arnold Schoenberg who becomes, for Kandinsky, representative of a more consistent adherence to 'inner harmony'. With him begins the 'purely spiritual' 'music of the future'.[37] Kandinsky and Marc heard Schoenberg's atonal music for the first time in January 1911, and from that moment, Kandinsky befriended the composer, made great efforts to understand his *Theory of Harmony*, and adopted what he regarded as the key ideas from that book for his own theory of art. Indeed, by 1912, in the foreword to the second edition of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky reframed the entire book on Schoenbergian terms, as constituting the initial chapters of a kind of '*Theory of Harmony* of Painting'. Careful reading of Kandinsky's texts during 1911–1912 shows that the above principles for the organisation of the different arts within the concept of the 'monumental art', foregrounding such concepts as dissonance and extended harmony, derive from Schoenberg's theory and musical composition.[38] Such formal freedom is not unbounded, but it is the task of each historical period to explore and exhaust the limits of freedom made possible to its age: thus, in his commentary on Schoenberg's 'On Parallel Octaves and Fifths' from the *Theory of Harmony*, Kandinsky quotes Schoenberg: 'I feel even today that there are certain limits which determine my use of this or that dissonance'.[39] As the human spirit develops, argues Kandinsky in relation to Schoenberg's text, so artistic freedom develops to become more spiritual – but artistic freedom cannot exceed the spiritual development of its age. Thus, in relation to Schoenberg's justification of the emancipation of musical dissonance through the history and development of the theory of harmony, Kandinsky began to develop a historical account of the emancipation of artistic form in relation to the development of human spirituality. The idea that each epoch has limits to its artistic freedom is one to which we shall return below; for the moment, however, we shall focus our attention on Schoenberg's most explicit contribution to the almanac, his essay entitled 'The Relationship to the Text'.

For Kandinsky, the most important point in Schoenberg's essay for *Der Blaue Reiter* was the insistence that 'the external congruence of music and text … has little to do with the internal congruence. An apparent divergence on the surface can be necessary because of a parallel movement on a higher level'.[40] In a number of his writings, including in the almanac itself, Kandinsky adopted this argument, and converted it into a law in which external disunity of any artistic form could be used as evidence for internal coherence. In 'On the Question of Form', with typographical emphasis and as if a guide to the entire

volume in which it appeared, he wrote that 'the greatest external dissimilarity becomes the greatest internal similarity'.[41] On this principle, the diverse pictures, poems, drawings and musical scores that appear within the volume are, despite their apparent incongruity with each other and the text, most fully united.

Yet the material in *Der Blaue Reiter* is not organized merely according to principles of dissimilarity or conflict.[42] Rather, text and image sometimes coincide and reinforce each other, and sometimes they become quite separate and contradictory. Certain of the images form sequences that reinforce what is written in the text, and others remain quite remote from themes of the text. In this way, parallel reinforcement joins opposition and contradiction as an organizational principle. The almanac is organized according to concepts that Kandinsky also developed, both in the almanac and related texts, for 'monumental art'. As such, the publication should be engaged not merely as a book, but as a compact version of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which the most diverse art forms are organized into a single work.

Legacies

Today, either as individuals, in pairs or occasionally as a group, artworks by Der Blaue Reiter are regularly subject to lavish exhibitions – within Germany and the United States, in particular – so it remains surprising that there has been no major academic stand-alone study of the group published in the English language to date. Whilst numerous studies published in English focus on individual artists and, in particular, on its leading light, Wassily Kandinsky and more recently on Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter either together, or apart, none have sought to explore the origins, contexts and legacies of Der Blaue Reiter as a whole outside of occasional exhibition catalogues.[43] When Der Blaue Reiter has been considered in English-language scholarship as a group, it has inevitably been yoked together with the other major group associated with German Expressionism, Die Brücke.[44] Yet despite this frequent conjoining of the two groups in a single study, very few accounts of Expressionism in Germany actually take time to consider the differences, similarities, exchanges and influences between them (something that is re-dressed by Christian Weikop's chapter further along in this volume). And while Die Brücke have been subject to a more recent edited volume published in English, this is the first new edited collection of academic essays in English to consider the origins, legacies and impact of Der Blaue Reiter across the twentieth century into the present.[45]

Arising from the only Blaue Reiter centenary conference held in 2011 at Tate Modern in London (funded by the British Academy), this volume brings together established and emerging scholars in the field of German Expressionist studies to look again at the histories, contexts and legacies of Der Blaue Reiter for new audiences in the twenty-first century. Consisting of eight newly researched essays, the volume builds on the already excellent body of research on the origins, formation, exhibitions, publication and demise of Der Blaue Reiter that has been meticulously established by Helmut Friedel

and Annegret Hoberg of the Lenbachhaus in Munich, in particular, as well as Peg Weiss and Vivian Endicott Barnett in the USA, in order to offer an in-depth examination of different facets of the group that have not been previously considered. The current volume draws on academic inter-disciplinary theories and methods rather than primarily curatorially motivated ones, in order to consider the contributions and legacies of this major avant-garde group of European modernism. Particular features include its mix of both established and emerging art historical voices combined with the variety of perspectives brought to bear on both the activities of Der Blaue Reiter itself, in particular the almanac and the first and second exhibitions, but also, crucially, on its interactions and influences with other modernist groups (Die Brücke, Dada and Bauhaus, in particular) and some of the Blaue Reiter's artistic and conceptual legacies in both post-war and more recent contemporary aesthetic practices.

The opening chapter explores whether Der Blaue Reiter is still relevant for contemporary art practices by focusing on the much-overlooked political ideals of anarchism that structure aspects of *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac and Kandinsky's theoretical writings. The apparent disunity of the almanac's structure and contents are shown by the author Rose-Carol Washton Long to be motivated by a deliberate challenge to the orthodox structures of classical institutional academic training motivated by a revolutionary impulse to change the existing order. Comparisons are effectively made between Blaue Reiter strategies of disruption and explicit embrace of anarchy as a political tactic and the peaceful protests of the recent political movements such as Occupy. The second chapter, by Shulamith Behr, addresses the dynamics of gender in relation to Der Blaue Reiter. In stark contrast to Die Brücke, Der Blaue Reiter included an active community of female artists, patrons and supporters as central to its activities, without whom the financial prospects of the group would have foundered even before their first exhibition. Behr explores the specific dynamics of gendered artistic identity and creativity through the case studies of Marianne Werefkin and Gabriele Münter in particular.

Three further chapters consider the different ways in which the ideals of Der Blaue Reiter were connected with other avant-garde practices of their era. In Weikop's chapter, Der Blaue Reiter's affinities, exchanges and differences from Die Brücke are explored, while in Katherine Kuenzli's chapter it is their influences on the museological directions of Karl Ernst Osthaus's Folkwang Museum in Essen that are highlighted. In chapter 5 Deborah Lewer considers Der Blaue Reiter's influence on Hugo Ball's early thinking about Dada in Zurich, before Dada's explicit rejection of Der Blaue Reiter, despite having named the café on the premises of the Galerie Dada in Zurich, as the Kandinsky room.[46] Chapter 6 by Annie Bourneuf considers affinities in the use of language and perception between Walter Benjamin and Wassily Kandinsky, in particular Kandinsky's seminal contribution to *Der Blaue Reiter* almanac 'On the Question of Form'.

The final two chapters explore diverse legacies that can be claimed for different aspects of Der Blaue Reiter after 1945. Nathan Timpano's chapter focuses on the hostile critical reception of the first exhibition of Der Blaue Reiter at the Tate Gallery in 1960, as a symptom of the British art establishment's Francophilia coupled with its long-standing

hostility to German modernism since World War II. And the final chapter by Sarah McGavran takes a different approach again, focusing on the ways in which contemporary Tunisian artist Nacer Khemir engages with legacies of modernism's colonial past in his 2007 film *Die Tunisreise*. As McGavran demonstrates, Khemir does this by retracing the steps of Paul Klee and his Blaue Reiter companions, August Macke and Louis Moilliet, on their visit to Tunisia in April 1914. The chapter raises important questions about the nature of cultural exchange across time and place within the frameworks of both post-colonialism and transnationalism in ways that have not normally been explored in relation to the more conventional extant scholarship on Der Blaue Reiter.

It is hoped that the volume as a whole also enables contemporary readers to think more widely about what some critics have regarded as a particularly niche and esoteric moment of spiritual modernism. Indeed, the most trenchant critique of Der Blaue Reiter as a form of solipsistic modernism can be found in the pages of the infamous *Aesthetics and Politics* debates played out by members of the Frankfurt School of philosophy during the 1930s and 1940s. In his essay 'Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline' (1934), Marxist critic Georg Lukács criticized the Expressionists for their lack of concrete actions with regard to the underlying economic, political and social causes of the crises of modernity that they were experiencing and expressing through their artwork. According to Lukács, the Expressionists' 'mystical irrationalism' was merely a form of heightened subjectivism that only reflected the experience of social crisis on a personal level without a consideration of the wider economic, social and ideological contexts in which they were working. Writing in the left-wing journal *Das Wort* in 1938, just after the opening of the 'Degenerate Art Exhibition' in which the Nazis had included hundreds of artworks by Expressionist artists for vilification, Ernst Bloch, also a Marxist, offered a vigorous and incisive counter-attack to Lukács' criticisms of Expressionism. Bloch's defence was written in the full knowledge that the Nazis, although for different reasons, had launched a virulent attack on Expressionism and one which he could not stand by and watch. He astutely recognized that the need for a defence (including of Der Blaue Reiter with whom he opens his essay) was urgent if it wasn't to be consigned to the dustbin of political disavowal. As Jason Gaiger has elegantly summarized, 'Bloch argued that as a critical reaction to the progressive elimination of the role of the subject in modern society (and especially under fascism), the Expressionist emphasis on the subject's inner life constituted a valid form of resistance'.[47] And we would add, a vital one. Bloch's redemption of Expressionism was timely and the legacies of Der Blaue Reiter have been continually re-envisioned since and well into the twenty-first century in multiple ways. The art of Nacer Khemir that Sarah McGavran highlights in her chapter is but one example of the myriad ways in which artists continue to reference, deference and difference the art of the Blaue Reiter. For example, in 2005 British artist Chris Ofili exhibited a new series of works in Berlin simply called *The Blue Rider* in unequivocal homage to the group. Ofili produced a lavish series of large-scale works on paper executed in a variety of blues and silver in a loose nod to the spiritual associations

that Der Blaue Reiter celebrated in their choice of favoured colour. And in 2006 the Lenbachhaus in Munich, where many of the seminal works by Blaue Reiter artists are still housed today, commissioned four contemporary artists to respond to the artworks on display by four of the artists of Der Blaue Reiter: Franz Ackermann to Franz Marc, Katharina Grosse to Alexej Jawlensky, Olafur Eliasson to Wassily Kandinsky, and Thomas Demand to August Macke. Furthermore Ethiopian-American artist Julie Mehretu is well known for her declared interest in Kandinsky's concept of 'the Great Utopia, when he talked about the inevitable implosion and/or explosion of our constructed spaces out of the sheer necessity of agency'.[48] Numerous other artists could not have conceived of their practice without the drive to abstraction pioneered by the artists of Der Blaue Reiter.

For the first time, then, Der Blaue Reiter is subject in this volume to a variety of novel inter-disciplinary perspectives ranging from philosophical enquiry into language and visual perception, through an analysis of its gender dynamics, its reception at different historical junctures throughout the twentieth century, and its legacies for certain kinds of post-colonial aesthetic practices. The volume offers a renewed perspective on familiar aspects of Expressionism and abstraction and takes seriously the inheritance of modernism for the twenty-first century in ways that we hope might recalibrate the field of Expressionist studies for future scholarship. Der Blaue Reiter still matters, we would argue, because the legacies of abstraction are still being debated by artists, writers, philosophers and cultural theorists today. As Leah Dickerman has so ably demonstrated, it was only after Kandinsky had exhibited *Composition V* that 'abstraction not only began to seem plausible but took on the character of an imperative'.[49]

Notes

1 Leah Dickerman 'Vasily Kandinsky Without Words', in Leah Dickerman (ed.), *Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* (New York, London: Thames and Hudson, 2012), p. 50.
2 Helmut Friedel and Annegret Hoberg (eds), *Vasily Kandinsky* (Munich: Prestel, 2008), p. 83.
3 Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (eds), *Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art*, vols I and II (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 52.
4 Wassily Kandinsky 'Forward to the Catalogue of the First Exhibition of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung Munich*', in Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 53.
5 Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc (eds), *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*. Documentary edition, ed. Klaus Lankheit, trans. H. Falkenstein (London, Tate Publishing 2006), p. 12.
6 Ibid., p. 13.
7 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 109.
8 Although it is clear that plans for just such an exhibition pre-dated the artists' resignation. See Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 110.
9 Kandinsky cited in Barry Herbert, *German Expressionism: Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter* (London: Jupiter Books, 1983), p. 154.
10 Friedel and Hoberg (eds), *Vasily Kandinsky*, p. 114.
11 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 113.

12 Reinhold Heller, 'The Blue Rider', in E. da Costa Meyer and F. Wasserman (eds), *Schoenberg, Kandinsky and the Blue Rider* (New York: Scala, 2003), p. 76.
13 Paul Vogt, *The Blue Rider* (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1980), pp. 47–50.
14 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 228.
15 *Ibid.*
16 Kandinsky and Marc (eds), *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, pp. 15–16.
17 *Ibid.*, pp. 250–1.
18 For an excellent summary of the work undertaken, see Friedel and Hoberg (eds), *Vasily Kandinsky*.
19 Kandinsky and Marc (eds), *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, p. 275.
20 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 59.
21 Kandinsky and Marc (eds), *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, p. 83.
22 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 256.
23 *Ibid.*, p. 235.
24 See Christopher Short, *Friedrich Nietzsche and German Expressionist Art* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Essex, 1995).
25 Kenneth Lindsay's research, referenced in P. Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 77.
26 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 77.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
28 *Ibid.*
29 Kandinsky and Marc (eds), *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, p. 251.
30 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 59.
31 See Christopher Short, 'Development of Theory During the War and After the Revolution', in *The Art Theory of Wassily Kandinsky, 1909–1928: The Quest for Synthesis* (London: Peter Lang, 2010).
32 Christopher Short, 'Kandinsky's Animated Page: The Almanac, The Blue Rider as a Work of Art', in K. Brown (ed.), *The Art Book Tradition in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013). For more on the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, see also Juliet Koss *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
33 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 206.
34 *Ibid.*
35 *Ibid.*, pp. 257–65.
36 *Ibid.*, p. 163.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 149.
38 See Short, *The Art Theory of Wassily Kandinsky*, pp. 55–64.
39 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 93.
40 Kandinsky and Marc (eds), *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, p. 102.
41 Lindsay and Vergo (eds), *Complete Writings on Art*, p. 245.
42 Short, 'Kandinsky's Animated Page'.
43 Examples of these kinds of studies in the English language include Bibiana Obler, *Intimate Collaborations: Kandinsky, Münter, Arp and Taeuber* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2014) and Reinhold Heller, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903–1920* (Munich: Prestel, 1997).
44 For examples of this, see Barry Herbert, *German Expressionism* (London: Jupiter Books, 1983) and Shulamith Behr, *German Expressionism* (London: Tate Publishing, 1999).
45 See Christian Weikop, *New Perspectives on Brücke Expressionism: Bridging History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011).
46 See Leah Dickerman 'Vasily Kandinsky Without Words', in Dickerman (ed.), *Inventing Abstraction*, p. 50.

47 Jason Gaiger 'Expressionism and the Crisis of Subjectivity', in Paul Wood and Steve Edwards (eds), *Art of the Avant-Gardes* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 55–6.
48 Julie Mehretu, quoted in Thelma Golden, 'Julie Mehretu's Eruptive Lines of Flight as Ethos of Revolution', in Catherine De Zegher and Thelma Golden (eds), *Julie Mehretu: The Drawings* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007).
49 Leah Dickerman 'Inventing Abstraction', in Dickerman (ed.), *Inventing Abstraction*, p. 14.