Rudolf Steiner’s Theories and Their Translation into Architecture

by

Fiona Gray
B.A. Arts (Arch.); B. ARCH. (Deakin).

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University
I am the author of the thesis entitled

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Abstract

At the turn of the twentieth century, Europe’s bourgeoisie, alongside many of its artistic and intellectual elite, were enthusiastically embracing a myriad of esoteric doctrines and mystical impulses. One of the most prominent and enduring examples of this cultural phenomenon is to be found in Rudolf Steiner’s quasi-philosophical system of Anthroposophy. Anthroposophy postulates the existence of an objective spiritual world that is accessible to direct human experience through the training of intellectual cognitive faculties. Steiner applied Anthroposophy as a conceptual scaffold to a wide range of practical and creative endeavours including architecture. Unlike his philosophical enquiries, exemplified by his comprehensive work on Goethe, Steiner never presented his architectural ideas in a systematic or methodical way. As a result, much of the critique of his architectural work tends to focus on the stylistic aspects of his buildings with limited recognition or understanding of the philosophical foundations from which they arose. In contrast, Anthroposophically inspired studies of his architecture have tended to be biased in their critique or have failed to appreciate the disciplinary complexities of architecture. These works often assume the reader’s knowledge, and unquestioning acceptance of occult concepts, and hence, are difficult to relate to the broader current of architectural discourse. Neither approach is wholly satisfactory since Steiner’s architecture and its conceptual basis are interdependent. This thesis seeks to redress this problem by reconsidering Steiner’s theories in non-esoteric terms in order to better understand what they could mean for architecture. This is achieved by selecting key tenets of Steiner’s philosophy and using them as a framework to analyse and interpret how he translated his theory into the practice of architecture. Five concepts structure this examination—polarity, metamorphosis, the cognitive faculties of imagination, inspiration and intuition, the senses, and anthropomorphism. An investigation into the ways in which each of these ideas manifests itself in built form helps to draw out the complexity and uniqueness of Steiner’s work. This supports a new reading of his architecture that moves beyond the problem of stylistic classification in order to probe more deeply into the possibilities that his philosophical ideas may offer. It provides the basis for a reassessment of the significance of Steiner’s contribution to the history and theory of modern architecture.
This thesis began from a search for meaning in architecture arising from the development of a client brief for the design of new classrooms, performance auditorium, and outdoor kitchen for a small rural Steiner School in Freshwater Creek, Victoria, Australia. My client was the school council, made up of a group of dedicated parents who shared a commitment to educating their children using the pedagogical principles established by Rudolf Steiner in 1919. Although they were an intelligent and enthusiastic client, it became apparent during the initial stages of establishing the client brief that they were unsure about what the architecture should say or do beyond responding to basic functional requirements. While they were deeply concerned that the architecture their children were to spend their days in should be meaningful and reflect the underlying philosophy of a Steiner school, their understanding of that philosophy and its inherent meaning was surprisingly unclear. Some parents were well versed in Steiner’s theories on education but were not familiar with his broader philosophical work and had no knowledge whatsoever of his architectural endeavours. Yet despite the fact that they were not able to articulate the philosophy, they did have a strong sense of what the building should look like. These ideas and images were generally borrowed from other Steiner schools even though they did not necessarily share any similarities in terms of the local environment, unique attributes or specific needs of their own school. The architecture of a large school set deep in a valley amongst thick, wet vegetation, for example, was considered equally appropriate for their school which was a fraction of the size and set on a flat, dry rural site. This begged the question whether the client actually wanted the design to be generated from a philosophical or stylistic foundation, or indeed, whether any real thought had been given to this aspect of the brief.

In my role as architect I attempted to clarify the client brief by undertaking some preliminary research in the hope of arriving at a greater understanding of both Steiner’s architecture and its philosophical foundation. This investigation quickly revealed that Steiner’s architectural writings were invested with meaning specific to his own system of Anthroposophy. To understand that meaning required a solid grounding in Steiner’s entire worldview. Turning to his architecture proved just as
problematic given that his two most significant buildings, the First and Second Goetheanums were strikingly different in their aesthetic expression, thereby indicating that a study of the architecture’s formal character alone was going to be severely inadequate in terms of arriving at any genuine understanding that might meaningfully inform the client brief.

Thus, my initial enquiry led to a host of questions far beyond the scope of the original project. Does one need to be a practicing Anthroposophist to fully grasp Steiner’s theories and hence appreciate their meaning and implications for architecture? Can a philosophical system such as Anthroposophy inspire meaningful architecture or does it result in a formulaic architectural style? Can a philosophy developed at the turn of the twentieth century still have anything meaningful to offer contemporary architects? So deeply consumed did I become by these questions that it became a project in its own right in the form of this thesis. As a result, both my research and practice have informed each other and evolved together. This thesis presents some of what I have learnt along the way.

An Australian response to an architectural brief for a small rural Steiner school – North and East facades of Classrooms 5 and 6 at Freshwater Creek Steiner School by Fiona Gray, 2010. Source: Author.
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PART I

The Context
Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Preamble

May youthful and striving thinkers and researchers—especially those who are not merely interested in breadth of vision, but who rather look directly at what is central to our knowing activity—grant my reflections some attention, and follow in great numbers to set forth more perfectly what I was striving to present.¹

These were the concluding comments written by Rudolf Steiner in 1884 in relation to his research into Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s study of morphology, a branch of science dealing with the form and structure of organisms. Steiner’s quote provides a sense of the spirit in which he strove to develop his own perception of human knowledge and presents a challenge for his ideas to be explored further by future research endeavours. This thesis responds to that challenge by investigating an area of Steiner’s thought that has produced a tangible and lasting legacy in the form of architecture.

The background to this research undertaking is established in this introductory chapter. It provides a biographical sketch of Rudolf Steiner and an overview of the underlying premise of his quasi-philosophical system of Anthroposophy. It contextualises Steiner’s philosophical and architectural pursuits within the broader cultural and architectural milieu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. An outline of the research aims, rationale and methodology are then set out, followed by an explanation of the scope, limitations and challenges of this inquiry. Finally, the overall structure of the thesis is described, including brief individual summaries of each chapter.

1.2 Who was Rudolf Steiner?

Rudolf Steiner was born on February 27, 1861 in the small town of Kraljevic, then on the border between Austria and Hungary and now part of Croatia (Figures 1.01 and 1.02). Steiner was the eldest son of three children born to Austrian parents, Johann and Franziska Steiner. As a young child Steiner’s performance at school was below average, however, he later developed into a talented student and completed his schooling with honours. In 1879 Steiner entered the Vienna Institute of Technology where he studied mathematics, physics, chemistry, zoology, botany, biology, mineralogy, geology and mechanics. He also attended lectures in literature and history. Upon recommendation from the German literature Professor and Goethe scholar, Karl Schröer (1825-1900), Steiner was invited in 1882 to become the editor of Goethe’s scientific writings for Joseph Kürschner’s Deutscher National-Litteratur. Goethe’s work was to have a profound influence on Steiner and in 1890 he moved to Weimar to start work at the Goethe and Schiller Archives. In 1891 he wrote a thesis on the idealist philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) which earned him a PhD from the University of Rostock in Germany.² During his time at the archives he

² Steiner was awarded his doctorate from the University of Rostock for his dissertation Die Grundfrage der Erkenntnistheorie mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre – Prolegomena zur Verständigung des philosophierenden Bewußtseins mit selbst, (The basis question of the theory of knowledge with special reference to Fichte’s theory of knowledge – introduction to an understanding of philosophical self-consciousness). The thesis was published in 1892 under the title Wahrheit und Wissenschaft – Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Freiheit, (Truth and Knowledge – Prelude to a Philosophy of Freedom).
also conceived and wrote one of his most important philosophical works, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, which was published in 1895. In the same year Steiner published a monographic study of Friedrich Nietzsche. Then in 1896 publication began on a twelve-volume edition of the collected works of Arthur Schopenhauer edited by Steiner. After a prolific six years at the archive, Steiner left Weimar and moved to Berlin, home of Germany’s nascent avant-garde, where he became the owner and chief editor of the literary journal *Magazin für Litteratur*. This move brought him into close contact with a number of famous writers, including Else Lasker Schuler, Stefan Zweig, Frank Wedekind, Paul Scheerbart and Rainer Maria Rilke. However, it was not long before the moribund journal collapsed due largely to the alienation of its academic readership which resulted from the occult slant Steiner’s writing was beginning to take.

The start of the new century marked a significant turning point in Steiner’s career as he began to adapt his earlier philosophical principles into a methodical approach for investigating esoteric spiritual phenomena. He quickly rose to prominence among Theosophists, and was soon made head of the society’s German Branch. Tensions began to grow between the main Theosophical Society and its German section which eventually saw Steiner break from the Society at the end of 1912 to form his own Anthroposophical Society. Most of the German Theosophists followed him and his newly founded organisation grew quickly. Fuelled by the need to find a new home, construction began on the *First Goetheanum* building in Dornach, Switzerland, in 1913. As the building neared completion after 10 years of dedicated effort, it was tragically destroyed by fire on New Year’s Eve, 1922. Construction began on the *Second Goetheanum* just two years later, and today, some ninety years later, it remains home to the society’s world headquarters (Figure 1.03 and 1.04).

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From the 1920s onwards Steiner dedicated much of his time to applying the findings of his earlier spiritual research to new practical endeavours, imparting his knowledge through thousands of lectures and articles and establishing numerous cultural initiatives. He staged a world premiere of Goethe’s *Faust*. He wrote and directed four of his own plays (known as Mystery dramas), and with his second wife Marie von Sivers, developed the movement-based art of eurythmy. Steiner’s work introduced new principles to the fields of agriculture, medicine, education and religion. Under his guidance, a number of pharmacists and physicians established a pharmaceutical company called Weleda which continues to distribute natural medicinal products worldwide. His lectures to farmers provided the founding principles of biodynamic agriculture which has gained considerable support over recent years as an alternative approach to crop cultivation; and his lectures on Christianity resulted in the establishment of *The Christian Community* which now has churches in several countries, including Australia. He is perhaps best known for his approach to education which began with a single school that he established in Stuttgart, Germany, for the children of the Waldorf Cigarette Factory workers and has since grown to become one of the largest independent schooling systems in the

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5 Steiner often referred to eurythmy as ‘visible speech,’ since performers carry out arm and hand gestures intended to correspond to the sounds of the vowels and consonants occurring in speech, while at the same time tracing footwork patterns, all conducted in a rhythmic and graceful manner.
world. It is known in different parts of the world as the Waldorf or Steiner School movement.

After many years of intense activity, Rudolf Steiner died on March 30, 1925, at the age of 64. His literary estate consists of over 6000 lectures, 30 books, hundreds of essays as well as several plays and many volumes of drawings.6

1.3 What is Anthroposophy?

Anthroposophy is a spiritual philosophy developed by Steiner. It postulates the existence of an objective spiritual world that is accessible to direct human experience through the training of intellectual cognitive faculties that are independent of sensory experience. The word Anthroposophy comes from the Greek words ‘anthropos’ meaning ‘human’ and ‘sophia’ meaning ‘wisdom.’ In his Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts, Steiner defined Anthroposophy as ‘a path of knowledge, to guide the Spiritual in the human being to the Spiritual in the universe.’7 Its investigations aim to achieve the same precision and clarity as natural science’s investigations of the physical world. Steiner formulated it programmatically in an effort to provide a practical method by which humans could attain concrete knowledge of a universal cosmic spirit.8 These methods are detailed in his major written works that are outlined in Chapter Three.

Steiner also aimed to express the content of Anthroposophy physically through the medium of architecture. Since buildings address human beings at a particular level of engagement and understanding different to that expressed through words, Steiner employed architecture as a means of giving visible form to his conceptual formulations. His buildings aimed to achieve a synthesis of the arts that was capable of revealing spiritual realities that were normally hidden from everyday consciousness.

6 Rudolf Steiner Archive, http://www.rsarchive.org/Holdings/
Steiner designed seventeen buildings; his two most widely recognised being the *First* and *Second Goetheanums*. The *Goetheanums* were built on a rising slope of the Jurasian hills to form the crowning centrepiece of the Dornach community. The *Second Goetheanum* was much larger than the *First*, servicing a variety of functions under one roof including lecture rooms, administrative offices, a library and an auditorium capable of seating 1000 people. Upon entering the main entrance of the building at ground level, twin staircases to the left and right lead up to the main auditorium. Halfway up the staircase, a landing opens via a grand portal to an outdoor terrace. The stairs then continue on to the third level auditorium foyer which is bathed in a glowing rose-coloured light that spills in from a large West facing stained glass, etched windows. This window offers just a hint of the symphony of colour and light that visitors are to be immersed in once they step inside the theatre. The auditorium space of both the *First* and *Second Goetheanum*’s is where many of Steiner’s philosophical ideas materialised into architectural form and are often referred to in the ensuing discourse on his theories.

The majority of Steiner’s other buildings are scattered throughout the 12 hectares of land that constitutes the grounds of the *Goetheanum* complex. These smaller structures are oriented towards the main building and are connected to it via walking paths, further emphasising the central role that the *Goetheanum* plays in the day-to-day life of the community (Figures 1.05 and 1.06).

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*Figure 1.05:* Aerial view of the Second Goetheanum and surrounding buildings in Dornach. Source: Hasler, *The Goetheanum*, 6.
The nearby village of Arlesheim also features some of Steiner’s residential buildings. An overview of Steiner’s architectural works is located in the Appendix which offers a useful point of reference throughout the thesis discussion.

1.4 Steiner within the Cultural Mosaic of His Time

The cultural and intellectual landscape that Steiner was working within during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was one of great innovation and dynamism. A comprehensive survey of the developments of this period is not possible within the scope of this thesis however a brief sketch of the complexity and plurality that was evident across all spectrums of society helps to contextualise Steiner within the broader cultural setting. The period between 1890 and 1920, the most productive years of Steiner’s life, was especially remarkable for its dramatic
new developments in the arts, sciences, and technology. Notable milestones included Thomas Edison’s invention of the movie projector in 1893, the publication of Sigmund Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, Orville and Wilbur Wright’s first powered aircraft flight in 1903, and the formulation of Albert Einstein’s special theory of relativity in 1905. In 1907 Pablo Picasso both shocked and enthused his contemporaries with his revolutionary painting *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, and in 1912 Wassily Kandinsky published his influential treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. By 1914 however, the fervour and promise of these tremendous advances was countered somewhat by the outbreak of the First World War, prompting widespread political, social and economic unrest throughout Europe. Architectural historian Alan Colquhoun characterised the period as one that ‘longed for a world of territorial and social fixity, while embracing, incompatibly, an economy and technology in flux.’ 9 Art and architecture responded to these contradictory social forces with unprecedented experimentation that resulted in a multiplicity of styles and ideologies. It became an age of ‘isms’—Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Neoplasticism, Constructivism, to name but a few. Other movements such as Art Nouveau, The Deutscher Werkbund and the Bauhaus, made pioneering contributions to the overarching enterprise of Modernism. The fragmentary and disparate nature of these movements reflected the chaotic nature of the modern society that gave rise to them.

Yet even within this context of exceptional diversity, Steiner found himself to be somewhat of an intellectual outsider. He bemoaned the fact that his efforts to engage with the thinking of others failed to be reciprocated. His autobiography records his feelings and perceptions

> I did not hold it against others that they sentenced me in this way to loneliness. In fact, I saw that many of them felt a deep, unconscious need for a philosophy that could get to the root of existence.10

Steiner attributed his isolation to the emphatic rejection of his spiritual life even by those whom he considered to be close friends.11 In recognising this, Steiner himself

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identified the very thing that made his acceptance into mainstream culture problematic. At the same time however, it was his unique spiritual outlook that enriched his architectural thinking and architectural production.

1.5 Research Aim

This thesis seeks to define Steiner’s architectural theories in non-esoteric terms in order to understand what they mean for architecture and how Steiner translated them into built form. It uses Steiner’s philosophy as an interpretive framework to interpret and explain his architecture. A further objective is to reassess the significance of Steiner’s contribution to architecture, particularly to twentieth century modern architecture. In order to fulfil these aims three primary questions are addressed

- What are Rudolf Steiner’s architectural theories?
- How do they relate to the production of architecture?
- What relevance do Steiner’s theories and architecture hold for the field of architectural history and theory?

In pursuing these questions, a further consideration arises in relation to the inherent gap that exists between theory and practice. On what terms does one assess Steiner—as philosopher or architect; as both or neither? Steiner used architecture as a vehicle through which to articulate his worldview therefore his ability to translate his ideas into built reality becomes an important concept. Responses to these research questions present new understandings with regard to the original contribution that Steiner has made to the field of architecture and the potential this may hold for the future.

1.6 Research Rationale – Why Revisit Steiner’s Architecture?

Unlike his epistemology, which he developed comprehensively through his major philosophical works, Steiner never presented his architectural theories in a systematic or methodical way. As a result, much of the architectural critique of his work tends to focus on stylistic and aesthetic considerations without any deep understanding of the philosophical foundations from which they arose. Anthroposophically inspired

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12 Steiner’s major philosophical works are identified and discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis.
studies of his architecture on the other hand, often tend to be biased in their critique or fail to appreciate the disciplinary complexities of architecture. These works often assume the reader’s knowledge, and unquestioning acceptance of occult concepts, and hence are difficult to relate to the broader current of architectural discourse. Neither approach is wholly satisfactory since the architecture and its conceptual basis are interdependent. It is impossible to arrive at a holistic understanding of Steiner’s architecture by separating it from his worldview. Similarly, by considering his architecture purely as philosophy turned concrete, it is robbed of important architectural concepts such as aesthetics, structure and function. As architectural historian, Spiro Kostof argued in his seminal text *A History of Architecture*

> We have the duty to understand sympathetically how it was and why it happened ... This is not to say that in writing about architecture of the past we can forego the exercise of critical judgement. It means merely that we must first establish the premises that govern the style or the form of a particular building, and then proceed to judge the style or building in the context of these premises.\(^{13}\)

Kostof highlights the need to understand architecture within its own time period and intellectual milieu. Rather than isolating his architecture and philosophy, the emphasis of this research is on interpreting and explaining Steiner’s complex doctrine as it relates specifically to his own architecture and to the broader history and theory of modern architecture. The concern for Steiner’s philosophy in this thesis stems from the view that ideas in the making of architecture are more fully appreciated when the character, attitude and intellectual beliefs of its creator are also understood. Some may argue that this approach commits a so-called ‘intentional fallacy’ that seeks to judge works of architecture not in terms of the object itself, but in relation to some prior ‘intention’ of the architect.\(^{14}\) This however misconstrues the ‘intention’ and its ‘expression’ as two entirely separate things, which they are not. Rather than attempting to provide a definitive description of Steiner’s intent, this study ventures to demonstrate that an understanding of his intention may modify and

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\(^{14}\) The term ‘intentional fallacy’ originated as a literary criticism in "The Intentional Fallacy" by William K. Wimsatt and C. Beardsley Monroe, Sewanee Review, vol. 54, no. 3 (Jul-Sep 1946): 468-488.
enrich our perception, interpretation and experience of the architectural object. The meaning and value of the object cannot be fully characterised without reference to the meaning and value of its intention. The validity of such an approach rests in the transformation of understanding and experience of the architecture that occurs through this exchange.\textsuperscript{15}

By peeling away the esoteric jargon that makes Steiner’s philosophy so difficult to access, a greater appreciation of his architecture can be gained through a more comprehensive understanding of the theory from which it is derived. In re-stating his theories for a non-Anthroposophic audience, caution must be exercised to ensure that the original meaning of Steiner’s work is not diluted and its integrity remains intact. While Steiner was working at problems that concerned other thinkers and architects at the beginning of the twentieth century, his approach was unlike any other. This thesis does not attempt to assimilate Steiner into the mainstream of architectural history, but rather it strives to arrive at an appreciation of his unique position within it. Steiner’s theories offer one way of considering how architecture may be imbued with significance and meaning by reframing and reemphasising architecture’s transformational power. It is this encompassing perspective that has been missing from previous studies of Steiner’s architecture. This thesis suggests that this is what makes his work interesting and worthwhile.

The examination of Steiner’s philosophy in non-esoteric terms presents an opportunity to reconsider how his ideas might relate to the architectural concerns of a society that has progressed and evolved since Steiner’s own time. Despite his efforts to expound Anthroposophy as a spiritual ‘science,’ Steiner’s occult concepts did not fit well with the twentieth century’s prevailing materialist view of science. Since then however, alternative and more subtle ways of knowing have been advanced that have challenged scientific materialism as the sole criterion of truth. Science has matured, allowing us to see its implications and consequences more clearly than was possible in Steiner’s time. In his book \textit{The Wholeness of Nature}, British science philosopher, Henri Bortoft notes that

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[\textsuperscript{15}] Roger Scruton, \textit{The Aesthetics of Architecture} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 123.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
We have for the most part, given up thinking of science as an autonomous activity which stands outside of history, or indeed outside of any human social context, pursuing its own absolute, contextless way of acquiring pure knowledge. In fact, now we have begun to recognise that this view of science itself arose within a particular cultural-historical context and that it is an expression of a style of thinking which has its own validity but does not have access to ‘ultimate reality.’

Given his scientific background, Steiner held a deep respect for modern science however he also recognised its limitations and dedicated himself to the task of breaking down the gulf between science, art and religion. He strove to overcome the reduction of the scientifically knowable world to those aspects of reality accessible only to outer empiricism and mathematical quantification, while at the same time upholding the rigor and objectivity that distinguishes science from mere opinion.

There is some degree of irony in Steiner’s position here. While he opposed a purely positivist outlook, his own endeavours to give his spiritual investigations a scientific foundation that removed all elements of uncertainty made his approach essentially positivist in its aims, if not its outcomes. To expand scientific methodology into deeper aspects of existence is no simple matter and Steiner’s claims that Anthroposophy constituted a science of the spirit are considered rather dubious by conventional scientific standards. It does not necessarily follow however, that his efforts to employ a scientific approach to his spiritual investigations were not genuine in their intent. This thesis makes no attempt to resurrect an archaic mysticism, but rather, endeavours to foster a more integrative paradigm that can accommodate such different ways of knowing. What is contradictory and irrational in Steiner’s work remains so. This research seeks to understand Steiner’s complex cosmology in order to gain a greater appreciation of his architecture in all its richness, meaning and eccentricity.

18 This matter is addressed in some detail in “Is Anthroposophy a Science?” by Sven Ove Hansson in Conceptus XXV, no. 64 (1991):37 – 49.
1.7 Research Approach and Methodology

This thesis adopts a critical-discursive approach. In addressing the multiple architectural, philosophical and social constructs that inform the research, the methods employed are primarily qualitative. The collection of data has been drawn from two main sources – namely literature research and field research. While various analytical methods have been utilised, the principal technique common to them all is that of close reading. Throughout the thesis, a combination of texts, images and buildings are thoroughly studied in order to discern details, identify patterns, uncover layers, and dissect different points of view. Social researcher, W. Lawrence Neuman, argues that

True meaning is rarely obvious on the surface; one reaches it only through a detailed study of the text, contemplating its many messages, and seeking the connections among its parts.\(^{19}\)

Close reading allows concepts and ideas contained within a work to be delved into and mined for embedded meaning. Literary Professor, Jane Gallop, maintains that

Close reading poses an ongoing threat to easy, reductive generalisation, that it is a method for resisting and calling into question our inevitable tendency to bring things together in smug, overarching conclusions.\(^{20}\)

It is this tendency that this thesis seeks to repudiate by providing a full and inclusive re-appraisal of Steiner’s theories and their relationship to architecture.

- Literature Research

Given the historical nature of this research, and the impossibility of direct access to Steiner himself, this study relies largely upon written information that already exists. A variety of contextual, inferential and re-collective data has been brought together and critically examined. The material has been analysed and interpreted in order to determine how our current understanding has been shaped, and to identify ways in which that understanding can be deepened. In this thesis, the review of literature


\(^{20}\) Jane Gallop, “The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading,” *Profession*, (2007): 185. In this thesis British/Australian spelling and grammar have been adopted throughout. In relation to this reference the article title used American spelling and has therefore been maintained in this instance.
encompasses two major components—one addressing Steiner’s place in architectural literature, and the other considering Steiner’s own writing and lectures. Chapter Two critically assesses how Steiner has been positioned in the history of architecture through literature produced by architectural critics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It includes key texts on modern architectural history as well as monographic studies of Steiner and his architecture. Chapter Three analyses primary literature produced by Steiner himself and examines the critical response it has received.

- **Field and Archival Research**

The primary field investigations for this research were visits to the site of the Goetheanum and its surrounding buildings in Dornach, Switzerland. Visiting Steiner’s buildings allowed a physical engagement with the architecture, offering an alternative perspective to that which can be gained from a purely literary engagement with his work. On the whole, Steiner’s architecture is spatial and tactile, qualities that are not particularly photogenic and hence benefit greatly from the direct experience of moving through and around the buildings. Despite having carefully studied the Goetheanum through literature, photographs and drawings, upon first visiting the building, the scale and monumentality of it came as a genuine shock to the author. The miniaturising effect of photographs created a significant distortion of the author’s perception. Photographs flatten the three dimensional object into two dimensional representation. They can also be composed or manipulated so as to present the architecture in a particular way that over-emphasises certain qualities to support a particular argument or thesis but which may not accurately reflect its reality. Direct experience through field investigation has been an essential component of the research process in order to avoid misconstruing the literature based data.

The Goetheanum is also home to three archives – The Rudolf Steiner Archive, the Goetheanum Archive and the Plan Archive. These archives provided invaluable access to Steiner’s original sculptures, models, drawings and plans, affording the author a much richer understanding of the practical methods and processes Steiner employed to create architecture. Access was also granted to entire buildings or parts of buildings not open to the general public. The archive curators and a number of
long standing employees offered a wealth of information through shared discussions and guided tours. They also acted as facilitators in establishing contact with other Steiner scholars who were willing to share their knowledge. Photographs, photocopies and sound recordings of relevant data were collected for on-going analysis after leaving the archives. On-going correspondence has been maintained with the Goetheanum site architect who has helped clarify particular aspects of the data or offered further advice and assistance when the data analysis has brought to light new ideas that have required further investigation.

Contextual field research has also informed the thesis. In particular, a visit to Le Corbusier’s Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, and an extended stay in Barcelona to explore Gaudi’s architecture immediately following the field research conducted at the Goetheanum, were of tremendous benefit. The experience of these buildings helped to contextualise Steiner’s architecture, allowing connections to be drawn and differences to be highlighted. These comparisons are integral to the research presented in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine. Site visits to a number of Steiner schools throughout Australia as well as other buildings produced by the award-winning, Anthroposophically inspired architect, Gregory Burgess, has offered some insight into the way Steiner’s theories have been translated in a different place and time. While these buildings do not necessarily form part of the major thread of the thesis discussion, they have nonetheless provided a current perspective for the research.

- **Analysis Methods**

In his book *Analysing Architecture*, Simon Unwin argues that the act of analysing creative work is different to that of analysing natural phenomena since

> One has to be sensible to the intellectual agenda inherent in the examples studied and be prepared to find and acknowledge ideas and strategies that may be original or used in new ways.\(^{21}\)

Mindful of the manifold nature of architecture, three different analytical methods have been adopted—visual analysis, interpretive analysis and historical-comparative analysis. The research has been approached in a variety of ways in order to reveal the

intellectual agenda that informed the built forms. What is not uncovered by one method is often revealed through another and each method complements the other.

Visual analysis looks for empirical clues and patterns that are evident in photographs, drawings, models, historical artefacts and the built form of the architecture. Throughout the thesis images are embedded in the text and form an integral part of the thesis discussion. Dependent upon quality and availability, the images have been obtained from a range of sources including archives, databases, the author’s own photographs, previously published books, and wikicommmons. In the case of the First Goetheanum these images constitute the primary point of reference for analysis, given that the building no longer exists.

Interpretive analysis is used to test the architecture against its philosophical claims. It draws upon the empirical research material gathered, as well as the insights that have been gained through the author’s personal engagement with Steiner’s architecture and professional experience as a practicing architect engaged in designing and building Steiner schools. It aims to construe the architecture’s inherent meaning and determine its consistency with Steiner’s intellectual and spiritual assertions.

Historical-comparative analysis examines various historical factors that impacted upon Steiner’s work and compares his work to that of others who were addressing similar issues. This analysis also compares Steiner’s theories to our present day understanding of those same ideas, in order to expose new-found similarities or differences.

1.8 Research Scope and Limitations

In order to focus on the primary aims of this thesis, clear boundaries to its scope have been established. Given the prolificacy of Steiner’s work, it does not attempt to provide an overview of every facet of Steiner’s thought. Rather, it is limited to those concepts which relate most significantly to his architectural endeavours. The sheer density and volume of Steiner’s writing mean that even the most learned critic remains somewhat of a beginner. This research makes no judgement on the value or validity of Anthroposophy as a spiritual belief system, but it does consider its value as a method of inspiring and producing architecture. The author adopts a critical position in examining the tenets of Anthroposophy, neither proselytising nor
maligning its claims. However, the qualitative nature of this study means that the researcher’s emphasis necessarily plays a role in the enquiry process. Through the process of interpretation, the researcher becomes an active agent that brings to the research a spectrum of values, norms, beliefs and concepts that characterise their own embeddedness in a specific point in time and culture. These are necessarily drawn upon to bring the work into an intelligible relationship with the interpreter’s own understanding of the world. The author of this research has endeavoured at all times to remain cognisant of the need to maintain a critical distance since it is the personal sympathies and aversions that Steiner’s challenging ideas can invoke that has been a major cause of the proliferation of biased critiques of his work, as revealed in the review of literature in Chapter Two.

1.9 Research Challenges

This research has presented its own unique challenges. The first of these is the cross-disciplinary nature of the study. This thesis is written from within the discipline of architecture however, its investigations overlap with the discipline of philosophy and the practice of Anthroposophy. The author makes no claims to specialised expertise in the field of philosophy and as such this study considers Steiner’s system of Anthroposophy on its own terms, rather than within the broader context of philosophical discourse. While it acknowledges the influence of other philosophers and ideologies, the focus is on gaining a greater understanding of Steiner in his role as philosopher-architect. Furthermore, for practicing Anthroposophists, Steiner’s philosophy is as much a process as it is a knowledge base and therefore offers a different perspective to that of a critic or scholar. Anthroposophy presents a methodology that aims to reach objective truths about the spirit world that can be faithfully reconstructed by those who follow Steiner’s prescriptions of self-development. For some it also represents a way of life that fully penetrates every aspect of everyday life including work, recreation, education, diet and healthcare. Since the author is not an Anthroposophist, this thesis is written from the position of an informed outsider. As such, the author has not engaged in the exercises or techniques prescribed by Steiner for the development of higher faculties of perception and therefore, from an Anthroposophist’s perspective, this research could be considered flawed in its approach. For the purposes of this thesis, Anthroposophy
is viewed as a carrier of underlying values and principles that can be realised by anyone sufficiently dedicated to respectfully studying and understanding its central tenets.

The next challenge for this research is the very nature of Steiner’s thought. How does one analyse Steiner’s philosophy as it relates to one specific field, such as architecture, without fragmenting his entire worldview and negating the holistic qualities Steiner sought? Steiner intended his philosophy to be all-encompassing. He envisioned a large interconnected understanding of the material and spiritual world that cannot be simply broken down into distinct parts. In order to make the scope of the research manageable, the process of analysis has necessarily entailed isolating particular parts that comprise the whole. For the sake of clarity particular themes have been identified within Steiner’s overarching philosophy. These themes are not intended to be prescriptively applied to his buildings, but rather, used as a way of coming to terms with the intrinsic meaning of Steiner’s theories as they relate to the reality of architecture. The themes are not self-contained; they are inherently interdependent and aim to offer a way of interpreting Steiner’s work in terms that are familiar to architectural discourse, without destroying the cohesive fullness of Steiner’s unique outlook.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge faced by this research though, is that of language. The challenges presented by language operate on multiple levels. Firstly there is the issue of translation from German to English. Secondly, there is the issue of the shifting nature of language itself, which changes from one century to the next and one culture to another. Thirdly, Steiner’s writing is littered with an esoteric vernacular that often makes his prose obscure and difficult to follow. And finally, there is the matter of Steiner’s verbose style which employs language with an extraordinary sense of free licence. Given these convolutions, it is remarkable that Steiner’s writings make any sense whatsoever – and indeed, sometimes they do not! Nonetheless, these difficulties have had to be addressed in order for the research to achieve its aims.

The challenge of language is not an uncommon one for researchers. With regard to the translation of words from German to English, Adrian Forty noted in the Introduction of his book Words and Buildings that
Although the trade between languages is in some respects a difficulty in a book like this, in another sense the problem of translation is simply another manifestation of the transitoriness of meaning that is central to the whole enquiry; the migration of ideas and words from one language to another is another aspect of what goes on within a single language as one metaphor is replaced with another.22

This is particularly relevant to this research since Steiner made extensive use of metaphors and analogies in his own writing. In describing the soul for instance, Steiner spoke of its resemblance to a lotus flower, an analogy borrowed from Buddhist teachings. He recognised though that using such an expression was ‘no more accurate than calling parts of a building “wings”.’23 A problem only arises when the vocabulary used is taken in a literal sense. Michael Lipson, the translator of a recent edition of one of Steiner’s most important texts, *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*, even goes so far as to argue that English language readers of Steiner’s texts have an advantage over German language readers, since those reading the books in the language they were originally written are tempted to adopt nominalistic equations of words with concepts. Lipson claims that by approaching Steiner through inadequate and changing English terms, the reader is more likely to face the inadequacy of all terms and leap to Steiner’s intended meaning.24 Adrian Forty also argues that ‘we should not regard the act of translation, as it often is regarded, as “a problem,” for through translation words gain as well as lose.’25 Some words have no literal translation from German to English and therefore the translator must recreate the original meaning of the text in a form congenial to the English language. Since English is the author’s first language, English translations of Steiner’s books and lectures have been heavily (although not solely) relied upon. As a general rule, the author has referred to the most recent translations of Steiner’s texts, published as *Classics in Anthroposophy* by the Anthroposophic Press, since this publishing house,

as its name indicates, specialises in Steiner’s work. These latest translations are accompanied by useful explanatory notes by the editor and have addressed the shortcomings of earlier translations which have been found to vary somewhat in their reliability.

Where trustworthy English translations have not been available, original German texts have been used. Given that the author was not familiar with the German language at the beginning of this research undertaking, a number of strategies have been employed to deal with this specific challenge. The most obvious place to start was to begin learning the language. This was done via a combination of weekly group and one-on-one classes. While these lessons were of tremendous value in providing a basic working knowledge of the language, becoming fluent in the language still remains a work in progress. The standard of proficiency that has been achieved does not yet allow a thorough understanding of complex scholarly texts. In order to attain this level of comprehension, the author has spent a great deal of time working side by side with a native German speaker and teacher, painstakingly translating important German texts. This approach proved to be highly beneficial in two ways. Not only has it allowed the author to gain a more extensive appreciation of the nuances of the German language, it has also helped facilitate the process of close reading by ensuring that the content of the text was not taken for granted. The native speaker’s knowledge of the language combined with the author’s knowledge of the subject matter led to many hours of interesting, in-depth discussions that sought to penetrate to the very core of the texts’ meaning.

Language is not a static entity as it relates to a specific time and culture. A successful translation of any historical text must accommodate this phenomenon, re-tuning the syntax for its contemporary audience while still maintaining fidelity to its original meaning. It must move the spirit of the original creation from one context to another. It is therefore the intention within the words that really matters, more so than the literal interpretation of the words themselves. While literalism struggles to accommodate the temporal dynamic of language, it is rendered almost entirely useless when dealing with mystical conceptions. Their non-sensuous nature presents a special problem for language, since it is extremely difficult to articulate an idea which relies on terminology not adapted to its subject matter. Steiner often used words in a spiritual context that ordinarily related to material facts, thus creating
serious ambiguities in his work. As Geoffrey Ahern recognised in *Sun at Midnight*, a study of Rudolf Steiner and the Western esoteric tradition, there are no rules which enable the reader to know when words connect literally with observable matter and everyday concepts and when they do not. Steiner’s use of the word ‘world’ provides one example of such a difficulty. In *Theosophy*, Steiner refers to spiritual and soul worlds, however they are not intended to describe physical, spatial worlds. Steiner explains that these worlds are ‘states of consciousness, not places. One does not move from one location to the next when one moves through these regions.’ Later on he explains the difficulty of talking about higher worlds in modern times, stating that

> The greatness of our age is due above all to its knowledge and mastery of the physical world, and yet using these ordinary words is our only possible link to what is familiar. This leaves the door wide open for misunderstanding by those willing to trust only their outer senses, since at first much can be expressed or indicated only through comparison and imagery.

A further complication is added by the notion of ‘spiritual blindness’ which suggests that it is impossible to communicate a mystical experience to anyone who has not had such an experience, in the same way that it is impossible to communicate the nature of colour to a person who is born blind. The non-mystic’s ‘spiritual blindness’ is deemed to be the cause of ineffability. Therefore, the mystic must describe the esoteric nature of the spiritual realm exoterically. For this reason Steiner often relied upon terminology that much of his audience were already familiar with from Biblical, Theosophical and Oriental sources. Over time he gradually replaced many of these terms with his own Anthroposophic terminology, training his audience to attach the correct concepts to the new words. The first edition of his fundamental

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27 See “Foreword” by Michael Holdrege in *Theosophy* by Steiner, xxii.
text, *Theosophy*, for example, provided old terms in brackets after the new ones he had introduced, whereas later editions used only the new terms.30

In creating this new terminology Steiner used ordinary language in a particularly liberal fashion. But words act as signs and symbols and it is through familiarity that we come to a shared understanding of their meaning. When they are used in such a way that their meaning is unfamiliar, problems of comprehension inevitably arise. Thus, a genuine understanding of Steiner’s philosophy can only be made possible once the limitations of the language he employed are overcome. Steiner was only too aware of this and called upon architecture to give non-verbal expression to his philosophical ideals. His philosophy and architecture therefore helped to express each other. This research attempts to achieve a deep comprehension of this symbiotic relationship.

1.10 Outline of the Thesis

- **Thesis Structure**

The thesis has been organised into three parts. *Part One: The Context*, consists of Chapters One to Three. It establishes the research topic, outlines the thesis aims and methodology, provides a backdrop to the research undertaking, and identifies the knowledge gap that it seeks to address. *Part Two: The Theories*, consists of Chapters Four to Eight and establishes Steiner’s ideological concepts and analyses how they relate to architecture. *Part Three: The Synthesis*, consists of Chapters Nine to Eleven. It draws together the research findings by considering Steiner in his role as an untrained architect and the contribution he has made to the broader context of architectural history and theory. It also identifies further research opportunities. The content of the individual chapters is outlined in more detail below.

- **Overview of Chapters**

Chapter One, the present chapter, introduces Rudolf Steiner, his system of Anthroposophy and locates him within the cultural milieu of his day. It establishes the thesis aims, rationale, methodology, scope, limitations and challenges and outlines the overall structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two situates the thesis within the current body of architectural knowledge by undertaking a critical review of existing literature. It begins by considering Steiner’s inclusion in, (or in some instances, pointed exclusion from) a number of seminal texts on modern architectural history. It then turns to monographic studies of Steiner’s architecture. The literature review reveals that Steiner’s conception of architecture remains largely unchartered territory in terms of a holistic analysis of his philosophy and its translation into built form.

Steiner is presented through his own words in Chapter Three. It explores some of the inherent problems in Steiner’s writings and lectures, and discusses the polarised opinions that his ideas elicit, thereby helping to establish the background to why his work has tended to be marginalised. An overview of Steiner’s key texts draws out the fundamental tenets of his philosophy, which, in turn, inform his architecture. A brief synopsis of these texts demonstrates the development of Steiner’s thought from orthodox philosophy toward more obscure esoteric ideas. Understanding this shift is critical to understanding and explaining his theories on architecture.

These first three chapters set the foundation upon which a deeper enquiry into Steiner’s architectural theories can begin. The first of these is the theory of the polarity, investigated in Chapter Four. Steiner did not perceive polarity as a simple dualism between two opposing phenomena, but rather as a three-fold concept that sought balance in a third reconciling factor. Steiner referred to this three-fold nature of polarity in hundreds of his writings and lectures however, the terms in which he described it were loaded with religious and mystical meanings. It can be argued that it was his architecture that made the concept most accessible to a non-initiated audience. This chapter illustrates how Steiner’s buildings became the medium through which conflicting forces were expressed and reconciled with each other in order to achieve what Steiner described as a ‘living’ quality. Yet, the harmonious balance between opposing elements that Steiner was striving for was not always present in his architecture. This highlights the fact that theory and practice are themselves a polarity that require sensitive and skilled handling.

The concept of polarity is fundamental to Steiner’s theory of metamorphosis which is investigated in Chapter Five. Steiner believed that Goethe’s concept of an archetypal force inherent in the metamorphosis of plants could also be experienced in
architectural forms, if only we could learn to perceive such forces. Steiner therefore set about applying this principle directly to his buildings. Mystically inspired notions of metamorphosis were prevalent in the philosophical musings and architecture of Louis Sullivan and a comparative analysis of the way in which Steiner and Sullivan sought to integrate this organic concept into their work helps to explicate and draw out the nuanced particulars of Steiner’s own theory.

Central to Steiner’s conception of metamorphosis is the power of the imagination. This leads into a discussion in Chapter Six that considers Steiner’s theory of imagination, inspiration and intuition. It investigates how Steiner related his spiritual understanding of these heightened cognitive faculties to the process of architectural creation. At the turn of the twentieth century, spiritual interpretations of imagination, inspiration and intuition were of significance to many avant-garde artists and architects who also espoused a belief in their ability to transform supramundane thought into creative works. Although such notions have often been dismissed as subjective fantasies, belief in these higher powers allowed Steiner, and others, to move beyond the imitation of earlier styles, to create highly original, artistic forms. The creative processes employed to create them warrant more rigorous examination.

In Chapter Seven, Steiner’s theory of the senses is examined. According to Steiner, within the sensory world there existed a spiritual world that remained concealed from our consciousness to the extent that our perception was limited to our senses and sense-bound thinking. He argued that ignorance of the super-sensible realm was the result of a limited understanding of the senses. Rather than the usual five senses, Steiner differentiated twelve sense functions through which, he believed, human beings were capable of perceiving subtle dimensions of life beyond the immediately apparent physical realm of being. His theory of the senses elucidated the potentiality for an understanding of the way the spiritual world created its image in the physical world. He saw artistic activity as a means of making this hidden union manifest. Steiner therefore advocated a multi-sensory architecture that articulated its spiritual presence experientially through an active engagement with its forms, colours, textures, light and sound. He employed the concept of *gesamtkunstwerk*, a ‘total work of art,’ to create a kind of sensory symphony that raised the architectural observer’s physical experience to a transcendent level, aiming to break down the barriers between the sensorial and spiritual worlds. While the notion of a
metaphysical architectural experience was prevalent among German Expressionist architects, Steiner’s theory of the senses presented an original means of addressing it. Due to its esoteric overtones though, this area of Steiner’s thought has received very little scholarly attention, particularly in relation to its relevance to architecture. This chapter offers new insights into Steiner’s perception of the senses as applied to the production of architecture.

The final theory to be addressed by this thesis is anthropomorphism, which is taken up in Chapter Eight. As the name ‘Anthroposophy’ suggests, Steiner’s worldview was a strongly anthropocentric one in which his writings and buildings drew upon a long and rich history of using the human form and its cultural associations as a means of comprehending humanity’s place in the cosmos. Although Steiner’s work was laden with anthropomorphic references, there has been little architectural scholarship investigating this concept beyond the obvious identification of certain physical human attributes present in many of his buildings. However, Steiner’s use of anthropomorphism in architecture extended far beyond the use of literal motifs. For Steiner, the human being, in all its variety and complexity, offered a much broader way of perceiving architecture. This chapter defines Steiner’s anthropomorphism by examining how he employed the human being metaphorically, as a means of engaging the architectural observer’s imagination in order to reveal the inherent meaning of an architectural work. It identifies three main anthropomorphic metaphors in his architecture—the bodily metaphor, the gender metaphor and the spiritual metaphor. These metaphors provide a framework for understanding and interpreting Steiner’s anthropomorphism within the context of Western architectural history which has employed human metaphors from ancient times until the present.

Equipped with an understanding of Steiner’s theories and how he translated them into architecture, Chapter Nine considers Steiner’s successes and shortcomings as an architect. Both his philosophy and architecture aim to give formal expression to his worldview, however, the means of articulating this worldview differ fundamentally within each discipline. Philosophy and architecture are separated by both process and product, and while an interdisciplinary reading of Steiner’s work does make certain connections between them evident, the incorporeal nature of thinking and the physical reality of building inevitably require different skills of their creators, as well as different criteria by which to assess them. This chapter explores the tension that
exists between Steiner’s philosophy and architecture and examines how he attempted to translate his theoretical ideas into built form. With no formal training as an architect, Steiner’s approach to architectural design was less concerned with the methods and techniques of the craft than with achieving what he saw as architecture’s true purpose—namely to give voice to the inner spiritual content of the building. In order to achieve this ultimate goal, the processes he employed necessarily influenced the final architectural products. The role of drawing, model making and his work with collaborators are also considered. In so doing an evaluation of his role as architect is made possible. How effectively his architectural forms and their philosophical content relate, can also be determined.

Chapter Ten considers Steiner within the broader context of architectural history and theory. While Steiner was striving towards creating a totally new architectural language appropriate to the modern age, he made free use of historical and mythological precedents as archetypal references in his work. This gives his architecture a genealogy that has remained largely undefined. By investigating Steiner’s indebtedness to these sources a greater understanding of his architectural heritage is made possible.

Finally, in Chapter Eleven, the conclusion reconsiders the contribution Steiner has made to the field of architecture in light of the new research that has been presented in this thesis. It states what this thesis has achieved and suggests how this may be relevant for contemporary architecture. It also presents opportunities for the uptake of this research into new areas of architectural investigation in order to move the current understanding of Steiner’s architecture beyond stylistic concerns, towards a more comprehensive appreciation of Steiner’s holistic outlook.
Chapter 2

Steiner in Architectural Literature

Before you study history, study the historian ... Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment.


2.1 Steiner in the Literature of Twentieth Century Architecture

An examination of twentieth century architectural historiography reveals a number of factors that have impacted the way in which Steiner’s work has been positioned within the context of twentieth century architectural history. Not least among them is the fact that Steiner’s spiritual conception of architecture has tended to fall beyond the narrowly circumscribed limits of positivist interpretations of modern architecture. The reductive, rationalist slant of Nikolaus Pevsner’s Pioneers of the Modern Movement published in 1936, and Sigfried Giedion’s Space, Time and Architecture published in 1941, exerted a powerful influence on the perception and reception of modern architecture.1 By refusing to acknowledge the multiplicity that was an intrinsic part of modernism’s struggle to find its own language, their polemical histories presented modern architecture as an unambiguous, normative model of functionalism and scientific objectivity. This sanitised view attempted to repress a compelling counter-movement of sculptural, organic forms, as exemplified by Steiner’s expressive buildings. As a result, Steiner’s work was largely censored out of the pages of architectural history.

More than thirty years later, Pevsner himself acknowledged this omission, admitting that the whole of his Pioneers of the Modern Movement could be rewritten by

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someone of the new generation to whom modern design meant the very opposite of what it had meant to him. He writes

The history which I expect will be written would start from the unquestioning self-expression of Victorian architects, their bold handling of period precedent and their complex plans and elaborate facades, would call Art Nouveau a first climax, with Gaudi as the climax of the climax, would regret the rationalism of my Pioneers and go straight on to the second climax, the expressionism of 1917 – 1923, i.e., the Amsterdam School and indeed Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower and also Steiner's Goetheanum. It would regret the reaction against this personal, creative liberty by those who, like Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, returned to rationalism, and finally end with the re-established expressionism of Ronchamp and so on. ... A history of modern architecture written in this spirit would have its incontrovertible logic, even if I would have my serious reservations about it.²

Despite this somewhat circumspect concession by Pevsner, Bruno Zevi regarded Pevsner as ‘a historian incapable of grasping expressionist originality.’³ Zevi also attacked the lacunae of Giedion’s historiography which had described expressionism as ‘faustean outbursts’ whose ‘influence could not be a healthy one or perform any service to architecture.’⁴ Zevi’s Towards an Organic Architecture published in 1950 was one of the first serious attempts to define an alternative modernist tradition.⁵ Even so, Steiner’s architecture remained conspicuously absent.

In 1958 Henry-Russell Hitchcock made mention of Steiner in his Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, albeit in a fleeting and unfavourable manner. Hitchcock argued that ‘the extreme point of abstract sculptural Expressionism in the twenties is found in the executed works of no architect, but in the cult edifice called the Goetheanum.’⁶ By 1962, in his opening address to a symposium in New York

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³ Bruno Zevi, Erich Mendelsohn: the Complete Works (Boston: Birkhäuser, 1999), LVIII.
entitled *Architecture 1918-1928: From the Novembergruppe to the CIAM*, Hitchcock acknowledged that

The study of the history of modern architecture has been rather biased for many years and several of the most popular books on the subject are no more than harangues in support of aprioristic critical opinions rather than objective reports on what really happened. The twenties are now long ago and it is time to re-examine the events of that critical period ... re-examine the inherited legends and the objectives, and reconsider these objectives in as far as they were realised and perhaps also those aspects that might have been realised.  

Steiner’s work formed part of the symposium’s lively debate that sought to broaden the perspective of modern architectural history.

Two years earlier, in 1960, architectural critics Ulrich Conrads and Hans Sperlich had already begun to address the bias Hitchcock had scorned with the publication of their book *Phantastische Architektur*.  

The English edition, *Fantastic Architecture*, was published soon after in 1963. In the preface to the book the authors state that ‘their aim is not so much to provide historical explanation as to be an apologia for the architecture of the moment.’ They believed that well-known survey books of modern architectural history had led to a perception that the architecture of the mid-twentieth century was ‘the only possible outcome of a logical evolution of earlier tendencies’ which had followed a step-by-step development based on the ‘formulation of doctrinaire principles and ideals.’ In response to this situation the authors positioned their book as

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A collection of what had to be discarded in order to arrive at an orderly definition of present architecture in terms of certain theories. In these theories the idea of an economy of means and methods predominated.\textsuperscript{12}

They argued that

If one ventured to construct a really complete picture of the architecture of this century, it would have to include phenomena which do not correspond to the better known, universally recognised trends and which for that reason have usually been ignored. They have been considered superfluous, passing fads, and frequently have been pronounced pathological. To preserve the orderly classification, impulses of architectural fantasy were branded as freaks.\textsuperscript{13}

Steiner won a place among the ‘freaks’ that Conrads and Sperlich sought to reconsider, alongside architects such as Antoni Gaudi, Erich Mendelsohn, Bruno and Max Taut, as well as later generation architects including Hans Scharoun, Paolo Soleri and Bruce Goff. The authors’ approach represented a shift in understanding in terms of the importance of these marginalised figures to the development of modern architecture. Their critique however is somewhat meagre and although the book is richly illustrated, its sparse commentary does little to support the images or articulate the authors’ position. The selection of works appears to have been determined on a visual, rather than historical or theoretical basis. The final section of the book presents a selection of primary source material that includes architects’ statements, lectures and letters. Among them is a lecture that was delivered by Steiner in Berne on June 25, 1921, titled \textit{The Building Concept of the Goethenaum}. The inclusion of these documents adds some intellectual substance to the publication however the lack of analysis by the authors fails to guide the reader in terms of the relevance and relationship of these documents to the broader context of modern architecture.

The concept of architectural fantasy was again taken up by Dennis Sharp in his book \textit{Modern Architecture and Expressionism} published in 1966.\textsuperscript{14} Sharp contends that the concept of fantasy in architecture dates back to the \textit{Antichi Edifici} engraving of
Giovanni Battista Piranesi in the eighteenth century and to the imaginative designs of the French Symbolist Claude-Nicholas Ledoux (1736-1806). According to Sharp a revival of fantasy was evident in the work of National Romantic architects during the last years of the nineteenth century as well as in the Art Nouveau and the ‘peculiarly eccentric buildings’ of Antoni Gaudi in Barcelona. Given the revival of interest in Gaudi’s work in the early 1950s that ‘produced so much enthusiasm for plasticity of form and sculptural monolithy,’ Sharp found it ‘strange’ that modern architects had ignored Steiner’s Second Goetheanum for so long. He argued that

No doubt a reappraisal of Steiner’s contribution to the architecture of Expressionism … in this post-Ronchamp era is valid, even if its connections with that master from La Chaux-de-Fonds (Le Corbusier), which is just down the road from Dornach, are continuously denied. The connections are denied in the face of good evidence …

Sharp sought to redress Steiner’s omission from the pages of modern architectural history by dedicating an entire chapter to him. This constituted the most detailed account of Steiner’s work that had hitherto been seen in the mainstream architectural press. Sharp recognised that a proper appreciation of Steiner’s architecture could not be arrived out without at least some reference to his philosophical views. He gives particular attention to Steiner’s theories on the metamorphosis of form and the experience of colour, which he relates back to the work of Expressionist painters Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Franz Marc, Wassily Kandinsky and Emil Nolde discussed earlier in his book. But despite locating Steiner within the context of Expressionism, Sharp himself seems to be not entirely convinced that Steiner properly belongs there. In his later book, Twentieth Century Architecture: A Visual History published in 1972, Sharp states that due to its idiosyncrasies and unique originality, Steiner’s architecture falls into no stylistic category and thus defies normal critical evaluation. Where Sharp differs from earlier historians however, is that he was able to accommodate such peculiarities since he was not attempting to preserve a strict polemical position as Pevsner and Giedion had done. Sharp accepts

15 Sharp, Modern Architecture and Expressionism, 27.
16 Sharp, Modern Architecture and Expressionism, 27.
17 Sharp, Modern Architecture and Expressionism, 164.
18 Sharp, Modern Architecture and Expressionism, 15.
Steiner’s architecture in its own right for its ‘amazing technical achievement’ as well as its ‘aesthetic curiosities’ that transcend functional requirements or structural efficiencies.\textsuperscript{20}

A year after the publication of Sharp’s \textit{Visual History}, American architectural scholar Rosemarie Haag Bletter discussed the difficulty of classifying Steiner stylistically in a lengthy footnote in her doctoral dissertation \textit{Bruno Taut and Paul Scheerbart’s Vision}.\textsuperscript{21} Bletter identifies Steiner’s belief in empathy and use of imitative organic forms as Art Nouveau characteristics that he continued to extol long after Art Nouveau had lost its momentum. However, she also recognises that as a theorist Steiner had had a direct influence on abstract art, particularly the work of Kandinsky, and hence, indirectly influenced many aspects of Expressionism. In terms of Steiner’s architecture though, Bletter suggests that this influence reversed itself, dating the height of architectural Expressionism between 1918 and 1920, several years before the appearance of Steiner’s \textit{Second Goetheanum} in 1923.

In 1973 another doctoral dissertation titled \textit{The Origins and Aims of Expressionist Architecture} by Eugene Santomasso also pointed out the affinities Steiner’s architecture shared with Art Nouveau (or more specifically its German incarnation, the Jugendstil) and Expressionism.\textsuperscript{22} Santomasso examined how the attitudes of Expressionist architecture were interpreted between 1900 and 1918, with a particular focus on Steiner, establishing him as an essential forerunner to the later Expressionism of the post war period. In identifying the Jugendstil as a major generating force of Expressionism, Santamasso emphasises Steiner’s indebtedness to the aesthetics of empathy, exemplified in the works of Hermann Obrist, August Endell, Henry van de Velde, Hans Poelzig and Erich Mendelsohn. He argues that Steiner’s work did not represent a new style in architecture, as Steiner himself contended, but rather that he rephrased the vocabulary of the Jugendstil into his own expressive language.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Sharp, \textit{A Visual History of Twentieth Century Architecture}, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Santomasso, \textit{Origins and Aims of Expressionist Architecture}, 297 and 300.
\end{itemize}
The German architectural historian, Wolfgang Pehnt, concurs with Santomasso’s thesis that the Jugendstil anticipated many of the features of Expressionist architecture. Pehnt also acknowledges the closeness of Expressionist and Anthroposophic aims but argues that

The authenticity of Steiner’s architecture is not affected by such associations. Despite its contemporaneity it is an isolated product of an unusual creative force, of the strength of will of an individual and at the same time of the convictions of a community that was (usually) at one with itself about its view of the world.

In his book Expressionist Architecture, Pehnt provides a detailed account of the development of Steiner’s architectural endeavours from their earliest inception in a model produced in 1907 for an unrealised building in Malsch, through to the First and Second Goetheanum and some of its ancillary buildings. This account of Steiner’s architecture was further elaborated in Pehnt’s monographic study of Steiner’s architecture titled Rudolf Steiner: Goetheanum, Dornach, published in 1991. The book’s text is presented in both German and English and while it does not offer a deep inquiry into the ideological basis of the work, it is accompanied by superb colour photographs that reveal the buildings’ striking visual effects. Pehnt is one of the most prominent writers on Steiner’s architecture and to this day continues to contribute knowledgably to the discourse.

Even though the writings of Sharp and Pehnt drew greater attention to Expressionist architecture, and Steiner in particular, this did not necessarily afford Steiner’s work any wider acceptance amongst scholars. In 1979, the conservative English philosopher, Roger Scruton, launched a scathing attack in his book The Aesthetics of Architecture, arguing that

To meet with an expressionist building in one's daily life is like being constantly button-holed by a self-vaunting bore, who urgently wishes you to know what he feels, and yet who feels just the same every day. It is thus with the architecture of Rudolf Steiner, than which little in the world

25 Wolfgang Pehnt, Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach (Berlin: Ernst and Sohn, 1991), 35.
of architecture exemplifies greater confusion of thought or greater depravity of emotion.  

By contrast Joseph Rykwert acknowledged Steiner’s buildings as some of the most ‘remarkable monuments of German Expressionism’ in his controversial essay titled “The Dark Side of the Bauhaus.” Rykwert’s essay sought to recognise the esoteric heritage that he believed constituted a vital but widely ignored aspect of modernist architectural discourse. He argues that

The apologists and historians of the Bauhaus have always presented it as the shrine of reason in an unreasonable, confused world. I wish to show that this picture is a distortion of what was thought or done. And I propose to suggest that the Bauhaus remains interesting and relevant because it has an irrational, strong dark side. 

In a brief foreword to the essay, Rykwert observes that

This, as it seems to me, unexceptional contribution to the history of the Bauhaus provoked the fury of a number of Bauhäusler who felt that I was trying to denigrate the holy house. In fact my intention—in showing its diversity and richness, and the awareness on the part of some of its masters of the deep issues touched—had been rather to underline its importance beyond the clichés of the handbooks.

With the dominant discourse of modern architecture having been stripped of all mystically inclined influences, Rykwert’s suggestion was simply too outrageous for some purists to bear. Nonetheless, by acknowledging these irrational aspects, new possibilities emerged for evaluating the supposed architectural aberrations that had been censored by earlier historians. More recent authoritative texts such as Hanno-Walter Kruft’s A History of Architectural Theory published in 1994, and Harry Mallgrave’s Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey, 1673-1968 published in 2005, both recognise Steiner’s unique contribution to architecture.

28 Rykwert, “The Dark Side of the Bauhaus,” 44.
29 Rykwert, “The Dark Side of the Bauhaus,” 44.
without trying to force it into a defined stylistic category. Kruft perceives Steiner’s architectural concepts as having great consistency by virtue of their Anthroposophical roots and places particular emphasis on the organic, rather than expressionist quality of his work. Mallgrave also considers the label of Expressionism problematic since there is no single thread that connects the different approaches of the various architects who were most commonly associated with the term. Mallgrave observes that Steiner’s architectural ideas ‘revealed the more esoteric side of Expressionist thinking but without the prevailing despondency.’

The literature presented thus far has provided some insight into the way in which Steiner’s work has been positioned within the broader narrative of twentieth century modern architecture. There is also much to be learned however, from more focused monographic studies of Steiner’s architecture. It is this literature to which the focus of this review now turns.

2.2 Monographic Studies of Steiner’s Architecture

A number of monographic studies on Steiner’s architectural work offer a variety of perspectives on the distinctive contribution Steiner has made to the field of architecture. The majority of these have been written by practicing Anthroposophists. While it is important to be mindful that such accounts have the potential to present a biased critique, they nevertheless provide an insight into the deeper ideological and philosophical tenets of Steiner’s architecture that have often been overlooked by architectural scholars.

Architectural histories that do include Steiner’s work, mainly refer to Steiner’s two most well-known buildings – the First and Second Goetheanums. More focused studies offer the possibility of looking beyond these recognised buildings to Steiner’s lesser known ancillary and residential buildings. These are presented in Erich Zimmer’s Rudolf Steiner als Architekt von Wohn und Zweckbauten (Rudolf Steiner as architect of residential and utility buildings) published in 1971. This  

31 Mallgrave, Modern Architectural Theory, 245.
comprehensive German text contains detailed descriptions of the buildings supported by hundreds of sketches, models, scaled drawings and photographs, providing a *catalogue raisonné* of Steiner’s architectural endeavours. However since it was never translated into English, it has remained relatively unknown outside the German speaking world.

This is not the case with another book on Steiner’s architecture by prominent Anthroposophists Rex Raab, Arne Klingborg, and Åke Fant. Originally published under the title *Sprechenden Beton: Wie Rudolf Steiner den Stahlbeton verwendete* in 1972, the authors wanted Steiner’s architecture to become accessible to a much wider audience and therefore released an English edition titled *Eloquent Concrete: How Rudolf Steiner Employed Reinforced Concrete*, in 1979. Few people would have been better equipped to conduct a study of Steiner’s architecture, given their direct experience of it as the consultants engaged to complete parts of the interior and the western end of the *Second Goetheanum*. Raab, an architect, Klingborg, an artist, and Fant, an art historian, brought to the research their first-hand knowledge of Steiner’s buildings combined with a deep understanding of Anthroposophy’s underlying tenets. This provided an intelligent base upon which to build a comprehensive understanding of Steiner’s architectural work. In the book’s preface the authors state that their aim is to present ‘in word and picture … a straightforward description of the architecture in reinforced concrete inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner.’ They also claim to have ‘sought to hold back with ready-made judgements’ and instead ‘hint at experiences rather than produce something definitive.’ In so doing, they hoped to create something that would be ‘acceptable both to the general public and the professional world.’ For the most part they succeeded in this objective. The wealth of black and white illustrations offer a real sense of the buildings’ spatial and tactile qualities; the materiality of the concrete is almost palpable. The images are supported by unambiguous text that employs neither Anthroposophical nor architectural jargon.

If the book suffers from any inadequacy, it is the limited footnoting that leaves some of the authors claims open to suspicion of hearsay. In one such example, architect

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Hans Scharoun is said to have claimed that the Second Goetheanum was ‘the most significant building of the first half of the century.’ Another conspicuous example is found in the final chapter of the book which opens as follows

Frank Lloyd Wright was standing in his studio at Taliesin North, contemplating a book in his hand, “Goethe’s Conception of the World, by Rudolf Steiner,” he read. One of his young assistants, Robert Warn, who had just handed it to him, saw that he was moved. “You know, Bob, nobody has any idea how much Goethe has meant to me in my life. For me he is a true world-liberator.” Then the eighty year old architect added, “I know about Rudolf Steiner, but I should know more.”

Given Wright’s and Scharoun’s esteemed status, in drawing these links the authors sought to bolster Steiner’s reputation as an influential figure and boost his credibility. Rather than relying on such fragile allusions, the authors’ aims could have been better served by investigating the potential influence of Wright’s work on Steiner, particularly given the extraordinary success of Wright’s Wasmuth Portfolio which was published in Germany in 1910, three years prior to the beginning of construction of the First Goetheanum. Titled Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright, (Executed buildings and designs of Frank Lloyd Wright), it consisted of a two-volume folio of 100 lithographs with an accompanying monograph by Wright. It is feasible that an exchange between Wright and Steiner could have worked in both directions, although given the individualistic nature of both men, it is unlikely that either would ever have admitted to such. In an essay on Wright, architectural historian, Vincent Scully, noted that in his later years Wright increasingly came ‘under the spell, woven mainly by Olgivanna Wright, of the mystical and pedagogically oriented system of Gurdjieff, ultimately related to the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner.’ In the early twentieth century George Gurdjieff (1866-1949) was an influential Russian spiritual leader, who, like Steiner, was deeply immersed in the teachings of esoteric traditions. Though their work shared some similarities, Gurdjieff’s teachings were not directly related to Steiner’s as Scully assumed.

37 Raab, Klingborg, and Fant, Eloquent Concrete, 18.
38 Raab, Klingborg, and Fant, Eloquent Concrete, 161.
Nevertheless, Wright may well have been familiar with Steiner’s work as a result of his wife’s mystical interests. A more detailed exploration of such connections, rather than attribution of unsubstantiated testimonials, could have proven to be a more fruitful approach by Raab, Klingborg and Fant.

Klingborg offered another worthwhile contribution to the literature on Steiner’s architecture in a book he produced with fellow Anthroposophist, Hagen Biesantz, titled *The Goetheanum: Rudolf Steiner’s Architectural Impulse*. The book was published in 1978 in parallel with an exhibition mounted at the *Goetheanum* between July and October of the same year. This sought to document the genesis of the building and its effect on contemporary architectural activity. The book is a compilation of chapters written by Biesantz and Klingborg with other contributing authors. The initial chapters provide an account of Steiner’s earliest architectural endeavours while he was still involved with the Theosophical Society, through to his major projects, the *First and Second Goetheanums*. These chapters are followed by a contribution by Åke Fant that attempts to place Steiner’s architecture within the broader context of early twentieth century architecture by considering contemporaneous architectural movements and identifying similar themes in these and Steiner’s work, such as colour, nature, social order and spirituality. While this approach holds some potential, the author fails to demonstrate how these ideas relate to Steiner’s particular interpretation of such concepts. Connections are loosely drawn, making the study more a cursory survey than a compelling argument that establishes evidence of kinship. Another contribution by Rex Raab, reviews the architectural literature that was available at the time on Steiner. It includes some of the references previously referred to in this thesis chapter, as well as some other brief, less influential essays and unpublished works. Raab rightly concluded from the review that there remained many aspects of the *Goetheanum* building impulse that had not been exhausted. He anticipated that in years to come, further writings would appear to reflect the architectural practice and experience of others who looked to the *Goetheanum* as a source of inspiration. The book concludes with an illustrated and

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annotated index of almost ninety architects (and some non-qualified, would-be architects) whose works were displayed in the exhibition as examples of buildings that attempted to develop Steiner’s ideas in their own practice, the most notable among them being Walter Burley Griffin (1876-1937).44

Another architect to have featured in the exhibition was Carl Kemper (1881-1957), who had collaborated with Steiner on the First Goetheanum from 1914 and had made a major contribution towards resolving the west façade of the Second Goetheanum after Steiner’s death. A book published in 1984 titled Der Bau: Studien zur Architektur und Plastik des ersten Goetheanum von Carl Kemper (Studies of architecture and sculpture of the first Goetheanum by Carl Kemper) presents a compilation of material recovered from Kemper’s estate.45 It includes detailed studies of the First Goetheanum’s sculptural elements with a particular focus on the columns, capitals and architraves as well as extensive mathematical and geometrical studies of the floor plan. The book incorporates many excellent detail photographs that record the fine craftsmanship that was lost forever when the building was ravaged by fire. Like Zimmer’s earlier publication though, the book was only ever published in German and its readership has not extended to a broader architectural audience.

In 1994 the General Anthroposophical Society determined that in order to make the Society truly cosmopolitan and international, a new English publication on Steiner’s architecture was necessary. There was a financial imperative behind this decision given that the Second Goetheanum and surrounding buildings were in need of refurbishment, extension and completion. By increasing awareness of Steiner’s architecture, the Society considered that it was more likely to garner financial support from branches throughout the world. This resulted in a dedicated edition of the quarterly magazine Stil being published in English. Stil was the official organ of


the Society’s Art Section to support arts training based on Steiner’s philosophical conceptions. The English edition of the magazine was titled *The Great Hall of the Goetheanum: Its Completion at the End of the Century*. It included contributions that presented the ideas behind the forms to be used in the auditorium along with photographs of models produced to explore these forms. A text by Steiner on the rebuilding of the *Goetheanum* that had been published in the Society newsletter just three months before his death was also translated into English for the publication.

In the same year, English architect Kenneth Bayes produced a small book titled *Living Architecture: Rudolf Steiner’s ideas in Practice* which helped extend Steiner’s reach into English speaking countries. Bayes is a prominent member of the Anthroposophical Society and has designed buildings that could be described as ‘Steineresque’ in terms of their aesthetic expression. Bayes’ familiarity with Steiner’s writings makes this book quite different to commentaries by mainstream architectural historians in that it considers Steiner’s architecture within the larger context of his all-embracing worldview. This is particularly evident in the book’s second and third chapters in which Bayes provides specific insights into Steiner’s occult understanding of cosmic evolution in relation to the development of architectural styles. After providing an overview of Steiner’s architecture that focuses primarily on the *First and Second Goetheanums*, Bayes attempts to locate Steiner’s work, and that of contemporary architects inspired by Steiner’s architectural impulse, within the broader stream of organic architecture. The brevity of the book however, does not permit a detailed consideration of this line of thought. As a result, Bayes awards Steiner the status of ‘organic pioneer’ alongside Antoni Gaudi, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Henri van de Velde, Charles Renni Mackintosh, Peter Behrens and Hans Peolzig. Whether Steiner, or indeed some of the other architects Bayes mentions, can rightly assume the title of pioneers of the organic stream is debatable and Bayes provides little evidence to substantiate his position.

American architectural scholar and Anthroposophist, David Adams, also sought to establish Steiner’s architecture as part of a larger organic movement. Adams most significant contribution in terms of scholarly investigation into Steiner’s architecture is a lengthy article that was published in the *Journal of Architectural Historians* in 1992 titled *Rudolf Steiner’s First Goetheanum as an Illustration of Organic Functionalism*. 49 In this article, Adams distinguishes ‘organic functionalism’ as an alternative to the ‘utilitarian functionalism’ that he perceives as synonymous with Modern architecture. He describes how Steiner’s organic functionalism arose out of a special form of intuitive thinking that Steiner called ‘organic structural thoughts.’ According to Steiner these thoughts were based on the essential laws of living nature, which, if properly applied, manifested in architectural form. Adams outlines the ways in which this organic principle finds tangible expression in Steiner’s First Goetheanum. Written for an academic audience, this essay carefully negotiates the esoteric content of Steiner’s architecture by relating it back to an established architectural lexicon of form and function.

This is not the case in the majority of Adams’ other writings. Written for an Anthroposophic audience, most of Adams’ other work makes extensive use of occult jargon, and at times, resorts to some rather apocryphal claims. This is made evident in his essay *The Goetheanum as White Magic, or Why is Anthroposophical Architecture so Important?* 50 The title is indicative of the esoteric slant the paper adopts, describing Steiner’s formal language in spiritual rather than architectural terms. Adams describes how, according to Steiner, architectural styles had a direct affect on future incarnations of the human soul. Based on this notion of pre-determined destiny, Adams makes the radical claim that

The “soul pollution” from wrongly designed spaces, forms and colours around us is surely a greater threat to humanity than the dangers of air pollutants or nuclear radiation in the physical environment. 51

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There is a wide schism between Adams’ scholarly and Anthroposophical accounts of Steiner’s architecture. As a bona fide scholar it can be assumed that Adams was quite deliberate in creating this disjuncture. However this seems to be something of a missed opportunity. Adams’ knowledge of both architecture and Anthroposophy could have potentially presented an interesting synthesis that may have enabled a much deeper understanding of Steiner’s work for both audiences. Instead this disparate approach leaves the reader unclear as to the author’s partisanship, thereby bringing the integrity of his writing into question.

A solid attempt at achieving such a synthesis was made in 1990, in a themed issue of the journal *Anthroposophy Today*. The issue titled *Anthroposophy and Architecture* presents eight essays from practicing architects and Anthroposophists. It also includes an English translation of an essay written by Steiner in 1923 titled *Art and Science – Two streams from One Source*. Steiner’s essay highlighted his desire for the Goetheanum not to be read in sectarian terms, but rather as an artistic expression of both heart and mind. The contributing authors address architecture in its relationship to Anthroposophy from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Kenneth Bayes contributed three essays, the first of which addresses the challenges of the day in relation to the application of Anthroposophical principles to architecture, the second of which links Gothic architecture with the Anthroposophic principle of cosmic evolution, and finally the third of which reports on a conference held by the Camphill architects in 1989. The Camphill movement was established in Scotland in 1939 by paediatrician Karl Koenig, who developed a community to cater for children with special needs based on therapeutic educative and social principles outlined by Steiner. The movement has since grown to more than 100 communities in 23 countries. Joan deRis Allen, a Camphill architect working in Northern Ireland, contributed an essay outlining the three guiding ‘pillars’ of the Camphill movement and how they can be expressed in architecture. Christopher Day, architect and author of multiple books on architecture that draw heavily on Anthroposophic principles, presented an essay discussing the health-affirming benefits of Camphill architecture.

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52 *Anthroposophy and Architecture*. Theme Issue of *Anthroposophy Today*, no. 9, (Spring 1990).
53 See [http://www.camphill.net/](http://www.camphill.net/)
55 Joan deRis Allen has documented more than fifty Camphill buildings in her book *Living Buildings: An Expression of Fifty Years of Camphill* (Bieldside: Camphill Architects, 1990).
qualities of architecture that can either be supported or impaired through the sensorial experiences buildings elicit. An essay by Andrew Beard titled *The Modern Movement: Is it Relevant to a Spiritual-Scientific Approach to Architecture?* briefly examines the principles of time, morality, sense of place and the essential qualities of form, in order to demonstrate cultural impulses that Steiner shared with modernist architects. On the whole these articles applaud Steiner as an architectural innovator. At the same time they recognise that Anthroposophically inspired architecture is impoverished if it does not strive to create a form language that is appropriate to its own time, program and place. While the journal proves to be a useful addition to the available literature on Steiner’s architecture, its reach into the field of architecture has been limited by the fact that it was published by an Anthroposophical rather than architectural publisher.

In the twenty-first century, Steiner’s architecture continues to be advanced by architects dedicated to the cause of Anthroposophy. One of its most prominent proponents in Europe is Dutch architect, Pieter van der Ree. Through his writing, teaching and exhibition curation, van der Ree has gone further than any other in terms of establishing Steiner’s architecture as part of a broader organic impulse. In 2001 van der Ree published *Organische Architektur: Der Bauimpuls Rudolf Steiners und die organische Architektur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Organic Architecture: Rudolf Steiner’s Building Impulse and Organic Architecture in the Twentieth Century). The book begins with an investigation into the origins and background of organic architecture as it emerged in different countries at the beginning of the twentieth century, through the work of Sullivan, Wright, van de Velde, Gaudi and Häring. This is followed by a chapter that explains Steiner’s architecture as a form of organic architecture inspired by Goethe’s scientific work that emphasises its spiritual content.


57 Beard draws further connections to modernist architecture in the Introduction to *Rudolf Steiner Architecture: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Andrew Beard (Forest Row: Sophia Books, 2003). The reader is a collection of segments of lectures delivered by Steiner on the subject of architecture. Beard’s introduction also provides an accessible pathway into some of Steiner’s ideas on metamorphosis, evolution and reincarnation and their relationship with architecture.

Van der Ree then considers how organic architecture continued to develop from the fifties through to the nineties in Le Corbusier’s chapel of Notre Dame du Haut, Eero Saarinen’s TWA airport terminal, and in the work of Alvar Aalto, Hans Scharoun and Santiago Calatrava. The study moves on to consider contemporary examples of organic architecture. Case studies are chosen from all parts of the world, with an emphasis on architects who identify their work with the tenets of Anthroposophy. In conclusion, the book considers how organic architecture can address current environmental, social and technological challenges.

Calling for a renewal in organic building, van der Ree, developed these ideas further in a travelling exhibition titled *Organic Architecture: Man and Nature as Inspiration for Building* that was shown for the first time in Amsterdam in 2003. Backed by the Iona Foundation, an organisation that supports a wide variety of Anthroposophical initiatives, the exhibition aims for these ideas to reach as wide an audience as possible.59 To date it has travelled to cities in Germany, Finland, Belgium, Netherlands and most recently to Estonia in 2013. The exhibition material consists of color photographs, transparencies, drawings and sketches, models and chairs. It covers similar content to that presented in van der Ree’s book *Organische Architektur* however, the exhibition has the advantage of making the content accessible to the general public, rather than limiting itself to Anthroposophical or architectural devotees. Van der Ree’s approach to merging his Anthroposophical and architectural perspectives is more successful than Adams and although his Anthroposophical allegiance is patently expressed in his 2009 book, *Formen schaffen als Ausdruck inneren Lebens* (*Creative Forms as an Expression of Inner Life*), he does not alienate the non-initiated reader.60 Unlike Adams, van der Ree seeks to relate the esoteric content of Steiner’s philosophy in familiar terms, grounding it in practical and experiential ways that inform the creative process. Nonetheless, van der Ree’s close personal attachment to Anthroposophy may contribute to the exalted view he holds of Steiner’s architecture.

The same cannot be said of Swiss architect, Werner Blaser. As the author of 108 architectural books, Blaser’s interests are both vast and eclectic. His titles include

studies of architects as diverse as Alvar Aalto, Richard Meier, Renzo Piano, Norman Foster, Santiago Calatrava and Tadao Aando. In 2002 Blaser produced a bi-lingual book on Steiner’s architecture titled *Natur im Gebauten/Nature in Building: Rudolf Steiner in Dornach*.\(^6^1\) In this book the principle of organicism is once again addressed. Blaser names Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin, Eero Saarinen’s MIT chapel and Frank Gehry’s Vitra and Guggenheim Museums, as works he perceives as having been created from the same ‘organic-visual understanding’ as Steiner’s.\(^6^2\) In making this connection, Blaser does not attempt to draw tenuous lines of influence, but rather suggests that these architects offer ‘encouragement for a redefinition of spiritual foundations’ through ‘a dialog (sic) with nature.’\(^6^3\) Blaser describes organic architecture as ‘a focus on the essential,’ which he sees ‘reflected in, among other things, the use of materials.’\(^6^4\) Blaser superbly illustrates this through a series of crisp black and white photographs of Steiner’s buildings and models that highlight their rich, textural materiality. Although the book is rather lightweight in terms of analysis, the sensitively captured images allow the architecture to speak for itself. While Blaser is receptive to Steiner’s ideals, he is not an Anthroposophist and his photographic approach clearly reflects the aesthetic persuasion of an architect. The book is primarily concerned with the visual, spatial and constructional qualities of Steiner’s architecture, rather than its philosophical content.

Blaser applied the same emphasis to his seminal study *Mies van der Rohe: The Art of Structure*, published almost forty years earlier in 1963.\(^6^5\) Blaser had a personal relationship with the renowned architect and was invited by Mies to publish the monograph. Several of Blaser’s other titles are dedicated to Mies’ work. Mies’ highly rationalised style could hardly be further removed from Steiner’s organic sculptural forms, and critics have been perplexed by Blaser’s appreciation of both. In a conversation between Blaser and the author in 2009, the 85 year-old architect stated


Architects think I’m wrong. I am very close to Mies van der Rohe and they don’t understand how I could make a book on Steiner and at the same time on Mies – but I think Steiner is great!66

According to Blaser, Steiner and Mies were both striving in their own way to find an architectural language appropriate to their time and, in his view, both were valid. Blaser recognised in Mies’ and Steiner’s work a yearning towards the spiritual, even though their means of expressing this in architectural form differed substantially. Mies himself described ‘building art’ as the ‘spatial execution of spiritual decisions.’67 Blaser said of Mies that he

Performed the meritorious service of redirecting architecture along the path of to a deeper spiritual plane and thus to an ultimate unity. Through his work we are able to recognise the spiritual nature of architectural problems and find ever new solutions for them in creative freedom.68

Blaser also understood that Steiner placed tremendous value on the concept of creative freedom, and therefore lamented that much of the architecture produced in Steiner’s name lacked any creative translation for the present.69 In an arena so crowded with partiality, Blaser’s more objective outlook is refreshing.

Blaser’s Nature in Building concludes with an essay by Walter Kugler, the director of the Rudolf Steiner Archive. Titled The Philosopher and the Door Lock, the essay discusses the unusual mechanics of the Glass House door handle in relation to the ‘gestalt-shaping forces’ of organic architecture.70 This piece was republished in 2007 in a volume of 34 essays edited by Kugler, titled Rudolf Steiner in Kunst und

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66 Informal discussion between Werner Blaser and author in Blaser’s architectural offices in Basel on October 15th, 2009. At the time of this discussion, Blaser was working on a visual research project that used transparent overlays to compare how the architecture of Mies van der Rohe and Danish architect, Erik Asmussen (1913-1998), related to nature. Asmussen was responsible for designing numerous Anthroposophically inspired buildings including schools, cultural facilities, student residences and workshops for the Steiner Seminary in Järna, Sweden. For a detailed account of Asmussen’s work see Erik Asmussen, Architect byGary Coates, Susanne Siepl-Coates and Max Plunger (Stockholm: Byggforlagte, 1997).


69 Informal discussion between Blaser and author, 15 October, 2009.

While a number of the essays had previously been published, this collection nevertheless makes for a convenient compendium of the field’s most prominent writers. It includes architectural essays by Sharp, Pehnt and Kugler, among others. Studies that explore Steiner’s relationship with contemporaneous Abstract Expressionist artists, and the influence that his work brought to bear on German Fluxus artist, Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) during the 1960s and 70s is also considered. Steiner’s blackboard drawings are investigated by several authors, while his lesser known hand-crafted jewellery pieces also come under scrutiny. An English translation of this volume would undoubtedly be welcomed by English speaking Anthroposophists as well as artists and architects working with Steiner’s ideas in practice.

Another compilation of essays by leading Steiner scholars was published in Russian in 2001 under the title of *Arkhitektura i Anthroposophia*, with a second edition being released in 2010. The book’s editor, Anna Sokolina, provides a useful introductory chapter that familiarises the reader with Steiner’s work and its relationship with the field of architecture. Sokolina has drawn together twenty-nine essays and divided them into two main themes—the first being historical and the second being contemporary in its focus. Part One, titled *Origins*, consists primarily of contributions by renowned Anthroposophical authors, most of whom have been identified in this chapter for their larger monographic works. Much of the content in this section is already available in German and English. It is significant however in that Steiner’s work had previously received relatively little scholarly attention in Russia where, during the Soviet period, Anthroposophy had been prohibited and its followers persecuted. Steiner’s work had nonetheless struck a chord with some of Russia’s most prominent artists. These included Wassily Kandinsky, who attended Steiner’s lectures, and novelist Andrei Bely, who became one of Steiner’s close personal friends. The historical context established by the first part of the book lays the foundation for the second, more original part, titled *New Impulses*. This section illustrates how Steiner’s ideas have been applied to various contemporary architectural and creative endeavours. It considers the work of a number Anthroposophically inspired architects, most prominent among them being Erik

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Asmussen in Sweden and Christopher Day in Wales. Other essays address a range of diverse subjects including ecologically sustainable housing, the use of water in architecture, and the application of organic design principles in bullet trains. Collectively these essays provide a broad sense of the impact and reach of Steiner’s ideas, demonstrating their relevance for a new Russian audience.

An expanding interest in Steiner’s architectural work has been reflected over the past decade or so in the number of new German titles that have been published exploring different aspects of Steiner’s architectural and aesthetic impulses. These have included detailed studies of the painted cupola motifs of the *First Goetheanum* and other related artworks, as well as sumptuous photographic expositions that range from the intimate scale of Steiner’s handcrafted furniture design to the macro scale of the powerful relationship that exists between the *Second Goetheanum* and the awe-inspiring landscape of the surrounding Jura Mountains.73 In the body of this thesis other German books are referred to in relation to particular ideas that are being investigated and are therefore not considered here in detail.74

Two recent titles however, published in both German and English editions, do warrant particular attention. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Steiner’s birth two major exhibitions were mounted in Germany with accompanying catalogues that represent an unprecedented public presentation and reconsideration of Steiner’s work and its influence on art and architecture today. The 2010 exhibition titled *Rudolf Steiner: The Alchemy of the Everyday* was assembled by the Vitra Design Museum and draws together a plethora of artefacts including 45 pieces of furniture, 46 models, 18 sculptures and over 200 original drawings as well as documents and letters to Steiner from such well known figures as Franz Kafka, Piet Mondrian and Richard Neutra.75 Comparative works by Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Antoni Gaudi, Frank Lloyd Wright and Erich Mendelsohn are included in

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the exhibition, suggesting shared aims and ideals, albeit arrived at by different means and methods and expressed in varying forms. There is a fertile convergence between these works that demonstrates Steiner’s work is not as isolated or idiosyncratic as some earlier critics have argued. The catalogue is produced as a large format hard-bound publication that is lavishly illustrated throughout. It contains numerous essays by both Anthroposophical and non-Anthroposophical authors, giving the book a sense of balance.

The second 2010 exhibition is titled *Rudolf Steiner and Contemporary Art* and was organised by the *Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg* in conjunction with the *Kunstmuseum Stuttgart*. It explores responses to Steiner’s ideas in the work of seventeen contemporary visual artists. Their individual approaches reveal how Steiner’s conceptions have been interpreted and filtered in such a way that gives them currency and relevance for the twenty first century. The introduction declares that ‘Steiner is not the exclusive property of the Anthroposophists!’ and this is clearly evident in the work, which does not rely on Steiner’s stylistic language in the way that so-called ‘Anthroposophical art’ has done for decades. Though this approach may barb Anthroposophical traditionalists, it offers a new way of engaging with Steiner’s work.

The literature presented in this chapter is not exhaustive. It does however highlight the conflicting and divergent points of view that surround Steiner’s architectural output. The totalitarian narratives of earlier architectural historians and the tendentious accounts by Anthroposophists, demonstrate that a new, synthesised reading of Steiner’s architecture is warranted. Any such reading must adopt a more inclusive critique that moves beyond the hollow endeavour of categorising Steiner’s architecture in stylistic terms. In order to make a valuable contribution to knowledge a holistic approach that considers Steiner’s architecture from the perspective of both its tectonic expression and its spiritual meaning is required. Only in this way can the physical and philosophical connections that exist in his work be fully understood and appreciated. Such an approach has either been missing or only partially satisfied by the literature currently available on Steiner’s architecture. It is this interstice that this thesis aims to fill.

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Chapter 3

Steiner and His Writings

3.1 Polarised Opinions

The architecture and philosophy of Rudolf Steiner has often met with indifference or antipathy in architectural circles. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, this can partly be attributed to the prejudices associated with positivist interpretations of modern architectural history which generally failed to acknowledge metaphysical and spiritual conceptions of architecture. However, in large part, it also has to do with the enigmatic nature of Steiner himself. Throughout his life, Steiner shifted from conventional academic scholar to international figurehead of Anthroposophy. His philosophy drew loyal acolytes and staunch opponents in equal measure and much of the literature written about him reflects these two extremes. He is often eulogised by biased devotees on the one hand or dismissed, ignored or even deliberately discredited on the other. In order to determine what relevance and significance Steiner may hold for architecture, it is important to understand the philosophical debates that have consistently surrounded Anthroposophy. The nature and content of Steiner’s own writings and lectures help to shed light on the way in which his work has been received.

Part of the reason such contradictory opinions of Steiner exist is because the man himself is a paradox. His work is rooted in a strong Germanic philosophical foundation stemming from his study of Goethe, Kant, Nietzsche, Hegel, and Shelling, among others. However Steiner’s claims of ‘factual’ knowledge of the spirit world, announced as divine revelations, have led some critics to dismiss him as a deluded eccentric or denounce him entirely as a fraud. At times his work demonstrates a disciplined mind of remarkable intellect, capable of highly original thought, while at other times his somewhat absurd ramblings read more like a bizarre fiction with a

Substantial parts of this chapter have previously been published as a journal article in Architectural Theory Review. The copyright of this material belongs to Taylor and Francis and is used here with their permission. See Fiona Gray, “Rudolf Steiner: Occult Crank or Architectural Mastermind?” Architectural Theory Review, 15, No.1 (April, 2010), 43-60. An electronic version of the published article is available online at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13264821003629246
completely unfathomable plot. In 1922 the Nobel Prize winning playwright, Maurice Maeterlinck, recognised this dichotomy in his book The Great Secret, commenting that

We ask ourselves, having followed him (Steiner) with interest through preliminaries which denote an extremely well balanced, logical, and comprehensive mind, whether he has suddenly gone mad, or if we are dealing with a hoaxter or with a genuine clairvoyant.¹

While Maeterlinck acknowledges this contradiction, he investigates it no further and in the next paragraph concludes that

When all is taken into account, we realise once more, as we lay his works aside, what we realised after reading most of the other mystics, that what he (Steiner) calls ‘the great drama of (occult) knowledge’ … should rather be called the great drama of essential and invincible ignorance.²

One of the major obstacles standing between Steiner and today’s reader is, in fact, Steiner’s own literary output. In his book Rudolf Steiner: The Man and His Vision, English philosopher Colin Wilson, describes Steiner’s writing as ‘formidably abstract and as unappetising as dry toast.’³ Wilson suggests that this is a result of Steiner’s background as a Goethe scholar. Having spent several years as the editor of Goethe’s works, Steiner adopts Goethe’s austere and stilted prose in his own writing.⁴ While this makes for difficult reading, this thesis suggests that the greatest stumbling block is the occult content of the work. At the end of the nineteenth century Steiner’s work shifted from orthodox philosophy towards more obscure esoteric ideas. This resulted in a rejection of his later work by many of his academic peers. According to Wilson, the key to understanding Steiner lies in how one approaches his work. He argues that beginning with Steiner’s later works is likely to cause confusion and scepticism and, as such, suggests that we should

Come to understand Steiner’s basic ideas through his early books which are grounded in philosophy and either ignore his later ideas or study them

¹ Morris Maeterlinck, The Great Secret (London: Methuen, 1922), 212.
² Maeterlinck, The Great Secret, 213.
⁴ Wilson, Rudolf Steiner: The Man and His Vision, 14.
purely in a spirit of intellectual curiosity, without detracting from the
importance of his earlier works.⁵

Wilson’s recommendation allows the uninitiated to enter Steiner’s worldview without having to take on board the occult aspects of his teachings. Yet to entirely ignore his later work paints an incomplete picture of the evolution and diversity of Steiner’s outlook, given that his practical initiatives in education, agriculture, medicine and architecture resulted from his later esoteric work.

A more balanced approach is recommended by Steiner scholar, Rudi Lissau, in his biographical study *Rudolf Steiner: Life, Work, Inner Path and Social Initiatives*.⁶ Lissau is critical of Wilson’s approach to Steiner, claiming that he is an example of a writer who wishes to penetrate Steiner’s idea but is unable to.⁷ Lissau suggests approaching Steiner with ‘suspension of judgement coupled with critical discernment.’⁸ Maintaining an open mind is perhaps the most effective way to approach Steiner’s work since we are neither able to prove nor disprove many of his claims. There is no doubt that many of Steiner’s claims are insupportable by conventional standards of historiography. However, serious attention is justified on the basis of the practical application of these claims, rather than purely on the basis of their academic rigor. Some may argue that such concessions should not be granted, however academics in other disciplines are discovering that Steiner’s epistemology represents a viable alternative to reductive systems of thought.⁹ Steiner was concerned about ensuring his ideas were not divorced from reality and therefore tested his theoretical concepts by applying them to practice. In terms of architecture, while he did not enunciate an architectural programme or manifesto as such, his wealth of philosophical insights informed and directed his own practical activity and continue to inspire architects today.

Understanding the shift that occurred in Steiner’s work after 1900 is critical in understanding why he has been overlooked or dismissed in architectural circles.

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⁵ Wilson, *Rudolf Steiner: The Man and His Vision*, 165.
Architects who come across Steiner’s work, tend to do so via his buildings rather than via his other diverse teachings. A number of Steiner’s lectures on architecture pertain specifically to the First and Second Goetheanum and its ancillary buildings. These lectures were delivered to audiences well acquainted with Anthroposophy, many of whom were actively involved in the building of the Goetheanum or other Anthroposophic pursuits. Anthroposophist and retired architect Christian Thal-Jantzen argues that readers who have no previous understanding of Steiner’s basic teachings are distinctly handicapped in coming to terms with his architectural ideas due to the assumed familiarity with Anthroposophy’s fundamental concepts and the use of Anthroposophic jargon throughout the lectures.10 As Wilson identified, to approach Steiner in this non-linear way is almost certain to put off many readers.

It is also arguable that translation from the spoken to the written word necessarily causes the lectures to lose some of their intelligibility which was conveyed via intonation, gesture and the assistance of Steiner’s blackboard drawings (which are now exhibited in art galleries throughout the world).11 Further, Steiner was unable to check and edit the transcripts of his lectures and therefore it is unreasonable to expect that they should withstand the kind of scrutiny that his books can be subjected to. Steiner notes in his autobiography that

> I would have preferred the spoken word to remain the spoken word. But members wanted the courses printed for private circulation. Thus they came into existence. If the time had been available to correct them, the restriction “for members only” would have been unnecessary from the beginning. As it is, the restriction was dropped more than a year ago.12

This lack of editing gives the texts an immediacy which conveys Steiner’s sense of purpose and mission, however acquaintance with the Goetheanum or his architectural lectures alone is insufficient without a deeper understanding of their underlying philosophy. Steiner himself argued that anyone wishing to trace his efforts to present Anthroposophy to his modern audience must do so through his writings published for general distribution rather than through the private lectures. He stated that

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12 Steiner, Autobiography, 28.
The right to judge that private material can, of course, be granted only to those who have the pre-requisite foundation of such judgement. And in terms of most of the material, this would mean at least knowing the human being and the cosmos as they have been presented in the light of Anthroposophy.\(^\text{13}\)

Many have been quick to pass judgement without this basic understanding and hence, have misrepresented Steiner’s ideas. Steiner recognised that his work was often deeply misunderstood, and addressed the problem in a lecture delivered in Dornach in 1914, noting that

It is all too easy to speak about spiritual science and its expression in the outer world in a way that totally misses its essence. Thus the virulent attacks that seem to be raining down on us at the moment first describe all manner of fantastic nonsense that has not the remotest connection with us, and then they proceed to attack that nonsense. The world is so little capable of accepting new spirituality that it has to invent wholly grotesque caricature against which it then proceeds to rail.\(^\text{14}\)

Though Steiner recognised the problem, he failed to recognise its cause. By continually striving to present Anthroposophy from various angles and relating it to a whole myriad of human endeavours, his basic ideas were often lost in a mélange of other concerns. His work covers areas as diverse as the arts, agriculture, Christianity, social theory, nutrition and medicine, science, education and more. His insights often became distorted by a superficial understanding of the complex ideas expressed across this vast body of work. Steiner’s published works total 354 volumes. Given the sheer quantity of Steiner’s output it is hardly surprising that critiques of his architecture only scratch the surface of the work’s philosophical underpinning.

Along with the inherent difficulties of Steiner’s literature and the application of his ideas to practice, a more damning allegation of plagiarism must also be addressed. Steiner has been accused of intellectual opportunism by his detractors who argue that he has simply patched together various parts of German Idealism, occultism and

\(^{13}\) Steiner, *Autobiography*, 289.

unorthodox Christianity to create his own eclectic system of esoteric thought. In the *Occult Establishment*, historian and biographer James Webb, has noted that

Steiner's ideas form less a “system” than an accumulation of sometimes apparently disconnected items. Thus from Theosophy he took the ideas of *karma* and reincarnation; from his mystical studies and possibly the OTO (Ordo Templi Orientis – Order of the Temple of the East), a personal “Rosicrucianism.” He discovered an entirely new idiosyncratic and poetic interpretation of Christianity and somehow contrived seeming coherence with these teachings for theories of a social and artistic life of man.\(^{15}\)

Steiner did indeed draw inspiration from a wide range of sources and as a result, his essential ideas were often overridden by an almost chaotic proliferation of tangled concepts. As Webb suggests, one source from which he borrowed heavily was Theosophy. The founder of the Theosophical Society, Helena Blavatsky, claimed to have access to a mysterious body of knowledge called the Akasha Chronicles. These are not a chronicle in the ordinary sense of a historical text, but rather a mystical record of the history of the cosmos and of the experiences between death and rebirth. Steiner based much of his theory of cosmic and human evolution on his supersensible readings of this chronicle, giving exhaustive accounts of lost civilisations such as Atlantis and Lemuria.\(^{16}\) Blavatsky was regarded by many as a charlatan and although Steiner severed his connection with the Theosophical Society in 1909, he was unable to escape being tarred with the same brush. Wilson argues that if Steiner had stuck with the important insights of his philosophical work and reserved his occult teachings strictly for the faithful, he may never have incurred the resentment that has been directed towards him. This may be so, however the Theosophical Society provided Steiner with a necessary platform from which to establish his own following. As a result his earlier philosophical works, which had previously only met with moderate success, received renewed interest and were reissued, often multiple times, to meet the demand of this new-found, captive audience.

\(^{15}\) James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1976), 68.

3.2 Steiner’s Philosophical and Spiritual Texts

Given the polarised opinions that surround Steiner’s philosophy, Steiner’s own writings are the best source to turn to in order to gain an overview of his work. Despite the overwhelming quantity of his literary output, the essential nature of his philosophy is contained within a handful of texts, which are then elaborated upon in various ways throughout his other work. These key texts not only identify the main areas of Steiner’s thought, but also track the development of his thought from his earliest writings through to his final work. A brief synopsis and critique of this literature provides an indication of the main concepts that are contained within Steiner’s major texts and which permeate his entire worldview. In turn, Steiner sought to translate these philosophical and spiritual concepts into architectural form. These writings therefore provide the intellectual foundation upon which his practical architectural endeavours were built. They are also fundamental to the more detailed investigation of Steiner’s theories in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Steiner’s first significant philosophical text, published in 1886, was *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe’s World Conception*. The widespread acclaim that Goethe’s literary work had enjoyed was denied him in respect of his scientific views which were seen as arbitrary intellectual constructs subjectively imposed upon nature. Steiner was one of the first scholars to consider Goethe as a serious scientific thinker. Steiner understood Goethe’s scientific findings within the totality of Goethe’s body of work and argued that his literary genius would have been unthinkable without the epistemology that also informed his scientific investigations. Steiner saw art and science as integrally related. Although recognised by Steiner and other Goethe scholars as frequently inaccurate in its particulars, Goethe’s principles and methods offered Steiner an epistemology, albeit implicitly stated, upon which he could base his own spiritual-scientific research. According to Steiner, Goethe was the harbinger of a way of knowing that honored both the claims of science and spiritual experience. Goethe was opposed to the Newtonian approach to science which he believed distorted experience through abstract analytical procedures. He alleged...

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instead that a correspondence existed between man’s soul and the natural world and his scientific methods aimed to respect the organic harmony of man and the cosmos by integrating the results of all human modes of cognition including imagination, intuition, and reason. This approach was seen by Steiner as a means of overcoming the limitations of materialistic science since it allowed insights to be gained that could not be achieved through traditional means that relied solely on empirical modes of cognition. According to Steiner, materialistic science lacked the ability to perceive the spiritual that permeated physical, sense-perceptible phenomena and Goethe’s approach offered a new way of comprehending the world. Steiner emphasised the role of the imagination in Goethe’s discovery of the biological archetypes in plants which led to his important theory of metamorphosis. Steiner’s adaptation of this concept to the field of architecture is examined in Chapter Five of this thesis. The fact that Goethe is now acknowledged as a pioneer of the science of morphology is, in large measure, due to Steiner’s work.19

By adding his own interpretation to Goethe’s theory of knowledge, Steiner revealed as much about his own thought as that of Goethe. Steiner developed and expanded upon this epistemological foundation in his later work The Philosophy of Freedom.20 Originally published in 1894 in German as Die Philosophie der Freiheit, this work has since been published under various English titles including The Philosophy of Freedom; The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity; and Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path.21 Steiner had recommended the term ‘spiritual activity’ for the English translation of this work since the term Freiheit, which roughly means ‘freehood’ or ‘condition of freedom,’ does not have an exact English equivalent. However, for today’s reader ‘spiritual activity’ is perhaps somewhat misleading, suggesting that the book may comment on religious or mediumistic activity, which it does not. Rather, the book provides a philosophical basis for the concept of human freedom.

21 The Rudolf Steiner Archive provides a comprehensive list of the known publications of this book. See http://www.rsarchive.org/Books/GA004/
Steiner considered *The Philosophy of Freedom* to be the single work that would outlast all his others and have the greatest spiritual and cultural consequences.\(^{22}\) This is because it provides the epistemological foundation upon which the results of his later spiritual research were built. Although Steiner repeatedly referred to *The Philosophy of Freedom* in his later writings and lectures, it contains none of the esoteric concepts that occupied most of his later work. Instead, it explores the nature of thinking—a concept that was fundamental to the system of Anthroposophy that he was later to develop. Steiner had taken Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schiller as his point of departure for this work, both of whom were deeply concerned with the concept of human freedom. Fichte had been the subject of Steiner’s doctoral dissertation submitted in 1891 and Schiller was referred to extensively in several of Steiner’s books and lectures.\(^{23}\) Due to its traditional approach and lack of provocative material on occult themes that became problematic from a scholarly perspective in his later work, *The Philosophy of Freedom* is readily accessible to academics, sceptics and the non-initiated. It also provides a bridge between Steiner’s earliest philosophical works and his later Anthroposophic writings. In the final paragraph of a later edition of the book Steiner indicated the relationship between the epistemology set out in *The Philosophy of Freedom* and his later investigations of the spiritual realm, stating that

> In this book an attempt is made to show that the experience of thinking, properly understood, is already an experience of spirit. Therefore, it seems to me that whoever can adopt the point of view of this book in earnest will not stop short of entering the world of spiritual perception. To be sure, what is portrayed in my later books cannot be logically derived – inferred – from the contents of this book. But a living grasp of

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\(^{23}\) Steiner’s doctoral dissertation *Die Grundfrage der Erkenntnistheorie mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre: Prolegomena zur Verständigung des philosophierenden Bewußseins mit sich selbst* was published in 1892 under the title *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Freiheit* (Truth and Knowledge: Prelude to a Philosophy of Freedom). For examples of Steiner’s references to Schiller see “A Turning Point in Modern History,” Lecture, 24 January 1919, [http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19190124p01.html](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19190124p01.html) and Chapter 1 of *Goethe’s Conception of the World*, [http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA006/English/APC1928/GA006_e01.html](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA006/English/APC1928/GA006_e01.html), vol.6 in *The Complete Works of Rudolf Steiner*. 

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what is meant in this book by intuitive thinking will naturally lead onward to a living entry into the world of spiritual perception.24

According to Steiner, the human capacity for thinking was the pre-condition required for access to knowledge of higher worlds. However, it is essential to grasp just what Steiner meant by thinking. His basic premise was that human thinking need not be limited to knowledge gained through sensory observation and intellectual analysis. He argued that thinking could be developed to a higher degree than that normally attained by the average human being, in order that the spiritual world within the sensory world could become known.25 This concept is central to the discussion of the senses in Chapter Seven of this thesis. For Steiner, thinking bridged the gap between our perception of the outer world and our inner ideals, and the first half of The Philosophy of Freedom is dedicated to defining and describing that process. Overcoming the binary division of mind and matter is also an important theme in Steiner’s architecture, which strives to express in artistic form the unity that can be achieved through our ability to think.

The Philosophy of Freedom explores the nature of human freedom from a metaphysical and ethical perspective. Steiner contended that our deeds are dictated by both objective and subjective elements of our own experience whereby our physical bodies respond to external sensory perceptions while our conscience dictates our inner life. By overcoming this dualism, Steiner believed that individuals could become truly free. On this premise, Steiner argued that freedom is won when we overcome the various motives acting within and upon us by bringing our external perceptions and inner thoughts into harmony with each other through the activity of our minds. Ethical deeds therefore arise from the freedom to think and act—to respond in a particularised way to any given situation rather than as a requirement of any ethical norm imposed by an external authority or out of our own reflexes, drives or desires. Free deeds are thus performed out of ethical individualism rather than out of any moral or bodily compulsion.

24 Rudolf Steiner, Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path (1894; Great Barrington: Anthroposophic Press, 1995), 243.
25 This concept is explored in greater detail in Chapter 7 – Sense and Non-sense.
This notion of individual freedom was central to the very core of Steiner’s system of Anthroposophy, and as such, he held a very clear position in regard to the attitude of his faithful followers. In a lecture he delivered in Milan in 1911, Steiner warned that mental laziness is prevalent today with the result that people are only too ready to acknowledge some individual or other as a great soul merely on authority. It is important for Anthroposophy to be presented in such a way as to be based on the smallest possible extent on belief in authority. Much that I have said today can be substantiated only by means of spiritual investigation. Yet I beg you not to give credence to these things because I say them, but to test them by everything known to you by history, above all by what you can learn from your own experience. I am absolutely certain that the more closely you examine them, the more confirmation you will find. In this age of intellectualism I do not appeal to your belief in authority but to your capacity for intelligent examination.26

Despite Steiner’s repeated injunctions along a similar vein, this problem persists even today and much of what is written about Steiner from Anthroposophic quarters smacks of blind worship and besotted adoration. Such sermonising does little to win the favour of sceptics or positivist critics and demonstrates that the accusations of sectarianism that frequently plague Anthroposophy are not without some justification. This perception stems largely from the failure of some of Steiner’s followers to understand the very core of his philosophical thought, rather than from failings of the philosophy itself.

In 1904 however, Steiner overstepped the boundaries of conventional philosophy to declare his esoteric ideas and beliefs in his book *Theosophy*.27 Despite the book’s title, it bears no connection with the Theosophical Society and subsequent editions were published under the same name even after Steiner’s break with the Theosophical Society. It should not be confused with Helena Blavatsky’s doctrine of

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Theosophy, although some elements of Steiner’s work do share affinities with her teachings. Steiner’s use of the word ‘theosophy’ derives from the Greek *theosophia* meaning ‘god-wisdom’ which has been used since ancient times to describe mystical insights into the nature of the divine.

The book *Theosophy* describes Steiner’s understanding of the multi-layered nature of the human constitution, the concepts of karma and reincarnation and the spiritual path through which one may arrive at such an understanding. It begins with a description of the threefold nature of the human being as body, soul and spirit. The body refers to our earthly existence, through which we perceive the world around us. The soul is the inner world of our being, through which we experience emotions. The spirit is concerned with our thinking, through which we gain knowledge about the world including the spiritual realm if our thinking is cultivated in the appropriate way. Steiner then moves beyond this primordial trichotomy to describe the human constitution in different terms as a four-fold being, made up of four ‘bodies.’ According to Steiner the Physical body is our physical, material structure which we share with the mineral world. The Etheric body is our source of life and growth which we share with the plant world. The Astral body is our emotional being which we share with the animal world. Finally the ‘Ego’ or ‘I’ is the faculty of self consciousness which, Steiner claimed, was unique to humanity. Supported by the Physical, Etheric and Astral bodies, Steiner believed that the Ego held the potential for ever-increasing self-knowledge and, ultimately, awareness of the Divine.

Building on his differentiated nature of the human being, Steiner described the experiences of the human being between death and rebirth and explained the concepts of karma and reincarnation. While on the surface these concepts may seem far removed from the concerns of architecture, they are important ideas in Steiner’s reading of Vitruvius and his interpretation of Classical architectural precedents as considered in Chapters Six and Ten of this thesis. They also reveal the influence of Buddhist principles on his thinking. With the introduction of such concepts however, language becomes a major stumbling block. Not only was Steiner attempting to use everyday language to describe concepts beyond the sense perceptible world, he was also introducing ideas that were relatively unfamiliar to the western mind-set. In the first edition of *Theosophy* many of the words were given in Sanskrit, however in later
editions of the book, Steiner coined his own substitute words. Steiner’s own terminology was not easily grasped, and so he revised this chapter repeatedly in numerous editions of *Theosophy* in an effort to communicate his ideas more precisely.

The book then goes on to discuss the concept of seven soul worlds and seven spirit worlds and the soul’s journey through these worlds after death. This is followed by the final chapter which provides a brief discussion on a path to higher knowledge. It suggests one way in which an individual can develop the faculties to transcend the limited experiences of the senses. This practical approach is introduced in *Theosophy* and is taken further in his later work *Occult Science*.

The inherent complexity of the subject matter and the difficulty of the language used to describe *Theosophy*’s unfamiliar concepts make it a difficult read. According to Steiner though, this was all part of the desired effect. In the preface to the third edition of the book he claimed that the only way for the book to become what it was intended to be, was if the meaning of every sentence was hard won through the reader’s own persistence to enter into the book in an active, experiential way. It was not intended to be merely a collection of information. Nor was Steiner attempting to prove his claims, but rather to prepare and enable the reader to experience them through their own faculties of higher perception.

Whereas *Theosophy* was concerned with the methods of obtaining higher knowledge only briefly and secondarily, *How to Know Higher Worlds* was a treatise on the techniques and effects of spiritual training. It was originally published in 1904 in installments for the periodical *Lucifer-Gnosis*. In the book, Steiner set out the conditions and methods of spiritual science that, when worked with diligently, were intended to lead to a greater capacity for spiritual knowledge. It comprised numerous exercises aimed at developing higher levels of consciousness through concentrated observation and meditation. According to Steiner, by developing this level of

[28] Steiner retained the word ‘karma’ for the simple reason that there was no western language equivalent for this oriental concept.
consciousness, the knowledge that was obtained from the spiritual realm could be reported as reliably and infallibly as scientific findings. In the preface of *How to Know Higher Worlds* Steiner stated that

This book seeks to provide … people with a picture of what must be done if one wishes to know the supersensible worlds. It tries to describe the spiritual path so that even those who do not undertake it themselves can have confidence in what is said by those who do. Once we become aware of what spiritual researchers do, we may find that it makes sense.32

Despite Steiner’s efforts to present the book as a scientific truth, its esoteric claims do not conform to the empirical evidence required by scientific methodology. Nonetheless, Steiner argued that esoteric knowledge was available to anybody, given the right teaching methods and correct attitude. Even more so than *Theosophy*, *How to Know Higher Worlds* was not a book to be passively read by the reader. Steiner recommended that the reader approach the book as though they were receiving oral instructions from the author.33 In effect this book was an instruction handbook on developing spiritual perception.

It describes three stages of spiritual schooling—preparation, illumination and initiation. In the initial stages meditative exercises are prescribed to foster virtues of patience, reverence, equanimity and tranquility. In the second stage detachment from all personal concerns is aimed at, as the meditator focuses on a verse, mantra or image. The third stage of esoteric training describes a series of ‘trials’ which are expressed in rather vague terms that portray various spiritual perceptions or experiences. The effects and results of initiation are then described, including changes that occur in the dream life of esoteric students and highly speculative accounts of encounters with spiritual beings referred to as ‘guardians of the threshold.’ Steiner’s intention with this book was to provide a method of obtaining higher knowledge appropriate to modern western culture. The super-natural character of the book, however, limited its appeal to devoted followers. Nonetheless, the book’s content bears particular relevance to this thesis in its articulation of the

32 Steiner, *How to Know Higher Worlds*, 3-4.
33 Steiner, *How to Know Higher Worlds*, 213.
concepts of imagination, inspiration and intuition which are investigated in Chapter Six.

Steiner’s previous expositions of the path of initiation that had been presented in *Theosophy* and *How to Know Higher Worlds* were advanced upon in his book *An Outline of Esoteric Science*. Written in 1908 at the age of 48, this book represents Steiner’s mature thinking. The original German title *Die Geheimwissenschaft in Umriss*, translates more accurately as *An Outline in Occult Science* and early English translations were published under that title. In modern English however, the word ‘occult’ carries a loaded meaning. British philosopher, Owen Barfield, points out that

> The detested word occult in the context of *Occult Science: An Outline*, signifies no more than what a more conventionally phrased cosmogony would determine as non-phenomenal, neumonal, transcendental. Yet it seems almost useless to point this out.

The title has also caused other misunderstandings in that the words esoteric or occult together with the word science present an oxymoron. If something is esoteric or occult it is perceived as secret or hidden, whereas the very nature of science requires that its findings are open and verifiable. This objection was presented in an early review of Steiner’s book in 1910 which stated that

> The expression *esoteric science* contains a contradiction just like dry wetness or light darkness. Science and esotericism, science and petty secrecy, are as far apart as day and night.

In the preface to a later edition of the book Steiner pointed out however, that such objections were based on a mistaken understanding of his meaning since he would not, of course, have published work that he intended to keep secret! Steiner’s claims of occult knowledge were, in fact, deliberately and openly stated. Instead, what he had meant the title to indicate was the nature of his enquiry. Just as natural

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37 This preface was written in 1923, fifteen years after the book was first published. It is reprinted in Steiner, *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, 1-8.
Science indicates a study of the science of nature, Steiner was indicating that this book was a disciplined study of the world of the spirit as a counterpart to natural science.\(^{38}\) He aimed to preserve the attitude of scientific methodology, whilst freeing it from its application to sensory phenomena alone, to include the non-sensory realm of the spirit. In a lecture delivered to the Independent Literary Society in 1910, Steiner argued that

> Science is in a position to restore our consciousness of freedom in a more excellent form than ever known before. There are laws at work in the human soul that are just as “natural” as those that cause the planets to circle the sun.\(^{39}\)

Whether this enquiry into the human soul can justifiably be called a science is debatable, however the book’s title does raise questions about the limits of scientific discourse. Verification of Steiner’s claims may not meet the criteria of accepted scientific procedure but does that necessarily mean that the criteria of orthodox science are adequate to explain all realities of the universe? This is why Steiner gave so much attention to developing an epistemology that could better explain what was for him, another reality. Rather than rejecting science, Steiner maintained that sound scientific enquiry was indeed necessary to reveal the reality of things that existed beyond the phenomenal world.

Nevertheless, *An Outline of Esoteric Science* is another book that requires the goodwill of the reader in dealing with both its difficult style of writing and its occult content. Though Steiner claimed to have arrived at the findings in this book purely through his own perception of the spiritual world, it does contain ideas common to gnostic cosmology and oriental teachings. Originally conceived as a continuation of *Theosophy*, it elaborated on many of the concepts first introduced there, including his theory on the nature of the human constitution as well as further discussion on dreams, death and reincarnation.

Its main contribution however is Steiner’s esoteric description of human and cosmic evolution. Beginning with the dawn of creation, Steiner gave a vast and systematic account of past, present and future evolution of the world that held little in common


with the biological and geological understanding of evolution at the time. Rather it was based on an occult explanation of spiritual evolution. Steiner also interpreted architectural history in evolutionary terms, perceiving humanity’s relationship with the spiritual realm as the catalyst for the development of architectural styles. The concept of evolution therefore weaves through most chapters of this thesis and is especially relevant to Chapter Ten which explores the influence of past architectural styles on Steiner’s work. In *An Outline of Esoteric Science* Steiner posited the mystery of Golgotha as a pivotal point in human and cosmic evolution, thus giving central importance to Christ which had not been included in earlier works. The significance of Christianity in Steiner’s philosophy was also expressed through his architecture which is loaded with Christian symbolism as demonstrated through the discussion in Chapters Seven to Ten of this thesis.

The thoughts and ideas that Steiner developed through the major texts discussed above, culminate in his autobiography which appeared as seventy installments in the Anthroposophical Society’s periodical *Das Goetheanum* between December 1923 and April 1925. These have been compiled in English as a book titled *Autobiography: Chapters in the Course of My Life*. At the time of his death, Steiner had only completed an account of his life up until 1907. At the beginning of the book Steiner noted his reasons for writing this account of his life stating that

> I feel obligated to offer an objective description of my spiritual path; I wish to correct numerous mistaken ideas about my personal relationship to what I have advanced in Anthroposophy; and the urgent request of friends seems justified under the circumstances.

According to historian and Steiner biographer, Stewart Easton, Steiner’s autobiography demonstrates a gradual and consistent evolution of thought throughout the course of his life. Easton also recognises though, that Steiner’s descriptions of his thoughts and ideas are based on recollections of events that occurred decades

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earlier. As such, it is possible that these recollections may have become skewed to a degree, reflecting a cohesive development of thought that, in reality, was probably far less homogenous. As with any autobiography, its content is selective, presenting only that information which its author wishes posterity to know. Although Steiner briefly described certain events in his personal life, he was keen to avoid detailed private accounts. In this regard Steiner stated

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\text{I do not wish to relate private matters in this account of my life, except when they are connected in some way with my spiritual development. ... A person's private life does not belong to the public. It is of no concern to them. And my spiritual development is completely independent of all private relationships; I realise that it would have taken exactly the same course if my private life had been entirely different.}\]

His claim of complete autonomy is a rather bold one, since the many teachers, friends and peers he mentions throughout the autobiography surely played some role in the development of his ideas. Certain congruences between his personal life and his philosophical development are occasionally admitted. His relationship with Marie von Sivers is one such example. In 1902 Steiner and von Sivers assumed the leadership of the German Section of the Theosophical Society and soon became close friends. Steiner credited von Sivers with being

\[
\text{The one who, with her whole being, made it possible to protect our work from sectarianism and to give it a quality that placed it in the general culture and educational life.}\]

Later he noted

\[
\text{Marie von Sivers was always my helpful companion; with her fine and tasteful participation in all I was privileged to experience in the realm of culture and art, she shared in and supplemented those experiences in a very beautiful way. She understood how all these artistic experiences flow into anthroposophy to enliven and mobilise its ideas and concepts.}\]

46 Steiner, *Autobiography*, 244.
Steiner and von Sivers were married in 1914 and upon his death she became the heir to his literary estate and the leader of the Anthroposophical Society.

In 1924 while writing his autobiography, Steiner also wrote weekly essays for distribution to members of the Anthroposophical Society. These essays provided concentrated summaries of Anthroposophy’s core concepts. Each essay ended with short aphorisms that became known as ‘leading thoughts.’ They were later collated into a single volume titled *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*. While the maxims it contains provide a useful reference for those familiar with Steiner’s worldview, without such prior knowledge it makes for rather impenetrable reading. These ‘leading thoughts’ are nonetheless significant in that they constitute Steiner’s final words on the subject of spiritual science, providing guidance and direction to his faithful followers as they carried forward his legacy.

Covering topics ranging from Goethe’s scientific methodology and the philosophy of human freedom through to the development of human cognitive faculties and mystical descriptions of concepts such as karma and reincarnation, Steiner’s fundamental texts are challenging in terms of both content and style. They become even more problematic when considered in relation to the internal agenda of architecture, since they offer no explicit links between Steiner’s conceptual ideas and the practical domains that he applied them to. This gap is partially filled however, by the lectures he delivered specifically on the subject of architecture.

### 3.3 Steiner’s Architectural Lectures

Steiner’s architectural ideas were a by-product of his larger effort to promote his spiritual teachings. His objective was to transform architecture from a profane to a spiritual activity. Steiner’s lectures on architecture emphasised the role that architecture could play in restoring the human being’s capacity for spiritual activity—a capacity that he felt had existed innately in earlier periods of architectural history but that had been lost in modern times. This approach necessarily resulted in a different way of thinking about and producing architecture than that of a trained architect. It led at times to some strikingly peculiar and unique pronouncements and

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creations. At other times, Steiner’s architectural theories were very much in sync with his architectural contemporaries, reflecting an awareness of, and sympathy for the broader concerns that modern architects were grappling with.

Steiner’s main architectural lectures have been drawn together in a small number of publications. *The Arts and Their Mission*, published in 1964, presents eight lectures that were delivered in Dornach and Oslo in 1923. They offer insights into the spiritual mission Steiner perceived for architecture, as well as for painting, music, drama and eurythmy. *Art as Seen in the Light of Mystery Wisdom*, published in 1984 consists of seven lectures delivered in Dornach between 1914 and 1915, which sought to unite science, art and religion through a new spiritual understanding and rejuvenation of the arts. A more recent publication of Steiner’s lectures on art and architecture is *Art as Spiritual Activity*. Published in 1998, this collection consists of eleven lectures delivered throughout Europe between 1888 and 1923. A lengthy introduction by the book’s editor, Michael Howard, helps to locate the lectures within a contemporary context by recounting Howard’s own experience as an artist employing Steiner’s ideas in his practical work. However, the most comprehensive and dedicated collection of Steiner’s architectural lectures is to be found in *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, published in 1999. Part one of this book presents three lectures delivered in Berlin between December 1911 and January 1914. Part two presents a series of five lectures delivered during the summer months of June and July in 1914. These lectures were delivered in the temporary carpentry studio erected adjacent to the construction site of the *First Goetheanum* which was converted at the end of each working day to accommodate an audience of artists, trades people and volunteers who were working on the building (Figure 3.01).

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Artist Natalie Turgenieff Pozzo, described these lectures as ‘cheerful courses of instruction, bright and lively.’ The book concludes with an appendix that features notes and extracts from other architectural lectures delivered by Steiner in Munich and Stuttgart in 1914 and in Dornach in 1923, as well as two newspaper articles from 1924. As a compilation of lectures, the book does not follow a singular progression of ideas and some concepts are repeated in multiple lectures. Nevertheless, this collection offers a useful and penetrating overview of Steiner’s architectural thought, covering topics as broad ranging as the evolutionary development of historical architectural styles, highly esoteric accounts of the aesthetic laws of form and colour, and practical considerations of materials, functional requirements and finances. In his architectural lectures, Steiner bequeathed numerous aesthetic theories, historical interpretations and practical indications that are discussed in greater detail in this thesis.

Though the writings and lectures that have been considered in this chapter represent only a fraction of Steiner’s literary output, they do articulate the essential tenets of Steiner’s worldview. No attempt has been made to provide a full account of each text since the depth and complexity of these works places much of their content outside

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53 Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, xi.
the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, a basic understanding of these texts is critical to the analysis undertaken in Part II of this thesis which explores some of the key philosophical and spiritual concepts addressed by Steiner and investigates how they are expressed architecturally. A number of Steiner’s texts that have not been included here are considered in the following chapters where they pertain specifically to the discussion of a particular idea. Although the esoteric nature of Steiner’s thought is at times difficult to reconcile with the practical and rational concerns of architecture, the two cannot be divorced without some loss to the inherent meaning and significance of his architecture. Through his system of Anthroposophy Steiner presented a means of moving beyond conventional ways of thinking about architecture. His concept that the spiritual realm can be perceived as an objective reality through the perception of material phenomena, particularly architecture, moves beyond the vagaries of style and transcends materialist modes of thought. The limitations of Steiner’s own architectural endeavours and the dogma others have attached to it should not detract from the intellectual premise of his work.
PART II

The Theories
Chapter 4

Three-fold Polarity

The fundamental characteristic of a living whole: to separate, to unite, to merge into the universal, to abide in the particular, to self transform, to specify itself, and - because living things tend to manifest under a hundred thousand conditions - to come forward and to vanish, to solidify and melt, to rigidify and flow, to expand and contract. Since all these effects occur simultaneously, any or all may occur at the same moment. Growth and decay, creation and destruction, birth and death, joy and sorrow are all interwoven in the same sense and in the same measure; therefore, even the most particular thing that occurs always appears as a picture and a parable for the most universal.

Goethe, Verses in Prose, 1833.

4.1 Steiner’s Three-fold Theory of Polarity

The concept of polarity is fundamental to Steiner’s worldview. Much of his philosophical and architectural work endeavoured to explore the opposition between spirit and matter, microcosm and macrocosm, and the sensory and non-sensory. However Steiner’s perception of polarity moved beyond simple contrasts or distinctions between opposites. His philosophical approach strove for transcendence of these opposing phenomena. For Steiner, every duality implied a trinity—a balancing, reconciling factor. Rather than a static duality, he perceived polarity as a dynamic tension between opposites that sought balance in a third resolving chord. This chapter establishes the theoretical basis of Steiner’s conception of three-fold polarity, drawing upon various mythological, theological and artistic interpretations that inform his philosophy. How Steiner realised the concept of polarity in built form is then investigated through an analysis of Steiner’s symbolic representation, building facade treatment, architecture detailing and sculptural work.
Steiner described the threefold nature of polarity in esoteric terms as Lucifer, Ahriman and the Christ Being. Steiner’s concept of Lucifer and Ahriman is likely to have stemmed from Gnostic and Zoroastrian sources, which he had been particularly interested in around 1906. References to these figures began to appear in Steiner’s writings and lectures at that time. Due to the religious and theistic associations that these names carry, it is important to clarify exactly what Steiner meant by them. According to Steiner, Lucifer and Ahriman represented two opposite poles of evil, between which stood the balancing power of good—Christ or the Christ Being. He considered Lucifer and Ahriman to possess both positive and negative aspects and it was only when one or the other became one-sided, and hence compelled a person’s thoughts, feelings and actions, that their influence became evil. Lucifer was perceived as the spirit of light that motivated creativity and spirituality, however tended to alienate the human being from their earthly duties, inclining them towards fantasy and mysticism. Ahriman, by contrast, was perceived as the spirit of darkness that stimulated intellectuality and technology, however sought to deny the human being’s spiritual nature, fettering them solely to earthly concerns and material pursuits. These competing forces were mediated by another spiritual entity referred to as the Christ Being. Throughout his writings and lectures, Steiner used the term ‘Christ’ in a variety of ways that was often quite different to traditional Christian usage. The inconsistencies in his unorthodox use of the term were never fully resolved, however in this context Christ represents a spiritual being that stands between and harmonises the two extremes of Lucifer and Ahriman. Steiner also referred to this mediating influence as the ‘Representative of Humanity.’

Steiner did not present Lucifer, Ahriman and Christ as orthodox religious concepts but rather as archetypal figures. These archetypal figures have appeared in many different guises throughout history. Whereas mainstream religions tend to portray evil as a single entity (eg: Satan in Christianity and Iblis in Islam), in ancient mythology evil is often portrayed as having a dual nature. In Greek mythology for

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1 Webb, The Occult Establishment, 69.
example, this twofold nature of evil is described in the figures of Scylla and Charybdis. They are the progenitors of the proverbial expressions ‘between the devil and the deep blue sea’ or ‘between a rock and a hard place’ since they represented for Odysseus a choice between two equally perilous passages between Scylla, the sea monster, and Charybdis, the whirlpool, through which he had to steer his vessel in order to return home (Figure 4.01).  

![Figure 4.01: Odysseus in front of Scylla and Charybdis by Füssli, Johann Heinrich, 1794-1796. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Johann_Heinrich_F%C3%BCssli_054.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Johann_Heinrich_F%C3%BCssli_054.jpg)

Similarly, in Norse mythology, two faces of evil are portrayed by Midgard the Serpent and Fenrir the Wolf, the sons of Loki who battled the great gods Thor and Odin (Figure 4.02). The serpent grew so large that it could encircle the world and grasp its own tail in its teeth. The image of a serpent or dragon eating its own tail is an ancient symbol referred to as the Ouroboros. One of the oldest images of the Ouroboros comes from the early alchemical text *The Chrysopoea of Cleopatra* written in the late Hellenistic period (Figure 4.03).

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Its black and white halves represent the Gnostic concept of opposing forces coming together to create a complete whole, similar to the Taoist Yin-Yang symbol. It represents unity in duality. In his study of archetypes, Erich Neumann, a psychologist and student of Carl Jung, vividly rendered this dual nature, describing how the Ouroboros

Slays, weds and impregnates itself. It is man and woman, begetting and conceiving, devouring and giving birth, active and passive, above and below all at once.\(^5\)

Steiner was very familiar with this symbol and its associated meaning since it formed part of the Theosophical Society’s official seal. In 1913 Steiner used the symbol in his design for the fourth Mystery Drama seal (Figure 4.04). The Mystery Drama seals were designed to reveal cosmic wisdom through meditative contemplation of their spiritual symbolism. Inscribed within the circle were the words ‘Ich erkennet sich’ which imperfectly translates into the English as ‘self knows itself’ and has been interpreted as a cosmic script that expresses the task of the individual in which the ‘I’ must come to recognise itself through its repeated lives on earth.\(^6\) The symbol can still be seen today in the Second Goetheanum where it is painted on one of the walls outside the Group Room.

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The duality of evil was also portrayed by Goethe in 1808 in his classic literary work *Faust*. It addresses issues of inferiority and superiority, objectivity and subjectivity, guilt and innocence, sensuality and asceticism, form and chaos, hope and despair.⁷ The play followed the plight of Faust, who made a deal with Mephistopheles to give him enlightenment in return for his soul. Mephistopheles was a fallen angel who identified himself as ‘part of that power which would do ever evil and does ever good’⁸ and declared that he was ‘part of the dark which bore itself the light’⁹ (Figure 4.05).

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Steiner considered Goethe’s characterisation of Mephistopheles to be flawed, claiming that he constantly confused Luciferic and Ahrimanic qualities. According to Steiner, Ahriman was the spirit of Satan, while Lucifer was the spirit of the Devil – two separately distinguished polar forces.

As a scholar of Nietzsche’s work, Steiner’s concept of Lucifer and Ahriman is also likely to have been influenced by Nietzsche’s perception of the Greek mythical figures, Apollo and Dionysus. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1872, Nietzsche borrowed the terms Apollonian and Dionysian which had designated two central principles in Greek art and culture. Apollo, the Sun God represented light, clarity and formal reasoning whereas Dionysus, the God of Wine, represented intoxication, emotion and ecstasy. Nietzsche believed that true Greek tragedy could only be produced by a tension between these two forces. He was intent on demonstrating that

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11 Rudolf Steiner, *The Incarnation of Ahriman: The Embodiment of Evil on Earth, Seven Lectures Given Between October and December 1919*, Intro by Sevak Gulbekian (Forest Row: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2006), viii.

a meeting of these forces could occur within a single artist, whereby the artist became the medium through which conflicting ideals were reconciled.

Steiner discussed the concept of duality in art in a lecture delivered in Munich on 15 February, 1918, titled *The Two Sources of Art: Impressionism and Expressionism.*

He used the terms ‘impressionism’ and ‘expressionism,’ not to describe the stylistic currents of the time, but to explain two principle impulses in all art. By impressionism Steiner meant any creative endeavour that originated out of the world of the senses, while expressionism referred to any creative activity that originated from inner spiritual impulses. Steiner saw impressionism as equivalent to the classical, Apollonian stream of art and therefore Ahrimanic in character, while expressionism belonged to the romantic, Dionysian stream and was therefore described as Luciferic. Steiner believed that by striking a balance between these opposing tendencies, true art could be achieved. He stated that artistic feeling arose ‘wherever the presence of something supersensible and mysterious is felt within the ordinary sensible existence we confront in the sense-world.’

This artistic feeling, Steiner contended, could be achieved by anyone whose ‘soul-attitude’ fell between the two boundaries of impressionism and expressionism, or Ahriman and Lucifer.

The artistic struggle to find this balance was, according to Steiner, what allowed the artist to be free. In a discussion on aesthetics, the early twentieth-century Irish novelist, James Joyce (1882-1941), also identified two streams of art which he described as proper and improper art. Further to this, improper art fell into two distinct categories which he described in his semi-autobiographical novel published in 1916 as follows:

> The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire and loathing. Desire urges us to possess, to go to something; loathing urges us to abandon, to go from something. The arts which excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts. The esthetic *(sic)*

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13 Steiner, *Art as Spiritual Activity*, 195.
14 Steiner, *Art as Spiritual Activity*, 196.
emotion (I used the general term) is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.\textsuperscript{15}

While Joyce’s description of improper art closely coincides with Steiner’s description of the Luciferic and Ahrimanic qualities of art, for Steiner the objective of art was not to achieve a state of stasis, but rather to fully experience these forces, and in so doing reach a higher middle ground. Steiner believed that the dual forces of Lucifer and Ahriman were necessary elements in the human struggle towards freedom and that freedom was not a fixed state but an ongoing spiritual activity that continuously strove towards finding a balance between these archetypal adversaries. Freedom must be won anew in each individual circumstance.

Steiner argued that freedom could be achieved through the power of human thinking since he perceived thinking as the realm in which the earthly and spiritual spheres met and intermingled. He proposed that thinking, fortified through spiritual discipline, or more specifically through the meditation or ‘initiation’ exercises he prescribed, would allow humanity to recognise and balance this dualism. In a lecture delivered at Dornach on New Years day, 1922, Steiner stated that

In ordinary life our state of balance is maintained because only a part of our total, our full being, is harnessed to our bodily form, and because it is not we who hold this bodily form in a state of balance within the world as a whole, but spiritual beings who stand behind us. Thus, in ordinary consciousness, we are on the whole unaware of the two dangers which can cause us to deviate from our state of balance towards one side or the other, towards the Luciferic or the Ahrimanic side. This is what is characteristic of initiation science. When we begin to comprehend the world in its true nature we feel as though we are standing on a high rock with one abyss on our right and another on our left. The abyss is ever-present, but in ordinary life we do not see this abyss, or rather these two

\textsuperscript{15} James Joyce, \textit{A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man} (1916; repr. New York: Viking Critical Library, 1964), 205.
abysses. To learn to know ourselves fully we have to perceive these abysses, or at least we have to learn about them.16

Steiner believed that the powers of Lucifer and Ahriman were at their most harmful when they could not be seen.17 As such, the expression of these forces was central to his entire conception of art and architecture. By concretely expressing the forces of Lucifer of Ahriman in architectural form, they no longer remained invisible and thus allowed humanity to experience the two ‘abysses.’ Steiner related this concept to architecture through a practical illustration of structural forces

To take our simple example, we shall feel a supporting element, an upward striving, supporting Luciferic element; a weighing and pressing down Ahrimanic element, and a balance between the Luciferic and Ahrimanic which is a divine quality. Thus, even lifeless nature becomes filled with Lucifer and Ahriman and their superior ruler, who eternally brings about the balance between them. If we thus learn to experience the Luciferic, Ahrimanic and divine elements in architecture, so that architecture effects us inwardly, we shall become conscious of a richer feeling of the world which leads or, one could almost say, pull's the soul into the things of the world; for our soul is now not only within our body's skin but belongs to the cosmos.18

Steiner drew a simple blackboard drawing to explain the concept (Figure 4.06).

Figure 4.06: Reproduction of a drawing produced by Steiner during a lecture delivered at Dornach, 2 January, 1915. Source: Rudolf Steiner, Architecture: An Introductory Reader, 24.

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17 Steiner, Art As Seen In the Light of Mystery Wisdom, 61.

18 Steiner, Art As Seen In the Light of Mystery Wisdom, 115-116.
Steiner saw the Greek Temple as a tangible expression of this three-fold principle of weight, balance and support. He described how ‘the impression given of the columns is one of bearing up, not of weighing down. But once you reach the lintel, the architrave, you feel pressure weighing down. The whole building is in a perfect state of equilibrium.’19 Two opposing forces are mediated to create a harmonious whole.

The tripartite schematisation of the Greek temple is evident on multiple levels. The temple facade was divided into stylobate, column and entablature. The entablature was divided into architrave, frieze and cornice. Each column further expressed the threefold principle in its base, shaft and capital. In *Archetypes in Architecture*, Thomas Thiis-Evensen offers a description of the threefold nature of the column, stating that

The column may be divided into three ‘energy sections.’ The uppermost is the column head or capital, which receives the load of roof or beam. The bottom part is the foot or base, which makes the transition to ground or floor. Between these two extremities stretches the third section, the column shaft, the intermediary of the rising and sinking action.20

This correlates directly with Steiner’s concept of threefold polarity. But whereas Thiis-Evensen’s observations are primarily concerned with the physical expression of load and support, Steiner’s observations were intermingled with a much broader, esoteric conception.

Steiner applied the concept of polarity not only to the structure of architecture, but also to the physical structure of the human being. In his book *Riddles of the Soul*, published in 1917, Steiner described three distinct organisational systems within the human body—the nerve-sense system comprising the brain, nerves and senses; the rhythmic-circulatory system comprising the heart, lungs and circulation; and the metabolic-limbic system comprising the digestive organs, legs and arms.21 This organisational structure provided the physical basis for the processes of thinking, feeling and willing, which Steiner described as functions of the soul.

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Four years earlier, in the February of 1913, Steiner had delivered a lecture in Berlin, linking the development of the human soul to the development of temple architecture. He perceived the development of historical architectural styles as a reflection of the way in which the human soul interacted with the environment. He identified the Egyptian pyramid with the ‘sentient soul,’ the Greco-Roman temple with the ‘intellectual soul,’ and the Gothic Cathedral with the ‘consciousness soul.’ According to Steiner the sentient soul brought to life inside the human being that which existed outside itself, in the same way that the pyramids depicted what was perceived in the cosmos through their shape and ratios of measurement. The intellectual soul, by contrast, was self-sufficient and enclosed within itself. The inner experience of this soul quality was therefore mirrored in the equilibrium of the Greek and Roman temples. As the soul evolved into consciousness, it strove to go outside itself, into contact with external reality. This struggle was reflected in the dynamic, reaching forms of Gothic architecture. Steiner believed that his own time presented the next stage of human evolution in which the human being needed to work its way out of the soul element, into that of the spirit. Therefore the present task of architecture was to create a new, modern temple form that reflected in its shapes, colours, contour and forms, the human being’s ‘spirit-self’ expanding out into the heavenly spheres.

Steiner’s understanding of architecture as a direct product of evolutionary development led him to an empathetic appreciation of buildings as organic ‘living’ entities. He believed that life itself implied a perpetual overcoming and recreating of opposites. Should the experience of such contrasts be balanced out, they no longer remained active and therefore became inert and died. The architectural historian and critic, Bruno Zevi, discussed the notion of contrasting elements in organic terms in his work *Architecture as Space*. Zevi wrote

> For a building to be *alive*, it must show contrast between vertical and horizontal lines, between solids and voids, between defined and undefined.

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22 Rudolf Steiner, “The Task of Modern Art and Architecture,” Lecture Two, 5 February, 1913 in *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts* by Rudolf Steiner, 22-34.

intangible forms, between volumes and masses. And for full expression, dominance of one element or other, or of a third is needed.\textsuperscript{24}

Zevi cited the \textit{Arch of Titus} (81-85AD) as one such example, whereby neither the vertical nor the horizontal prevailed, but the mediating element of the arch was dominant (Figure 4.07). Harmony was achieved, but without negation of the contrasting elements. Renaissance architecture also created a dynamic tension between contrasting elements in its combination of triumphal arch and temple front motifs. This is superbly illustrated in the facade of Alberti’s \textit{Basilica of Sant’Andrea} (1470-1476), in which its temple front suggests a barrier while its arch suggests procession and extension (Figure 4.08).\textsuperscript{25}

These images were removed due to copyright restrictions

\textbf{Figure 4.07:} Arch of Titus, Rome 81-85AD.
Source: \url{http://www.umehon.maine.edu/images/hon111/forum/Arch%20of%20Titus.jpg}

\textbf{Figure 4.08:} Alberti, Facade of Sant’ Andrea, Mantua, 1470-1476.

Although Steiner’s buildings did not use the same classical language, he applied the same underlying principle of contrast and balance. The formal devices he employed to architecturally express this principle are explored in the following section.


4.2 Steiner’s Polarity in Practice

Although Steiner had not presented his concept of the threefold nature of the human being as a comprehensive theory until 1917, the exploration of polarity began to find physical expression some years earlier in the design of the First Goetheanum. The building consisted of two interpenetrating domes of unequal size positioned on an east-west axis (Figure 4.09). This axis itself can be interpreted as a polarity that referenced the Occidental and Oriental sources from which Anthroposophy borrowed. The larger dome on the western side housed the public auditorium space and represented the physical realm of being. If continued to form a complete circle, the arc of the dome would touch the ground. The smaller dome on the east, encircling the performance stage, represented the spiritual realm of being. A full circle inscribed within the small dome would hover above the floor (Figure 4.10). In Anthroposophic terms, the large dome represented Ahriman, while the small dome represented Lucifer.

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Figure 4.09: Floor Plan and Longitudinal Section, First Goetheanum.
Source: Raab, Klingborg and Fant, Eloquent Concrete, 60-61.

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Figure 4.10: Diagrammatic Illustration of interlocking domes in plan and section, First Goetheanum.
Source: Bayes, Living Architecture, 74.
The point of intersection between the domes was of particular significance to Steiner, since it represented the point of balance between the earthly and spiritual worlds; the realm of the Christ Being. According to Steiner’s way of thinking, if the domes had been positioned closer together they would have merged into a single entity and lost their separate identities. If however, they had been located further apart they would have become completely independent of each other and ceased to relate. The overlap between the domes was intended to create a bridge between the two polar spheres—in essence a trinity within the duality. This was reflected in both plan and section.

The unequal size of the domes resulted in the area of overlap forming a slightly irregular *vesica piscis* symbol. The sacred geometry of the *vesica piscis* is formed by the intersection of two circles of the same radius so that the centre of each circle lies on the perimeter of the other. The central area common to both forms the *vesica piscis*. This iconography is rich in ancient pagan and Christian symbolism. In his study of sacred geometry, mythologist Robert Lawlor, has described the motif as

> A representation of the intermediate realm which partakes of both the unchanging and changing principles, the eternal and the ephemeral. Human consciousness thus functions as a mediator, balancing the two complimentary poles of consciousness (Figure 4.11).26

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The iconography of the *vesica piscis* also appears in the work of contemporary Anthroposophically inspired architects. The Hungarian architect Imre Makovecz (1935-2011), made direct reference to the double domed form of the *First Goetheanum* in his design for the *Stephaneum Auditorium* at the Catholic University in Piliscaba (Figure 4.12).


In the *Stephaneum*, Makovecz’s unequal cupolas not only intersect, but also lean dramatically towards each other as if literally embracing one another, thus representing a more complete fusion of the physical and spiritual world (Figure 4.13).

![Stephaneum Auditorium at the Catholic University in Piliscaba, Hungary](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piliscsaba_Stephaneum_d%C3%A9li_oldal.JPG)

This image was removed due to copyright restrictions.

The style Makovecz adopted borrowed directly from the language of Classicism. While the hemispherical domes of the First Goetheanum were also classically inspired, Steiner was actively trying to break away from the styles of the past to find an entirely new and modern way of expressing the world of the spirit. Makovecz, on the other hand, deliberately superimposed modernity with tradition, incorporating a number of classical details such as fluted pilasters on the tilted façades and a massive Doric-inspired column which housed an internal spiral staircase. The unconventional manner in which these references were used helped to create an inherent tension between the polarities of past and present, dynamism and stasis, order and irregularity.

Polarity also finds expression in the work of Australian architect, Greg Burgess. His understanding of the concept of polarity closely reflects the three-fold nature of polarity set forth by Steiner. Burgess claims that what makes his buildings ‘alive as distinct from classically dead’ is that a dynamism has been introduced into the geometry so that ‘there’s a movement, a life, a breathing.’27 He contends that most of his buildings have a sense of ‘expansion and contraction, of polarities’ and observes that ‘life’s full of polarities, everything is held in balance. This is what I mean by integrating energy. The balance between chaos and order.’28 Burgess repeatedly employs the vesica piscis motif in his work to express this notion of polarity. In his Catholic Theological College (1997) in East Melbourne, for example, the vesica piscis is given centre stage in the massive bulkhead that hangs above the central spiralling staircase (Figure 4.14). The northern circle of the bulkhead consists of a series of spaced battens which are penetrated by direct light, while the southern circle is an impenetrable, solid surface. This interplay of openness and solidity, darkness and light, references the polarities of cosmic and terrestrial, sacred and the profane.

In his Church of St Michael and St John (1987) in Horsham, Burgess also employed the vesica piscis motif, layering the form in plan, ceiling, wall and window details (Figure 4.15).

A winged bulkhead with a *vesica piscis* form cut out of its centre is suspended directly over the altar where the priest delivers his spiritual message. It can be read as an open portal between the heavenly and earthly spheres. Directly behind the altar is a large circular stained glass window which consists of overlapping panes of coloured circles that repeat the form of the *vesica piscis* multiple times.

As an architect, Burgess considered himself to be ‘in the wonderfully privileged and responsible position of being able to contribute to the evolution of human consciousness,’ a sentiment that strongly echoes Steiner’s evolutionary account of architectural styles in relation to the development of the human soul.29 Like Steiner, Burgess used the concept of polarity to explore this cosmic connection in a concrete manner.

Both Makovecz and Burgess interpreted Steiner’s threefold principle in a visual rather than esoteric language, thereby making his ideas accessible to a contemporary audience. It is interesting to note that Makovecz and Burgess have attracted

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commissions from the Catholic institution. While Catholics rejected much of Steiner’s unorthodox interpretation of the *Bible*, Makovecz and Burgess both managed to imbue their work with a spirituality that supports, rather than alienates people in their own spiritual beliefs. They achieved this without relying on an orthodox canon of Catholicism to respond to their briefs. Each drew upon Steiner’s formal and theoretical ideas while interpreting them in their own personalised way to achieve a sense of connection between the spiritual and material world through the expression of dynamic polar forces.

While the image of the *vesica piscis* furnished Steiner’s architecture with a powerful symbol of polarity, this was not the only device he employed to explicate the concept in his buildings. Like the threefold arrangement of Greek temple architecture discussed earlier, the facade of the *First Goetheanum* also has a distinct tripartite arrangement (Figure 4.16).

![Figure 4.16](This image was removed due to copyright restrictions)

The smooth, solid concrete base of the building strongly connected the building to the earth. Above this base sat the main body of the building, with its sculptural carved walls. This was then crowned by a massive, soft-brimmed roof dome of Norwegian slate shingle tiles that shimmered with a slight iridescence, gently connecting the building with the heavens. The tripartite theme continued in the
division of the main entrance portal and was again repeated in the windows above. A large central window was flanked by two narrower windows whose arched lintels leaned in towards the centre panel. The picture motifs of the three window panes were all connected. Each of the nine triptych windows in the Goetheanum was a different colour, relief-etched to attain varying shades of light and dark. Based on Goethe’s *Theory of Colour*, Steiner believed that the genesis of colour resulted from the conflict between the polar forces of darkness and light.30

The threefold articulation of architectural elements is also evident in the *Second Goetheanum*. Here though, it tends to be less explicit in its expression. Although the building sits firmly on the ground with its substantial concrete plinth, the walls above the plinth tend to morph into the form of the roof. And although a three-fold division is evident in the entrance doors, the tripartite framing of the uppermost window is weakly articulated when compared with the sculpted timber framing of the *First Goetheanum* windows (Figure 4.17).

![Figure 4.17: Front facade, Second Goetheanum. Source: Author, 2009.](image)

The concept of three-fold polarity does find stronger expression in the sequence of forms moving from the rear of the building to the front of the building along its east-west axis. The eastern end is a planar, cubic mass which transforms into richly sculpted, plastic forms at the western end. The interplay of concave and convex

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30 The coloured windows of the Goetheanum are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7: Sense and Nonsense.
forms at the western end, accentuate the flatness of the rear eastern facade while the side wings act as mediating elements between the strongly contrasting rectilinear and organic forms at opposite ends of the building (Figure 4.18). This external articulation of form expresses the building’s internal spatial functions with the more exuberant west end welcoming visitors and housing the busy public spaces while the more constrained eastern end houses the building’s more subservient functions.

Figure 4.18: View of the Second Goetheanum from the South East.
Source: Stuten, Der Goetheanum-Bau in Seiner Lanschaft, 63.

The choice of reinforced concrete as the main building material for the Second Goetheanum represented for Steiner an ideal expression of three-fold polarity. Although Anthroposophists voiced reservations about the use of this ‘unnatural’ material, Steiner deemed it to be entirely suitable due to the fact that concrete was hardened by water, while its steel reinforcement was hardened by fire, and thus it inherently demonstrated a balance between polar forces of nature.31

One area in which Steiner was less successful in resolving the balance between opposing forces was in the expression of the Goetheanum’s mechanical functions. Since the functions of supplying heat and electricity to the Goetheanum were seen by Steiner to be in opposition to the building’s main artistic purpose, they were treated as separate architectural elements. Rather than finding an appropriate expression for

31 Pehnt, Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, 35.
these necessary components within the building, Steiner treated them with hostility by isolating them from the main building (Figure 4.19). He chose instead to give expression to the ‘Ahrimanic’ nature of their work in the form of bizarre little outbuildings designed to express their utilitarian function.

Figure 4.19: Siting of the Boiler House in relation to the First Goetheanum.  

The *Boiler House*, which provided central heating to the main building via an underground duct, consisted of two small domes at the front, behind which rose a sculpted concrete chimney, crudely symbolising billowing smoke (Figure 4.20).\(^{32}\) Similarly, the *Transformer House* was a literal interpretation of the process of transforming electricity (Figure 4.21). The larger boxes that projected from the main structure indicated high currency input while the smaller boxes reflected lower currency output. Rather than finding a successful architectural solution for the formal expression of these mechanical services within the main building of the *Goetheanum*, Steiner, in effect, gave them greater presence and power through his simplistic treatment of them.

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\(^{32}\) The Boiler House is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8: Anthropomorphism.
Aside from these curious service structures, there are other buildings in the grounds of the Goetheanum that can be seen to articulate Steiner’s concept of three-fold polarity. To the west of the Goetheanum building sits Duldeck House (Figure 4.22). Originally built in 1915 as a private residence, it now houses the Rudolf Steiner Archive. Anthroposophic architect and author Rex Raab, recognised the expression of polar forces at play within its sculptural forms, noting that

To the northeast more concave forms prevail, as if the roof had been ‘impressed’ by the portal motif of the main building opposite; to the southwest, overlooking the valley, the roof is corbelled out in a massive swelling and convex forms predominate. This polarity is to be noted in every aspect of the house, from the disposition of the parts on plan to the detailing of cornices and mouldings, balconies, doors, openings in the roof, the chimney, and the charming forms of the outside steps.33

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33 Raab, Klingborg and Fant, *Eloquent Concrete*, 127-128.
The use of concave and convex shapes in *Duldeck House* is much more than a formalistic exercise. The interplay between them results in the successful combination of formal dichotomies to create an integrated whole. Convex forms leads into concave forms and vice versa (Figures 4.23 and 4.24). They work together so that one form cannot be individually demarcated from the other.

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**Figure 4.22:** View of Duldeck House from east showing the concave forms of the roof, Rudolf Steiner, 1915. Source: Author, 2009.

**Figure 4.23:** View of Duldeck house from the north-west showing the convex forms of the roof. Source: Kries and von Vegesack eds., *Rudolf Steiner: Alchemy of the Everyday*, 195.

**Figure 4.24:** Side entrance door of Duldeck house facing south-east. Source: Blaser, *Nature in Building*, 49.
The *Publishing House*, built in 1924, also provides another example of the way in which Steiner unified opposing forces, this time through the use of positive and negative space (Figures 4.25 and 4.26).

![Figure 4.25: Original sketch and model for the Publishing House by Rudolf Steiner, 1924. Goetheanum Art Collection. Source: Author, 2009.](image1)

The deep recess in the front of the building creates a negative hollow within the positive planar surface of the facade. This void serves to identify and highlight the entrance while at the same time guard and protect it. It creates a threshold that mediates the contrasting domains of inside and outside. Some ten years earlier, Steiner had described the interior of the *First Goetheanum* in terms of positive and negative space, using the analogy of a jelly mould to illustrate his point. He stated that
The jelly takes shape inside the mould and when the mould is upturned and removed, the jelly reveals all the forms that are present in negative inside the mould. The same principle may be applied in the case of the interior design of our building, only here there is no jelly inside but the living word of spiritual science moving and weaving in the form possible for it.  

Steiner went on to describe the interior walls as the ‘living negative of the words that are spoken and the deeds that are done in the building.’ In the same way that the inside of a jelly mould is the negative of the jelly form that fills it, Steiner perceived the building’s form as the necessary product of the spiritual activities that occurred within its internal space. According to this reasoning, the opposing properties of form and content, positive and negative, spirit and matter, mutually determined each other. Steiner sought to convey both the unity and tension of such relationships in every detail of his buildings.

This can be seen in the newel post detail of the First Goetheanum’s west internal staircase (Figures 4.27 and 4.28).

Figures 4.27 and 4.28: Section of original newel post of the First Goetheanum salvaged from the fire, now on display in the Second Goetheanum. Source: Author, 2009.

34 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 69.
35 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 69.
Within this single detail, the peculiar hooked prongs express the relationship of movement in opposing directions—up and down, forwards and backwards, left and right. It is referred to by Anthroposophists as the ‘organ of balance’ due to its apparent similarity to the organs of the inner ear which give rise to the sense of balance.\(^{36}\) In a lecture delivered in 1921, Steiner noted that after having designed the detail he later remembered the three semi-circular tubes of the inner ear.\(^{37}\) He claimed that the form of the post had not arisen out of a naturalistic desire to copy the shape of these aural canals, but from the sensation of balance that one experiences when climbing stairs. The form of the post itself is not however symmetrically balanced. The central prong looks like a drooping head, as if the weight of the nodule on the end is almost too much to carry. The two side prongs are like arms that twist around the belly of the form, but rather than balancing each other by moving in counter directions, they move towards the same direction. Although there is a certain tension evident in the form, as a visual articulation of Steiner’s concept of threefold polarity it remains somewhat ambiguous to the uninitiated. In this detail it is the physical relationship between the newel post and the human hand that best articulates Steiner’s concept of polarity. The post’s form appears to anticipate the hand’s caress as one embarks upon the stairs, providing an embodied example of Steiner’s jelly mould analogy. The hand is the living negative of the architectural form.

While the concept of polarity is revealed in Steiner’s architecture through visual metaphor and embodied experience, the concept is communicated far more literally in the imagery of his sculptural work. This is evident in the massive 9.5 metre tall carved wooden sculpture known as *The Representative of Humanity* or *The Group* (Figures 4.29 and 4.30).

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Since it had been incomplete at the time of the *First Goetheanum* fire, the sculpture had remained in the carpentry workshop and was hence spared from destruction. Steiner perceived this sculpture not merely as a symbol for the human condition but as a tool for spiritual development; a sculptural meditation. The sculpture depicts the figure of Christ as the archetype of the human being, mediating between the two evil forces of Ahriman below and the winged figure of Lucifer above, who both work to tempt the human soul in one direction or another. In his subterranean cave, Ahriman is fashioned as a concave, angular and rigid figure, representing the hardening force of intellectualism. In contrast, above the left arm of the central Christ figures, Lucifer is rendered as a fallen angel in rounded, convex forms, representing heated passion and fantasy. The sculpture does not seek to counter or deny these forces, but rather to recognise the freedom of humanity to rise above them.

By expressing his philosophy of threefold polarity through the mediums of sculpture and architecture, Steiner was attempting to visually reveal the connection between the cosmic and the terrestrial; between the sacred and the profane. His aim was not to express them as an oppositional or contradictory duality. Nor was it to fuse them...
together into a unified whole. Rather, his intention was to convey the dynamic tension of forces acting and reacting upon one another within the work in order to awaken the observer's awareness of such forces. For Steiner these forces were but a manifestation of the very nature of the human being. This belief was reflected in his pronouncement that 'the human being is always and winter and summer at the same time.'³⁸ For Steiner, art and architecture provided the means through which the inner world of the human being met the outer world in freedom, leading to the ultimate goal of transcendence through the power of self-knowledge.

The concept of threefold polarity provided Steiner with the conceptual foundation upon which to develop one of his most important theories in relation to architecture—the theory of metamorphosis. Steiner perceived metamorphosis as a direct expression of earthly and cosmic forces. Through the interplay of such forces a plant’s leaves strive upward towards the heavens while its roots bury down into the earth. Only when the terrestrial and solar forces are both active, is the plant able to thrive. The way in which Steiner applied this notion to his architecture is considered in the following chapter.

³⁸ Kugler, Rudolf Steiner: Blackboard Drawings 1919-1924, 78.
Chapter 5

Metamorphosis

*Behold the plant:*
*It is the butterfly*
*Fettered to the earth.*
*Behold the butterfly:*
*It is the plant*
*Freed by the cosmos.*

*Rudolf Steiner, Lecture, 26 October, 1923.*

5.1 Intellectual Foundations

In the prefatory notes of a published lecture titled *The Architectural Conception of the Goetheanum*, Steiner outlined the tremendous significance of Goethe’s thought in the development of his architectural conception of the *First Goetheanum*.\(^1\) Steiner stated that it seemed permissible to him to name the building after Goethe since its architectural forms had arisen out of the attempt to embody Goethe's theory of metamorphosis. Working at around the same time as Steiner, on the other side of the Atlantic, the American architect, Louis Sullivan (1856-1924) also looked to the concept of metamorphosis as a major source of inspiration for his architecture. Both Steiner and Sullivan shared a Romantic attitude towards nature that made them especially receptive to Goethe’s way of thinking. Goethe’s unorthodox methodology sought to achieve genuine scientific knowledge through a communion with nature that employed both sensory and intuitive perception. In the mutual interplay of these alternative cognitive approaches, Steiner and Sullivan recognised a way to bring the creative essence of nature into their own architectural expressions. This chapter considers how the principle of metamorphosis was employed by Steiner, and compares it with Sullivan’s handling of the same natural law, as applied to

\(^1\) Steiner, *The Architectural Conception of the Goetheanum*, 3.
architecture. The comparative approach adopted here helps to identify and explicate the specific way in which Steiner interpreted and adapted the concept architecturally in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of his sculptural organic forms. Although the concept provided a common basis for Steiner and Sullivan’s thinking, there are significant departures in their built work that reflect their different skills, agendas, and creative processes. Particular focus is given to Steiner and Sullivan’s treatment of architectural ornamentation as a means of examining the connections and distinctions in their conceptual and formal translation of the theory of metamorphosis into material reality.

Steiner and Sullivan approached the task of architecture from fundamentally different perspectives—Steiner as a thinker and spiritual leader who used architecture as a means of articulating his conceptual tenets; and Sullivan as an architect who looked to science, philosophy and transcendentalism as a means of informing his architecture. Sullivan’s architectural output was about 180 buildings to Steiner’s seventeen, while Sullivan’s writings, though significant, fell well short of Steiner’s copious number of lectures and books. And whereas Steiner established a thorough, first-hand knowledge of Goethe’s scientific writings in the seven years he spent as editor at the Goethe Archive in Weimar in the 1890s, Sullivan’s knowledge of Goethe’s work was less direct, having been acquired more through second-hand sources. These sources included the architect, John Endelman, for whom Sullivan worked as a draftsperson in Chicago during the mid 1870s. According to scholar, Narciso Menocal, Endelman and Sullivan’s friendship developed into an informal master-disciple relationship whereby Endelman, who had spoken German since childhood, shared his knowledge of German Transcendentalism with Sullivan.2 Menocal has noted that there is no evidence that Sullivan read German, and few works of German Transcendentalists were available in English before 1885.3 Nevertheless, Sullivan’s personal library contained five German volumes of Goethe’s Complete Works, Goethe’s most famous tragic drama, Faust, as well as a biography of Goethe by Herman Grimm, demonstrating that his interest in Goethe

was not entirely incidental.² Lauren Weingarden, another Sullivan scholar, considers the American Transcendentalist poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892) a more immediate source of Sullivan’s knowledge of Goethe.⁵ Yet even though Whitman held Goethe in high regard, Whitman himself credits fellow poet, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) for his own critical impressions of Goethe.⁶ It was through Whitman however, that Sullivan was able to translate Goethe’s foreign concepts into an American idiom.⁷ These are contributing factors in the different interpretations of Goethe’s ideas that are rendered through Steiner and Sullivan’s architectural forms.

In order to fully appreciate how Steiner and Sullivan translated Goethe’s ideas into their buildings and ornamentation, it is necessary to first understand and contextualise the concept of metamorphosis. As a biological process, metamorphosis, describes the rapid and complete transformation of a larva into its adult form. Deriving from the Greek words *meta*, meaning ‘change’ and *morphē*, meaning ‘form,’ the process of metamorphosis describes a change of form that involves not only a quantitative change, but also a qualitative change in bodily structure from one condition to another, such as chrysalis to butterfly or seed to plant. This qualitative distinction has seen the term applied non-scientifically to describe the notion of transformation in areas such as philosophy, art, literature, music and architecture. The Roman poet, Ovid (43 BC- AD 17/18), for example, described tales of transformation from Greek and Roman mythology in his epic narrative poem *Metamorphoses*.⁸ Another notable literary example, contemporaneous with the early twentieth century work of Sullivan and Steiner, is Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*.⁹ Written in 1915, this seminal work of short fiction describes the bizarre transformation of a travelling salesman into a repulsive, giant beetle-like insect, reflecting the alienation of humanity from modern industrialised society. This

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⁶ Maurice O. Johnson, *Walt Whitman as a Critic of Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1938), 17.
theme of alienation fed into the socialist agenda pursued by German Expressionist architects such as Bruno Taut (1880-1938) and Hermann Finsterlin (1887-1973) whose utopian schemes also employed mutating biomorphic forms. In art, the concept of metamorphic transformation has been translated into image by the Dutch graphic artist M.C Escher in his series of woodcut prints titled *Metamorphosis I, II* and *III* dating from 1937 to 1968 (Figure 5.01).

![Figure 5.01: Metamorphosis III, M.C. Escher, 1967-68. Source: M. C. Escher, *The Complete Graphic Work*, 326.](image-url)

Escher associated his works on metamorphosis with the notion of time and the rhythmic organisation of music, principles that Steiner and Sullivan also aimed to express in their work. The concept of organic transformation has been applied directly to music by the German composer, Martin Scherber (1907-1974) in his *Metamorphosis Symphonies*, written between 1938 and 1955. These symphonies drew direct inspiration from Goethe’s theory of metamorphosis.

Goethe’s essay *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, was published in 1790. In it Goethe described the homologous nature of the leaf organ in plants, in which he understood every part of the plant to be a metamorphosis of the leaf. He believed that there was no finished existence of any one plant form, but rather a process of continuous becoming, in which one part developed out of another. In his botanical notes from his Italian journey in 1787 Goethe wrote ‘Hypothesis: all is leaf. This simplicity
makes possible the greatest diversity. Goethe did not mean by this that the various plant organs (seed, stamen, pistil, fruit, flowers, etc.) grew out of a leaf in a literal sense, but that the leaf represented an omnipotential form that could take on any outer appearance. According to Goethe, even though each plant organ was different in its external appearance, they were identical in their formative principle. In a letter to his friend, German philosopher and poet, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), Goethe stated

> It had occurred to me that in the organ of the plant which we ordinarily designate as leaf, the true Proteus lay hidden, who can conceal and reveal himself in all forms. Forward and backward, the plant is always only leaf, so inseparably united with the future germ that we cannot imagine one without the other.

For Goethe, the leaf represented an archetypal plant form which he perceived intuitively as an ideal of the mind, rather than as a finished material object. His notion of the archetypal plant was not an existing physical plant and yet existed within all plants. To Goethe, it was an example of the universal abiding in the particular and the particular manifesting in the universal. Nature’s multiplicity was perceived by Goethe in the archetype of the leaf and, in the process of becoming, the archetype remained unchanged within constant change. This understanding led Goethe to claim

> The archetypal plant will be the strangest creature in the world, which nature herself ought to envy me. With this model and the key to it, one can invent plants endlessly which must be consistent – that is, if they did not exist, yet they could exist, and not some artistic or poetic shadows and appearances but possessing inner truth and inevitability. The same law can be applied to everything living.

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12 Goethe, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, 16.
Goethe also applied this intuitive approach to human morphology, leading him to discover the human intermaxillary bone in 1784.\(^{13}\) This discovery dispelled the widely held notion that the apparent lack of an intermaxillary bone in humans was a distinguishing feature between man and ape.\(^{14}\) Despite such important findings Goethe’s scientific writings were largely ignored during his day and it was only with the articulation of phenomenology in the twentieth century that a conceptual language was developed that allowed his work to be better understood.\(^{15}\) Goethe believed that genuine understanding required both intuitive feeling as well as direct sensory experience of the phenomenon. He employed a method that he referred to as ‘exact sensorial imagination.’\(^{16}\) This approach allowed Goethe to perceive the process of transformation that occurs in metamorphosis by reading the phenomenon in terms of itself, rather than by applying external rules. He believed that the phenomenon itself disclosed an intrinsic intelligibility that could be encountered through a mode of consciousness that moved beyond the sensory realm. At the same time, this could only be achieved by delving more deeply into the sensory experience of the phenomenon by engaging one’s own intuitive perception in order to find that which lies beneath its changeable externalities. Goethe aimed to use the power of the imagination in a systematic or ‘exact’ manner to help fill the conceptual gaps that a purely mechanistic approach could not fully explain.

It was this attitude that particularly influenced Steiner, who was inspired as much by Goethe’s methods as by the actual content of his thought. Steiner claimed that

> When the content of Goethe's theory of metamorphosis has been made available through a more comprehensive understanding of nature than was possible in Goethe's day – when a comprehensive view is able to unveil nature – this theory will have a much greater capacity for life and a much broader application. We may say that even Goethe's


\(^{15}\) Seamon and Zajonc eds., *Goethe’s Way of Science*, 1.

\(^{16}\) Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature*, 236. 
understanding of the theory of metamorphosis was very limited; it can be expanded.\textsuperscript{17}

Steiner took it upon himself to do just that by applying the theory of metamorphosis to his own system of spiritual enquiry and, in turn, architecture. He believed that the activity present in organic nature corresponded with the activity of the spirit world.\textsuperscript{18}

According to Steiner, if our perception is penetrating enough, the supersensible can be perceived within the sensible. As such, Steiner prescribed various meditations designed to develop this perceptive faculty. In \textit{How to Know Higher Worlds}, Steiner described a meditation in which a seed is used as a physical prop to be contemplated and visualised as a future plant.\textsuperscript{19} The aim of the exercise is to focus one’s mind on the invisible reality of the future plant concealed within the seed. By imagining the invisible forces within the seed that will, in time, change into a visible plant form, Steiner offered a practical means of grasping the epistemological foundation of Goethe’s ‘exact sensorial imagination.’ By developing our perceptive abilities in this way, Steiner believed that we could learn to experience the inner spiritual essence active within the material phenomena. Applying this concept to art, he claimed that ‘… in art, what is outwardly perceptible to the senses is spiritualised and imbued with the impulses of the spiritual world and what is inwardly perceptible to the soul is depicted in an outer embodiment.’\textsuperscript{20} He argued that the outer aspect of an artist’s work must bring the inner spiritual aspect to expression.\textsuperscript{21}

Sullivan shared Steiner’s spiritualised attitude to artistic creation, declaring that

\begin{quote}
I regard spiritual facts as the only permanent and reliable facts, the only solid ground. And I believe that until we shall walk securely upon this ground we can have but little force or directness of purpose, but little insight, but little fervor, but little faith in material results.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Steiner, \textit{Art as Spiritual Activity}, 200.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Steiner, \textit{Autobiography}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Steiner, \textit{How to Know Higher Worlds}, 56-7.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Rudolf Steiner quoted in “The Seven Column Motifs: Spiritual Truths Made Visible,’’ by Peter Wolf in \textit{The Great Hall of the Goetheanum}, eds. MacDonald and Thal-Jantzen, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Steiner, \textit{Art as Spiritual Activity}, 129.
\end{footnotes}
Sullivan expounded his spiritual beliefs throughout much of his writing, but like Steiner, his message was often obscured by the convoluted writing style he employed. This was made evident in 1886 in his essay *Inspiration* which he delivered to a somewhat bewildered audience of architects at a convention for the Western Association of Architects in Chicago. In lengthy, and rather ambiguous prose, Sullivan rendered a poetic reading of the creative life cycle of nature through the rhythmic stages of birth, growth, maturity, decay and rebirth. This transcendental reading of nature was a constant theme in Sullivan’s writing, often echoing Goethe’s theory of metamorphosis. This is demonstrated in the frontispiece of his 1923 treatise *A System of Architectural Ornament According with a Philosophy of Man’s Power*. Beneath a simple drawing of a split seed, Sullivan placed a caption by Nietzsche describing the unseen vital force held within the seed which finds physical expression in the forms which grow from it (Figure 5.02). As eminent Nietzsche scholar and translator, Walter Kaufman, has established, Nietzsche’s own thought was deeply indebted to Goethe.

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**Figure 5.02:** Frontispiece from Sullivan’s *A System of Architectural Ornament*, first published in 1923.

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5.2 Metamorphosis as Cosmic Evolution

Steiner’s first attempt at communicating the theory of metamorphosis in artistic form occurred in 1907 at the annual conference of the German section of the Theosophical Society in Munich, in which he decorated the walls of the Munich Congress Hall with seven tall rectangular boards painted as columns, alternated with five circular pictures referred to as ‘planetary seals’ (Steiner designed two additional seals in 1911) (Figure 5.03).

![Figure 5.03: Steiner’s Seven Planetary Seals. The first five were presented in 1907, and the last two in 1911. Source: MacDonald and Thal-Jantzen eds., The Great Hall of the Goetheanum, 38-39.](image)

The metamorphosing sequence of the seals and column motifs were intended to be a visual representation of Steiner’s occult understanding of the stages of world evolution. According to Steiner, throughout its entire evolution, the world would undergo seven distinct stages of development. Each of these seven epochs was perceived as a higher development of the preceding epoch, and Steiner aimed to illustrate this progression through the sequential development of the capital and seal motifs.

Evolution had become a prominent theme in art and architecture in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, owing to the influential work of nineteenth century art historians Gottfried Semper (1803-1879) and Alois Riegler (1858-1905).27

Semper and Riegl had both confronted the question of how art and ornamentation related to the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin (1809-1882). According to Steiner, their interpretations were based on a materialistic conception of the evolution of art that failed to recognise the inner principle of artistic creation that he perceived through Goethe’s work. In a detailed study of Goethe’s morphological and aesthetic theories, science historian, Robert Richards, concluded that Darwin’s theory had its predecessor in the evolutionary theory of Goethe and Schelling. Darwin himself had acknowledged Goethe in the introduction to the third edition of *The Origin of Species*, declaring him an ‘extreme partisan’ of the transmutation view. Nonetheless, Goethe’s intuitive approach did not fit within the mechanistic explanations demanded by modern science and it was Darwin’s theory of natural selection that provided the concept of evolution with the rational, scientific foundation that had been seen to be lacking in Goethe’s original findings.

In adapting the concept of evolution to the discipline of art and architecture, Semper and Riegl were not restricted by the material emphasis of science and instead applied a cultural emphasis that was primarily concerned with the motives and ideas that had come to shape formal development. Indeed, Semper implored that his work should not be read in a materialist manner. In the introduction to his seminal text *Der Stil*, Semper insisted that

> We will pursue the constructional-technical understanding of the origin of basic architectural forms, alluded to above and pursued below, but this will have nothing in common with the coarsely materialistic view that

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holds architecture’s essence to be nothing but improved construction – illustrated statics and mechanics, as it were – a mere materiality.33

Harry Mallgrave has posited that Semper’s interpretation of architectural evolution was the first in modern times not to base its reasoning on quasi-mythical values.34 However, fifty years after the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and Semper’s *Der Stil*, Steiner’s interpretation of evolution was still far more akin to the attitudes of primeval knowledge than present-day understanding. In his book *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, Steiner presented a theory of evolution based on an esoteric interpretation of Goethe’s methodology which sought to extend the evolving cycle of nature as described by metamorphosis, to incorporate the transmutation of the entire cosmos.35 Unlike Darwin’s biological explanation of evolution, Steiner perceived this transmutation of the world as a spiritual phenomenon.

Like Steiner, Sullivan also understood the concept of evolution in spiritual terms. Weingarden attributes the intellectual impetus for Sullivan’s philosophy to the evolutionary theories of English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) which had been filtered through the mystical lens of American Transcendentalism. Drawing on a variety of sources including Goethe and Schelling, Spencer’s essay *Progress: Its Law and Cause*, was written two years prior to Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and presented evolution as a universal law that applied equally to the development of biological organisms as to the progress of society, the human mind and the cosmos.36 By linking the theory of evolution to a higher cosmic order and applying it to architecture, Steiner and Sullivan sought to elevate architecture beyond the mundane concerns of building.

### 5.3 Creative Expression

This shared outlook has resulted in some interesting parallels between Steiner and Sullivan’s creative expressions. A comparison between Steiner’s seals for the Munich Congress and Sullivan’s early sketch studies of organic forms starts to draw out some of the similarities and differences in their work. In developing his

35 Steiner, *An Outline of Esoteric Science*.
exceptional talent for drawing, Sullivan turned to the work of French art historian and architect, Victor-Marie Ruprich-Robert (1820-1887). In 1876 Ruprich-Robert published his highly influential work *Flore Ornementale*. This book was the fruit of twenty years of teaching ornamental composition at the *Ecole Gratuite de Dessin de Paris*. It was divided into four parts, arranged in order of increasing complexity, beginning with leaves, then progressing to plants, flowers, and finally compositions. Ruprich-Robert ended the introduction to *Flore Ornementale* by quoting Goethe and urging design students to obey their own impressions and listen to the beating of their own heart. The book was widely consulted by architects, painters, sculptors, industrial designers and ornamentalists. Sullivan did numerous studies from *Flore Ornementale*, producing elegant drawings of stylised floral forms inscribed within circles (Figure 5.04).

![Figure 5.04: Louis Sullivan’s pencil study of Ruprich-Robert’s Flore Ornementale, c.1875. Source: Twombly and Menocal, Louis Sullivan: The Poetry of Architecture, 188.](113)

Steiner’s planetary seals adopt a similar formal arrangement using organic, plant inspired forms to decorate the circular plates. But whereas Sullivan’s drawings were independent investigations into the ornamental potential of natural forms, Steiner’s seals worked together to explore the morphing of forms from one plate to the next. This sequential formal development can also be seen in the painted column capitals that alternated between the seals (Figure 5.05).

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The archetypal forces that Steiner perceived to be active in the process of metamorphosis were made visible in the column motifs, whereby forms from above interacted with forms from below. Upper teardrop forms seemed to pull downwards while the lower forms appeared to lift upwards as if striving to connect the two. For Steiner, this was a deliberate attempt to illustrate a balance between the polar cosmic and terrestrial forces active within a growing plant.

Preliminary design studies which Sullivan prepared for John Endelman for the interior mural decorations of *Moody’s Tabernacle* (1876) and the *Sinai Temple* (1876) show a similar quality, albeit in a more floriated and less self-conscious manner than Steiner’s capitals (Figure 5.06).
In Sullivan’s *National Farmers Bank* (1906-1908) in Owatonna, Minnesota, the tension between upward movement and downward pressure is made more apparent (Figure 5.07).


The large semi-circular arched windows that puncture the solid brick walls fan outwards from the central entrance doorway and small square windows of the front and side facades. The vertical fenestration of the stained-glass panels reaches upwards, giving a sense of vitality to the restrained, cubic mass of the building. At the same time, the red sandstone base anchors the building to its site and the heavy top cornice exerts a powerful downward pressure on the entire structure. The overall effect of these opposing tendencies is one of equilibrium and coherence.

The reconciliation of opposites is a fundamental aspect of Goethe’s theory of metamorphosis, which he perceived in terms of alternating phases of expansion and contraction. In plants these alternating phases are evidenced in the contracted seed which unfolds and expands into leaves and roots. This is followed by successive stages of expansion and contraction of the calyx to corolla and then stamen and pistil to fruit, finally bringing forth the contracted seed once again. In the process of metamorphosis simpler forms expand into more complex forms and complex forms contract into matured simple forms in a continuous loop (Figure 5.08).
Figure 5.08: A complete mature leaf sequence of a Sow thistle arranged in a continuous loop. Source: Bochemühl, *Toward a Phenomonology of the Etheric World*, 135.

This concept was illustrated by Steiner in the seven pairs of carved timber columns of the *First Goetheanum* (Figure 5.09). These columns gave sculptural expression to the painted columns Steiner had produced several years earlier for the Munich Congress.

Figure 5.09: Rudolf Steiner’s model of the First Goetheanum, 1913. Source: Author, 2009.

Each column was carved from a different timber—cherry, elm, birch, ash, oak, maple and hornbeam. Drawing on ancient mystical wisdom, the particular qualities of each timber were believed to emanate from the different planets each column represented,
namely the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The sequence of metamorphic change that occurs in plants was shown side by side in the columns through a progression of the ornamental forms of their capitals and bases, beginning with the simplest forms of the first column, advancing to the most complex forms of the middle column and then returning to the more simplified forms of the last column. Each capital and base appeared to grow out of the forms of the previous, adjacent column. Steiner believed that through imaginative perception these isolated stationary forms could be experienced as a continuous, rhythmic process that revealed the invisible temporal nature of metamorphosis.

The metamorphic rhythm of simplicity and complexity found quite different expression in Sullivan’s work. Much of Sullivan’s ornamentation starts from a simple geometric base which is then developed and transfigured into incredibly detailed and complex forms. Erring towards excess, Sullivan’s elaborate ornamentation does not complete the metamorphic cycle by returning to simplicity. Instead, the buildings which support the ornamentation are themselves an expression of restrained simplicity. In his essay Ornament in Architecture, Sullivan described the relationship between structure and ornamentation stating that ‘while the mass-composition is the more profound, the decorative ornamentation is the more intense.’ He extolled the necessity for organic unity between ornament and structure, demanding that ‘ornament should appear, not as something receiving the spirit of the structure, but as a thing expressing that spirit by virtue of differential growth.’ According to Sullivan, by logic of the principle of growth it then followed that ‘a certain kind of ornament should appear on a certain kind of structure, just as a certain kind of leaf must appear on a certain kind of tree.’ Yet architectural critic Hanno-Walter Kruft has noted that Sullivan’s conception of ornamentation is not as organic as he may have propounded, and Weingarden goes so far as to say that ‘objectively considered, in most cases, his ornament appears stuck on, even though he warned against such an aberration.’ But as Wim de Wit has noted, while

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39 Each of these planets refers to a spiritual stage of world evolution and not to the planets as they appear in the solar system.
40 Louis H. Sullivan, Kindergarten Chats (Revised 1918) and Other Writings (New York: George Wittenborg Inc., 1947), 188.
41 Louis H. Sullivan, Kindergarten Chats, 189.
42 Louis H. Sullivan, Kindergarten Chats, 189.
Sullivan does ‘push ornament to the brink of architectural possibility’ and sometimes even ‘over the edge of propriety’ it is owing to the fact that Sullivan allowed ornament to risk taking on the heroic role, rather than playing the part of an accessory, that his designs are so exceptional.44 There is a symbiosis between Sullivan’s ornament and structure, through which both benefit, and thereby create a sense of architectural unity.

Whereas Sullivan’s stereometric structures offer a restful counterpoint to the exuberance of the ornamentation, Steiner’s buildings are all energy and movement. In contrast to Sullivan’s static, unadorned walls surfaces, Steiner’s walls are active and dynamic. Describing the walls of the First Goetheanum, Steiner declared that ‘here the wall is not merely a wall, it is alive, just like a living organism that allows elevations and depressions to grow harmoniously out of itself. The wall has come alive – that is the difference.’45 The three-dimensional sculptural carving of the timber walls reinforced the metamorphic concept of expansion and contraction by allowing elevations and depressions to appear to grow out of and recede into them.

This sense of movement and dynamism was carried even further in the Second Goetheanum. Although Steiner’s death in 1925 meant that he was unable to see the building through to its completion, it can nonetheless be argued that his concept of metamorphosis was more fully realised in the second building than it had been in the first. For example, whereas in the First Goetheanum the motifs of the columns appeared side by side as separate entities, in the Second Goetheanum there is a continuous development of one form morphing into another so that the motifs begin to fuse into one another. The individual columns become more like deep pilasters, so that rather than emphasising their separateness, they literally become part of the walls and window architraves (Figure 5.10).

45 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 88.
The strong division of base, shaft and capital in the previous columns also lose their individual articulation, thus allowing the columns to merge into the wall above. Where the motifs of the column capitals in the First Goetheanum were intended to demonstrate the interaction of forces from above and below, in the new building the entire pilaster reflects this relationship. And whereas each motif previously appeared as an arrested stage of development, they now work together to create a rhythmic sense of movement towards the stage. As the sculptural forms develop from west to east, they become progressively more dynamic (Figure 5.11).46

Figure 5.10: Interior of the Second Geotheanum, looking south. Source: Author, 2009.

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This sense of movement creates the impression that one form has generated out of another in a more organic way than before. In a contemporary monograph of Goethe’s scientific methods, physicist and philosopher of science Henri Bortoft, notes that in the metamorphosis of plants

the individual leaves we see with the senses are no more than single snapshots of … movement – as if they were transitory markers making the movement visible. What is real is the movement itself, not any single form. It is the movement which is the unity.47

In the First Goetheanum, Steiner’s columns are ‘snapshots’ of metamorphosis, whereas unity is achieved in the Second Goetheanum through fluid movement. Observing changing forms however is not the same as observing movement, therefore the imaginative perception of the observer must provide the link between the sensory reality and what the mind comprehends. The movement grasped by our thinking represents an ideal relationship between the separate architectural entities. A musical analogy can help explain this idea since movement can also be perceived in music, even though literally speaking, nothing actually moves – we simply hear one note then another. Like metamorphosis, movement is perceived through time and as

with architecture, movement in music is perceived imaginatively as a phenomenological truth rather than an empirical reality. It requires a mental activity to connect the notes to create a sensation of rhythm and movement. Steiner often employed musical metaphors to describe his work and believed that the interplay between his architectural forms could ‘arouse a musical mood in the soul’ thereby making it possible to feel ‘invisible music.’ Phenomenologist, David Seamon, has described movement within the context of metamorphosis, explaining it not as the outward alteration of one form into another but as the differing outward expressions of an inner idea. He states that ‘the idea is intuited in the object, as an inwardly felt potency of growth and, hence, “life”.’ In giving artistic expression to this conception of metamorphosis, Steiner aimed to stimulate in the architectural observer an inner sensibility for movement, growth and transformation that he believed was instructive to their own spiritual growth and development.

Steiner’s effective articulation of movement does have the consequence however, of lending his architecture the feeling of being in a constant state of flux. Sullivan’s architecture, by comparison, achieves a state of composure that imparts a sense of dignity and quietness. The opposing forces of simple and complex, geometric and organic, movement and stillness, strike a delicate balance. Whereas Steiner’s architecture appears to be always in the process of becoming, Sullivan’s architecture expresses a state of completeness. This may be attributed to the very different processes they each employed to create their architecture. Sullivan articulated his morphological design process in 1923 in his published lithograph *A System of Architectural Ornament*. It set out a systematic account of his technical methods for producing architectural ornamentation. In a series of annotated drawings, Sullivan begins each study with a simple organic or geometric form that is then manipulated through a sequence of systematic changes in order to eventually be transformed into an intricately detailed and complicated form (Figure 5.12).

49 Seamon and Zajonc eds., *Goethe’s Way of Science*, 106.
50 Seamon and Zajonc, eds., *Goethe’s Way of Science*, 106.
Sullivan used geometry as a scaffold to explore the organic pattern of growth from the simple to the complex. The forms slowly evolve from rigid geometric shapes towards more organic, plastic forms, eventually culminating in flourishing vegetal arrangements that oftentimes are still contained within a geometric framework.

Sullivan’s consummate drawings skills allowed him to comprehensively explore the layering, scale and detail of form in a way that was simply not available to Steiner. Steiner’s rudimentary drafting skills precluded such a technical, refined approach. Instead, following Goethe’s methodology, Steiner sought to intuit the most appropriate formal solution based on the particular conditions of the architectural task. For Sullivan the process of metamorphosis was carried out on paper and only once it had reached its highest point of development, did he commit the form to architecture. By contrast, Steiner revealed the progressive change and evolution of his forms in the architecture itself, with minimal development and transformation occurring prior, through the medium of drawing.⁵¹

⁵¹ The way in which Steiner employed the tools of drawings and model making is analysed in Chapter Nine: Rudolf Steiner as Architect.
This is indicative of important differences in Steiner and Sullivan’s overall intent. Steiner perceived architecture as an agent through which other things could be expressed while Sullivan saw it as something of meaning in its own right. Whereas Sullivan’s primary concern was for the final architectural product, Steiner’s most important consideration was the actual process of metamorphosis. Sullivan’s work was a glorification of ornamentation in all its elaborate splendor. Steiner’s architecture, on the other hand, sought to exalt nature’s methodology rather than nature’s material reality, which may help to account for the more nebulous look and feel of his work. While Sullivan’s fully resolved and beautifully refined forms embody a particular point in time, Steiner’s forms sought to convey time itself. Steiner wanted the process of metamorphosis to become the very nature and essence of the architecture rather than be an attribute applied to the building. Any symbolic interpretation of his architectural motifs as a systematic manipulation of form was seen by Steiner as an external concept that failed to comprehend his spiritual vision. He intended for the transmutation of his architectural forms to be felt in an inwardly active manner so that the archetypal forces inherent in metamorphosis could be directly experienced.

In order to achieve this objective, Steiner applied the concept of metamorphosis more comprehensively than Sullivan, to incorporate the entire ornamental, spatial and structural articulation of his architecture. He even extended it beyond individual buildings. On a small scale Steiner often repeated motifs in metamorphosed form in details such as columns, doors and windows. He then continued to carry the principle through to major structural components such as the double dome motif which found different formal expression between buildings such as the First Goetheanum, the Glass House and the Boiler house, all built one year after the other (Figures 5.13 and 5.14).
Figure 5.13: South Elevation of the First Goetheanum, Rudolf Steiner, 1913 Source: http://fineart.elib.com/fineart.php?showpic=1&prev=Alphabetical%2FSteiner_Rudolf&dir=Site_index%2FSteiner_Rudolf%2FGoetheanum&name=Site_index%2FSteiner_Rudolf%2FGoetheanum%2Ffirst-goetheanum-1921.jpg&srow=1

Figure 5.14: The Glass House, Rudolf Steiner, 1914. Source: Kries and von Vegesack eds., Rudolf Steiner: Alchemy of the Everyday, 113.

The separated domes of the Glass House and the Boiler House were intended to reflect the inorganic function of these buildings, while the merged domes of the main building were meant to demonstrate the organic unity of the Anthroposophical endeavours carried out inside the building. Upon the First Goetheanum’s destruction by fire, Steiner conceived the Second Geotheanum as a metamorphosis of its predecessor, embodying the same spiritual forces that brought the first building into being.

The concept of metamorphosis for Steiner was an all-embracing idea that was applicable to his entire system of Anthroposophy. Through the medium of architecture he was able to illustrate his theory in a visual rather than intellectual language, thereby making complex ideas more readily accessible to his followers. In so doing, he hoped to make evident the notion that matter is imbued with spiritual forces that can be experienced in the physical realm if only we can learn to perceive them. But does this mingling of spirit and matter not lead to arbitrary design solutions based on mystical superstition? To be sure, Steiner and Sullivan both had their respective foibles, however the strength of their overall achievements suggests that rather than falling victim to a facile subjectivity, they were in fact striving for a higher kind of objectivity that was based not only on observable facts, but also on the human ability to think and perceive things through the power of the imagination. Architecture’s ability to evoke the imagination as well as the intellect makes something of a nonsense of the scientific versus intuitive debate that has dogged critiques of Goethean ideology. In embracing Goethe’s way of knowing, neither
Steiner nor Sullivan were interested in negating the validity of reductionist science, but rather, sought to challenge it as the only way of knowing. Their unique approaches expanded the way in which nature could inform and inspire architectural creation. The marked differences in their work reflect the diversity that nature itself holds. However these differences also reveal something more, something deeper, that sets Steiner apart from Sullivan and offers an insight into the otherness of Steiner’s architectural agenda. Much as Sullivan was inclined to imbue architecture with a mystical subtext, the spiritual mission Steiner conferred upon architecture was far more absolute. He sought nothing less than transcendence to a divine realm and architecture was but the vehicle through which this ultimate objective could be achieved.
Chapter 6

Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition

I believe in intuition and inspiration. ... Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution.

*Albert Einstein, Cosmic Religion with Other Opinions, 1931*

### 6.1 Contextualising Steiner’s Conception of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition

True artistic creation, according to Steiner, resulted from three distinct cognitive processes: imagination, inspiration and intuition. This chapter investigates Steiner’s esoteric understanding of these concepts and considers how they relate to the way in which he produced architecture. Romantic and Eastern perceptions of these ‘higher powers’ are considered so as to provide a contextual backdrop for Steiner’s own thinking. While being influenced by these currents of thought, Steiner’s systematic effort to establish a defined method for accessing the faculties of imagination, inspiration and intuition sets his work apart from his predecessors. The task he set himself was no small feat and the inherent difficulties of the methodology he developed, especially in regard to its application to artistic endeavour, are also examined. For Steiner the faculties of imagination, inspiration and intuition were necessary not only to the creation of art and architecture, but also to its comprehension by the observer, requiring an empathetic engagement with the work in order to appreciate its significance and meaning. This leads into a discussion of the role of symbol and myth as clues to understanding the spiritual potentiality of the human being. Steiner’s occult reading of the acanthus leaf motif is juxtaposed with scholarly readings by Alois Riegl, and more recently, George Hersey. By applying his faculties of higher knowledge, Steiner sought to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which spiritual phenomena found material expression. The influential
Russian painter, Wassily Kandinsky aspired to similar objectives and looked to Steiner’s writing as a direct source of inspiration in his shift towards abstraction. An analysis of Steiner’s and Kandinsky’s work provides further insight into the way in which the concepts of imagination, inspiration and intuition were manifested in artistic form. Finally, a critical analysis of the coloured glass windows and cupola paintings of the First and Second Goetheanum windows illustrates how Steiner applied his theory of imagination, inspiration and intuition to his own creative endeavours.

Throughout history, imagination, inspiration and intuition have been interpreted in a broad range of philosophical, psychological, metaphysical and scientific terms, thereby making them rather elusive and difficult to define in any precise way. In order to frame these concepts in architectural terms, this chapter focuses its enquiry on the Romantic perception that such faculties reveal a deeper truth embedded within the material world, and is made apparent to those who possess a privileged form of insight. Today this may seem a rather quixotic or even pretentious claim however, at the turn of the twentieth century the belief in the human capacity to apprehend the inner nature of things through the powers of one’s mind stimulated new ways of thinking about artistic creation. The mysterious workings of these faculties were associated with notions of an alternative reality that could not be fully comprehended by the sense-bound intellect. For many avant-garde artists and architects engaged in the struggle to break free from the constraints of nineteenth century eclecticism, the province of creativity was seen as a spiritual endeavour that offered meaning in a modern, secularised world and, as a result, transcendental notions of higher creative powers were widely embraced.¹ Such an outlook bolstered Steiner’s own interpretation of imagination, inspiration and intuition which promoted these faculties as vehicles of some sort of revelatory power that informed the creative process.

¹ Although this spiritual tendency has often been overlooked in modern architectural histories by authors such as Nikolaus Pevsner, Sigfried Giedion, and Peter Collins, its influence on important figures such as Behrens, Gropius, Mondrian, Kandinsky, and members of the Glass Chain Group has been recognised by Manfredo Tafuri, Francesco Dal Co, Dennis Sharp and Harry Mallgrave.
Aristotle’s formulation that to imagine was to have an image in one’s mind is deeply embedded in theories of perceptual experience. According to Aristotle, sensory impressions provide the content for the mind to form imaginative pictures or images. As an essentially reproductive faculty, it held no special connection with creativity or inventiveness. Likewise, Descartes stated that ‘... imagining is simply contemplating the shape or image of a corporeal thing.’ Steiner however, challenged the notion that imagination is necessarily connected to physical images. He argued that

In ordinary thinking one looks only as far as the mirror of one’s inner being where the things of the world are mirrored within. When one thinks in imagination one sees behind the mirror. There we do not find the same as we find in outer nature; for that is the place of creative forces.

In common parlance the word imagination is often used in connection with mistaken or falsely held perceptions. Again, Steiner’s view differs from this attitude, in that rather than perceiving the imagination as something fictional or fanciful, he perceived it as a genuine clairvoyant power capable of experiencing a world not available to ordinary consciousness. Given the modern predilection of rationalist thought, it is not surprising that Steiner’s claims of clairvoyant access to the spiritual realm have largely been dismissed as delusional fantasies.

Steiner’s concept of inspiration also differs from historical notions of inspiration. In Greek thought for example, inspiration was seen as a state of ecstasy or poetic madness. By contrast, Steiner’s methods require that the individual achieve a state of tranquillity, equanimity and reverence before progressing along the path of higher

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7 For example “I thought I saw someone in the shadows but it was just a figment of my imagination.”


knowledge.\textsuperscript{10} While Steiner’s concept of inspiration is not to be found in a state of fitful frenzy, it does share in the ancient belief that inspiration is in some way connected with divine power. Inspiration was perceived in ancient times as a divine gift bestowed by the Gods.\textsuperscript{11} Stemming from the Latin term \textit{inspirare} (\textit{in-} "in" + \textit{spirare} "to breathe"), the Roman poet Ovid asked the Gods to ‘breathe into’ his poetic work in the first lines of his \textit{Metamorphoses}.\textsuperscript{12} Inspiration allowed poets to harness incorporeal energies that gave them greater expressiveness and fluency.\textsuperscript{13} This notion of inspiration was enthusiastically embraced by nineteenth century Romantic poets who claimed that they were conduits of a divine source that compelled them to create.\textsuperscript{14}

With the rise of the Romantic movement, the mysterious, non rational workings of imagination and inspiration and their role in original, creative thinking were granted sacrosanct standing. Goethe, alongside his countryman Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), and their British Romantic counterparts Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and John Keats (1795-1821), exalted the imagination as the ultimate source of creativity.\textsuperscript{15} While their respective formulations of the imagination vary slightly in their detail, with some being less comprehensive and more fragmentary than others, there is a common tendency to associate the imagination with the notion of artistic genius. Herein lays a fundamental difference with Steiner’s exposition of the imagination. Steiner believed that higher powers of cognition were not just present among a gifted few, but were latent in all human beings. As such, he contended that through appropriate training, the creative world of the spirit could be directly experienced by anyone prepared to develop these cognitive abilities. Steiner’s system of Anthroposophy articulated three distinct faculties of imagination, intuition and inspiration which must each be activated along

\textsuperscript{10} Steiner, \textit{How to Know Higher Worlds}, 13-37.  
\textsuperscript{11} Brogan, \textit{The New Princeton Encyclopedia or Poetry and Poetics}, 609.  
\textsuperscript{12}Ovid, \textit{Metamorphoses}, trans. Sir Samuel Garth, John Dryden, et al.  
http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.1.first.html  
Of bodies chang'd to various forms, I sing:  
Ye Gods, from whom these miracles did spring,  
Inspire my numbers with coelestial heat;  
'Till I my long laborious work compleat:  
And add perpetual tenour to my rhimes,  
Deduc'd from Nature's birth, to Caesar's times  
\textsuperscript{13} Brogan, \textit{The New Princeton Encyclopedia or Poetry and Poetics}, 609.  
\textsuperscript{14} Brogan, \textit{The New Princeton Encyclopedia or Poetry and Poetics}, 610.  
the path of initiation in order to allow progressively higher levels of visionary insight to be attained. Through such heightened encounters with the spiritual world, Steiner argued that it was possible to tap into new sources of artistic creativity.

The principle behind this notion was that by focusing concentration on a particular image or idea, the meditator can summon forces from within their soul that are stronger than those ordinarily required in everyday cognition, thereby allowing recognition of that part of the self which is not bound to the physical organs.\(^\text{16}\) By passing through the various stages of imagination, inspiration and intuition, the student’s cognitive abilities are intended to become increasingly refined in their ability to perceive the super-sensible realm, and each stage represents a deepening communion with the divine.\(^\text{17}\) One of Steiner’s blackboard drawings from 1920 describes how imagination, inspiration and intuition are received on earth as the human virtues of beauty, wisdom and strength (Figure 6.01).

![Figure 6.01: Blackboard drawing produced by Rudolf Steiner in a lecture delivered in Dornach on 28 November, 1920: Source: Kugler ed., Rudolf Steiner: Blackboard Drawings 1919-1924, 44.](image)

A link can be drawn here between architecture and the Masonic tradition which observes rites through which its members are initiated into the craft. In Masonic lore, each of these virtues bears a direct relationship to the orders of architecture, with the


Doric order being symbolic of strength, the Ionic order symbolic of wisdom and the Corinthian order symbolic of beauty. The virtues of wisdom, strength and beauty are the three symbolic pillars upon which the institution of Freemasonry is supported. The German Masonic writer, Friedrich Schröder, stated that

The universal Lodge, as well as every particular one, is supported by three great invisible columns – Wisdom, Strength and Beauty; for as every building is planned and fashioned by Wisdom, owes its durability and solidity to Strength, and is made symmetrical and harmonious by Beauty, so ought our spiritual building to be designed by Wisdom, which gives it the firm foundation of Truth, on which the Strength of conviction may build, and self-knowledge complete the structure, and give it permanence and continuance by means of right, justice, and resolute perseverance; and Beauty will finally adorn the edifice with all the social virtues, with brotherly love and union, with benevolence, kindness, and a comprehensive philanthropy.18

These virtues relate back to the Vitruvian ideals of *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas*.19 In 1904 Steiner indicated the relationship Freemasonry held with the architecture of ancient times in a lecture titled *The Essence and Task of Freemasonry from the Point of View of Spiritual Science*.20 He explained that

The Freemasons of old were actually stonemasons. They performed all the duties of a mason. They were the builders of temples and public buildings in ancient Greece and where they were known as Dionysiacs. The building work was carried out in the service of the temple of Dionysus. In Egypt they were the builders of the pyramids, in ancient Rome, the builders of cities, and during the Middle Ages they built cathedrals and churches. After the thirteenth century they also began to

19 These terms are variously translated from Latin as *firmitas* - strength, durability, solidity; *utilitas* – convenience, function, utility; and *venustas* – beauty, delight, desire. Marco Vitruvius Pollio, *The Ten Books on Architecture* (Memphis: General Books, 2010), 15.

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build independently of the authority of the Church. At this time the expression ‘Freemason’ came into use. Before that they were under the authority of the religious communities and were the recognised architects.

Let us take our start from the fact that the Freemasons were the builders of the pyramids, of the mystery temples, and of the churches. You will easily gain the conviction—especially by reading Vitruvius—that the manner in which architecture was formerly studied is quite different from our present method. One did not study it at that time by making calculations, but instead, definite intuitions were imparted by means of symbols.\(^{21}\)

Steiner argued that in the intellectual culture of his own time, such symbols, and Freemasonry itself, had lost their meaning.\(^{22}\) His referencing of Masonic ideas was based on a much older understanding of Freemasonry in which he perceived the Masons as architects whose ‘intuitive gaze’ penetrated higher relationships that they incorporated into their buildings.\(^{23}\)

Freemasonry was not the only source to which Steiner’s conception of imagination, inspiration and intuition is indebted. Eastern spiritual traditions also supported his quest to tap into a universal consciousness via these heightened faculties. In the Vedic tradition for example, the imagination is both a transcendent power by which the gods create and sustain the harmony of the universe, as well as the human faculty by which artist, priest or sage recognises and partakes in this harmony.\(^ {24}\) All of the schools of Indian philosophy that accept the scriptural authority of the Vedas rely on intuition as an important source of knowledge that is more reliable than inference.\(^ {25}\) Steiner was familiar with the Vedas through his involvement with Theosophy which drew heavily from Hinduism and its ancient Vedic Sanskrit text.

\(^{21}\) Steiner, “The Essence and Task of Freemasonry,” 77-78.
\(^{22}\) Steiner, “The Essence and Task of Freemasonry,” 79.
\(^{23}\) Steiner, “The Essence and Task of Freemasonry,” 72.
\(^{24}\) “Imagination – Non Western Traditions” \text{http://science.jrank.org/pages/9769/Imagination-Non-Western-Traditions.html}
\(^{25}\) “Intuition,” \text{Dictionary of World Philosophy} (Routledge, 2001) \text{http://www.credreference.com/entry/routwp/intuition}
Anthroposophy also shared a number of similarities with Buddhist ideology, though Steiner was reluctant to admit any indebtedness to Buddhist teachings. He raised a rather non-sensical defence to claims of allegiance to Buddhism by arguing that such suggestions were analogous to accusing a geometry teacher of perpetrating Euclidism.\footnote{Rudolf Steiner, “Buddha and Christ,” Lecture, 2 December 1909, vol. 58 in The Complete Works of Rudolf Steiner. \url{http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19091202p01.html}.} He argued that Spiritual Science was the instrument that must be used to penetrate into and test what was propounded by other religions, including Buddhism. Despite his denials, Steiner’s reliance on Buddhist symbolism in his own writings can hardly be refuted. For example, in articulating the effects of initiation on the esoteric student as they proceed along the path of spiritual enlightenment as outlined in his book \textit{How to Know Higher Worlds}, Steiner described clairvoyant visions of central Buddhist motifs such as lotus flowers and chakras.\footnote{Steiner, \textit{How to Know Higher Worlds}, 110.} Steiner emphasised that these were not literal descriptions, but rather analogies intended to convey an experience of the spiritual realm.\footnote{Steiner, \textit{How to Know Higher Worlds}, 110.} In a footnote to the main text Steiner acknowledged that ‘people familiar with the subject matter will recognise in the requirements for the development of the sixteen petalled lotus flower the instructions Buddha gave his disciples for the “path”’, but argued that the point was ‘not to teach Buddhism but to describe conditions for development that grow out of spiritual science itself.’ \footnote{Steiner, \textit{How to Know Higher Worlds}, 118.}

Much like Buddhist techniques, Steiner’s methods were based on meditative practices that aimed to achieve sense-free thinking. At the level of imagination, the meditation exercises prescribed by Steiner were closely tied to physical objects. As the training progressed, the external impressions of the senses became increasingly diminished in order to reveal the inner nature of things. As a student’s cognitive abilities developed, they learnt to focus on the activity that was required to create the image, rather than focusing on the image itself. It was not the content of the meditation that mattered but the discipline and concentration that went into constructing the thought and keeping it centred in the mind. Steiner claimed that by dwelling on this inner activity a student is freed from the sensory data of physical reality and by sufficiently developing the will to extinguish images altogether, the
spirit world is then able to be observed. Steiner’s notion of Intuition also bears similarities to the Buddhist concept of prajna, defined as ‘transcendental wisdom’ or ‘existential intuition,’ which allows one to know things in their totality. The state of those who attain this knowledge is prajnaparamita (prajna awakened or attained), the perfect enlightenment of Buddha.

In borrowing from a wide range of intellectual and theological sources, Steiner struggled to clearly articulate his own position. This is evident in his writings which contain discrepancies between what content actually differentiates the various faculties of imagination, inspiration and intuition. For example, in An Outline of Esoteric Science, inspiration, the second stage along the path to higher knowledge, is referred to as the reading of the ‘hidden script’, while in How to Know Higher Worlds, learning to read the ‘hidden script’ does not occur until the highest stage of initiation has been reached, that being intuition. Similarly his concept of intuition shifted from his earlier writing in which it referred to the process of immediately grasping a thought or idea, to his later writing in which it referred to a far more advanced apprehension of reality that included the apprehension of spiritual beings independent of their physical reality. In a footnote to a revised edition of Theosophy, Steiner himself acknowledged that

In my book How to Know Higher Worlds and in Occult Science (An Outline of Esoteric Science), the real nature of intuition is described. Casual readers could easily imagine a discrepancy between how this term is used in those two books and how it is used here.

This infers that it is the limited understanding of the reader that is the problem rather than Steiner’s own mixed use of the term. This thesis argues that this discrepancy is not ‘imagined’ by the reader, but is an ambiguity that undeniably exists in Steiner’s work. Steiner’s justification that the esoteric nature of such concepts renders them incapable of accurate description is a convenient way to dismiss the reality of his own struggle to clarify these slippery, intangible concepts. However, given the

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30 This concept is explored further in the Chapter 7: Sense and Non-sense.
32 Steiner, An Outline of Esoteric Science, 334; and Steiner, How to Know Higher Worlds, 72.
33 McDermott ed., The Essential Steiner, 43-44.
34 Rudolf Steiner, Theosophy, 51.
voluminous nature of Steiner’s work, it is reasonable to also expect that Steiner’s articulation of such complex ideas might change and develop over time, thus resulting in some internal inconsistencies.

This struggle was not unique to Steiner. The creative energies that exist beyond the boundaries of rational thought occupied the minds of many German Idealist philosophers and were influential in Steiner’s thinking. Most notable among them were Johann Fichte, Arthur Schopenhauer and Georg W. F. Hegel, who also interpreted these concepts in metaphysical terms, albeit varying widely in the particulars of their individual theories. Their collective efforts to arrive at a deeper understanding of the mysterious workings of human cognition and the world of the spirit found particular resonance in early twentieth century art and architecture as it grappled to find a way to express the non-rational content of the spiritual realm within the context of a tenaciously rationalist, industrialised society.

6.2 Artistic Creation as an Expression of Spiritual Forces

The powers of imagination, inspiration and intuition are, according to Steiner, latent faculties that were active in earlier times when human beings saw themselves as an extension of the cosmos, intertwined with spiritual, divine beings. His theory of cosmic evolution maintained that the human consciousness had slowly awoken to a sense of independent selfhood over immense periods of time, and in the process, had lost all awareness of the universe’s original creative powers. What had once been divine wisdom was now lost to the power of the individual human mind, thus allowing the rational intellect to gain an uneven balance of power. By developing the faculties of higher cognition, Steiner believed that the instinctive spiritual wisdom of earlier times was still within reach and that architecture could provide a means of accessing it.

In *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, Steiner used an architectural analogy to explain his understanding of the super-sensible content that permeates material phenomena. He stated that

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We all agree that in the physical construction of the house, one brick must be placed on top of another, and that when the house is finished, its structure and the fact that it holds together can be explained in terms of purely mechanical laws. In order for the house to come about, however, the architect’s idea is needed, and this idea is nowhere to be found when we investigate only the physical laws that apply.\textsuperscript{37}

In this statement, Steiner contended that the creative activity of the architect is an invisible but essential attribute of the building’s materiality. Perceiving this activity to be spiritual in nature, he believed that the principles of architecture cannot be understood via symbolic interpretation of its external forms, but rather, must be grasped through the architectural observer’s own spiritual striving to recognise the inner essence of architectural forms. Through the creative process, he maintained that the physical substance of the work acquired a qualitative, super-sensible, dimension through which its higher meaning could be discerned.

According to Steiner, not only were imagination, inspiration and intuition required to create a work of architecture, but these same faculties were necessary to understand it. Steiner argued that the observed objects of the world, including architecture, remained unintelligible if one was incapable of finding the inner quality that completed their reality. On this basis, Steiner deemed that ordinary sensory perception necessarily fails to recognise the inner content of an architectural work because it must be perceived in such a way that divests all normal intellectual strictures that are imposed upon it from outside. For Steiner, symbolic interpretations of the \textit{First Goetheanum} proffered by critics only served to illustrate this point. In a lecture delivered to the workers and members of the Anthroposophical community at Dornach in January 1915, Steiner avowed that

\begin{quote}
When the building is eventually finished we do not continually want to be asked, “What does this mean and that mean?” and have to witness people happily believing that they have discovered the meaning of some of these things. ... If you want to, you can of course explain everything like this. But we are not concerned with this kind of interpretation, but with entering into things and joining in the process of creativity that
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37}Steiner, \textit{An Outline of Esoteric Science}, 69.
came from the higher hierarchies and fills and forms the whole of our world. There is no need to avoid doing this just because it is more difficult than symbolic or allegorical interpretation. For it leads into the spiritual world and is the very strongest incentive for really acquiring imagination, inspiration and intuition.\textsuperscript{38}

According to Steiner, it was possible for anyone actively dedicated to developing their cognitive faculties to reach the level of creative inspiration. Does this in turn mean that anyone capable of achieving this particular type of insight is also capable of understanding, or indeed creating, inspired art or architecture out of that heightened state? There are inherent difficulties in such a proposition. Firstly, the meaning of Steiner’s architecture accrues not only through the formal qualities of the work, but also through the institutional associations of Anthroposophy. Conventions whose meanings do not lie clearly on the surface of the work, create a degree of ambiguity for those not familiar with their subtext. Secondly, in any great work, the artistic talent of its creator plays an essential role. The task of the artist or architect is to create a work that is so skilfully rendered as to allow the cooperative observer to be affected by it in some meaningful way. A solid knowledge of the discipline is therefore required to support the processes of higher cognitive faculties in exploring new creative possibilities.

Steiner was not oblivious to this fact, acknowledging that whilst the spiritual observer is concerned with excluding all sensory perceptions, the artist must unfold his creativity in material form.\textsuperscript{39} The fundamental difference between thinking and doing means that while Steiner’s system of cognitive development can possibly inform the creative process, it cannot ensure that the final product embodies any tangible spiritual content, since by its very nature that content is immaterial. Nor does it exempt the architecture from critical judgement of its artistic quality. However Steiner was quick to refute any such criticisms, arguing that the spiritual content of his work could only be perceived by those possessing more highly developed spiritual faculties thereby nullifying the authority of ‘expert’ opinion.\textsuperscript{40} He boldly stated that

\textsuperscript{38} Steiner, \textit{Art as Seen in the Light of Mystery Wisdom}, 154-155.
\textsuperscript{39} Cited in Biesantz and Klingborg, \textit{The Goetheanum: Rudolf Steiner’s Architectural Impulse}, 86.
\textsuperscript{40} Steiner, \textit{Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts}, 53.
It is obvious that a person can understand a work of art only insofar as they live in the whole spiritual stream from which the work of art has arisen. ... Solely in belonging to a spiritual stream can a work of art be genuine.  

According to this logic, any critical analysis of Steiner’s work by non-Anthroposophists can only afford an inferior, lower order of understanding than that of the initiated. The self-righteousness of such an assertion is readily exposed when one considers the powerful responses that the great monuments of Greek, Roman and Gothic times still manage to engender in contemporary audiences. That said, given the prominent status such monuments have assumed in the history of western architecture, it is difficult to approach these buildings without some preconceived notion of how they are to be perceived. Ultimately though, architecture is a material reality that can be experienced by all and the experience of its sublime spiritual content does not necessarily require the observer to understand the architects underlying program or subscribe to any spiritual beliefs.

Despite Steiner’s emphasis on the spiritual content of architecture, by its very nature, architecture requires rational thinking at least in some measure. The design of a building is not only bound by the individual will or creative limits of its designer, but also by the practical constraints of structure, function, aesthetics, bureaucracy and budget. Steiner’s system of spiritual cognition makes few concessions to rational thought, identifying intuition, rather than reason, as the highest level of human cognition. He asserts that

Intuition strips our impressions of their last sensory, physical remnants, and the spiritual world begins to be apparent to our cognition in a form that no longer has anything in common with the characteristics of the physical world of the senses.  

In order to acquire this level of cognition, nothing must remain in the soul from any previously known outer or inner experience, so that a conscious union with the spirit can be achieved. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines intuition as the ‘immediate apprehension of an object by the mind without the intervention of any reasoning

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process.’ 43 Intuition is popularly perceived as an unconscious process that provides us with certain beliefs or understandings that we cannot necessarily justify but that somehow provoke within us an inner sense of knowing. For Steiner though, intuition was not a vague or momentary feeling, but a form of knowledge that surpasses the ordinary intellect to offer a more advanced apprehension of reality. He perceived this condition as a particularly delicate, subtle experience that held nothing in common with the properties of the physical world and thereby claimed that it was impossible to directly describe and communicate to anyone not familiar with a super-sensible way of knowing. 44 As such, it represents a form of occult knowledge available only to the initiated. Steiner confirms this in his claim that organs of perception can be trained to allow one to acquire the ability to read the ‘hidden script.’ 45 This hidden script, which he often referred to as the Akasha Chronicle, is a record of mystical knowledge said to be encoded in the non-physical plane of existence and is common to other systems of occult thought, including Rosicrucianism, Theosophy and various New Age cosmologies. 46

Steiner for example, applied his own reading of the ‘hidden script’ to derive a spiritual understanding of the ornamentation of the Corinthian column. 47 His account begins by relating the origins of this decorative ornament from antiquity to an ancient ceremonial dance that represented humanity’s relationship with the macrocosm. According to Steiner, in ancient times the alternating forces of the sun and the earth were given different gestures to demonstrate the cosmic tension that existed between them. Plants were subsequently used as a medium to portray the living experience of these forces. The palm motif represented the sun and the bud form represented the earth (Figure 6.02).

44 In the Introduction to the fourth edition of An Outline to Esoteric Science Steiner describes his constant struggle to adequately express concepts only capable of being experienced in the super-sensible realm. Also see Steiner, How to Know Higher Worlds, 69.
45 Steiner, An Outline of Esoteric Science, 349.
47 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 58-68.
Steiner perceived the selection of these plants to be an artistically creative act since it resulted from a deep understanding of the cosmic connection between the sun and the earth. This idea later became simplified into ornamental lines that summarised what had once been felt as a living gesture in the form of dance (Figure 6.03).

For Steiner, the interaction of palm and bud forms reflected the dynamic pushing and pulling forces of the universe. Steiner went on to show how the motif was transferred from a painted decoration on the Doric column, into three dimensional sculptural form in the Corinthian column which evolved into the shape of an acanthus leaf (Figure 6.04).
He refuted that the ornamentation of the Corinthian capital was a naturalistic representation of the acanthus leaf and argued instead that it was a metamorphosis of the ancient sun motif. He declared that

Insight into the origin of the acanthus motif has given me much joy, for it proves circumstantially that the primordial forms of artistic creation have also sprung from the human soul and not from imitation of external phenomena.48

By studying the acanthus leaf intuitively rather than empirically, Steiner perceived an internal resonance that revealed to him its artistic development in a way that transcended external evidence. Yet in spite of this intuitive interpretation, Steiner’s own notebook sketches of the acanthus leaf motif are rather naturalistic, hinting at a capital form that derives its curled shape from that of the acanthus leaf (Figures 6.05 and 6.06). While his theoretical account is careful to avoid simplistic interpretation, his ability to translate the concept in a formal study is challenged. This highlights one of the complexities of translating myth into matter.

![Figure 6.05: Sketch of Corinthian capitals by Rudolf Steiner, from his notebook, June 1914. Source: Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 56](image1)

![Figure 6.06: Sketch of Corinthian capitals by Rudolf Steiner, from his notebook, June 1914. Source: Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 64.](image2)

The conclusion that the acanthus leaf had developed out of an ancient palm motif had been arrived at some years earlier by the influential art historian, Alois Riegl. In his book Questions of Style, published in 1893, Riegl stated that

48 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 66.
I hope to be able to convince at least some of my colleagues that the acanthus ornament did not result from the direct imitation of a model found in nature but rather from an essentially artistic developmental process within the history of ornament.49

Riegl sought to prove that the appearance of the earliest acanthus motifs lacked the characteristic peculiarities of the acanthus plant and therefore did not represent a naïve naturalism. According to Steiner, Riegl’s interpretation did not go far enough. He argued that Riegl failed to recognise that the palm motif was merely a symbol behind which the earlier sun motif was hidden. Riegl had referred to an earlier Vitruvian account of the origins of the ornamentation of the Corinthian Capital which related a tale about the Corinthian sculptor, Callimachus who had seen a small basket encapsulated by an acanthus bush which had inspired the sculptural form of the capital. However Riegl neglected to mention the location of the basket, which Steiner considered to be of particular significance. Steiner argued that since the event had occurred at the site of young girl’s grave, Vitruvius was implying that Callimachus possessed clairvoyant abilities that were able to perceive the struggle between the opposing forces of the cosmos and the earth occurring within the girl’s etheric body. Rather than the Corinthian capital being a naturalistic representation of the basket and acanthus bush, Steiner understood Vitruvius’s account to be inspired by the perception of spiritual forces. According to Steiner, the habit of symbolic interpretation prevented people from understanding what really lay behind this anecdote.

One may well ask though, whether Steiner’s own interpretation was not simply an alternative symbolism that sought to invest the ornamentation with his own esoteric layer of meaning. The interpretation of Vitruvius’s myth of the Corinthian capital by the art and architectural historian George Hersey (1927-2007) offers some support to the associations Steiner made between death and the representation of spiritual forces in architectural form. In his book *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture* published in 1988, Hersey emphasises the significance of the grave site, recognising that the myth occurs ‘in an atmosphere of death and sacrifice, though these are not violent.’50 He links Vitruvius’s story with the tradition of using trees and plants as

tombs, which, in turn, is linked to the idea that the dead metamorphose into plants. Although Hersey’s interpretation differs from Steiner’s in its details, it shares the same intent to reveal the ancient mythical meaning of the architectural motif. In his conclusion Hersey notes that today the sense of ornament’s meaning has once again been lost; for centuries we have been the heirs of a scientific philology that drains architecture of its poetry. Rationalistic etiologies have been the order of the day.51

As a result, Hersey claims that Vitruvius’s myths had ‘seldom been taken seriously by architectural historians.’52 Steiner’s mythical interpretations have suffered a similar fate. By contrast, Hersey’s mythological and symbolic reading of the classical orders, is ‘widely regarded as an original and provocative piece of research.’53 A review of Hersey’s book shortly after its publication emphasised Hersey’s ‘savage will to expose the fatuousness of academic convention’ by using his thorough knowledge of that convention as his primary weapon.54

Steiner and Hersey share an intention to search beyond the mimetic surface of classicism to the more oblique signification afforded by ritual and myth. But unlike Hersey, who directly engages an academic audience by debunking its assertions on its own terms, Steiner tends to alienate such an audience through the occult content of his writing. Whereas Hersey aimed to deliver an authoritative reading of creative mythologies as a paradigm for interpreting architecture, Steiner asked his readers to actually enter into a heightened state of mythic awareness via the occult practices he taught. As a result Hersey’s later analysis has enjoyed greater acceptance than Steiner’s earlier interpretation. This reveals something significant about the reception of Steiner’s work by architectural critics and historians. Steiner’s philosophical training, coupled with his broad knowledge of esoteric traditions, allowed him to approach Vitruvius from an alternative perspective that offered astute insights others

51 Hersey, The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture, 149.
52 Hersey, The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture, 149.
had not yet come to appreciate. Due to its esoteric overtones however, the essential wisdom of Steiner’s original reading was granted no credence.

6.3 Art and Architecture as the Material Embodiment of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition

Even though Steiner’s account of the origins of the acanthus leaf did not gain any traction among architectural critics and historians, the notion that art and architecture drew upon a spiritual reservoir that could be perceived by higher cognitive faculties did find acceptance among a number of early twentieth century artists. The corporeal expression of spiritual forces was at the very core of Expressionist art and architecture. In *The New Vision in the German Arts*, German-American poet and playwright, Herman Scheffauer writes that ‘the essence of Expressionism lies in something indefinable because it is rooted in the instinctive, the intuitional, the esoteric.’ He later goes on to say that ‘the Expressionist commonly defines his art as one that acts upon the external world from within—from the soul, mind or spirit outwardly.’ This understanding of Expressionism, written in 1924 at the height of its influence, demonstrates that rather than being seen as mystical nonsense far removed from the real concerns of art and architecture, the spiritual ideals of Steiner and his contemporaries were not only indispensable to their work, they defined it.

In creative terms, this meant that artists and architects were no longer restricted to a formal language developed from the material world, but could attempt to convey impressions received in the mind from a higher source. The paintings of Wassily Kandinsky provide one example of the development from pictorial images taken from sensory impressions, towards the expression of an inner spiritual character that no longer relied on external stimuli. In his treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, published in 1911, Kandinsky described the relinquishment of the material object, stating that

> This eternally exquisite matter, or as it is more commonly called, spirituality, does not give itself up to firm expression and cannot be...

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expressed by overtly material forms. The need for new forms has arisen.57

Around 1910 Kandinsky began to classify his paintings into three principal types, namely Impressions, Improvisations and Compositions, which gradually advanced from the depiction of external observations to the abstract expression of internal creative processes.58 The Finnish scholar, Sixten Ringbom, has drawn strong analogies between these categories as identified by Kandinsky, and Steiner’s classifications of imagination, inspiration and intuition, recognising that both share a general tendency towards a gradual and systematic ascent from the outer physical world to an inner spiritual realm.59 Ringbom offers a detailed analysis of Kandinsky’s interpretation of Steiner’s theory of higher knowledge based on evidence of Kandinsky’s close reading and annotation of Steiner’s book *Theosophy*, as well as a series of articles written by Steiner and published in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis* 1904-1908.60 The following discussion therefore seeks to provide only a brief illustrated example of the way in which Kandinsky’s three categories of painting visually interpreted the spiritual ascent Steiner expounded.

The first example, *Autumn Impression*, painted in 1908, is an ‘impression’ taken directly from nature (Figure 6.07). It is a connotative depiction of a church, surrounded by various shapes and colours that imply trees. The foreground of grass and the dark mountains in the background lend the painting a sense of spatial definition.

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58 Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 79.
60 Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos*, 62.
While it remains a landscape painting, its colour and forms are not tied to a naturalistic representation of the scene. Forms are derived entirely from colour; lines do not define their shape. Steiner, who lectured extensively on colour, maintained that the use of line in painting to define form was a lie, since the delineation of form arises out of the relationship between different colours.\(^{61}\) According to Steiner every colour had a formative gesture from which the forms of a painting should derive. As an example, he indicated that blue exhibited an inward gesture, while yellow tended to radiate outwards. However, rather than applying such indications as rules, Steiner emphasised the need for artists to perceive directly for themselves the inner dynamic of each colour and colour relationship.\(^{62}\) He believed that once a form was given colour, the inner movement of the colour lifted the form out of its resting condition so as to allow the spirit to flow through it, thereby bringing it to life. For Steiner colour was not about the physical pigment; it was a product of the spiritual being made visible to the senses through a material substance. This was a concept that found particular resonance with Kandinsky and his efforts to translate spiritual phenomena into painting through the use of colour became especially evident in his Improvisations.

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\(^{61}\) Peter Stebbing, *Conversations about Painting with Rudolf Steiner: Reflections of Five Pioneers of the New Art Impulse* (Great Barrington: Steiner Books, 2008), 68.

\(^{62}\) Howard ed., *Art as Spiritual Activity*, 105.
Kandinsky’s second group of paintings, Improvisations, were intended to convey spontaneous emotional reactions inspired by events of a spiritual nature.\textsuperscript{63} Improvisation 19, painted in 1911, still contains elements of the representational world however the scene is one of mysterious ritual or initiation (Figure 6.08).

\textbf{Figure 6.08: Improvisation19, Kandinsky, 1911}
Source:http://www.abcgallery.com/K/kandinsky/kandinsky68.JPG

The entire painting is bathed in shimmering colour. The centre is dominated by vivid shades of blue which shine through the translucent figures on the right, while luminous oranges, yellows, greens and reds encroach from the top and left hand side of the painting. A procession of smaller figures presses forward on the left and behind them is a vague outline of a further group of figures surrounded by white. Annegret Hoberg, art historian and curator at the Staedtische Galerie, Lenbachhaus, Munich, which houses many of Kandinsky’s paintings, offers the following interpretation of the painting’s spiritual content

The larger figures, in an attitude of spellbound concentration, appear closer to the moment of being “chosen” than the group advancing from the background on the left. Between the two groups an elongated form with rounded contours enters the picture from the top: its diaphanous play of colours is bordered by a thick black line. These evidently represent a form of aura, the visible emanation of a particular mode of

\textsuperscript{63} Kandinsky, \textit{Concerning the Spiritual in Art}, 79.
thought and feeling; and the round form at the top of the picture can be seen as a kind of occult manifestation. Whereas the figures on the left are characterised by “earthly” colours, the blue is the colour of a higher spiritual realm; the violet heads of the “initiated” convey the idea of transition to a higher plane of consciousness.64

This interpretation suggests a direct correlation between Kandinsky’s pictorial representation of the path of initiation and Steiner’s writings on access to the spiritual realm. According to Ringbom, the spread of colour across the canvas surface regardless of the contours of the physical forms, results in the figures becoming transparent, and thus represents ‘an important step towards the spiritualisation of the content of the work and the dissolution of material forms.’ 65 The empty contour shells are merely remnants of physical matter.

The final category in Kandinsky’s system of classification is his Compositions.66 These were Kandinsky’s most complicated works and were carefully put together over a period of time, following numerous preliminary studies. In Composition VII, painted in 1913, the development towards abstraction is clearly evident (Figure 6.09).

![Figure 6.09: Composition VII, Kandinsky, 1913](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kandinsky_WWI.jpg)

65 Ringbom, The Sounding Cosmos, 104.
66 Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 79.
Kandinsky claimed that ‘the very word composition called forth in me an inner vibration. Subsequently I made it my aim in life to paint a composition.’

The vibration he referred to was an internal emotional response of the soul to which he aspired to give appropriate visual form. Through the expressive qualities of the work Kandinsky sought to strike the same emotional chord in the spectator. Modern art historian, John Golding, deemed Kandinsky to have succeeded in this aim, describing the painting’s overwhelming power to envelop and enfold the viewer.

This was partly achieved by the spatial ambiguity of the painting, created by the complex arrangement of abstract shapes and dynamic use of colour. In an article published in *Lucifer-Gnosis* in 1905, Steiner described how in the realm of cosmic imagination, colours are released from sensory impressions so as to float freely in space.

In translating this concept into painting, Kandinsky emancipated colour from the object and eliminated three-dimensional perspective to create for the viewer a sense of being ‘inside’ the painting, consciously partaking in the super-sensible experience of it. While drawing inspiration from Steiner’s conceptual ideas, Kandinsky maintained his own artistic freedom, thereby avoiding any reliance on occult symbolism. The motifs Kandinsky employed transcended allegorical representation. Drawing on his own artistic genius Kandinsky transformed, reworked and assimilated them in an effort to make them accessible to the initiated and non-initiated alike.

By contrast, Steiner’s own heavy reliance on occult symbolism has meant that much of his work is unintelligible to a non-Anthroposophic observer. This is demonstrated in the design of the *Goetheanum’s* coloured glass windows and painted cupola ceilings. Here Steiner moves beyond subtle allusions to a higher realm by applying an esoteric language that alienates those who cannot understand the meaning of his expressionistic, and at times grotesque, images. In the *First Goetheanum* nine coloured windows were designed to visually illustrate the path of initiation. The windows were in the form of a triptych with a large centre window flanked on either

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side by two smaller windows. In the Second Goetheanum the form of the windows changed from a triptych style to a single, elongated form, while employing the same motifs as the First Goetheanum. In the long windows of the Second Goetheanum the central motif was placed above the two lateral motifs which were located side by side on the same pane of glass. The meaning of the windows’ occult symbolism has been extensively documented by Anthroposophists and is too lengthy, and indeed too esoteric, to be fully explored within the limits of this thesis. However, a brief overview of the imagery employed in the windows provides some insight into the scope of their content. The windows contain numerous references to animals—the eagle, the lion, the bull and the serpent. The influence of the East is represented in the image of the lotus flower. The cosmos is encapsulated in images of the constellations of the zodiac, as well as earthly images of rocks and vegetal forms. Grotesque, monster like figures, are countered by images of angels and celestial beings (Figure 6.10). The passage of the spirit soul as it enters the physical world through birth and then detaches itself from the physical realm at death is depicted (Figure 6.11). Ancient mythology is referenced in a Janus head that looks into the past as well as the future. The New Testament is also referenced in the depiction of Michael and the dragon and in the three crosses of Golgotha. Images of eyes, hands, skeletons, skulls, a rifle toting hunter and bizarre spiral-shaped winged creatures all add to the windows’ complexity and obscurity.

Fascinating though this iconography may be, it is little wonder that the windows’ content fail to resonate universally. Standing before one of the windows on a guided tour through the First Goetheanum for participants of the summer Art Course in 1921, Steiner guarded against such criticism, stating that

In contemplating the motifs of this window, you should not think it is merely symbolic figures. In this large window it can already be recognised that what is created in these windows is nothing other than what results from Imagination. ... Spiritual facts are whispered into the ear of the human being on the left and right, and these are cosmic secrets.  

Such justification may satisfy pupils willing to subscribe to the occult tenets of Anthroposophy however, for the casual observer, the profusion of mythical, religious and esoteric iconography is nothing short of bewildering.

Though it may not have been his intention, Steiner’s use of pictorial imagery and symbolism demands that the windows be read allegorically. It is interesting to

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compare the windows to the paintings Kandinsky was producing at around the same time which were becoming progressively less detached from pictorial imagery. In the preliminary studies Kandinsky prepared for Composition VII, scholars have identified numerous figurative motifs relating to biblical themes of the resurrection, the last judgement, the deluge and the garden of love. These include a reclining couple, a boat and oars, a horse and rider, the tumbling towers of a walled city, and trumpeting angels. In the final painting however, these images are mostly dissolved and hidden among a profusion of abstract shapes. The painting is unencumbered by a narrative or references the known world, thereby allowing the viewer to respond on their own terms.

The medium of painting was also employed by Steiner in the two cupolas of the First Goetheanum (Figure 6.12 and 6.13). Painted motifs extended over the entire interior surface of the intersecting domes, depicting Steiner’s occult reading of world evolution. As is the case with the window motifs, the iconography of the cupolas is the subject of much interpretation and is not the topic of this thesis. In essence though, the motifs depicted the spiritual evolution of the world, according to Steiner, beginning with its creation by the biblical Elohim, to the great epochs of Lemuria and Atlantian. It then traversed the post Atlantean epochs, leading to the building’s central motif, the Mystery of Golgotha, which is seen in Anthroposophic terms as the midpoint of world evolution that carries implications for the future development of the Earth and humanity.

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Figure 6.12: View up into a scale model (1:10) of the large cupola of the First Goetheanum. Built by Carl Liedvogel and painted by Hilder Boos-Hamburger. Source: Stebbing, *The Goetheanum Cupola Motifs of Rudolf Steiner*, 36.

Figure 6.13: View up into a scale model (1:10) of the small cupola of the First Goetheanum. Built by Carl Liedvogel and painted by Hilder Boos-Hamburger. Source: Stebbing, *The Goetheanum Cupola Motifs of Rudolf Steiner*, 116.

The philosophical intent of Steiner’s painted cupolas was to depict events of a spiritual nature. In seeking to express their spiritual content, Steiner, like Kandinsky,
placed great importance on the use of colour. But whereas Kandinsky employed strong, intense oil paints, Steiner used thin, vegetable based paints that were built up in layers. As a result, Kandinsky’s paintings are vibrant and vivid, while Steiner’s are translucent and ethereal. It is in their pictographic representation however, that their individual approaches differ most. Whereas Kandinsky’s *Improvisations* start to shift away from the naturalistic representation of figures towards more abstract forms, Steiner remains attached to the realistic representation of his subject. Figure 6.14 shows a small detailed section of the small cupola painting in the *First Goethenaum*.

![Image](image_url)


Among the flowing, swirling colours, the forms of a skeleton and human figure are clearly depicted. Steiner also employed text (“*Ich*” – I) which not only provided clues to the painting’s meaning, but also served to maintain a connection to tangible reality. This may have been a device Steiner borrowed from the Cubists, Pablo Picasso and George Braque, who introduced typography into their paintings and collages both as a formal device to assert the flatness of the picture plane, as well as a means of embracing the realism of the printed word that abounded in the modern world. The use of such a device demonstrates that Steiner’s artwork remains far more tied to the objective world than Kandinsky’s does. While Kandinsky gradually turns more and more towards abstraction as a means of articulating the spiritual

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content of his work, Steiner relies on symbolism and literal representation. This is a reflection of the two men’s differing talents and agendas. For Steiner, the medium of art provided a means of activating the faculties of imagination, inspiration and intuition. His ability to render this ideology in artistic form was however, not as skilled or sophisticated as Kandinsky’s. Nonetheless, the consequence of his thinking was significant as it offered an alternative way of perceiving the spirit beyond material appearances. This provided a springboard for Kandinsky to move beyond sensory impressions in order to express the non-objective nature of the spirit realm in abstract form. For Kandinsky the artistic product itself was an experience of the spirit, rather than the vehicle through which higher planes may be accessed, as Steiner perceived it to be.

Steiner’s insights into the lost meaning of artistic production were penetrating and powerful. He understood that an excessively materialistic approach to art and architecture drained it of its poetry and transcendental value. By reimagining art and architecture from a philosophical perspective he was able to offer new and alternative interpretations of its historical, mythical and spiritual meaning. However, due to the occult content of his work and the effectiveness of his own artistic output to translate his ideas into material form, his tremendous vision and its influence has been largely devalued by historians. This re-examination of Steiner’s conception of imagination, inspiration and intuition has sought to extricate and understand these difficulties, while restoring the essential worth of such ideas.
Chapter 7

Sense and Non-sense

The dancer has his ears in his toes.

Friedrich Neitzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 1885.

7.1 Steiner’s Theory of the Senses

Steiner believed that within the sensory world there exists a spiritual world that remains concealed from our consciousness to the extent that our perception is limited to our senses and sense bound thinking. He argued that ignorance of this supersensible realm was the result of a limited understanding of the senses. Rather than the usual five senses, Steiner differentiated twelve sense functions through which, he believed, human beings were capable of perceiving subtle dimensions of life beyond the immediately apparent physical realm of being. His theory of the senses elucidated the potentiality for an understanding of the way the spiritual world creates its image in the physical world and he saw artistic activity as a means of making this hidden union manifest. Steiner therefore advocated a multi-sensory architecture that articulated its spiritual presence experientially through an active engagement with its forms, colours, textures, light and sound. This chapter presents Steiner’s expanded conception of the senses and analyses how he expressed that conception tectonically, with a particular focus on the architectural detailing of his buildings. The concepts of *gesamtkunstwerk* and synesthesia frame a discussion of the relationship between Steiner’s understanding of the senses and the formulation of his colour theories and the art of eurythmy. The way in which coloured glass is employed in the Second Goetheanum is compared with Bruno Taut’s Glass Pavilion and Le Corbusier’s Ronchamp Chapel. This is done to highlight their correlations and contrasts as a means of explicating the distinct nature of Steiner’s theory of the senses and the implications that it held for his architecture.
For Steiner, spiritual content was an objective reality that was as valid and true as the material world. He therefore reasoned that it must be possible to give a scientific foundation to the spiritual world by defining super-sensible phenomena in the same way that natural science defines sense perceptible phenomena. In his autobiography he wrote that 'through direct experience of the spiritual world, the sensory world was revealed to me as spiritual, and I wanted to create a natural science that acknowledges spirit.'¹ Steiner acknowledged the greatness of materialistic science, however, he also believed that it had arbitrarily bracketed out all qualitative attributes of sensory experience, thereby giving validity only to the quantitative dimension of reality.² This is a view also posited by the contemporary American author and naturalist, Diane Ackerman, who wrote in her book, *A Natural History of the Senses*,

> When scientists, philosophers, and other commentators speak of the real world, they're talking about a myth, a convenient fiction. The world is a construct the brain builds based on the sensory information it's given, and that information is only a small part of all that's available.³

Despite holding a broader view of sensory experience, Steiner constantly emphasised that his outlook must not be relied upon on the basis of faith. Indeed, his methodological approach to investigating sensory phenomena was essentially empirical in that he demanded experiential evidence. But unlike classical empiricists, Steiner did not place the same boundaries on the types of experience that grounded his assertions, admitting sensory, mental and spiritual experience as legitimate forms of evidence. In a lecture delivered in 1921 titled *Man as a Being of Sense and Perception*, Steiner argued that

> Of course there must be a reason for the fact that sight has a physical-sensible organ of so specific a nature but this does not justify us in restricting the range of the senses to those which have clearly perceptible physical organs. If we do that it will be a very long time before we shall

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¹ Steiner, *Autobiography*, 165.
² Steiner, *Art as Spiritual Activity*, 103.
reach any higher conception; we shall meet only what happens in everyday life.⁴

This position is closely linked to Steiner’s conception of imagination whereby the observer is required to move beyond what is immediately given in order to perceive the hidden aspects of the sensible world. Steiner’s belief that all human beings possess the potential for the development of super-sensible organs that can be developed and trained through patience and effort is, in essence, no different to the cultivation of the traditional senses through persistent practice, such as a musician who exercises their ear or a chef who cultivates their palate.

Steiner’s inclusive view of the senses led him to distinguish twelve sensory functions (Figure 7.01).

![Diagram of Steiner’s concept of the twelve senses from the lecture series The Riddle of Humanity, Lecture 7, 12 August, 1916.](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/RiddHuman/19160812p01.html)

He then categorised these senses into groups made up of four physical senses, four soul senses and four spirit senses.⁵ Through the physical senses of touch, life sense,
balance and movement the human being is tied to the body in that these senses provide an awareness of one’s own bodily nature and life processes, drawing attention to one's own dynamic capabilities and physical presence in the world. The soul senses of smell, taste, vision and temperature are the senses through which the human being connects to the outer world and perceives its effects upon the body. The four spirit senses of hearing, thought sense, word sense, and ego sense allow the human being to penetrate more deeply into the being of things outside itself by giving an awareness of meaning to human perceptions. In describing these various sensory experiences, Steiner also distinguished those that draw us inward towards an inner state of being and those that tend to take us outward, mediating our relationship to the cosmos (Figures 7.02 and 7.03).

**Figure 7.02:** Blackboard diagram drawn by Rudolf Steiner during a lecture on 22 July, 1921. Source: Kugler, *Rudolf Steiner: Blackboard Drawings 1919-1924*, p52.
This research does not seek to examine the details of each sensory function, since this has already been done by other Steiner scholars. Rather, the focus here is to consider the senses as described by Steiner, holistically as part of a continuum of sensory interaction that mediates human experience, particularly through the lens of art and architecture. Steiner began to articulate his insights into the relationship between the arts and the senses in 1909 in a lecture delivered in Berlin titled *The Spiritual Being of Art.* In this lecture he presented a mythical story that described seven spiritual beings who approached a woman referred to as ‘Art’ who united her soul with each of these beings in accordance with their particular needs, thus giving rise to the various art forms. Steiner’s imaginative perception of the arts as spiritual phenomena followed in the ancient Greek tradition of the muses who were perceived as goddesses that possessed specific attributes associated with the different arts. In Steiner’s account, each individual art form was related to a particular sense—dance with the sense of balance, drama with the sense of movement, sculpture with the sense of life, architecture with the sense of touch, painting with the sense of sight, music with the sense of hearing and poetry with the sense of speech or word sense.

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7 Steiner, *Art as Spiritual Activity*, 135.
While this particular myth links architecture specifically with the sense of touch, Steiner himself adopted a far more multi-sensory approach to the creation of architecture. Of all the art forms he considered architecture to be the one most detached from man’s inner spiritual being, since its utilitarian function placed it in the service of external impulses. This followed Hegel’s metaphysical understanding of the arts which ranked architecture lowest in its hierarchy since it was the heaviest and most material means of expressing the spirit. Yet, through mastery of its medium, Hegel also recognised architecture as an appropriate vehicle of the spirit, such as in the Gothic cathedral where matter appears to dematerialise through the agency of light, having a transformative effect on the resistant stone. Steiner too was enthralled by the transcendent qualities of Gothic architecture, declaring that ‘there is something in all Gothic forms that seems to lead out and beyond; such forms strive to make themselves permeable.’ For Steiner the Gothic cathedral provided a physical example of the super-sensory experience that he believed was possible through the medium of architecture. He aimed to achieve this in his own buildings through a variety of techniques that borrowed freely from Gothic precedents but which were revised and reworked to suit his own agenda. A critical analysis of the architectural detailing in many of Steiner’s buildings illustrates how he sought to achieve this.

7.2 Steiner’s Sensory Architecture

The interior walls of the First Goetheanum exemplify the way in which Steiner manipulated matter and space to engage the senses as a means of stimulating an experience of the spiritual realm. At close proximity, the highly textured surface of the walls emphasise the hand of the carver and the physical tactile quality of the timber (Figure 7.04).

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8 Steiner, *Art as Seen In the Light of Mystery Wisdom*, 31.
10 Shapiro, “Hegel,” 319.
Yet seen in its entirety, the chiselled patterning and graininess of the material begins to break down the overall solidity of the walls. The organic cellular character of the wood lends a sense of softness that blurs the notion of the wall as a hard delineator between interior and exterior space. This is especially evident in many of the old photographs of the First Goetheanum interior, in which the haziness of the black and white images further accentuates this quality to suggest that the walls are almost permeable (Figure 7.05). The character of the timber interacts with the qualities of light within the space and the effects of time and ageing on the photograph itself, to create an ethereal visual impression that poetically expresses a feeling of penetrability.
Steiner’s aim was to create the illusion that the walls expanded out into the cosmos, imitating the way in which he perceived the individual human soul to expand into the world of the spirit. Unlike the Gothic cathedrals, which emphasised an upward motion that encouraged the worshiper’s soul to rise towards the heavens, the interior space of the First Goetheanum was far more nebulous, reaching out in all directions. Yet this tendency was balanced by the opposing action of the walls forcibly pressing into the interior space so as to envelop the occupant. In this way the sense of touch was not only perceived directly through the walls tactile features, but also indirectly through the sensation of enclosure and embrace.

Steiner’s affinity for the tactile qualities of materials was reflected in a comment he made in a lecture in Dornach in 1914, where he rapturously stated

> You grow to love the surface you are creating, the surface that is coming into being here under your mallet and gouge. I must confess that I cannot help caressing a surface like this once it has been created. We must grow to love it, so that we live in it with inner feeling instead of thinking of it as something that is merely there for our eyes to look at.¹²

Steiner’s respect for the inherent character of materials is reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright’s earlier dictate from his influential essay written in 1908 titled *In the Cause of Architecture*, which urged architects to

> Bring out the nature of materials, always let their nature intimately into your scheme. ... Reveal the nature of the wood, plaster, brick or stone in your designs; they are all by nature friendly and beautiful..."¹³

Drawing on the principles of the Gothic Revival and Arts and Crafts movements, Wright honoured the natural beauty of his materials through impeccable attention to detail and an insistence on the highest standards of quality craftsmanship. As an untrained architect Steiner’s architectural detailing may not be comparable with the skilled design mastery of Wright, however the role of the craftsman was an important theme that Steiner emphasised in both his writings and his architecture. Steiner believed that an empathetic appreciation of the way in which a form had come into

¹² Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 70.
being through the craftsman’s loving touch, opened up the possibility for an additional dimension of experience that could deeply enhance the human being’s connection to the rest of the world by eliminating their sense of estrangement. He described how this was apparent in the Middle Ages when individual craftsmen poured their soul into their environment in every hand-crafted piece they made, which in turn became an active soul force in those who moved amongst such things. This notion was revived in the nineteenth century by the Gothic Revival designer and theorist, Augustus W. N. Pugin (1812-1852). Pugin’s ideas and design principles were instrumental in the design and philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement, demonstrated in the work of architect Phillip Webb (1831-1915) and designer William Morris (1834-1896). Steiner was familiar with Morris’s work, having made reference to it in an editorial note in Magazin für Litteratur in 1898, and again in 1899 as a contributor to a publication Das XIX Jahrhundert in Wort und Bild. Yet Steiner brings his own interpretation to the concept of craftsmanship, presenting it as a practical illustration of the ego-sense, whereby the presence or ego of another person can be perceived through the object they have created. According to Steiner when a person perceives the ego of another human being, they have a relationship with their environment similar to that which they have in the perception of colour by the sense of sight.

This concept has been tangibly expressed in the crafting of individual door handles used in different locations throughout the buildings and grounds of the Anthroposophical community in Dornach. One example is to be found in the handle of a small garden gate that leads into a memorial grove known as the Gedenkhain (Figures 7.06 and 7.07).

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14 Steiner, *Art as Spiritual Activity*, 27.
18 It is not known who the creator of this handle was. The gate was constructed by sculptor and architect Christian Hitsch who selected the handle from stock that had been for held many years by the Art Section of the Goetheanum.
It is a hand crafted handle which, through its form, indicates its simple lever action. Its soft, sculpted shape invites the grasp of the hand. The patina of time, weather and use evokes a sense of the handle’s history.

The sensory experience that a door handle is capable of eliciting is eloquently described by Swiss architect, Peter Zumthor in his book *Thinking Architecture*. Zumthor writes:

> There was a time when I experienced architecture without thinking about it. Sometimes I can almost feel a particular door handle in my hand, a piece of metal shaped like the back of a spoon. I used to take hold of it when I went into my aunt’s garden. That door handle still seems to me like a special sign of entry into a world of different moods and smells. I remember the sound of gravel under my feet, the soft gleam of the waxed oak staircase, I can hear the heavy front door closing behind me as I walk along the dark corridor and enter the kitchen, the only brightly lit room in the house.\(^{19}\)

Zumthor’s account relates the experience of the door handle to multiple senses, offering the reader a greater appreciation of its true significance. This deeper meaning is also recognised by Finnish architect and author, Juhani Pallasmaa. In his classic book *The Eyes of the Skin*, Pallasmaa likens door handles to a handshake, noting that ‘the tactile sense connects us with time and tradition; through impressions

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of touch we shake the hands of countless generations.'\textsuperscript{20} The \textit{Gedenkhain} gate handle evokes such associations. These are particularly meaningful given its location at the beginning of a path to commemorate important forebears of the Anthroposophical community. An intuitive understanding of the path’s spiritual significance is supported by the initial sensory experience that the handle quietly communicates to the beholder.

In contrast, the door handle to the \textit{Glass House} (1914) building evokes an entirely different sensory experience (Figures 7.08).

\textbf{Figures 7.08}: Detail of the door handle to the Glass House by Rudolf Steiner, 1914. Source: Kugler, \textit{Architekturführer Goetheanumhügel}, 51.

The \textit{Glass House} is a workshop that was built specifically for the purpose of making the coloured glass windows for the \textit{Goetheanum}. The iron handle to this building has a rigid, rectangular form which contrasts with the soft, rounded forms of the building itself. The visual impression of the handle does not reveal how it operates, eluding many who attempt to enter the building (the author included!). Opening the door requires a two-step procedure of pulling the handle in towards oneself, and then at exactly the right point, doing a counter movement to push the door away from oneself. The handle brings an immediate awareness to those entering the building that pre-conceived ideas have no place in a building dedicated to the creation of

original artistic work. Steiner was attempting to circumvent thoughtless habit in order for the subtle effects of grasping the handle, opening the door, and entering the space to be attentively and deliberately experienced.

The sensory engagement involved in these mundane actions is beautifully captured by the French poet Francis Ponge (1899-1988) in his short poem *The Pleasure of the Door*

Kings never touch doors.

They’re not familiar with this happiness: to push, gently or roughly before you one of these great friendly panels, to turn towards it to put it back in place — to hold a door in your arms.

The happiness of seizing one of these tall barriers to a room by the porcelain knob of its belly; this quick hand-to-hand, during which your progress slows for a moment, your eye opens up and your whole body adapts to its new apartment.

With a friendly hand you hold on a bit longer, before firmly pushing it back and shutting yourself in—of which you are agreeably assured by the click of the powerful, well-oiled latch.

As in this evocative poem, the sensory experience of entering through the Glass House door, reveals more to the participant than can be understood by its appearance alone. In the simple act of opening the door the process of thought and awareness are ignited. For Steiner the mind was an integral sensory organ and he perceived that physical experiences of the world were inextricably linked with ideas. Steiner attempted to circumvent the dichotomy between the natural sciences, which sought to measure the world through the physical senses, and the humanities, which sought to understand it through ideas, by integrating their methods. In his autobiography Steiner claimed that ‘thinking has the same relationship to ideas that the eye has to light and the ear to sound. It is the organ for apprehending.’

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thinking, our sensory perception is enriched by memory and imagination, bringing an artistic element to our observations of the world and thus ‘opening our eyes,’ so to speak, to a world beyond that of sensorial exactness. Pallasmaa claims that “all our senses “think” and structure our relationship with the world, although we are not usually conscious of this perceptual activity.” Steiner actively advocated a conscious awareness of this fact, which he articulated through an indivisible complex of all-encompassing sensorial impressions captured in architecture.

Steiner employed the concept of gesamtkunstwerk, or ‘total work of art’ to help him achieve this integrated sensory experience. The program of gesamtkunstwerk was first explicitly formulated by Richard Wagner (1813-1883) in the mid-nineteenth century, although the theoretical foundation of the idea had its roots in early Romanticism and German Idealism around 1800. Romantic writers, composers and visual artists were fascinated with the idea of creating a heightened artistic experience through a synthesis of the arts. They looked to the Gothic Cathedral as an example of the arts coming together to amplify their poetic and spiritual effect. The resounding music, the fragrant incense, the chanted or spoken word, the numinous experience of colour and light through stained glass windows, and the drama and ritual of the Mass itself, were designed to work together to elevate the architectural experience to an encounter with divinity. In The Transformative Vision, Jose Argüelles describes how the Gothic Cathedral provides an aesthetic process whose end is achieved when the participant is able to experience the state of psychosensorial interfusion. The effect of the different sensory agents acting upon the participant simultaneously transfuses and uplifts the whole being, evoking a transcendent experience.

Steiner too aimed to reveal the spiritual content of his own artistic endeavours by inducing a heightened level of consciousness through a multi-sensory architectural experience that fully integrated painting, sculpture, music and theatre. To this end

Steiner produced his four ‘mystery dramas’ which were an important focus of the Anthroposophical community’s activities and remain so to this day. These plays trace the spiritual evolution of four major characters. The performances, which involve speech, movement and music, take place within the sculpted and painted surfaces of the Goetheanum auditorium. This simultaneously engages the senses to enhance the entire experience of the work.

In partnership with his second wife, Marie von Sivers, Steiner also created the new performance art of eurythmy, which came into being in 1912. Eurythmy is described as ‘visible speech’ whereby sounds and patterns of speech are translated into visible shapes or physical gestures (Figures 7.09 and 7.10).

According to Steiner the beauty and character of words was lost in speech because it was a servant of intellectual knowledge and was therefore devoid of the spirit from which it had originated. In a lecture on the twelve senses delivered in 1920, he claimed that

\[\text{it is pure misconception to believe that with the sense of hearing, what the word sense contains is exhausted; we might have heard, but we need not have sufficiently perceived the content of the words thoroughly to}\]

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28 Steiner’s eurythmy is distinct from Dalcroze eurhythmics which was also developed in the early twentieth century by the Swiss Musician Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (Note the different spelling of eurthymy and eurhthmy). Dalcroze’s eurhythm aims to teach concepts of rhythm, structure, and musical expression through movement. It shares certain qualities with Steiner’s eurythmy in that it focuses on allowing the student to gain a physical awareness and experience of music through training that takes place through all of the senses.

understand them. ... The hearing of sounds is mediated through the ear; the perceptions of words is mediated through other organs, just as much of a physical nature as those to which the sense of hearing is mediated. And we penetrate even deeper into the being of something external when we understand it through the word sense, than when we listen to the mere sound of its inner being.30

Through the art of eurythmy, Steiner attempted to bring the senses of sight, hearing, balance and movement into unison in order to facilitate an appreciation of the inner spiritual content of words.

For Steiner, the art of eurythmy was intimately linked to the architectural space in which it was performed. After the First Goetheanum burnt down on New Years Eve 1922, he wrote

When this art of eurythmy was performed on the stage of the Goetheanum, one was meant to have the feeling that there was a very natural relationship between the moving eurythmists and the stationary forms of the internal architecture and sculpture. The latter was meant to be pleased, as it were, to receive the former. The building and eurythmy movement were meant to grow into one. If I make no greater claim than this, that such a unity between building forms and the words or music was only being attempted, what I say will not sound too presumptuous. Because no one is more convinced than I am that our achievements are still very imperfect. But I did make the attempt to create the design in such a way that one can feel how the movement of the words naturally runs along the forms of the capitals and architraves. And I know, too, that I shaped the forms of the building out of the same soul state from which the pictures for eurythmy come. Thus the harmony of the two was not striven for out of an intellectual intention, but arose out of a similar artistic impulse. Probably eurythmy could not have been found without the work on the building.31

31 Steiner, Eurythmy, 262-263.
Steiner’s assertion that the forms of eurythmy and the forms of the building were both derived from the same artistic impulse relates back to the Greek conception of rhythm and proportion. The word eurythmy stems from the Greek *eurythmia* meaning rhythmical order, and was used by Greek and Roman architects to refer to the harmonious proportions of buildings.\(^\text{32}\) In 1946, Romanian aesthetician and historian, Matila Ghyka, noted in his book *The Geometry of Art and Life*, that while we generally tend to associate the term of rhythm with the arts working in the time dimension (poetry and music) and the notion of proportion with the arts working in the space dimension (architecture, painting and decorative art), the Greeks made no such distinction.\(^\text{33}\) They recognised that the interplay of periodicity and proportion applied to both time and spatial associations. This is reflected in Steiner’s eurythmy, which took the rhythm and proportion he perceived in speech and architecture, and united them into a new performance art of graceful bodily movements.

Steiner’s concept of eurythmy was based on the idea that not only are human beings affected by the sense or meaning of words, but also by their particular sound. According to Steiner the world of sound deepens and enlivens the life of the soul.\(^\text{34}\) In this regard, he drew upon earlier esoteric traditions which had long spoken of a ‘sounding cosmos’ which was a primal creative force that called substance into form.\(^\text{35}\) Ringbom attributed Steiner’s enunciation of these ideas as ‘the immediate source’ of Kandinsky’s notion of inner sound that he perceived in the colour and form of paintings.\(^\text{36}\) For Steiner and Kandinsky alike, sound carried an inner spiritual quality that could be perceived by developing finer senses. Consequently, both men believed that the inner sound of material objects was actually audible and that different colours and forms carried their own particular sound vibrations. In *An Art of Our Own*, Robert Lipsey argues that while the ideas of necessity and inner sound may seem old-fashioned

they are in fact powerful ideas, more ancient by far than the twentieth century and important to creative people in any era. ... The concept of the inner sound of all things is found among the earliest recorded instructions

\(^{34}\) Steiner, *Art as Seen in the Light of Mystery Wisdom*, 100.
\(^{36}\) Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos*, 118.
to artists in the Chinese tradition ... hearing is less material, telling us not how things appear, but what vibrations they emit.\(^{37}\)

For Kandinsky, this concept further assisted his shift away from the outer representation of objects in favour of abstract forms. He believed that abstract forms resonated their meaning through their own unique sound rather than through imitative formal associations. The physical impressions of his art were intended to create vibrations in the soul in the same way that sound creates invisible waves in the air.

The ability to receive a stimulus in one sense modality and experience sensations in another is a medically defined condition referred to as synesthesia. The most common form of synesthesia is ‘coloured hearing.’\(^{38}\) Kandinsky’s cross-modal sensitivity to colour and sound has raised much debate as to whether he was a natural synesthete or merely experimenting with the confusion of senses in combination with the colour theories of Goethe, Schopenhauer and Steiner.\(^{39}\) Regardless of scientific proof, Kandinsky was striving towards a similar goal in painting as Steiner was in architecture—namely to achieve a simultaneity and interaction of the senses through artistic form. In line with the concept of *gesamtkunstwerk*, both Kandinsky and Steiner approached their art holistically and did not individuate sensory experience in the same way science does. Steiner for example, claimed that

> In the eye, something like a mysterious sense of touch is always present; the eye is also always feeling as it sees. In ordinary life, however, this is suppressed. Because of the eye’s one-sided development, those who are able to perceive such things always feel the urge to experience the eye’s suppressed sense of touch, as well as the sense of another's I-being and the sense of self movement, which develops when we move through space and feel our limbs move.\(^{40}\)


\(^{40}\) Steiner, *Art as Spiritual Activity*, 208.
For Steiner, like Goethe before him, the eye was not just a scientific instrument, but a window to the soul, capable of revealing far more than mere visual data. Steiner’s insights into the nature of light and colour derived directly from Goethe’s *Theory of Colours* which was first published in 1810.41 Although many of the findings of Goethe’s theory have proven to be inaccurate, Steiner placed greater emphasis on the principles Goethe had employed than on the specific conclusions he had arrived at. Rather than studying colour from the purely physical perspective of light striking an object and entering the eye, Goethe investigated colour in terms of the sensations it created and how that was perceived. He explained this diagrammatically in a colour wheel that described each colour in terms of human characteristics (Figure 7.11).

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\text{Figure 7.11: Colour circle with assigned human characteristics, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1809.}
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\text{Source: Freies Deutsches Hochstift - Frankfurter Goethe-Museum.}
\]

In the inner circle of the wheel he assigned colours as: red—beautiful, orange—noble, yellow—good, green—useful, blue—common, blue-red—unnecessary. In the outer ring, overlapping colours were divided into four segments which were assigned as: red/orange—reason, yellow/green—understanding, green/blue—sensuality, blue-red/red—fantasy.42

This experience of colour required a sensitive awareness of its qualitative nature. According to Goethe, this nature was revealed through the interaction of light and

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dark. He asserted that when light and dark meet, either light overcomes dark and thus gives rise to active colours of red, orange and yellow hue, or darkness prevails, creating hues of blue and violet. Goethe coined the term ‘moral qualities’ to characterise the unique properties he experienced in colour and it was this concept that particularly inspired Steiner. Rather than light waves measured in frequencies, Steiner perceived colours as having innate qualities that revealed a spiritual character. In a lecture delivered in 1914 titled The Creative World of Colour, he asserted that these qualities could not be intellectually understood but must be felt as a living essence, stating that

We must find ways of not merely looking at colour, and painting them onto surfaces, but of really living with them and experiencing their innate living qualities. ... This can only be done by bringing alive the essence of colour in such a way that instead of arriving at colour symbolism ... we really discover the quality that is innate in colour, innate in the same way as the quality of laughter is innate in someone who is laughing.

This Goethean notion of colour was applied by Steiner to the painted motifs of the double cupola ceilings of the First Goetheanum. In order to convey the inner spiritual nature of the painted motifs, Steiner sought to imbue them with a self-luminous quality. To achieve this effect he created a new painting technique called ‘lazure’ in which multiple layers of thin transparent colours made from pure vegetable substances were built up to create a sense of three-dimensional depth. Unlike the heaviness of densely pigmented saturated colour, this technique produced a radiant translucency that made the colours seem to merge with the surrounding space. The painting therefore elicited a sense of expansion that helped dissipate the impenetrable character of the domes, complementing the permeable quality of the carved timber walls and architraves.

The effect was not dissimilar to that achieved by the illusionistic ceiling frescoes of Baroque churches. David Adams notes in his study of the First Goetheanum that, having been reared as Roman Catholic in Austria and later active in Bavaria, Steiner

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43 Soesman, The Twelve Senses, 86.
44 In English the term ‘moral’ suggests right or wrong however Goethe’s usage of the term refers to non-physical qualities of colour.
45 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 139.
was undoubtedly familiar with a number of great Baroque and Rococo edifices. Located in Bavaria, in the town of Staffelstein, Johann Balthasar Neumann’s *Basilika Vierzehnheiligen* is one of the most celebrated churches of the German Baroque style (Figure 7.12).

**Figure 7.12:** Basilika Vierzehnheiligen by Balthasar Neumann, begun in 1744. View looking east towards the altar with the shrine of the 14 helper saints. Source: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York, Oxford Art online database.

Begun in 1744, the pilgrimage church commemorates the hilltop on which a shepherd boy had an apparition in 1445 of the fourteen guardian angels after whom the church was named. The church’s ceiling fresco was painted by the Italian court painter Giuseppe Appiani, who used delicate pastel colours accented with gold to emphasise the ceiling’s ethereal quality. The frescoed ceiling appears to almost dissolve, as if its surface could be broken through to provide direct access to the heavens above. Though Steiner did not employ the optical technique of *trompe l’oeil* that featured so prominently in Baroque mural painting, the illusionary depth created by his diaphanous layering of colour created a similar effect of blurring the ceiling’s spatial boundaries.

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The ‘living’ qualities of colour where further exploited by Steiner in the glass windows that he designed for the auditorium of the First Goetheanum. While only a few remnants of the First Goetheanum windows remain, the windows for the Second Goetheanum auditorium, completed by Steiner’s co-worker—the pioneering glass-artist Assya Turgeneiff—faithfully carried forward Steiner’s design intent (Figure 7.13).

**Figure 7.13:** Assya Turgenieff in the Glass House, ca. 1940. In the background is her 1:1 preliminary drawing for the red window middle motif of the Second Goetheanum. Source: Stebbing, *The Goetheanum Cupola Motifs of Rudolf Steiner*, 197.

In the Second Goetheanum four different coloured pairs of tall, narrow, monochromatic windows flank the sides of the main auditorium in a sequence running from east to west of rose, violet, blue and green (Figures 7.14 and 7.15). Each window was etched with motifs that represent stages along the path of spiritual development as decreed by Steiner.
Like the motifs of the painted cupolas, the window imagery seems to contradict Steiner’s assertion that nothing in his buildings is symbolic. Yet one need not be familiar with Steiner’s occult teachings or the figurative meaning of the images to
experience the ethereal effect that the windows create. Through his accomplished manipulation of light and colour, Steiner managed to produce a sense of mystery and awe within the space that moved beyond the purely physical impressions of sight. This was largely due to the etching technique that was employed which allowed varying degrees of light to pass through the glass. The deeper the relief etching and the thinner the glass, the more the light was able to shine through. Correspondingly, the thicker the glass, the greater its opacity. The images were executed using a carborundum grinder, much like a dentist’s drill but in larger proportions. In the *First Goetheanum* the window motifs were etched into the glass using a relief technique. In the *Second Goetheanum* a different technique was employed, whereby repetitive oblique strokes were made from top right to bottom left across the surface of the glass. This created a far more painterly, ethereal quality to the windows, allowing the pictorial figures to emerge through an interplay of light and shadow (Figure 7.16).

![Figures 7.16: Detail of the glass showing the etching technique used for the windows of the Second Goetheanum. Source: Author, 2009.](image)

The flat two-dimensional surface character of the glass was largely mitigated, to create a sense of something behind or beyond what was immediately present, giving the windows an almost X-ray quality. The varying degrees of transparency and
opacity made the connection between visible and invisible, sensory and non-sensory, evident in a tangible way.

The different qualities of each of the coloured glass panes is brought to life as one moves through the auditorium, experiencing a succession of colours that conjure imaginative visions of what it might be like to pass through a rainbow. One feels as though the atmosphere itself is coloured. In a lecture on the renewal of artistic principles, Steiner described the appearance of a rainbow as something that unites the heavens with the earth through colour.\footnote{Rudolf Steiner, “The Renewal or the Artistic Principle,” Lecture, 25 October, 1914 in The Goetheanum Cupola Motifs of Rudolf Steiner, ed. Stebbing, 8.} The strong presence of colour in the interior space is illustrated in figures 7.17 and 7.18. These photographs, taken as instant snapshots that capture a frozen moment in time, make the walls and columns appear to be coloured in hues of violet and green. They are in fact a neutral grey-beige concrete with pinkish flecks of aggregate (Figure 7.19). This can only be appreciated inside the space where one discovers that the individual building elements are not made up of solid colour, but instead appear to glow, as if radiating with their own inner light.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figures717.png}
\caption{Interior of the main auditorium of the second Goetheanum. Source: Author, 2009.}
\end{figure}
The experiential impression created by the coloured glass is almost magical. Photographic images fail to effectively translate this captivating effect and they serve only as an aide mémoire. While the instantaneous capturing of an image creates the illusion that the photograph is an objective record, it is in fact a decontextualised representation of reality in which the embodied, sensory experience of the space is lost. This is another contributing factor towards the disdain with which Steiner’s architecture is often met. Critiques written from the reviewer’s desk can offer no sense of the experiential quality of the spaces and without this understanding, these qualities can be easily overlooked, or worse, can be visually interpreted as gaudish and unsophisticated through the deception of the camera lens.

A sensory engagement with the work offers a more genuine understanding of what Steiner was attempting to achieve. The visible, yet incorporeal nature of light readily lends the architecture a palpable sense of the ineffable. Of course this phenomenon had been recognised long before Steiner’s time, perhaps most notably through the stained glass windows of Gothic Cathedrals, which imbued their cavernous interiors with an ethereal, diaphanous quality that evoked in worshippers powerful feelings of
a strong spiritual force or presence. This experience is poignantly expressed by the influential patron of Gothic architecture, Abbot Suger (1081-1151)

When—out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God—the loveliness of the many-coloured gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an analogical manner.49

Steiner used the Gothic Cathedral as an example of the influence architectural forms could have on the physical and spiritual countenance of the human being, as Suger described. Steiner perceived the creators of the Gothic Cathedrals as ‘adepts in occultism,’ describing them as ‘initiates’ whose purpose was to convey ‘definite soul impressions’ through the divine forces of the architecture.50 Steiner skilfully re-appropriated this notion in his own secular buildings, to create atmospheric spaces that in some instances, also managed to achieve a divine-like quality.

The sacred nature of light has been discussed in contemporary terms by architecture professor, Marietta Millet, who writes

Sacred light connects us with a higher order of things, with the essential, with the immutable truth. Sacred light is not tied to revelation of a particular deity, or to a particular religion, or even to a typical religious place, such as a church. Rather sacred light reminds one, whenever one comes into contact with it, that a higher order exists, whatever it may be called.51

While Steiner’s use of light was not specifically religious, its goal was transcendence to this higher order.

50 Steiner, Architecture: An Introductory Reader, 29.
Steiner was not alone in his endeavour to translate the sensual, atmospheric qualities of colour and light found in Gothic cathedrals into a modern secular context. In 1914 the German Expressionist architect Bruno Taut designed the Glass Pavilion for the Deutscher Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne (Figures 7.20 and 7.21). The building was unfortunately destroyed shortly after the exhibition and like the First Goetheanum, can now only be experienced through the black and white photographs that remain.

**Figure 7.20:** The Glass Pavilion for the Werkbund Exhibition by Bruno Taut, Cologne, 1914. Source: Schwartz, *The Werkbund*, 184-185.

**Figure 7.21:** Glass Pavilion for the Werkbund Exhibition by Bruno Taut, Cologne, 1914. Source: Schwartz, *The Werkbund*, 184-185.
One of Taut’s early drawings for the Glass Pavilion described the structure as having been made in the ‘spirit of a Gothic cathedral.’ Financed by a group of glass manufacturers, the building was a small, fourteen–sided polygonal structure designed to demonstrate the potential of different types of glass. Taut placed particular emphasis on the material’s ability to orchestrate human emotions. Light entered the building through a mosaic of glass block walls. These were capped by a ceiling of red and gilded glass tiles with a central oculus that was located above the top of a seven-tiered waterfall which cascaded down over glass pearls lit by underwater coloured lights. A glass-treaded metal staircase ascended into the upper crystalline room from the darker, earth-bound space below. The exterior stringcourse of the building was inscribed by aphorisms from the Expressionist poet, Paul Scheerbart, which extolled the virtues of glass. Scheerbart’s utopian vision for modern architecture was elaborated in his book Glass Architecture, which was also published in 1914. Although glass had previously been used in modern architecture to extraordinary effect, Scheerbart, Taut and Steiner were aspiring to heighten the material’s metaphysical qualities. While examples like Walter Gropius’s Fagus Works (1911) sought to exploit the transparency of glass, Taut’s Glass Pavilion and Steiner’s Goetheanums sought to accentuate its translucency. The distinction is significant. Pevsner considered that the clear glass facades of the Fagus Works served to ‘annihilate’ the hard separation of exterior and interior. In contrast, the coloured glass of the Glass Pavilion and the First and Second Goetheanums maintained that separation. From inside the buildings, the coloured glass rendered the outside space difficult to properly discern, creating a sense of mystery and intrigue as to what might lie beyond. It also afforded the interiors a feeling of enveloping intimacy that was not possible with clear glass. The interior spaces were clearly separate from, but closely connected to the outer world. Steiner and Taut achieved this effect by exploiting, rather than negating, the materiality of the glass to create a veiled mantle between the earthly and divine realms.

One hundred kilometres west of the Goetheanum, in the small French village of Ronchamp, Le Corbusier’s Notre Dame du Haut (Figure 7.22) is another building

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54 Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 162.
that employs coloured glass to reveal the spiritual qualities of architecture. Also known as \textit{Ronchamp Chapel}, this small church was completed in 1954, thirty years after Steiner had designed the \textit{Second Goetheanum}.

![Figure 7.22: Notre Dame du Haut by Le Corbusier, 1954. Source: Author, 2009.](image)

According to Olé Falk Ebbell, the Norwegian engineer who collaborated with Steiner on several of his buildings, Le Corbusier had visited the unfinished shell of the \textit{Second Goetheanum} in 1927 and was deeply impressed by it. In recalling Le Corbusier’s visit, Ebbell reported that

\begin{quote}
Although the structure by Le Corbusier appeared to reflect more intimately our architect’s function and the one by Rudolf Steiner conveyed an impression that far surpassed it in height, depth and definition, I could nevertheless not avoid recognising that the factor
\end{quote}

\footnote{Sharp, \textit{Modern Architecture and Expressionism}, 164.}
which inspires us as architects was common to both creative approaches.\textsuperscript{56}

Imai perceived in both buildings an ‘earnest plea’ on the part of both architects to give expression to a higher, invisible power that had a ‘living’ quality capable of engendering a ‘higher enthusiasm’ in those who came in contact with it.\textsuperscript{57}

Though Ebbell and Imai failed to articulate the basis upon which their assertions were arrived at, certain affinities between the two buildings are evident. Their siting presents one such example. In each case the buildings sit high upon a hill, commanding breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape which is often shrouded in morning mist or blanketed in winter snow. The ascent from the bottom of the hill to the sanctum of the chapel or ‘theatre-temple’ offers a metaphor of the visitor’s spiritual journey. In terms of the architecture itself, comparisons can be drawn between the organic, plastic forms they both employed. Masterful combinations of convex and concave forms give the buildings a powerful sculptural quality, while the interplay of shadow, light and coloured glass lends a sublime quality to the interior spaces. In each case a sacred atmosphere has been created that prompts an almost involuntary feeling of reverence and awe.

While these reactions are evoked through a synergy of form, space, colour and light, the way in which these elements are manipulated by Steiner and Le Corbusier differs considerably. Their handling of daylight helps to illustrate their alternative means and methods of rousing the visitor’s emotional and physical responses. Upon entering \textit{Ronchamp Chapel}, the visitor is first struck by the darkness of the interior. As the eyes begin to adjust, the atmospheric role of light starts to become evident. The dim light has a mystical quality as it filters into the space from multiple, indirect sources. The curved shafts of the three towers above the devotional altars act as giant scoops that baffle the light and suffuse it into the space below. Twenty-seven irregular windows on the southern wall reflect light via the coarse stippled surface of their deeply splayed recesses. Their glazing is a combination of clear and coloured panes that dramatise the interior space. On the eastern wall fourteen tiny scattered windows create a constellation of stars that surround an asymmetrically positioned

window that houses a pivoting statue of the Virgin Mary. A narrow splice of glazing separates the east and south walls from the roof, making it appear to magically hover over the space, while softly illuminating the dark grey of the cast concrete ceiling (Figures 7.23, 7.24 and 7.25).

**Figure 7.23:** Interior of Notre Dame du Haut facing altar, South wall on right of image, Le Corbusier, 1954. Source: Author, 2009.


These layered lighting devices lend the interior space an ethereal luminosity that shifts and transforms throughout the day. Le Corbusier deliberately strove for such an effect and audaciously claimed that

I am the inventor of the phrase ‘ineffable space,’ which is a reality that I discovered as I went on. When a work reaches a maximum of intensity,
when it has the best proportions and has been made with the best quality of execution, when it has reached perfection, a phenomenon takes place that we may call ‘ineffable space.’ When this happens, these places start to radiate. They radiate in a physical way and determine what I call ‘ineffable space,’ that is to say, a space that does not depend on dimensions but on the quality of its perfection. It belongs in the domain of the ineffable, of that which cannot be said.58

This pronouncement points to a correlation between Le Corbusier’s and Steiner’s messianic attitude towards their architecture. Steiner also apotheosed the notion of ethereal space, however the functional program of the Goetheanum as a theatre and administrative centre necessitated that the architectural manifestation of such a notion must also respond to the building’s essentially secular nature. Whereas Le Corbusier used only small bursts of colour to act as gentle interludes to the overall stillness and quietness of the space, Steiner drenched his auditorium in a rhapsody of colour and light to dramatise the space and arouse the senses.

Steiner’s efforts to find an appropriate formal expression for the Goetheanum in terms of both its utilitarian purpose and the spiritual nature of the Anthroposophical endeavours it supports, represents an earnest and compelling attempt to advance the senses as an intermediary between the material and spiritual worlds. The examples presented in this chapter provide an insight into just some of the ways Steiner achieved this. Perhaps where he was most successful was in the minutiae of his detailing, as highlighted by the tailored crafting of a door handle, the delicate etching of coloured glass, or the intricate carving of timber walls and architraves. A sensory engagement with Steiner’s work undoubtedly enriches the participant’s experience of his architecture. Whether this translates into an experience of extrasensory phenomena remains largely a subjective matter that is dependent on the predisposition of the participant. A certain level of empathetic involvement with the architecture is required for the possibility of an additional dimension of experience to be opened up and made available to the sense-bound consciousness. Nevertheless, the effort is rewarded for those willing to do so.

Chapter 8

Anthropomorphism

A plan arranges organs in order, thus creating an organism or organisms. The organs possess distinctive qualities, specific differences. What are they? Lungs, heart, stomach? The same question arises in architecture.  


8.1 Anthropomorphic Architecture

The human being, in all its variety and complexity, offered Steiner an identifiable way of perceiving architecture. The concept of anthropomorphism provided him with an interpretive mechanism that helped him to understand the physical, social and spiritual qualities of architecture. It assisted him to negotiate the exchange that occurs between theory and practice by applying human experiences and qualities to the making of buildings. Although Steiner's work is laden with anthropomorphic references, there has been a lack of architectural scholarship investigating this concept beyond the obvious identification of certain physical human attributes present in many of his buildings. While acknowledging these highly evocative formal aspects, this chapter also draws out the historical, theoretical and cultural references to anthropomorphism that Steiner drew upon to articulate his anthropocentric philosophy in built form.

Through the use of anthropomorphic metaphors, Steiner sought to create a dialogue between the built form and the architectural observer by activating the imagination. In turn, he believed this would enhance the observer's perception. The very essence of metaphor is to consider one thing in terms of another, in order to gain a greater insight into the nature of that particular entity. A metaphor's creative power lies in its ability to bring two separate domains into relation with one another so as to enable a new or deeper appreciation of the subject in question through the manifold
associations such relations bring to mind. In his seminal text on classical architecture, *The Dancing Column*, Joseph Rykwert recognises that

A repeated recourse to a metaphor in a book devoted to building requires a general apology, since for many readers, metaphor will seem a surface dressing, embroidery on the real business of utilitarian and even of abstract-formal concerns.¹

However, he then goes on to assert that

Such is not my view: I think it is an essential part of the business of building, as of all human activity ... I have come to think that (metaphor) may direct the way all men and women relate themselves to what they build.²

This thesis shares Rykwert’s perspective and employs three different metaphors—the bodily metaphor, the gender metaphor and the spiritual metaphor—to frame an understanding of Steiner’s anthropomorphism within the broader context of architectural history and its theoretical interpretation. While the human being is the central motif of all three metaphors, the different emphasis of each metaphor opens up alternative ways of understanding Steiner’s work through the experiences, values and links they evoke. Steiner’s anthropomorphism was a complex entanglement of symbolic, allegorical, and figurative references that were both meaningful and fantastical. In order to fully appreciate this complexity, this chapter begins by considering what is understood by anthropomorphic architecture.

Anthropomorphism is the act of attributing human qualities to non-human organisms, objects or deities. This includes physical as well as psychical characteristics. It is a phenomenon that dates back at least forty thousand years to anthropomorphic representations in Palaeolithic art.³ The earliest critique of anthropomorphism in the West was made by the Greek philosopher, Xenophanes, in the 5th century BC.⁴ Twenty six centuries later, anthropomorphism informs research in areas as diverse as

religion, literature, science, psychology, philosophy, computing and robotics. Although scholars have long argued over the merit of anthropomorphism as a means of cognition, it is a deep-seated and persistent phenomenon that appears worldwide.

In the field of architecture, the attribution of human characteristics to buildings provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for interpreting and critiquing architectural work. At its most rewarding, architectural anthropomorphism extends beyond the limits of physical shape and form, to incorporate a broad diversity of human behavioural, emotional and sensorial qualities. These qualities can be present in either subtle or patent ways that shape our experience of architecture at both a conscious and unconscious level. Almost inevitably though, literal references fail to provide the level of insight that a metaphor is capable of achieving through the elucidatory power of its extended meanings. More indirect references often allow the work to be accessible while still providing enough ambiguity so that the personal resonances of the observer can add a richness and depth of associations and offer variable interpretations.

Through the device of anthropomorphic metaphor, there is a transference of attributes and virtues that allows architecture to be related to empathetically. The term *Einfühlung* (empathy) was coined in 1873 by the German aesthetician Robert Vischer. The term describes the projection of one’s own physicality or emotions into objects of the phenomenal world. The concept was cogently applied to the theory of architecture in 1886 by the Swiss art historian, Heinrich Wölfflin in his doctoral dissertation *Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture*. Wölfflin’s thesis argued that

> We expect everything to possess what we know to be the conditions of our own well-being. Not that we expect to find the appearance of a human being in the forms of inorganic nature: we interpret the physical world through the categories ... that we share with it. We also define the

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expressive capability of these other forms accordingly. They can communicate to us only what we ourselves use their qualities to express.8

The quality that Wölfflin’s empathetic perception most strongly identified in architecture was the corporeal nature of the human body. He asserted that

We always project a corporeal state conforming to our own; we interpret the whole outside world according to the expressive system with which we have become familiar from our own bodies.9

Bodily experiences provide a link between the concept of empathy and architectural anthropomorphism in that the comprehension and appreciation of architectural qualities such as balance, strength, and movement are enhanced through the projective identification of the human body within the built form. In his doctoral dissertation Origins and Aims of German Expressionist Architecture, Eugene Santomasso examined the role of empathy in Expressionist architecture, considering it to have played a central role in the creation of its new formal qualities.10

Referencing Steiner’s use of the ear canal motif for the newel post detail (examined in Chapter Four of this thesis), Santomasso described how Steiner had conceived the form out of an empathetic feeling for the sensation of balance.11 He then went on to interpret Steiner’s joining of the ear and stairway as a Christian symbol drawn from the Augustinian medieval trope of the incarnation of Christ achieved by fertilising the Virgin through the ear.12 Santomasso further related this symbolism to ‘entering the Goetheanum, an anthropomorphically conceived vessel, within which one’s spirit could be reincarnated’ in the same way that Holy Spirit entered the Virgin and conceived the body of Christ.13 Though Steiner had acknowledged formal similarities between the semi-circular canals of the ear and the newel post detail, he maintained that this had not arisen out of a naturalistic desire to copy the ear’s forms. Steiner’s understanding of the ear was not based on its formal anatomy alone. Rather, he perceived the ear as an organ that had been created ‘in communion with Higher

8 Heinrich Wölfflin, “Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture” (1886) in Empathy, Form and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893, ed. Harry Mallgrave, 152.
11 See earlier discussion on the ‘organ of balance’ in Chapter 4: Threefold Polarity.
13 Santomasso, Origins and Aims of German Expressionist Architecture, 254.
spiritual beings.' Given Steiner’s spiritualised conception of the ear, Santomasso’s allegorical interpretation of the newel post detail is a plausible one, suggesting that the anthropomorphic references in Steiner’s architecture draw upon more sophisticated symbolic and metaphoric references than Steiner cared to admit to, or that scholars have so far managed to uncover.

8.2 Body Metaphors

Like Wölfflin, Steiner perceived architecture as an empathetic expression of the human being’s own physicality. Steiner maintained that

> All the laws present in the architectural utilisation of matter are also to be found in the human body. When we project the specific organisation of the human body into the space outside it, then we have architecture.

However, in relating the theory of empathy to his own buildings, Steiner’s bodily associations were far more explicit and literal than Wölfflin’s. Whereas Wölfflin’s analogies were defined in architectural terms of regularity, symmetry, proportion and harmony, Steiner’s metaphors described particular components of the building in relation to body parts.

One of the most prominent metaphors Steiner employed described the walls of the Goetheanum as larynxes or ‘organs of speech.’ While this metaphor made reference to a specific physical part of the human body, Steiner used it as a way of articulating an incorporeal spiritual concept. According to Steiner, art was the creation of organs through which the gods spoke to humanity. Therefore, just as the larynx provides humans with the ability to speak, Steiner perceived the walls of his buildings as conduits of the spiritual world. He proclaimed that

> With the powers that spiritual science can awaken in each of us we must try to create an interior space which, in the effects produced by its colours, forms and other features, is a place set apart; but not shut off, for

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15 Steiner, Architecture: An Introductory Reader, 36.
16 Wölfflin, “Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture,”162.
17 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 83.
wherever we look our eyes and our hearts should be invited to penetrate through the walls. So that while secluded, as though within a sanctuary, we are at the same time at one with the weaving life of the divine. The temple that belongs truly to the future will have walls— and yet no walls. Its interior will have renounced every trace of egoism that may be associated with an enclosed space, and all its colours and forms will give expression to a selfless endeavour to receive the in-pouring forces of the universe.\(^{18}\)

In an effort to counter the physical substance of his walls, Steiner sought to shape them in such a way that they would ‘negate themselves.’\(^{19}\) As previously discussed, the hand carved timber walls of the First Goetheanum have a texture and warmth that is inviting to the touch. Unlike the impenetrable character of a smooth concrete wall, the graininess of the timber lends the walls a sense of permeability. The interlocking circular floor plan also contributes to the penetrable character of the walls by removing the need for corners which act as strong, space defining elements. This lends the walls a certain degree of fuzziness through a lack of clearly defined edges and boundaries. The double domes of the First Goetheanum are supported by timber columns, while the walls are recessed behind them. Relieved of their load bearing function, the walls’ role is one of defining space rather than imparting strength. Yet the undulating concave and convex surfaces of the interior walls also work to destabalise this function. While the convex forms press inward, the concave forms expand outward, creating a dynamic push and pull intended to demonstrate the spiritual forces active within the building. Rather than a distinct boundary between inside and outside, Steiner perceives the walls as a mediating space between the activities carried out within the building and the spiritual forces streaming into the building from the cosmos. In a lecture delivered in Berlin in 1911, titled *And the Temple Becomes Man*, Steiner asserted that

> The words sent forth into this space will set their own range and boundaries, so that as they strike upon the walls they will find something to which they are so attuned that what has issued from the human being will resound back into the interior. The dynamic power of the word will

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\(^{18}\) Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 12.

\(^{19}\) Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 94.
go forth from the centre to the periphery and the interior space itself will then re-echo the proclamation and message of the Spirit. This interior will set and maintain its own boundaries and at the same time open itself freely to the spiritual infinitudes.\(^{20}\)

The interior walls are a thick, in-between zone; a liminal space that mediates between the human being and the spiritual realm. Steiner’s use of the larynx as a metaphor for the wall provided a unique way of conveying his understanding of the walls’ functional and philosophical role.

Steiner turned to another bodily metaphor, the human skeleton, to articulate the role of structure in his architecture. In a lecture on the First Goetheanum delivered in The Hague in 1921, Steiner stated that

> Throughout the whole architectural conception of the building we have paid attention to everything that may be found in nature in the development of the forms of bones and muscles. If you consider the bone structure within the knee, the wonderful inspiration of nature has so shaped certain bones that they constitute the basic structure and support what rests upon them. Their forms must expand or contract in the right places. This inner feeling for the shape of organic formative process, the shapes that are able to carry weight—this was essential in order to construct the Dornach building.\(^{21}\)

This concept is vividly expressed in the staircase in the western entrance of the First Goetheanum (Figures 8.01 and 8.02). The winding balustrades have the appearance of muscles in torsion and the support posts of the staircase are like giant bones set into the sockets of the landing.


\(^{21}\) Steiner, Architecture: An Introductory Reader, 156.
So convincing is the visual correlation to human bones, the forms could easily be accused of an unsophisticated naturalism. However, the internal logic of structure and support makes the forms feel entirely appropriate. According to Steiner the organic shape of the stairs’ support column had been borne out of the same creative forces active in nature. Having studied physics, mechanics, biology and zoology, Steiner had an inherent understanding of structure and organic form, that found authentic architectural expression in these stairs.22

Comparisons can be drawn between the ossified forms of Steiner’s staircase and the bone-like details of Gaudi’s Casa Batlló (Figure 8.03), completed in 1906, seven years prior to construction starting on the First Goetheanum. The anatomical associations evoked by Casa Batlló have earned the building local monikers such as Casa dels ossos (House of Bones) and Casa dels Badalls (House of Yawns). Such connotations are especially evident in the detailing of the first floor windows. The stone structure surrounding the windows appears to be supported by finely sculpted pillars that simulate the bones of a limb complete with articulated joints. The lip-like edge of the windows’ large round openings resemble a wide open mouth, while the balconies of the upper levels can be read as either pelvic bones or portions of a skull

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22 Steiner, Architecture: An Introductory Reader, 163.
(Figure 8.04). Inside the house the skeletal references continue. The staircases carved timber stringer suggests the vertebrae of a curved spine while the winding banister has a sinuous, tendon-like quality (Figure 8.05).

Yet the way in which Gaudi articulated these bodily references differs notably to Steiner’s formal expression. For example, whereas Gaudi joined separate elements together to create an integrated composition of parts, Steiner melded individual components into a singular entity. In both cases the result was a unified organic whole even though their methods and visual character were quite distinct from one another. This is partially due to the different materials employed by Gaudi and Steiner. Steiner’s choice of concrete for the staircase lends itself to a greater fluidity of form than the materials of stone, iron and timber used by Gaudi. Yet the differences cannot be fully accounted for by the pragmatics of material choice alone. They also lie in the way in which they approached their architectural task. For Gaudi, bodily analogies were tied to the truthful tectonic expression of structure, function and ornamentation as he openly looked to nature as a guiding model. Steiner’s emphasis was on the extended associations and spiritual meanings such analogies could evoke. Refusing to acknowledge any physical references to nature, Steiner argued instead that any resemblances between the forms in his building and those of
the human body were the result of the same higher forces at work in both, seeking to exist as ‘pure etheric form.’

Juhani Pallasmaa picks up on the extended associations of anthropomorphic metaphor in his essay *Stairways of the Mind*, noting that ‘the mental significance and symbolic connotations of stairs are deeply rooted in the body.’ Pallasmaa draws an analogy between the vertical circulation provided by stairs and role of the heart in pumping blood up and down the body, noting that the regular rhythm of the stairs echoes the beating of the heart and the rhythm of breathing. This concept can be related to earlier analogies drawn by Steiner in a lecture he delivered in 1914 on the aesthetic laws of form, in which he identified the human body as an allegorical expression of universal laws active within the forms of his building and the entire cosmos. He referred to the heart as the microcosm of the sun, the lungs as the microcosm of the earth and the brain as the microcosm of the moon. Explaining this diagrammatically, he illustrated the circulation of blood through the human body as a microcosm of the circulation of the sun, earth and moon as spiritual beings (Figure 8.06).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 8.06:** Diagram drawn by Steiner during a lecture in Dornach, 5 July, 1914. Source: Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 119.

The drawing showed the sun, earth and moon aligned along a central axis, connected by curved lines that represent the interplay of forces as electrical currents. He then

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translated this into a diagram of the human circulatory system and argued that ‘if a shape were to be made from this diagram, its very form, copied from the cosmos and expressed in an artistic motif, would give us a sense of profound cosmic mystery’ (Figure 8.07).27

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 8.07:** Diagram drawn by Steiner during lecture at Dornach, 5 July 1914. Source: Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 121.

According to Steiner, this mystery might only be sensed at a subconscious level, yet the form created from it would innately be recognised as beautiful. The basic form of the *First Goetheanum* is evident in this diagram, with the lines that illustrate the flow of blood through the body roughly circumscribing the small and large intersecting circles of the building’s floor plan. The point of intersection, which is indicated in the diagram as the heart, is the location of the speaker’s rostrum from which the teachings of Anthroposophy were to be conveyed.

British architectural scholar, Vaughan Hart, has used Steiner’s diagrammatic explanation of the macrocosm and microcosm as a basis for the aesthetic laws of form and applied them to an analysis of the Erich Mendelsohn’s *Einstein Tower*, built in Potsdam in 1920 (Figure 8.08).28

27 Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 121.
Hart draws the comparison on the supposition of ‘Mendelsohn’s probable knowledge of Steiner’s ideas.’ Though Hart provides no evidence to support his assumption, Mendelsohn’s friendship with Kandinsky suggests at least indirect links to Steiner. A letter written to Steiner from Mendelsohn’s employee, Richard Neutra, inviting him to visit the Einstein Tower, also supports the likelihood of Mendelsohn’s familiarity with Steiner’s work. Hart’s interpretation places the ground floor plan of Mendelsohn’s tower alongside Steiner’s hieroglyphic sketches to demonstrate that the dome’s telescope chamber occupies the position of the sun, the staircase into the subterranean chamber occupies the position of the earth and the entrance crescent and stair occupy the place of the moon (Figure 8.09).

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30 The original letter is held in the Rudolf Steiner Archive in Dornach and is published in Kreis and Vegesack eds., Rudolf Steiner: The Alchemy of the Everyday, 228.  
Hart suggests that the tower’s curved walls might be seen to correspond with electrical currents, matching Steiner’s description of the stream of spiritual beings passing through the sun, earth and moon. Hart’s aim was not to present the tower as a direct copy of Steiner’s cosmic reading of the universe, but rather to highlight a degree of compatibility between Steiner’s theories and the tower’s form and purpose, both of which aimed to develop an understanding of the relationship between the earth, sun and the moon. Hart then went further though, to draw bodily analogies. He related Steiner’s diagram of the human circulatory system to the observatory’s basement plan, comparing the microphotometer laboratory to the brain and head, the twin semi-circular stairs to the lungs, the tower’s cross-axis or light ray to the navel and the long spectrographic chamber to the legs (Figure 8.10).  

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As speculative as Hart’s analogy may be, Mendelsohn did look to the human body as a way of conceptualising architecture. Shortly after the tower’s completion in 1923, Mendelsohn stated that ‘for architecture, two components are necessary ... the first component (is that of the) intellect, brain, the organising machine ... the second ... is that of the creative impulse, the blood, the temper, the senses, and organic feeling. Only the union of the two components leads to the mastery of spatial elements.’

Hart also described the tower as a ‘phallus-like object erupting from the earth.’ Similar phallic analogies have been drawn with Steiner’s Boiler House which will soon be explored within the context of gender metaphors. Yet, in spite of the associations Hart identified, Mendelsohn’s and Steiner’s overall aims were quite different. Whereas Mendelsohn’s essential aim was to articulate the dynamic spatial and formal implications of Einstein’s theory of relativity, the underlying program of Steiner’s boiler tower was primarily spiritual in that it sought to express the dark Ahrimanic forces he perceived to be active in the process of coal combustion.

Notwithstanding their different motivations, the use of body imagery in both Mendelsohn’s and Steiner’s work can be seen to relate to a recurring appeal

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35For a detailed discussion of the tower’s architectural form as an expression of Einstein’s theory of relativity refer to Kathleen James, “Expressionism, Relativity, and the Einstein Tower,” Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. 53, no.4, 1994, 392-413. As described in Chapter 4: Threefold Polarity, Ahriman is the spiritual entity that Steiner associated with materialism.
throughout the history of architecture to the notion of organicism. While their forms may have seemed new and disturbing, their ideological foundation was, as Joseph Rykwert described, ‘almost pedestrianly old-fashioned.’\(^{36}\) According to Mendelsohn, Einstein himself had praised the tower as ‘Organic!’\(^{37}\) Mendelsohn interpreted Einstein’s pronouncement to mean ‘that you can’t change or take away a part without destroying the whole.’\(^{38}\) Rykwert related Mendelsohn’s definition of organic to Leon Battista Alberti’s definition of beauty pronounced five centuries earlier, as ‘that reasoned harmony of all parts ... so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered but for the worse.’\(^{39}\) Following in this same vein, Steiner exalted the human body as an example of design perfection that neither he, nor any architect or engineer, could improve upon.\(^{40}\) As a living organism the human body resists partitioning into separate parts and therefore provides architecture with a familiar model of wholeness and organic necessity in terms of the suitability, composition and correspondence of its parts. Steiner used this notion to rationalise the forms of the First Goetheanum, claiming that

> Each separate part of the living organism has to exist within, and in accordance with the whole. It would be nonsense to want to change the nose and put another organ in its place. Similarly a big toe as well as a small toe would have to be different if the nose were different. Just as no one in his senses would wish to remodel the nose, so it is impossible that any form here should be other than it is. If one form were changed the whole building would have to be different, for the whole is conceived as a living organic form.\(^{41}\)

This notion of wholeness not only lends itself to the analogy of architecture as an expression of the human body, but can be extended to describe architecture as a

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\(^{38}\) Mendelsohn, “My Own Contribution to the Development of Contemporary Architecture,”166.


\(^{41}\) Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 72.
microcosm of the entire universe. In his study of the Greek orders of architecture, Rykwert explains that

Metaphor is generally understood as a figure of speech limited to two terms only: this is like that. But the metaphor with which I have been concerned is more extended—a double one—in that it involves three terms: a body is like a building and building in turn is like the world.42

A similar double metaphor is employed by Steiner, however the metaphor works in the reverse order to Rykwert’s formulation. Whereas Rykwert was attempting to understand architecture through the body and the world, Steiner was seeking to understand the world through architecture and the body. This highlights a fundamental difference in the way that Steiner perceived architecture. For Steiner architecture was a means to a higher end, rather than the primary goal in and of itself.

This perspective broadened Steiner’s scope of interest to areas beyond the limits of traditional architectural enquiry into the more obscure realm of cosmological belief systems. Perceiving the relationship between aesthetic form, human beings and the cosmos, both anatomically and metaphysically, Steiner looked to astrology as a way of expressing these connections in physical form. The old ‘science’ of astrology groups stars together in a seemingly arbitrary way to create anthropomorphic forms that are said to exert some sort of cosmic influence on all manner of human concerns. Although it had lost its intellectual credibility by 1700, Steiner applied its symbolic language to his architecture in a rather arcane fashion. The painted ceiling domes of the First Goetheanum, for example, made a direct reference to the celestial heavens above. More abstrusely, the seven pairs of columns that supported the large dome related to Steiner’s esoteric theory that identified seven stages of cosmic evolution to which he assigned the planetary names of Saturn, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus. Each column capital carried a motif that metamorphosed from one column to the next representing the archetypal forces of the evolution of the cosmos in visible form. Evolution, as a process of time, represented for Steiner the essential nature of the human being. He perceived the physical body as a container for an etheric body that was connected to the whole cosmos. This etheric body, according to

42 Rykwert, The Dancing Column, 373.
Steiner, was to be understood in terms of cyclical and rhythmical movement through time and had a spatial character only in so far as it inhabited the physical body.\footnote{Steiner, \textit{Art: An Introductory Reader}, 211.}

The concept of anthropomorphism need not be limited to the static image of the physical body, but in spite of Steiner’s incorporeal understanding of the human body, one can hardly ignore the numerous references his architecture makes to the body’s physical appearance. This might initially suggest an unsuccessful translation of his philosophical ideals into the creative program of his buildings. However, in his book \textit{Biomorphic Architecture}, Günther Feuerstein argues that every building is \textit{a priori}, an analogy with the human body in its three dimensional, tactile and spatial qualities, especially in those buildings that are broadly classified as ‘organic.’\footnote{Günther Feuerstein, \textit{Biomorphic Architecture: Human and Animal Forms in Architecture} (Stuttgart: Axel Menges, 2002), 7.} Similarly, art critic, Adrian Stokes, argues that our human interests cause a ‘pre-eminence in aesthetic form of an underlying image of the body’ and there is a sense in which ‘all art is of the body.’\footnote{Richard Wollheim ed., \textit{The Image in Form: Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes} (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 117.} Following this line of thought, the fact that the visual appearance of Steiner’s buildings share much in common with the human body can be seen as a consequence of his deeply anthropocentric perspective of the inanimate world.

Steiner’s buildings have invited all manner of anthropomorphic, and more specifically, physiognomic interpretations by critics. In his monographic study of the \textit{Goetheanum}, Wolfgang Pehnt noted the vehement reaction of journalists to the building. Among other things, they described the building as a gigantic bald skull that defaced the countryside.\footnote{Pehnt, \textit{Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach}, 37.} The neighbouring \textit{Duldeck House} has been interpreted by Feuerstein as an enormous head, for which the entire concrete roof forms a protective helmet (Figure 8.11).
While there is some legitimacy to this suggestion in terms of the roof’s weightiness that emphasises its shielding quality, Feuerstein’s critique does not look closely enough to recognise that the roof’s armour is punctuated by windows that start to break down its defensive veneer, allowing light and air to penetrate. This effect calls to mind the imposing rooflines of Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886) that often incorporated dormer or ‘eyelid’ windows, helping to reinforce the human scale of his buildings. Richardson’s *Sever Hall* at Harvard University, built in 1878, and *Thomas Crane Library*, built in 1882, are two notable examples (Figures 8.12 and 8.13).

Richardson’s roof forms lack the animated organic quality of Steiner’s *Duldeck House* and as a result do not invite the overt anthropomorphic analogies that critics
such as Feuerstein have applied to Steiner’s work. The thin window splices in the roof of Richardson’s *Thomas Crane Library* have an elegance and refinement to them that counter any suggestion of the roof as a helmet. Interestingly though, the idea of protection and fortification is reinforced in *Duldeck House* by its circular corner towers that are reminiscent of the turrets embedded in the heavy Neo-Romanesque walls of Richardson’s buildings.

Feuerstein also applied a physiognomic reading to Steiner’s *Glass House* built in 1914. He described how the door and windows of the entrance archway evoked a face, seeing the two upper arched windows as eyes and the entire entrance portal as a mouth (Figures 8.14 and 8.15). Feuerstein went so far as to suggest that the white streaks of weathering on the upper edge of the shingled wall could count as hair.47

![Glass House front facade, Rudolf Steiner, 1914. Source: Author, 2009.](image)


*Figure 8.15:* Detail of the Glass House entrance portal, Rudolf Steiner, 1914. Source: Kugler, *Architekturführer Goetheanumhügel*, 53.

The tendency to recognise the human face in artistic objects is, according to Ernst Gombrich, the result of the human being’s inborn disposition to read certain configurations in terms of their own biological interests. This led Gombrich to argue that such physiognomic representations may be accidental on the part of the designer and it is the observer who meets the designer halfway in making such associations.48

While ‘accidental’ resemblances can be read into Steiner’s work, he would surely have denounced the literalism of Feuerstein’s interpretation. Feuerstein’s analysis does little to illuminate the deeper layers of meaning Steiner intended his architecture

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47 Feuerstein, *Biomorphic Architecture*, 47. The replacement of the shingles in recent years makes this analogy no longer apparent.

to convey. Steiner does however require that the observer meet him halfway in order that the architecture can be appreciated within the broader context of his overall philosophy. Trained in the way of Steiner’s thinking and familiar with Steiner’s artistic objectives, Anthroposophists naturally understand the work quite differently to the non-initiated. Consequently, their tendency is to interpret the buildings as philosophical text rather than as buildings in their own right. This too can create problems for the architecture by opening it up to literal interpretations that Steiner may never have intended. Whereas the architectural critic may look only at the building’s image without appreciating its philosophical significance, many Anthroposophists look only to the philosophy, missing the power of the image.

Critics have drawn further analogies between Steiner’s buildings and the human body by making associations with human sexual organs. These connections will be considered within the context of gender metaphors, which are not limited to the biology of the sexes, but incorporate various social, cultural and spiritual constructions of gender and sexual difference.

8.3 Gender Metaphors

The gendering of architecture is a well established tradition dating back to prehistoric cultures.49 The concept was formally theorised by Vitruvius in his description of the Greek orders as masculine (Doric), feminine (Ionic) and maiden (Corinthian) which were carried through to the Italian Renaissance.50 In France from the mid-eighteenth century buildings were also described in terms of sexual differences by writers such as Blondel and Laugier.51 In the early twentieth century gender terms were largely removed from the language of architectural criticism because they were seen to be a convention of criticism that was common to all of the arts and were therefore deemed unsuited to defining what was specific and unique to architecture.52 Nevertheless, in his essay Masculine, Feminine or Neuter Adrian Forty recognises that gender

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49 Diane Bolger, Gender in Ancient Cyprus: Narratives of Social Change on a Mediterranean Island (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003), 37.
50 Vitruvius, The Ten Books on Architecture, 103-104.
terminology had supplied an important metaphor for the best part of two millennia, and it was therefore unlikely that these mental distinctions would cease simply because the metaphors used to signify them had become unsuitable.\footnote{Forty, “Masculine, Feminine or Neuter,” 143.} Indeed, the following discussion illustrates how deeply embedded the notion of gender was for Steiner and others working in the early years of the twentieth century.

According to the architectural theorist Diana Agrest

the body in architecture is not only an essential subject, but one, moreover, indissolubly linked to the question of gender and sex, a question that has generated the most extraordinary metaphors in the elaboration of an architectural ideology.\footnote{Diana Agrest, Architecture From Without: Theoretical Framings for a Critical Practice (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 174.}

Some of these extraordinary metaphors are to be found in both Steiner’s writings and buildings. Steiner’s description of the different qualities of gender that are expressed in the original Indo-European languages as ‘masculine,’ ‘feminine’ and ‘neuter’ provides an interesting starting point. According to Steiner, in the early stages of human development there existed a primitive clairvoyance in humans that perceived a living, spiritual quality within things. He believed, for example, that the sun and the moon were perceived as gendered as a result of elemental beings living in the sun being experienced as brothers and sisters.\footnote{Steiner, Eurythmy: An Introductory Reader, 173.} He also described how in antiquity the sun was felt to be a brother and the moon a sister.\footnote{Steiner noted that in modern German the genders were reversed so that the sun (\textit{die Sonne}) is feminine and the moon (\textit{der Mond}) is masculine.} Similarly, the day was perceived as the son and the night as the daughter in the Northern myth of the giant Norwi.\footnote{Steiner, Eurythmy: An Introductory Reader, 173.}

Steiner interpreted the gender of language as a product of the connection primitive people held with the external world in which character traits were the source for determining gender. For example, he explained that the elephant (\textit{der Elefant}) was considered strong and therefore was given the masculine gender, while the mouse (\textit{die Maus}) was considered weak and therefore was given the feminine gender.\footnote{Steiner, Eurythmy: An Introductory Reader, 173.} Though many languages are inherently structured through gender, Steiner’s assignment of stereotypical gender norms seems archaically sexist by twenty first
century standards. Steiner’s attitude towards women however was not inherently sexist. Rather, he advocated full equality for women in all areas of social, economic and political life. In his book *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*, Steiner made a case for human characteristics to be explained according to the nature of the individual, rather than generic associations based on one’s gender. He lamented that

> The activity of a man in life is determined by his individual capacities and inclinations; that of a woman is supposed to be determined exclusively by the fact that she is, precisely, a woman. Woman is supposed to be a slave of the generic, of what is universally womanish.

He argued that ‘what women are capable of according to their nature should be left to women to decide.’ In 1894 when this book was first published, these were relatively liberal opinions and reflected the concept of individual freedom that was at the very core of Steiner’s philosophy. For Steiner the notion of individuality was of greater significance than the sexual characteristics of gender because it moved beyond the materialistic view that categorised the human being according to physiological differences, to one that saw the human being as a unified, spiritual whole. He did not wish to ‘crawl into bleakness or asceticism or to deny sexuality,’ but rather to move beyond gender, beyond the personal, in order to receive knowledge of the inner nature of the human being that transcended sex. In articulating his vision of the wholeness of the individual, Steiner described a future androgynous human being in which

> both the male soul in the female body and the female soul in the male body ... become double-sexed through fructification by the spirit. Thus man and woman are different in their external form; internally their spiritual one-sidedness is rounded out to a harmonious whole.

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59 Language and gender is a field of study within sociolinguistics that falls beyond the scope of this thesis. For a more detailed discussion of the use of gender in language see Jennifer Coates, *Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language* (London: Longman, 1986).


61 Steiner, *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*, 227.

62 Steiner, *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*, 227.


64 Steiner, *Cosmic Memory*, 91.
This statement was made in relation to the concept of human evolution, in which Steiner perceived an androgynous, ancient mystical archetype of humankind that had been separated into two genders and that would, in the distant future, become a supra-sexual whole. This can be read as a revival of Plato’s description of the original androgynous nature of humankind that had been divided into two by the ancient god, Zeus, causing each half to strive to reunite with its other half in order to restore its original wholeness.65

A more direct source for Steiner’s occult conception of androgyny can be found in Goethe’s most famous literary work, *Faust*.66 Camille Paglia, author of the literary critique, *Sexual Personae*, writes

> Faust has a variety of sexual personae, more than any other work of major literature. Goethe inserts romantic androgynes into the traditional Faust story. Faust’s acquisitive western intellect is invaded by hybrid sexual forms, bursting out of the alchemic unconscious. All of Faust is a *Walpurgisnacht*, a return to the occult.67

Paglia describes the double-sexed nature of the two characters in *Faust* that symbolise poetry, which she interprets as an implication by Goethe that poetry attains universality through a fusion of genders.68 Paglia perceives Goethe’s androgynes as ‘fitting symbols for his life work with its titanic all inclusiveness’ and offers an even-handed reading of Romanticism, claiming that rather than making ‘large, simple gestures of rebellion,’ it was in fact ‘charged with sexual complexity and ritualism.’69

The same might also be said of the sexual references evident in Steiner’s architectural forms. While at first glance they can appear to be rather crude in their suggestive symbolism, many of the forms carry a kind of double coding that can be read simultaneously as both male and female. This is especially evident in the

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66 The association of androgyny with figures in Goethe’s Faust has been extensively documented by Wilhlem Emrich in *Die Symbolik von Faust II: Sinn und Vorformen* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1957).
ambiguous gender images of the Boiler House which displays a hybridised sexuality with multi-layered meanings. United in the one building are forms that are strongly suggestive of both male and female genitalia. Taken in isolation the double domes at the front of the building resemble breasts. From the side, these same domes, read in conjunction with the phallic, thrusting chimney, look more like testicles (Figures 8.16, 8.17 and 8.18). The chimney projects itself into space and extends its reach even further through the excretion of smoke, much like a penis excreting urine or ejaculating.

Figure 8.16: Boiler House, front and side elevations, Rudolf Steiner, 1915.

Figure 8.17: Side view of the Boiler house from the West.
Source: Pehnt, Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach, 84.
Figure 8.18: Detail of the double domes of the Boiler house.
Source: Pehnt, Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach, 85.

It is possible that this dual representation of male and female genitalia was a conscious attempt by Steiner to move beyond the dichotomy of gender in order to
create a higher, transcendent form. This notion appears in the Greek myth of Hermaphroditus, in which male and female lovers merged into a higher and more powerful androgynous form that was capable of self-fertilisation.\(^{70}\) This concept has its origins in the East where deities of a dual nature frequently occur.\(^{71}\) Having developed out of a synthesis of Greek and Eastern ideas, Gnosticism also emphasises the principle of androgyny, perceiving God as the reconciliation of opposites. According to the Gnostics, the masculine ‘Father of Creation’ created all things via matter (the flesh) while the ‘Mother-spirit’ created the soul of all living things.\(^{72}\)

Steiner presented his own occult understanding of the concept of androgyny in his book *Cosmic Memory*, which contained essays originally published in monthly instalments in 1904 in the Theosophical periodical, *Lucifer Gnosis*.\(^{73}\) In offering an account of the prehistoric evolution of the earth and humanity, Steiner described how, in Lemurian times, humanity had existed as an androgynous being that reproduced internally without the need for a partner. He claimed that the differentiation into male and female had been a necessary part of humanity’s evolutionary development in order to develop the capacity of individual thinking and ego consciousness. According to Steiner, this split could eventually be overcome by following a path of spiritual development.\(^{74}\)

The concept of androgyny is expressed in architectural form by Steiner through the power of metaphor. In juxtaposing the dome and tower he creates a direct dialogue between the rich associations these motifs carry. Two of the most constant and enduring analogies they invoke are that of the cave or dome as a womb and the column or tower as a phallus. These analogies lead to a chain of related concepts that link the womb to architectural notions of interiority, protection and birth, and the penis to notions of exteriority, power and virility. Although Steiner denied the use of any symbolism in his architecture, his own words indicate that he was certainly...

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conscious of the loaded meanings these forms carried when he chose to use them in his buildings.

The *Boiler House* illustrates this in multiple ways (Figures 8.19, 8.20, 8.21 and 8.22). For example, Steiner described entering into the form of the architraves and enlarging it into the form of the chimney. Making a rather obvious allusion to the act of procreation he declared

> There is no other way of going about creating things than by trying to get inside them. This slipping into things and being inside them is another way of imitating the creative forces in nature ...\(^75\)

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75 Steiner, *Architecture: An Introductory Reader*, 120.
The sprouting protrusions on the shaft of the chimney lend it an unmistakable plant-like quality. In his knowledge of biology, Steiner would have been well aware that plants are often hermaphroditic, bearing both male and female reproductive organs.

Steiner made other references to reproduction, describing how the relief work on the interior walls of the First Goetheanum created a sense of the walls ‘being alive and giving birth’ to the three-dimensional shapes. 76 Steiner was especially concerned with the interior of the building, proclaiming that the external appearance was of ‘no consequence’ since it was merely for the secular world. 77 By contrast, he declared that the interior space must be ‘the most perfect form that is possible.’ 78 The interior provided Steiner’s followers with a maternal, protective space for the private esoteric activities of the initiated, yet at the same time, evoked a sense of pregnant anticipation of Anthroposophy’s broader spiritual mission in which the fruits of its internal spiritual quest would be brought forth to the rest of the world through their external practical pursuits.

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76 Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 91.
Further sexual allusions are evoked by the *vesica piscis* form created by the interlocking circles of the floor plan of the *First Goetheanum*. The pointed oval shape of the *vesica piscis* is also referred to as a Mandorla, the Italian word for almond. During medieval times, the almond was interpreted as a symbol of the embryo enclosed in the uterus. The *vesica piscis* is also widely associated with symbolic representations of the vulva or sacred *yoni*. In Hinduism and Tantrism, the *yoni* is the generative organ of Devi, the Great Goddess. Early Christian art often represented Christ inside a *vesica piscis*, representing the womb of the Virgin Mary (Figure 8.23).

**Figure 8.23:** Evangelistar von Speyer, Manuscript in the Badische Landesbibliothek, Karlsruhe, Germany. Shows Christ in the vesica shape surrounded by the animal symbols of four evangelists, c1220. Source: [http://www.blb-karlsruhe.de/](http://www.blb-karlsruhe.de/)

Although the form of the *vesica piscis* is not apparent in the floor plan of the *Second Goetheanum*, the shape of the plan is rather uterus-like. The building is entered into via a canal that might be likened to the vagina (Figure 8.24).

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79 Refer to previous discussion of Steiner’s use of the *vesica piscis* in the Chapter 4: Threefold Polarity.
This iconography is particularly suited to the occult nature of the activities that occur inside the building. Paglia describes woman’s body as a secret, sacred space, claiming that

The womb is the veiled Holy of Holies ... The taboo on woman’s body is the taboo that always hovers over the place of magic. Woman is literally the occult, which means ‘the hidden.’ These uncanny meanings cannot be changed, only suppressed, until they break into cultural consciousness again.83

In her book *Architecture From Without*, Diana Agrest discusses the historical negation of woman’s gender in architecture.84 She argues that woman is excluded, repressed by the male anthropocentric discourse of Western architecture developed by Vitruvius and rewritten by Renaissance authors Alberti, Filarete and Francesco Di Giorgio Martini.85 Agrest claims that whenever woman has surfaced from her space of repression she has been called a witch, a hysteric, and been burned or locked up.86 Again, woman is tied to occult concepts, but here Agrest relates this understanding

85 Agrest, *Architecture From Without*, 175.
specifically to the unconscious of architectural rules and configurations established by the classical tradition.\textsuperscript{87} According to Agrest society has developed a symbolic order where not everyone can equally fit and those who do not find their place within this order are considered odd, abnormal or perverse and are labelled neurotics, ecstacies or outsiders.\textsuperscript{88} In trying to establish her own presence, rather than limiting herself to finding a way of fitting in, Agrest perceives woman as being placed within this category of mistfits. As Chapter Two of this thesis demonstrates, Steiner’s unconventional beliefs and ideals also secured him a place within this same category. Agrest argues however, that this outside position allows a critical discourse to be developed within the ideological realm of architecture that can allow ‘the inclusion of the denied, the excluded, the hidden, the repressed.’\textsuperscript{89} This is precisely what Steiner was attempting to achieve. Rather than remaining within the established norms of society and architecture, Steiner was intent on developing his own symbolic order. Within this order, he conceived the \textit{Goetheanum} as an interior space into which the hidden realm of the spirit could penetrate. Here Steiner’s gender metaphors tend towards more spiritualised notions that also found metaphoric expression in his anthropomorphomorphic architecture.

\section*{8.4 Spiritual Metaphors}

For Steiner the human being could not be understood at a purely corporeal level. In drawing upon the human being as a source of inspiration for his architecture, he also looked to the concept of the human soul. He alleged that

When the soul truly permeates the body, the body becomes the outward expression and the manifestation of the soul. The human body is then revealed to us as a work of artistic perfection, permeated by soul, an infinitude complete in itself.\textsuperscript{90}

Although in his own time modern culture had become fixated with the physiology and anatomy of the body, the question of what constituted a whole body up to and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{87} Agrest, \textit{Architecture From Without}, 175.
\textsuperscript{88} Agrest, \textit{Architecture From Without}, 174.
\textsuperscript{89} Agrest, \textit{Architecture From Without}, 189.
\textsuperscript{90} Steiner, \textit{Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts}, 9-10.
\end{flushright}
including the Renaissance had included the soul.\textsuperscript{91} Since the Renaissance, the increasingly detailed studies of western medicine had caused a fundamental shift in the conception of what constituted a human body. Despite this modern scientific understanding, the concept of the body as an instrument of the soul remained a central tenet of the Christian faith which informed Steiner’s philosophy. Blending his knowledge of science with his unorthodox reading of Christianity and his occult perception of the human being, Steiner arrived at his own peculiar understanding of the soul, explaining that

A little child can easily change the oxalic acid in its abdomen into folic acid so its organs receive sufficient folic acid. Folic acid also provides the base on which the soul and spirit can develop. But when a person grows old and can no longer generate sufficient folic acid, then the soul and spirit go away (Figure 8.25).\textsuperscript{92}

\textbf{Figure 8.25:} Blackboard drawing produced by Steiner during a lecture on December 22, 1923. Source: Kugler ed., \textit{Rudolf Steiner Blackboard Drawings 1919-1924}, 137.

\textsuperscript{91} Scott Drake, \textit{A Well Composed Body: Anthropomorphism in Architecture} (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008), 29.

\textsuperscript{92} Kugler ed., \textit{Rudolf Steiner: Blackboard Drawings 1919-1924}, 137.
Steiner understood the human being to be a three-fold organism made up of body, spirit and soul and applied this conception to the historical development of architecture. He claimed that architecture proper only began to evolve out of caves and subterranean chambers hewn into rock when the soul began to evolve out of its bodily nature. He used the example of the Egyptian pyramids to illustrate how the architectural form provided a vehicle for the soul to leave the body and be led upwards to the higher realms. In another lecture, he described how architecture reached its pinnacle in monuments for the dead. According to Steiner a primeval clairvoyance allowed people to perceive that at the time of death the soul forsakes its physical body. In order for it to be released into cosmic space however, it needed to be enveloped by the artistic forms of the tomb so as to give spatial form to the soul that would prevent it from being battered and torn apart by chaotic weather currents and thus allow it to find a path into the cosmic reaches. This recourse to a primordial impulse was very much in keeping with Wölfflin’s empathetic theory that Forms become meaningful to us only because we recognise in them the expression of a sentient soul. Instinctively we animate each object. This is a primeval instinct of man.

Steiner believed that if an architect considered the relation of the soul to the spatial universe then he or she must necessarily arrive at the right architectural forms. He regarded the Greek Temple as the embodiment of artistic perfection because in creating the work, the human soul poured itself into the architecture. Yet Steiner was by no means advocating a return to the architecture of Greek times. He believed that the mission of his age was to create a new architecture that reflected the soul nature of the human being while still responding to the impulses and aims of modernity as part of an ongoing process of human evolution. For Steiner, the pertinence of the Greek temple lay not in its formal elements, but in the fact that it reflected the life of the soul in built form. Perceiving the soul as a mediator between the human spirit and the bodily organism, he applied this same three-fold nature to his own architecture. In doing so Steiner described the different architectural elements of the First

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93 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 25.
94 Steiner, Architecture: An Introductory Reader, 39-40.
95 Steiner, Art: An Introductory Reader, 172.
96 Steiner, Art: An Introductory Reader, 172.
97 Wölfflin, “Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture,”152.
98 Steiner, Art: An Introductory Reader, 173.
Goetheanum as representations of different aspects of the human being, associating the columns with the body, the domes with the soul and the windows with the spirit.99

Steiner’s primary concern was for the building to act as a vehicle for articulating his spiritual conception of the human being. But by importing his philosophical concerns into the program of the building, Steiner largely denied the autonomy of architecture to articulate meaning in its own right. As a result, the highly suggestive anthropomorphic forms of the building tend to be more readily recognised on a physical rather than spiritual level—the ideal is overshadowed by the corporeal. Steiner’s insistence that his architecture must not be interpreted allegorically is in fact contrary to the anthropomorphic metaphors he himself employed. As a result, the interpretation of his architecture is limited to an extent by this corporeal imagery because the anthropomorphic references are not translated into a language of architectural making.

Nevertheless, the device of anthropomorphism allowed Steiner to articulate his ideas in such a way that helped lessen the resistance to their esoteric content by providing a means of explaining the unknown in terms of what is known. The concept of anthropomorphism also helps to locate Steiner’s work within a long and rich architectural tradition that has looked to the human being, in all its guises, as a wellspring of inspiration and catalyst for creativity. As illustrated in this chapter, anthropomorphism proved as relevant to the architects of ancient Greek temples as it did to Steiner and his contemporaries Gaudi and Mendelsohn. But unlike Gaudi and Mendelsohn, Steiner used anthropomorphism as a means of expressing a philosophical, rather than an architectural imperative. Though this resulted at times in a seemingly unsophisticated formal language, Steiner’s use of anthropomorphic metaphor was by no means trivial. Rather it demonstrates a depth and originality of thinking that adds another dimension to our understanding of both Steiner and the tradition of architectural anthropomorphism.

99 Steiner, Art as Seen in the Light of Mystery Wisdom, 117.
PART III

The Synthesis
Chapter 9

Philosopher as Architect

Architects who have aimed at acquiring manual skill without scholarship have never been able to reach a position of authority to correspond to their pains, while those who relied only upon theories and scholarship were obviously hunting the shadow, not the substance. But those who have a thorough knowledge of both, like men armed at all points, have sooner attained their object and carried authority with them.

Vitruvius, Ten Books on Architecture, circa 15BC

9.1 Translating Philosophy into Architecture

Having studied broadly across multiple disciplines in the fields of humanities and the sciences, the notion of privileging one area of knowledge over another was entirely foreign to Steiner’s way of perceiving the world. His worldview fostered ‘a consciousness of the common source of art, religion and science.’ Given this holistic outlook, it naturally follows that for Steiner, philosophy and architecture were not separate, individual pursuits, but rather complementary means of demonstrating the organic unity and interconnectedness of all things. However, the complexity of the disciplines of philosophy and architecture, coupled with a lack of formal architectural training, presented Steiner with significant challenges that needed to be resolved in order to satisfy the requirements of each practice. Although many early modern architects regarded themselves as serious thinkers, producing treatises that addressed not only architectural but also social, spiritual and cultural concerns, few modern philosophers tried their hand at architecture. One notable exception was fellow Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), whose own foray into the field of architecture, serves in this chapter to underscore the difficulty of such an endeavour.

1 Steiner, The Arts and Their Mission, 83.
2 For example, see writings by architects such as Bruno Taut, Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe in Programs and Manifestoes on Twentieth Century Architecture, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971).
When the initiative was undertaken to begin work on the purpose-built facility for Anthroposophy in Dornach, Steiner asserted that ‘... the artistic forms must proceed on the same principles as those from which Anthroposophical thought itself issues.’ He stressed however, that Anthroposophic principles must not simply be applied as abstract intellectual concepts. It was essential to Steiner that his ideas found expression in practical ways in order that they may be understood in a non-theoretical, concrete manner. He was deeply aware however, that such a position could be open to misinterpretation, acknowledging that whenever a worldview attempted to step into outer representation, it risked falling into crude symbolism that failed to capture the genuine intent of its philosophical foundation. He referred to such interpretations as non-art or anti-art, considering them to be a mockery of true artistic sensibilities. Whether Steiner himself managed to avoid such pitfalls is open to debate. Steiner’s architectural oeuvre reveals that his architecture underwent significant stylistic changes that demonstrate his continuous struggle as a philosopher-architect, working between the boundaries of the two disciplines, to find more effective ways to bring his theoretical ideas into physical form. Since architectural success can be measured in many different ways, determining Steiner’s merit as an architect is not a simple or straightforward matter.

This chapter explores the way in which Steiner communicated his philosophical intentions as a built reality with a particular emphasis on the design tools and techniques he employed to create architecture. As anthropologist Edward Robbins has recognised in his book *Why Architects Draw*, ‘in all processes of creation and its theorisation, there is room for different notions about just what the creation should be and how one best realises and communicates that creation.’ An analysis of Steiner’s architectural drawings and models, provides an insight into Steiner’s methods of architectural production. A comparison between Steiner’s methods and those of his contemporaries, Antoni Gaudi and Erich Mendelson, both of whom approached the task of architecture in very different ways, helps to ascertain where Steiner’s own strengths and weaknesses as an architect lie.

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3 Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, xii.
4 Steiner, *Art as a Spiritual Activity*, 251-252.
The interactions between philosophy and architecture are multiple and diverse. The success of such interactions is largely dependent upon the sensitivity with which they are handled. An insightful understanding of the limits and complexities of each discipline offers the possibility for such connections to add richness and depth to both. Links drawn between the two can provide original and creative insights into a problem, facilitating a broader approach that helps draw out the meaning and subtlety of the work, thus adding to its profundity. This thesis recognises that such associations can also be used in a divisive manner to manipulate a particular agenda or make a polemical statement. To what end Steiner employed the dual disciplines of philosophy and architecture, and how effectively he did so, is an important consideration in gaining a fuller understanding of his work.

While the exchange that occurs between philosophy and architecture can work in both directions, this thesis is particularly concerned with the way in which Steiner’s philosophy informed and influenced his architecture. As art historian and curator, Mateo Kries, pithily remarked, ‘Steiner was not a philosophising designer but rather a designing philosopher.’ Steiner used architecture, along with a variety of other practical pursuits, to demonstrate and articulate his philosophical findings. Expressing his theoretical ideas through different creative mediums enabled Steiner to add clarity and emphasis to some of his most difficult concepts. Steiner often noted that ordinary language was inadequate for explaining spiritual phenomena. Architecture therefore provided him with an alternative way of exploring and articulating his meaning. However, as Simon Unwin points out in *Analysing Architecture*, ‘knowing all the words in the dictionary would not necessarily make one a great novelist.’ Similarly, the expanded vocabulary offered by the language of architecture may have given Steiner greater choice of expression, but his ability to effectively use that vocabulary is of greater consequence.

The technical and artistic skill required to craft buildings, combined with the physical concerns of architecture such as materials, gravity, spatial requirements and so on, complicate architecture in ways that do not apply to philosophy. These concerns present specific challenges for the architect who employs philosophy in their work.

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6 Kries and von Vegesack eds., *Rudolf Steiner: Alchemy of the Everyday*, 204.
7 Steiner, *How to Know Higher Worlds*, 51.
8 Unwin, *Analysing Architecture*, 34.
How does philosophy find its place meaningfully in built form? How can theoretical concepts be embodied in material form without loss of their ideological purity? In order for the marriage of philosophy and architecture to really work, the level of integration between them must be such that neither is harmed by the union, and at best, both are enhanced by their alliance to produce an eloquent statement both architecturally and philosophically.

Such were the concerns faced by Wittgenstein in his Stonborough House (Figure 9.01). Like Steiner, Wittgenstein had no formal architectural training. He ventured into architecture in 1926, a year after Steiner's death, when he was engaged by his sister to design a large modern townhouse in Vienna.

For both Steiner and Wittgenstein, architecture and philosophy were intimately related pursuits that helped define and articulate their particular worldview. Wittgenstein stated that

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9 These questions serve to highlight the inherent complexities that exist in the exchange that occurs between philosophy and architecture, though their answers fall beyond the scope of this thesis. For a useful discussion regarding these questions see Michael H. Mitias, Philosophy and Architecture (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), particularly Chapters 6, 7 and 8.
Working on philosophy—like working on architecture in many respects—is really more a working on oneself. On one’s own interpretation. On one’s way of seeing things.¹⁰

In his comprehensive study of Stonborough House titled Mysticism and Architecture, Roger Paden argued that the connection between the house and Wittgenstein’s philosophy is much deeper than is generally recognised. He believed that ‘the house must have been intended to bring about the same kind of ethical/spiritual transformation that Wittgenstein hoped his philosophical works would bring about.’¹¹

Although Wittgenstein shared Steiner’s high aspirations for architecture, he wrote very little directly about the subject. Steiner, on the other hand, delivered many lectures on architecture and was far more prolific in terms of his architectural output, having designed and built seventeen buildings compared to Wittgenstein’s one. It is interesting to note however, that Wittgenstein’s singular contribution tends to be more widely recognised in architectural circles than Steiner’s multiple works, which aside from the main building of the Goetheanum, remain relatively obscure. This may be partially due to the fact that as a philosopher, Wittgenstein has enjoyed greater success and influence than Steiner, whose occult persuasion has tended to alienate many. As a natural consequence, it is understandable that Wittgenstein’s architectural pursuits may have been granted more attention by contemporary scholars than those of Steiner.

The fact that Wittgenstein’s architecture has a distinct stylistic character that borrows heavily from one of modern architecture’s most important pioneers, Adolf Loos, also gives critics a familiar model against which to assess Wittgenstein’s work, unlike the idiosyncratic and highly eclectic nature of Steiner’s architecture which has made his work notoriously difficult to classify and interpret.¹² Paden claimed that Wittgenstein’s ‘approach is Loosian from start to finish, and even where he diverges from Loos ... he does so for Loosian reasons.’¹³ As a result however, the cubic rectilinear forms, lack of applied ornamentation, and taut white surfaces of

¹² See discussion in Chapter 2: Steiner in Architectural Literature.
¹³ Paden, Mysticism and Architecture, 67.
Stonborough House tend to be more of a recast copy of Loos’ spare modernist aesthetic, than a unique architectural statement of Wittgenstein’s philosophy which made original contributions in topics as broad ranging as logic and language, perception and intention, ethics and religion, aesthetics and culture.\textsuperscript{14} Clearly disillusioned by the unexceptional character of Wittgenstein’s building, architectural critic Robert Harbison, complains that Wittgenstein’s architecture ‘breeds some disappointment’ in that ‘the house is more like other houses, than his thinking is like other thought.’\textsuperscript{15} Accordingly, during its day Stonborough House warranted not a single mention in architectural periodicals and Loos himself, although a friend of Wittgenstein, considered its architectural merit to be somewhat mediocre.\textsuperscript{16}

Unlike Wittgenstein, Steiner did not look to any contemporary architectural style or mentor. He believed that an entirely new architectural language was necessary to articulate his spiritual vision. He asserted this position in an article written for The Basel News just prior to the commencement of construction works on the Second Goetheanum in 1924, stating that

\begin{quote}
Quite clearly, the Goetheanum cannot be erected in just any existing architectural style since it is to serve Anthroposophy, which does not intend to function one-sidedly as a theoretical philosophy but is, in fact, an all-embracing model for human life as a whole, conducted in unison with the will of the spirit. It is the Anthroposophical view of the spirit that must generate any artistic style it may display to the world. Not to build in its own style would be tantamount to denying its very essence.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Although his architectural works do display certain Art Nouveau and Expressionist tendencies (quite opposite to the austere rationalism employed by Wittgenstein), they cannot be accused of being a mere adaptation of an existing architectural model. Nevertheless, in many respects Steiner did share the outlook and mind-set of Expressionism. As an architectural movement Expressionism has tended to be linked more by its attitudes and beliefs than by its formal language. In the New Vision of the

\textsuperscript{17}Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 170.
German Arts published in 1924, Scheffauer declared that ‘expressionism denied the need of an artistic training’ since it postulated that the expression of any inner impulse was artistically valid and therefore need not submit to the authority of professional judgement.\(^{18}\) Scheffauer despaired that this brought about the ‘disastrous consequence’ that inferior work, created by a myriad of imposters was solemnly received as authentic art.\(^{19}\) Clearly this did not apply to all Expressionist creations, as the technically accomplished works of artists and architects such as Kandinsky and Mendelsohn attest, however such an attitude opened the way for non-professionals to join the quest for new and original forms that would give material expression to their inner aspirations. It was within this milieu that Steiner began to create his own Anthroposophically inspired architecture. He stated

> Anthroposophical spiritual science must form its own style of building apart from all the usual building styles. Naturally, one can criticise this in every possible way; but nothing which makes its first appearance is perfect, and I can give you the assurance that I know precisely all the mistakes, and I am the one who says: if I had to put up this building a second time, it would be out of the same background, out of the same laws, but would be in most details, and perhaps even totally, different. But when something has to be taken in hand, then at some point it must be undertaken as well as one can do just at that time. While carrying out such work one really learns for the first time the actual laws of its being.\(^{20}\)

It is clear from this statement that Steiner was well aware that in his efforts to strike upon something genuinely new, his endeavours would not be flawless. However he saw these failings as a necessary part of the learning process and, given his emphasis on practical work, he believed that the best place for such learning to occur was on the job. Of course few architects can afford such luxuries and it was only through the full backing of the Anthroposophical Society that Steiner was able to indulge these ambitions. The total faith placed in Steiner by Anthroposophists is reflected in their staunch defence of even his least successful architectural attempts, such as the Boiler

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\(^{19}\) Scheffauer, *The New Vision of the German Arts*, 32.
House, which in its crude resolution reflects the inherent difficulty of cogently communicating a conceptualisation of spiritual forces in built form (Figure 9.02).

Figure 9.02: Wax model of the Boiler House produced by Rudolf Steiner, 1913. Source: Kries and von Vegesack, *Rudolf Steiner: Alchemy of the Everyday*, 175.

This peculiar structure was Steiner’s first attempt to creatively employ the plastic qualities of reinforced concrete. Steiner believed that this relatively new building material was not being exploited to its full potential.²¹ He therefore sought to employ concrete in a thoroughly innovative and original way, aiming to give authentic expression to the material’s fluid, sculptural possibilities, as well as to the prosaic function of the building itself. The fact that the final result received scathing criticism by outsiders was of less concern to Steiner than the fact that at least an attempt had been made to organically express the building’s utilitarian purpose.²² Anthroposophists were quick to reject any suggestion that Steiner’s lack of formal architectural training could have impacted on his abilities as an architect on the same basis that Expressionism accepted all creative efforts as authentic art. They believed that Steiner’s work, as the expression of an inner impulse received from the spiritual realm, was beyond criticism.

While Steiner recognised his architectural endeavours as only a modest beginning towards a new architectural style, he did share with his followers a certain level of

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contempt for expert opinion. His disdain was openly demonstrated in a lecture he delivered at Dornach in 1914, where he stated

We must realise ... once the building has been completed it will meet with all manner of criticism, particularly from so-called experts who will state that it is unconvincing, perhaps even amateurish. This will not disconcert us, for it lies in the nature of things that ‘expert’ opinion is least of all right when anything genuinely new is placed before the world. We shall, however, not become dispirited in the face of derogatory criticism levelled at our idea of artistic creation if we realise ... that it is precisely in our age that the origin of the arts and the origin of their particular forms and motifs is being misinterpreted by professionals.23

Pre-empting a negative response from experts and professionals before the building of the First Goetheanum had even reached completion suggests that despite his own acknowledgment of his limitations, Steiner’s amateur status as an architect was perhaps a sensitive matter for him. This premature attack on his critics sounds suspiciously like an attempt by Steiner to protect his own elevated status in the eyes of his faithful followers, should any potential criticisms bring his architectural authority into question. According to Wolfgang Pehnt, among Anthroposophists Steiner’s competence as an architect was undisputed.24 No doubt Steiner wanted it to remain that way.

Within the Anthroposophical Society Steiner enjoyed total authority, effectively acting as both client and architect for the entire building program at Dornach. He obstinately asserted

I alone am to be allowed to work on the artistic creation of the Goetheanum. It will not be possible to take much account of even the best intentioned advice or suggestions already offered.25

Steiner’s control also extended beyond the main public buildings, to private residences. He argued that in order to preserve the Anthroposophical character of the entire community, external architects should not be employed and he implored

24 Pehnt, *Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach*, 27.
landholding Society members to exercise patience until such time as designs could be carried out in accordance with his Anthroposophical principles. Although Steiner required this cooperation from the members through ‘their own free will,’ it does suggest a certain level of dogmatism. This doctrinaire attitude meant that the client, who often plays a vital role in drawing out peculiarities of a project that may not necessarily be apparent to the architect, was missing from the design process. As a result of this authoritarian approach, the Anthroposophical community at Dornach represents a rare example of one man’s holistic vision embodied in architectural form that is largely undiluted by external factors. Although it was necessary for Steiner to employ the expertise of trained architects, engineers and artists, the project remained entirely under his command.

With this level of control it also follows that the responsibility for any architectural failings must rest squarely with Steiner himself. Steiner argued that at the present stage of human evolution, human faculties were not yet sufficiently developed to fully realise the spiritual task of architecture, thus effectively absolving himself of any personal blame for his architectural shortcomings on the basis that at the current point in time it was simply not possible to fulfil what needed to be achieved. Again thwarting the unfavourable opinions of his opponents, Steiner deflected their criticism by claiming

> It is quite possible that something may arise that will appear comical in the eyes of the world. Let them laugh! It will stop eventually. If one were never to undertake anything of this kind there would never be any progress in human evolution.27

Thus, Steiner presented himself as an architectural maverick whose pioneering efforts would pave the way for future generations of architects to follow. Employing his clairvoyant abilities, he even went so far as to name 2086 as the year in which buildings resembling the double cupola of the First Goetheanum would appear throughout Europe, defining a golden age of architecture in which spiritual life would flourish. Although such claims may seem rather far-fetched, Steiner’s belief that architecture’s true realisation could only be achieved by successive generations

26 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 41.
27 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 43.
28 Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 154.
was shared by architects such as Berlage, Mendelsohn and Taut, who all believed their architectural mission to be far too lofty to ever be fully realised in their own time.\textsuperscript{29}

This mindset encouraged architects to experiment with new ways of expressing their architectural ideals and through this experimentation, the art of architecture was propelled forward into new and unfamiliar territory. Working in such a climate Steiner enjoyed the freedom to push boundaries and challenge conventions while at the same time, advance his skill and proficiency as an architect. Steiner’s development as an architect is most clearly illustrated in the very different design solutions he presented for the \textit{First Goetheanum} designed in 1913, and its successor some ten years later. Dennis Sharp noted in this regard that ‘the experimental nature of the first building and the almost blind groping for the expression of new aesthetic laws gave way to the imposing sculptural mass of the second.’\textsuperscript{30} Some of the disparity that exists between the two buildings may be accounted for by Steiner’s failing health and eventual death in 1925 which severely restricted his involvement with the reconstruction effort. Nevertheless, Steiner had dictated the essential form and character of the second building and a distinct transformation is clearly evident in his work. In every design that he produced, Steiner strove to find more effective ways to bring his philosophical ideas into architectural expression.

Although he had no formal academic architectural training, Steiner’s profound interest in architecture and its development throughout history led him to acquire a significant breadth of knowledge on the subject that he then brought to bear on his practical work. In his Autobiography he stated

\begin{quote}
Being able to observe the development of architecture was especially significant to me. While contemplating the forms of styles, seeds for the forms in the Goetheanum began to grow in my soul.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

During his University days in Vienna, under the tutelage of Joseph Bayer, a disciple of Semper and writer on aesthetics, Steiner studied Semper’s theories and was introduced to his architecture. In Vienna Steiner also kept the company of artists,

\begin{itemize}
\item[]\textsuperscript{29} Pehnt, \textit{Expressionist Architecture}, 35.
\item[]\textsuperscript{30} Sharp, \textit{Modern Architecture and Expressionism}, 156.
\item[]\textsuperscript{31} Steiner, \textit{Autobiography}, 294.
\end{itemize}
poets and writers who were all engaged in the artistic and aesthetic debates of the day. Later, in his roles as the leader of the German Theosophical Society and then as founder of the Anthroposophical Society, Steiner’s lecturing activities presented him with the opportunity to travel extensively throughout Europe, thus providing an opportunity to keep abreast of the latest developments in architecture. Architecture was therefore a subject to which Steiner dedicated a considerable amount of time and thought. As such, his greatest challenge was not in his ability to understand and appreciate architecture, but rather in his ability to employ the architect’s tools of design practice to translate his ideas into a physical reality. This process can be considered by turning to the drawings and models that Steiner himself produced.

9.2 Steiner’s Architectural Processes

Architectural theorist, Marco Frascari describes architectural drawings as ‘semiotic tools that make tangible what is intangible.’ What Frascari saw as the role of architectural drawing, Steiner saw as the role of architecture itself. However, in producing architecture, drawings are one of the primary tools by which the ultimate goal of architecture can be achieved. Drawings are a materialisation of the architect’s concept. Through the act of drawing the architect goes some way towards describing the invisible processes that take place within the mind, in order to demonstrate his or her intent. How effectively the architect’s intent is conveyed through the medium of the drawing can significantly impact how effectively the intangible is made tangible in the final architectural product. The preservation of meaning from idea, through drawing to building, can be a difficult task, even for those proficient in the art of drawing. For Steiner, whose drawing skills were limited, the challenge to translate his worldview into built form must have been an especially difficult one.

As early as the fifteenth century, Francesco di Giorgio recognised that architectural ideology is well served by the process of drawing, stating that

There have often been worthy authors who have written at length about the art of architecture, but they have used characters and letters and not representational drawings (figurato disegno) and so, although to the writers themselves it seems that they have elucidated their designs

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according to their intentions, to us it seems that through lack of drawings there are few who can understand them. For, following the imaginative faculty each person makes different compositions, which are often more different from the truth of the first idea than day is from the darkness of night; as a result the readers are not a little confused, because, as it is said, “so many readers, so many diverse interpreters.” But if such writers had matched their writings with drawings it would be possible to react to them much more directly, seeing at the same time both the signifier and the signified, and so every obscurity would be removed.33

Steiner recognised the potential of drawing to elucidate the ideas set forth in his writings and he filled hundreds of small notebooks with sketches and diagrams that attempted to clarify and define his spiritual conceptions. He even claimed that his book *The Philosophy of Freedom*, could feasibly have been drawn rather than written.34 In his lectures Steiner also made extensive use of blackboard drawings as a way of visually explaining his ideas to his audience (Figures 9.03 and 9.04).

*Figure 9.03*. Blackboard drawing by Rudolf Steiner showing basic form of First Goetheanum in section, 28 December 1921. Source: Kries and von Vegesack, *Rudolf Steiner: Alchemy of the Everyday*, 146.

*Figure 9.04*: Conceptual blackboard drawing for Second Goetheanum by Rudolf Steiner, 1 January 1924. Source: Kries and von Vegesack, *Rudolf Steiner: Alchemy of the Everyday*, 220.

Although these drawings have received considerable critical attention, they were created by Steiner to serve a different purpose to that of an architect’s conceptual drawing.35 Architectural drawings not only give shape to the architect’s idea, they invite a dialogue to take place between the concept and artefact, thereby allowing the

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34 Rudolf Steiner, “Wesen und Bedeutung der illustrativen Kunst” Lecture, 3 December, 1917 (Dornach: Sektion für redente und musiche Künste am Goetheanum, 1940), 21.
intricacies of the idea to be resolved through an ongoing process of evaluation and revision. As Frascari has described, through the act of drawing, architects divide, combine, emphasise, order, delete, fill and distort their thought-experiments on paper in order to discover something new.\textsuperscript{36} This process becomes frustrated however, if the particular architectural qualities being sought are not able to be effectively extrapolated in the drawing itself.

Steiner’s architectural drawings are rather naive free-hand sketches that provide limited information and exhibit a restricted exchange between concept and object. His pencil work consists of hesitant, broken lines that are essentially concerned with shapes and outlines. The recurring shape of the cross, for example, is clearly evident in his thinking and is transposed onto paper in his sketches for both the \textit{First} and \textit{Second Goetheanum}. The symbol of the cross was central to Steiner’s unorthodox Christian philosophy and in his book \textit{Outline of Esoteric Science}, Steiner offered his readers a ‘rose cross meditation’ as an archetypal symbol to be used in following his path of initiation into the mysteries of occult knowledge.\textsuperscript{37} However, in its translation from philosophy to sketch and finally to architecture, the central focus of the cross was almost entirely lost. In the \textit{First Goetheanum}, it was the gesture of the intersecting domes that carried a far more powerful presence in the building than the cross motif. The allusion to the cross form that was created by the north and south side transepts shown in the final plan did not figure in Steiner’s original concept and were only added later. From a structural perspective the braced walls of the transepts served a practical function by buttressing the point of junction between the two domes in order to counter their lateral thrust (Figures 9.05 and 9.06).\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Marco Frascari, Jonathon Hale and Bradley Starkey eds., \textit{From Models to Drawings: Imagination and Representation in Architecture} (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 4-5.

\textsuperscript{37} Steiner, \textit{An Outline of Esoteric Science}, 293.

In the *Second Goetheanum*, the plan roughly relates to the form of a misshapen cross, but as in the *First Goetheanum*, this is not able to be read inside the three dimensional space of the building, since the transepts are separated from the main auditorium space by dividing walls. In both plan and section very little changed or developed in the design from inception to completion. (Figures 9.07 and 9.08).

Where differences between the early sketches of the *Second Goetheanum* and the final drawings can be seen in the roof form, this was the result of restrictions placed...
on the height of the building by planning authorities rather than through any will of
the architect to modify the roof design (Figures 9.09 and 9.10).

The original sketched shapes of the buildings are faithfully, even rigidly adhered to,
and there is little evidence to be found in the drawings to suggest that the designs
went through any process of development, resolution and refinement. While the seed
of an idea may make its appearance in the architect’s first sketch, it remains
embryonic until the architect has fully explored the many parameters which act upon
it. This is a complex task that requires a considerable degree of rigour and expertise
in order to bridge the distance between revelatory vision, its articulation in
architectural drawing, and its materialisation in architecture. The idea is a potentiality
that must be brought into physical existence and drawing offers a medium through
which this can be facilitated.

This process is exemplified in the prodigious drawings of Steiner’s contemporary,
Erich Mendelsohn. As with Steiner’s Second Goetheanum, Mendelsohn’s Einstein
Tower was an attempt to exploit the plastic, sculptural quality of concrete. However
the means by which they each explored and expressed the potentiality of the material
differed markedly. Mendelsohn’s sketches consist of simple lines and contours made
with flowing gestures to provide a basic spatial outline of the building which
manages to capture the vitality, energy and essential character of the architecture
(Figure 9.11).
This character is entirely missing from Steiner’s hesitant markings which lack any sense of solidity, vitality or depth. Unlike Mendelsohn’s confident strokes which convey a sense of directness and immediacy that appear to actually capture the very moment in which his idea transformed into a pictorial expression, Steiner’s vague and indefinite lines fail to express their ideational basis. For Mendelsohn ‘a picture tells a thousand words,’ while for Steiner the instrument of drawing does little to illuminate his verbose writing.

While on guard in the trenches on the Russian Front in the First World War, Mendelsohn had studied the theme of the observatory in a collection of sketches he produced for imaginary projects that he had dreamt up. In 1919 Mendelsohn was invited to exhibit his drawings in an exhibition called *Architecture in Steel and Concrete*. They were ridiculed by some critics as being mere book illustrations with little or no connection with tangible architecture.\(^39\) However, in his monographic study of Mendelsohn, Bruno Zevi argued that ‘in the repetitive experimentation, in the constant search for alternatives, we can without doubt detect a method of disassembling and reassembling reality.’\(^40\) Mendelsohn’s sketches for the *Einstein*
*Tower* effectively document how the design developed over time.\(^4^1\) For example, Mendelsohn’s sketch of the tower produced in 1917 shows a simple outline of a typical, tapered tower protruding from the rear of a rectilinear ground floor structure (Figure 9.12). Two years later, the fluid lines of a subsequent sketch show the tower and ground floor merging into one organic, sculptural form. Shading gives the building three-dimensionality while bold sweeping gestures add a sense of density to the surrounding atmosphere (Figure 9.13).

\[\text{Figure 9.12: Sketch of the Einstein Tower by Erich Mendelsohn, 1917.} \]

\[\text{Figure 9.13: Sketch of the Einstein Tower by Erich Mendelsohn, 1919.} \]

As his sketches progressed, Mendelsohn’s exploration of space, form and fabric intensified. By contrast, Steiner’s sketches demonstrate no probing of architectural elements or yearning towards development.

The facility to draw effectively does not necessarily mean however, that a building will possess the qualities that are illustrated in the drawing. This was a problem for many Expressionist architects whose utopian paper fantasies were simply too difficult to construct. Even Mendelsohn’s relatively simple Einstein Tower encountered major technical difficulties with the complicated formwork required to pour the concrete. A change in construction method from concrete to conventional brick masonry for much of the building may help to explain why it never quite achieved the level of dynamism that Mendelsohn’s seductive sketches promised.

Regardless of an architect’s dexterity with pencil and paper, drawing as a translatory medium from idea to architecture, has its limitations. As architectural theorist, Robin Evans argues, ‘what comes out is not always the same as what goes in.’\(^{42}\) Evans refers to a ‘blindspot’ between drawing and architecture in which one can never be quite sure how an idea will travel and what will happen to it along the way.\(^{43}\) If the qualities of a drawing are not transposed to the building itself, then the drawing may actually do the architecture a disservice. Edward Robbins, maintains that drawing can limit an architect by precluding things that are not amenable to its instrumentality.\(^{44}\) In such cases the design process may be better served by instituting another way of working. One such alternative method is the use of models—a medium which Steiner appears to have been far more comfortable with.

Steiner had an aptitude for three-dimensional work as his sculptural works demonstrate. His most significant sculpture was *The Representative of Humanity* which is still displayed in the *Second Goetheanum*.\(^{45}\) Steiner explored the form of the sculpture through multiple clay, plaster and plasticine models which record the creative process that he and his collaborator, English sculptor Edith Maryon, went through (Figures 9.14 and 9.15). The model shown in Figure 9.14, referred to as ‘the first sketch of the group’ is traditionally credited as the work of Maryon based on a two-dimensional sketch by Steiner. The model shown in Figure 9.15, referred to as ‘the second sketch of the group,’ was produced by Steiner in the Spring of 1915.

\(^{42}\) Evans, *Translations From Drawing to Building*, 181.
\(^{43}\) Evans, *Translations From Drawing to Building*, 182.
\(^{45}\) See earlier discussion of *The Representative of Humanity* in Chapter 4: Threefold Polarity.
Modelling was a technique that Steiner also applied to the creation of his buildings. The plastic nature of modelling materials was far more amenable than drawing to the exploration of the complicated convex and concave forms that Steiner enthusiastically employed. In effect, Steiner used models in much the same way that architects use three-dimensional sketches, producing numerous models at various scales for each of his designs. For Steiner, the invisible was made visible through the medium of the model. Qualities of weight and mass became tangible realities and the physical act of model-making provided him with a direct means of engaging with materiality that activated both the mind and senses, affording Steiner a level of responsiveness and proximity that was not available to him through his limited drawing ability. This allowed him to define, develop and test his ideas more thoroughly and the sculptural, tactile quality of his models overcame much of the ambiguity of his flat, rudimentary sketches. In a *London Times* review of the Second Goetheanum, English architect, Montague Wheeler observed

> It was in no respect planned on the drawing board. It was conceived and sketched as architecture ought always to be sketched – that is, in three
dimensions; and for this reason it must be seen in three dimensions in order to be understood.46

Indeed, the powerful undulating and organic quality that is so readily felt in the physical presence of the building, is difficult to capture in two dimensions due to its non-orthogonal, aperspective character. While Mendelsohn’s sketches demonstrate an ability to successfully convey such qualities through the medium of drawing, Steiner’s talents in this regard lacked the mastery to properly transfer onto paper the sculpted spatiality his mind could conceive.

Steiner’s reliance on the three dimensional nature of models in the conceptualisation of architecture can be appreciated by examining the models he created for the First Goetheanum. These range from simple form studies, such as the small plasticine model he produced to indicate the basic form of the two intersecting domes (Figure 9.16), through to large scale studies of the building’s exterior and interior forms that detail windows, doors, columns, capitals and architraves (Figures 9.17 and 9.18).

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 9.16: Plasticine model of First Goetheanum, by Rudolf Steiner, 1913, Rudolf Steiner Archive. Source: Author, 2009.*

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Steiner also produced countless models of individual elements such as stairs, handrails, door handles and joinery fixtures (Figures 9.19 and 9.20).

Unfortunately the Second Goetheanum was denied the same level of detailing by Steiner. After his death, Steiner’s collaborators were left with the difficult task of divining his full intentions. This may help to explain why the building itself has the unsettling appearance of being a giant, oversized model. This peculiar quality might be attributed to a phenomenon discussed by Mark Morris in *Models: Architecture and the Miniature*, which suggests that through the model making process, the ‘objecthood’ of the architectural concept can be arrived at too soon.\(^47\) In other words, while the architectural concept may be sufficiently materialisable to be a model, it may not be sufficiently materialisable to become a building.\(^48\) Due to the scale of the model and the nature of the modelling material, it was not possible for Steiner’s

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model for the *Second Goetheanum* to contain the level of detail required for a finished building. But nor is it incumbent upon a conceptual model to do so. Had Steiner lived longer, in all likelihood he would have produced subsequent models that would have provided additional information or resolved various design concerns, as he had done for his earlier buildings. However, since this was not to be, it seems that rather than misinterpret Steiner’s original intentions, the exterior of the building has received little more detailing than the original model. Obvious inclusions such as windows have been made, however even these have been treated rather dubiously. Their placement and proportions have a somewhat haphazard appearance that fails to fully integrate with the rest of the design (Figures 9.21, 9.22, 9.23 and 9.24).

![Plasticine model of Second Goetheanum by Rudolf Steiner, 1924. Source: Author, 2009.](image1)

**Figure 9.21:** Plasticine model of Second Goetheanum by Rudolf Steiner, 1924. Source: Author, 2009.

**Figure 9.22:** The Second Goetheanum seen from the North East. Source: Raab, Klingborg and Fant, *Eloquent Concrete*, 19.

![The Second Goetheanum seen from the South West, 1924. Source: Author, 2009.](image2)

**Figure 9.23:** Plasticine model of Second Goetheanum by Rudolf Steiner, 1924. Source: Author, 2009.
**Figure 9.24:** The Second Goetheanum seen from the South West, 1924. Source: Author, 2009.

Work has continued on the *Second Goetheanum* since Steiner’s death and his models have been studied in intricate detail by his successors in an effort to determine those aspects of the model that were intentional features of the design and those which may have simply been the result of the modelling process, such as fingerprints and shrinkage of the modelling material. Having only reached a schematic stage, it is
reasonable to argue that the form model which Steiner had produced was never intended to be taken so literally. As a consequence of this literal interpretation, the building may well be a faithful rendition of the model, yet one suspects it may also be some distance from Steiner’s actual vision. Such suspicions arise from the fact that the conceptual model can only extrapolate certain aspects of Steiner’s design thinking, while neglecting others, and although it distils the general character of the building’s exterior form, it reveals little about the subtleties that Steiner would have undoubtedly hoped the building itself would bring to light.

At full scale the blocky, solid forms of the model become menacing and intimidating. The suppleness and malleability of the modelling material is lost to the hard, monolithic bulk of concrete that dwarfs everything surrounding it. This characteristic may also be due to the fact that Steiner created the model as an isolated, self-contained object, completely removed from its site and context. With no scalar points of reference, the model fails to transmit any sense of the building’s actual size. Of course real buildings can never be viewed as freestanding objects. Therefore, although presenting a model in this way may take best advantage of the building’s forms, it can be just as misleading as an architect’s deft sketch that somehow loses its essential qualities in transition to the object of its depiction. The architect’s ability to mediate this transition is an enigmatic, but nonetheless essential ingredient in the process of architectural creation. In inexperienced hands this leap does not always occur.

In this regard it is interesting to compare Steiner’s models to those of master model-maker and architect, Antoni Gaudi. As a contemporary of Steiner, and an architect who employed complex organic forms in his work, Gaudi’s models and their translation into architecture, provide a point of reference against which Steiner’s techniques can be considered. Gaudi’s designs were in fact so complicated, as to be ‘undrawable’, and hence models became essential to communicating his architectural vision.49 Yet, while the creative process of both Gaudi and Steiner relied heavily upon models, the types of models they created and the purpose they served were not the same. One of the most obvious distinctions is to be found in their level of detail. Even Steiner’s more fully resolved models of the First Goetheanum, pale in

49 Mark Burry, *Gaudi*, Lecture, Deakin University, Geelong, 21 April, 2009.
comparison to Gaudi’s. This is due to a number of reasons, not least of which is the amount of time they each dedicated to their respective projects. Steiner’s extensive touring and lecturing commitments meant that he was often away from Dornach and therefore had to rely heavily upon his collaborators to carry the project forward, often with only vague verbal directions from him. By contrast, Gaudi dedicated the last twelve years of his life exclusively to his seminal work, the *Sagrada Familia* (begun in 1882), resigning all other commissions and living on the construction site. The elaborate models he produced clearly articulated his vision and ensured that at the time of his death his successors were well equipped to continue his work.

Work continues today on the *Sagrada Familia*, led by New Zealand architect Mark Burry, who is responsible for the design and documentation of the nave clerestory, central rose window and Passion facade. Burry, along with an international team of architects, use Gaudi’s original models and drawings to create sophisticated parametric models that generate forms based on the underlying geometry of Gaudi’s designs that has been uncovered through extensive research of his models. The wide variety of model types that Gaudi employed provided a breadth of information and level of sophistication that is lacking from Steiner’s models which were essentially only concerned with general problems of mass and form. Gaudi’s famous inverted string and birdshot models which he produced for the *Church of Colònia Güell*, for example, provide essential information on the complicated structural aspects of the design by simulating the compressive loads on each column, arch and vault (Figure 9.25). Further to his structural studies, a multitude of intricate plaster models elaborate the form, geometry and ornamentation of his exquisitely crafted details (Figure 9.26). Architectural qualities of balance, scale, proportion, texture and rhythm are all primary concerns that are explored in Gaudi’s models.
Another significant difference is made evident by investigating the way in which Steiner’s models were built. Steiner tended to carve his models from solid lumps of clay or plasticine. This method is fundamentally different to the process of making architecture, which requires a process of building up rather than taking away. The very nature of these modelling materials prohibited a high level of refinement, unlike architecture itself which requires a sophisticated level of resolution. This does not necessarily invalidate the technique, but suggests that it is appropriate to only particular stages of the design process that do not require an exacting level of precision. However, as a result of relying so heavily on this method, Steiner’s buildings have taken on the same dense, lumpy quality of the modelling material. The degree of refinement that Steiner was able to achieve with this method was limited, which in turn, translated to the building. As with drawing, the medium of the model does not remain entirely neutral in the creative process. It too is an alternative form of architectural abstraction capable of leaving its own trace on the built work.
9.3 Steiner’s Architectural Feats and Follies

So, given what is now known about Steiner’s buildings and how he produced them, can he rightly assume the title of architect? Today, throughout most western countries, the title of architect is protected by law. This reflects the recognition that architecture, like other professions such as law and medicine, deals with complex matters that require the education, experience and commitment of one who accepts the task as a professional responsibility. Looking further back in history, the role of architect was much more broadly defined than it is now. The word ‘architect’ derived from the Greek word *arkhitekton* meaning ‘chief builder,’ and it is perhaps in this sense that Steiner might best be described as an architect. He successfully managed to fulfil the role of building co-ordinator, overseeing the many social, technical, economic and artistic problems associated with building. His holistic outlook was also in keeping with antiquity’s conception of the architect as a man deeply involved in the culture of his time, with architecture being just one manifestation of that culture. Architecture was not seen as an independent discipline as it is today. Vitruvius claimed that those ‘who from tender years receive instruction in the various forms of learning, recognise the same stamp on all the arts, and an intercourse between all studies, and so they more readily comprehend them all.’

This view was later reinforced in the Renaissance by Alberti and Serlio, who advocated that the architect must be a Universal man, who was not only proficient in the technical skills of drawing, surveying, geometry, arithmetic, and optics, but was also well versed in literature, history and philosophy, medicine and astronomy.

This, however, is where Steiner as architect does not quite deliver, for although he was highly accomplished in many of those fields, his drawing ability was at best, mediocre. As one of the architect’s most important tools, the necessity for architects to draw proficiently has remained constant in the profession from antiquity through to modern times. Reyner Banham, for instance, has called the persistence of architectural drawing ‘a kind of meta-pattern that subsumes all other patterns ...’ and goes on to claim in a rather overstated manner, that they were of such crucial value to

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the architect that ‘being unable to think without drawing became the true mark of one
fully socialised into the profession of architecture.’52

Nevertheless, we must also recognise that while drawings do have an important role
to play in the production of architecture, they are not the only means by which
architecture can be realised. While architecture and its representation are intimately
related, they still remain separate realities. Buildings possess an experiential
dimension that simply cannot be conveyed in conventional representational modes,
therefore Steiner’s buildings must ultimately be judged on their own merit,
independent of the drawings and models that produced them.

Steiner believed, rather naively, that if his architectural forms were artistically
faithful to his spiritual work, then even without knowing anything about
Anthroposophy, people would innately recognise the spiritual content of his
buildings and hence, respond favourably. This has not proven to be the case. The
spiritual meaning behind his highly unusual architectural forms remained totally
illegible to many, resulting in a widespread misunderstanding of his work. On this
basis, his architecture must be deemed ineffectual, in that it fell short of achieving its
primary goal of spiritual enlightenment for all who came in contact with it. That is
not to say however, that his efforts were futile. Rather, they serve to highlight the
inherent difficulty of such an interdisciplinary approach. In this regard, Juhani
Pallasmaa argues that

> An architect who attempts to both design and write about design has to
develop a sort of dual personality for himself. Without this dualism, his
intellectual appraisal will prematurely arrest the vulnerable, emotionally
motivated design process.53

Steiner’s goal was complete unity, rather than duality. Although the dual disciplines
of writing and designing undoubtedly inspired and informed each other in his work,
ultimately, architecture is not philosophy, nor is philosophy architecture. As such, it
is reasonable to conclude that while Steiner may have provided a way for the two
streams to draw closer together, his architectural endeavours, although sincere,

52 Reyner Banham, “A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture,” *New Statesman and
lacked an architect’s sensibility that might have seen the work find wider acceptance and appeal. The limitation of his own technical skills presented him with a handicap that did not burden his trained counterparts. Be that as it may, Steiner’s buildings are striking modern examples of architecture as pure spiritual enquiry. Being an outsider to the discipline of architecture, while actively engaging with its internal processes, Steiner provided an alternative way of thinking about modern architecture that acknowledged and responded to philosophical and spiritual concerns at a time when reason and objectivity had come to overshadow such intangible ideals.
Chapter 10

Steiner’s Architectural Heritage

The past reminds us of timeless human truths and allows for the perpetuation of cultural traditions that can be nourishing. It contains examples of mistakes to avoid, preserves the memory of alternative ways of doing things, and is the basis for self-understanding.


10.1 Steiner and the Concept of Style

Having considered Steiner’s theories and their application to his own architectural pursuits, the purpose of this chapter is to recognise the fruitful points of contact between his unorthodox approach and the broader landscape of historical architectural principles and styles. By expanding the critique of Steiner’s architecture from one that has largely focused on its formal characteristics, to one that also includes its cultural meanings and associations, the influences of earlier architectural precedents can be more readily discerned and appreciated in his work. However these influences are not necessarily linear or causal. His eclectic approach permitted a variety of different, and even antithetical ideological and stylistic references to come together in his work without invalidating each other. By investigating Steiner’s indebtedness to ancient classical, baroque, esoteric, and organic streams of thought, and in turn the influence his translation of these ideas had upon others, a more nuanced understanding of his formal language and its philosophical basis is made possible. This helps to locate his architecture within a genealogy that has, until now, remained largely undefined. A spiritual thread runs through this history demonstrating that Steiner’s architecture is not as idiosyncratic as it has often been portrayed.
The concept of style was a dominant theme in Steiner’s work. This reflected a wider social interest in the stylistic development of art and architecture as formulated in the late nineteenth century by influential historians and theorists such as Heinrich Wölflin and Alois Riegl. Wölflin perceived style as an evolutionary development over time that vacillated from classical to baroque tendencies, classified by five polar formal categories, namely linear and painterly, plane and recession, closed and open, multiplicity and unity, and clearness and unclearness.¹ Riegl’s theory advanced a continuous historical evolution of style between haptic and optic modes of representation, reflecting a distinctive artistic will that governed each period of art.² The tendency to interpret styles in evolutionary terms was a product of nineteenth century thinking in the natural sciences. Writing in 1910, American architect Thomas Hastings, drew direct parallels between the development of architectural styles and Darwin’s theory of evolution, claiming that

As in nature, the types and species of life have kept pace with the successive modifications of lands and seas and other physical conditions imposed upon them, so has architectural style in its growth and development until now kept pace with the successive modifications of civilisation. For the principles of development should be as dominant in art as they are in nature. The laws of natural selection and of the survival of the fittest have shaped the history of architectural style just as truly as they have the different successive forms of life.³

Just as new developments could be traced within the changing forms of species, a building’s physical features were also seen as a visual revelation of its evolutionary development, arising out of the specific influences of its particular time and place.

In his endeavour to develop an entirely new language of architecture appropriate to the modern age, Steiner was certainly not immune to these evolutionary interpretations of

² Riegl, Problems of Style, 1893; Alois Riegl, Late Roman Art Industry (1901; Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985).
style. He also perceived style as an evolutionary process, but one that was based upon a spiritual, rather than scientific premise. According to Steiner, style was the product of unconscious feelings within the soul being poured out into architecture. Their expression changed over time in accordance with the spiritual evolution of humanity. Throughout the course of history, Steiner perceived a gradual separation of the human soul from the spirit world, which he claimed had been a necessary process in the development of humankind in order to allow humanity the freedom to re-unite with the spirit world without being compelled to do so, as he perceived had been the case in earlier epochs. According to Steiner, this demanded a new architectural style that would lead out beyond interior space, to the depths of infinity. He imagined an architecture that would ‘represent an overcoming of physical substance in the whole way the walls, the architectural motifs, the columns, and all the decorations are treated.’ In attempting to negate architecture’s corporeality, Steiner’s conception of style had little to do with the defining patterns and recognisable elements generally considered indispensable to the concept and that play a crucial role in informing the way in which architecture is interpreted and perceived within the dominant European narrative of architectural history. Rather than seeking to imitate the formal attributes of earlier styles, Steiner was attempting to tap into the spiritual forces embodied within the forms and, through his self-proclaimed visionary awareness of cosmic evolution, allow them to pass over into a new creative expression. On this basis, Steiner was able to draw upon different stylistic references without contradiction, since they were all drawn from the same ‘spiritual sea of the cosmos.’

### 10.2 Temple Influences

For Steiner, the temple of the future was mysteriously foreshadowed in the past and this notion allowed him to connect his work with one of humanity’s greatest mysteries—the legend of Solomon’s Temple. Solomon’s Temple is believed to have been built on

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4 Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 33.
Mount Moriah in Jerusalem in 953BC by King Solomon, ruler of the ancient Israelites. There are various accounts of the temple in the *Old Testament*, however, exactly what it looked like or how it was planned is not known. This riddle has ignited the imagination of artists and architects for centuries. Its design was most probably adopted from various Mesopotamian and Egyptian temples and is said to have had two large bronze columns, named Joachim and Boaz, at its front portal. Steiner made possible allusions to these columns in the stage set he created for the Theosophical Society’s Munich Congress of 1907, where he erected two columns with the initials ‘J’ and ‘B’ inscribed in them. Steiner cryptically referred to these initials as the first two letters of two words that he was ‘not entitled to utter.’ The massive pair of external piers on either side of the *Second Goetheanum* hint at the same reference (Figure 10.01).

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**Figure 10.01**: Second Goetheanum, external pier, North side, built in 1925. Source: Stuten and Hammacher, *Der Goetheanum-Bau in Seiner Landschaft*, 72.

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8 “And he reared up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz.” *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, The Second Book of Chronicles, Chapter 3, Verse 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1611).
The columns of Solomon’s Temple carry symbolic meaning for a variety of religious traditions and esoteric orders, with the notion of balance between opposing forces being common to most of them. In Masonic symbolism the pillar of Joachim represents the masculine, active principle of light, while the pillar of Boaz represents the female, passive principle of darkness.\textsuperscript{10} In other esoteric traditions the two pillars represent complementary opposites (eg: good and evil, spirit and matter) and it is the task of the initiate to reconcile these opposing forces into a single principle of harmonious unity.\textsuperscript{11} As discussed in Chapter Four, the concept of polarisation was a central tenet of Steiner’s worldview, lending support to the notion that Steiner drew upon the symbolism of Solomon’s Temple as a means of expressing his esoteric concepts in architectural form.

Carl Kemper, an architect who was involved in the completion of the Second Goetheanum, undertook a detailed study of the First Goetheanum which also indicated certain relationships between the geometry of the intersecting circles of its floor plan and the dimensions of Solomon’s Temple (Figure 10.02).\textsuperscript{12} The seven pairs of carved timber columns that Steiner employed in the large dome of the First Goetheanum suggest a correspondence with the seven pillars referred to by Solomon in the Bible’s Book of Proverbs which states ‘Wisdom has built her house. She has carved out her seven pillars.’\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Raske ed., Der Bau, 201.

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Allusions to ancient temples in early twentieth century architecture were not limited to Steiner. According to architectural historian, Wolfgang Pehnt, the principal and subsidiary axis of Solomon’s Temple was reflected in Bruno Taut’s 1919 visionary planning scheme for Die Stadtkrone. The Expressionist artist, Hugo Hoppener, also held a long fascination with temples. Hoppener, who was well versed in Steiner’s writing and lectures, had been producing imaginative temple designs several years prior to the design of the First Goetheanum and is said to have been rather disgruntled at not having received an invitation to Dornach to work on the project. The translation of temple architecture also played an important role in the works of a number of notable architects including Joseph Olbrich’s Secession Building, built in Vienna in 1897 and Peter Behrens’ AEG Turbine Factory, built in Berlin between 1908 and 1910 (Figure 10.03). Wenzil Hablik’s visionary sketches of crystalline temples from 1914 and Hendrik Berlage’s imaginary scheme, Pantheon of Mankind, created in 1915, are examples of unrealised projects that explored the theme of the temple.

15 Pehnt, Rudolf Steiner, Goetheanum, Dornach, 31.
These examples serve to illustrate that Steiner’s referencing of ancient temples was by no means exceptional, and in fact, proved to be a recurrent theme that helped to enrich and inspire modernism’s search for new architectural forms. There is however, a fundamental difference in the way that Steiner used temples as an architectural precedent compared with that of his contemporaries. Whereas for many modern architects, the temple provided a tried and tested architectural lexicon that could be drawn upon as a catalyst for new forms, Steiner was attempting to invent an entirely new architectural language based upon the incorporeal spiritual ideals that the temple embodied—a mighty task for even the greatest of architects!

As a case in point, Behrens’ stylistic references to the classical temple in the AEG Turbine Factory helped to appropriate the new factory building type into an established architectural idiom that demonstrated power, strength and stability. By contrast, Steiner employed the archetype of the temple as a way to enshrine what the human being held most sacred in their soul into built form. Rather than seeking inspiration from the temples formal characteristics, Steiner was concerned with its inherent meaning as a sanctified place that, he believed, was capable of reflecting a more holistic, spiritualised conception of modern life.
He was therefore not burdened by the rules of symmetry, proportion, geometry and regularity of parts that were essential to the architecture of Classical antiquity. This granted him licence to combine his classical temple references with a certain baroque sensibility that added drama, theatricality and vitality to his work.

10.3 Baroque Influences

In his study *Architecture of the New Baroque*, Michael Ostwald observed that

> While the baroque movement has only dominated Western European architectural taste once in history, baroque sensibilities have informed architecture constantly, in various minor, diffuse or subtle ways, since that time.\(^\text{16}\)

This is evident in Steiner’s architecture, which in many respects preserved the spirit of the Baroque, without necessarily employing its formal idioms or imagery.\(^\text{17}\) Although the term ‘baroque’ refers to a particular moment in history to which a defined body of buildings, sculptures and paintings belong, the term also operates conceptually and critically beyond these specific manifestations.\(^\text{18}\) Architectural historians John Macarthur and Andrew Leach have noted that ‘the field of baroque architectural historiography has long been a testing ground for the twentieth century historiography of architecture,’ and consider that ‘baroque and avant-garde are perfectly balanced terms around which to consider the role of history in modern architecture.’\(^\text{19}\) Therefore, while fundamental differences in style and content cannot be ignored, parallels between the conceptual and intellectual tenets of Steiner’s architecture and the baroque open up possibilities for a different understanding of his work.


\(^{17}\) When referring to the ‘Baroque’ as an historical style capital ‘B’ is used. Where the word ‘baroque’ is used to describe a conceptual or ideological phenomenon, lower case ‘b’ is used.


\(^{19}\) Macarthur and Leach, “Francesco Borromini and the Crisis of the Humanist Universe,” 329.
Interestingly, both Steiner and the Baroque have suffered considerable disparagement and ridicule from critics. In the case of the Baroque, the etymological development of the word itself reveals its pejorative nature, originally being used in the sixteenth century to designate strange or bizarre ideas. As late as 1888, Wölfflin wrote that ‘today we see no distinction between baroque and bizarre ... As an art historical term baroque has lost its suggestion of the ridiculous, but in general use it still carries a suggestion of repugnance and abnormality.’ The negative connotations of the baroque make its connection with the similarly maligned Steiner all the more intriguing, particularly given their mutual ability to elicit strong emotive responses. Rather ironically, Steiner accused the Baroque of being a degenerate style that desired only to perpetuate its subjective whims and fancies into the forms of the architecture—an infraction that he himself has often been accused of.

German art historian Erich Hubala points out that during the Enlightenment ‘the volley of abuse hurled at the Baroque’ was ‘mingled with other attitudes such as those of Goethe, who noted that the baroque contained a ‘sense of splendour and monumentality – containing immense diversity.’ Goethe scholar, Helmut Rehder, claimed that the Baroque style surrounded Goethe’s childhood and early youth and therefore had a lasting influence on him. Rehder believed that baroque paintings by Rembrandt and Rubens suggested to Goethe the notion of ‘inner form’ which was to become a fundamental concept of his aesthetic philosophy. Rehder also acknowledged Baroque landscape art as a model for Goethe’s romantic stage sets in which the infiniteness of the universe was given earthly existence. Given the direct and profound influence that Steiner attributed to Goethe, it is reasonable to suggest that Goethe’s baroque ideals may have unconsciously filtered down to Steiner. As previously discussed in Chapter Seven, Steiner had also grown up with Baroque and Rococo Churches forming part of the

22 Heinrich Wölfflin, Renaissance and Baroque, 23.
23 Steiner, “Architectural Forms Considered as the Thoughts of Culture and World Perception,” 12.
26 Rehder, Reflection on Goethe and the Baroque, 372.
27 Rehder, Reflection on Goethe and the Baroque, 372.
architectural backdrop of the local area in which he lived. Although Steiner denounced the Baroque style as the inartistic expression of a materialistic conception of the world, a translation of baroque principles can nonetheless be gleaned from his buildings.\textsuperscript{28}

Perhaps the most readily apparent correlation is to be found in the concept of movement, which Italian art critic, Gillo Dorfles briefly discussed in relation to the rhythmic, plastic forms of the \textit{Second Geotheanum} in his book \textit{Barocca nell’architettura Moderna}.\textsuperscript{29} Dorfles defined the building as ‘typically neo-baroque’ and went on to describe how Steiner’s use of concrete freed the architecture from the inherent static laws of brick and stone that resulted in ‘extreme vitality.’\textsuperscript{30} However, during the Baroque period tremendous dynamic effects were achieved specifically through the use of brick and stone. One must therefore look to other means through which this sense of motion was accomplished. In this regard, the use of geometry can be seen to have played a significant role. The elliptical plan of Bernini’s \textit{Sant’Andrea al Quirinale} (1658 – 1670), provides a pertinent example. Unlike a circle which has no directional emphasis, an ellipse has a long and short axis that creates a stimulus to movement. In \textit{Sant’Andrea} the elliptical shape was formed using the geometry of two overlapping circles (Figure 10.04).

\begin{figure}[h!]
    \centering
    \includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure10.04.png}
    \caption{Analysis of Bernini’s S. Andrea al Quirinale, floor plan showing the geometry of the oval configuration. Source: Julia M. Smyth-Pinney, “The Geometries of the S. Andrea al Quirinale,” 61.}
    \end{figure}

\textsuperscript{28} Steiner, “Architectural Forms Considered as the Thoughts of Culture and World Perception,” 11.
\textsuperscript{29} Gillo Dorfles, \textit{Barocca nell’architettura Moderna} (Milano:Libreria editrice Politecnica Tamburini, 1951).
\textsuperscript{30} Dorfles, \textit{Barocca nell’architettura Moderna}, 48-53.
This was a device used to great effect by Steiner. After having experimented with elliptical forms in a prototype for a tiny temple built in Malsch in 1908 by one of his Theosophical students E. A. Karl Stockmeyer, Steiner ultimately developed the impulse into the interlocking double-domed concept of the *First Goetheanum*. In both the plan and section of the *First Goetheanum*, Steiner created an uneasy tension through the overlapping of different sized, incomplete circles. This feature agreed with Wölfflin’s reckoning that ‘the baroque sought out ... free proportions as a matter of principle; everything that was self-contained and complete was contrary to its essential nature.’31 While the incompleteness of the *First Goetheanum’s* double domes created an extraordinarily complex engineering problem, it was essential to the building’s conceptual program in more ways than one. Not only to did it create a sense of dynamism, but the area of overlap between the two circles created the form of an irregular *vesica piscis*. As previously discussed in Chapter Four, the *vesica piscis* implied the principle of unification of opposites by acting as a point of balance between two polar opposites.32

Polarity was a concept that featured prominently in Baroque architecture. One way in which the principle was made tangible in built form was through the interplay of convex and concave forms. This was illustrated in the three-bay facade of Borromini’s *San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane* (1665-1667) in Rome (Figure 10.05). Compelling comparisons can be drawn here with and the undulating sculptural forms of Steiner’s *Duldeck House* built in 1915 (Figure 10.06).

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32 See discussion in Chapter 4: Threefold Polarity.
The fluctuating concavities and convexities of both facades appear to yield to alternating forces of expansion and contraction. The push and pull of interior and exterior space create recesses and protrusions that exploit the elusive quality of light. Solid forms seem to dematerialise through the powerful interplay of shadow and spatial depth, creating a sense of the infinite that responded to their common desire for access to the spiritual realm. Despite these similarities, Borromini’s inventive and layered use of classical elements lent his facade a level of complexity and contradiction that is not present in Steiner’s more monolithic structure. Nevertheless, in stripping the facade of formal references to the language of classicism, Steiner was able to use the baroque sensibility as a scaffold upon which to forge a new and expressive modern aesthetic that managed to convey the pulsating energy of its seventeenth century precursor.

Another tool that was employed repeatedly in Baroque architecture to enhance the sense of drama and infinite space was the merging of painting, sculpture and architecture into entire schemes so as to create a deliberate blurring of boundaries, both physical and imagined. A similar type of obscuration was to be found in the First Goetheanum where individual elements merged into the fluid, sculpted forms of the hand carved architraves, making it difficult to discern where the walls stopped and the ceiling domes began (Figure 10.07).
Ostwald has noted that ‘baroque architects decorated their interiors so that walls were painted and sculptured until they were no longer simply walls.’³³ This idea recalls Steiner’s pronouncement that ‘the temple that belongs truly to the future will have walls—and yet no walls.’³⁴ Steiner and the Baroque masters perceived the wall as a threshold to a higher realm. Through the use of colour and form they created a sense of permeability that alluded to the possibility of transcendence from earth-bound existence. The symbolic reference to the heavenly spheres above in the domes of Baroque churches and the First Goetheanum also achieved a heightened spiritual effect through the paintings that adorned them. Baroque interiors revealed a conception of space directed towards creating an illusion of infinity in which physical form was dissolved by the contrasting effects of light and dark, or chiaroscuro, that accentuated the impression of boundless depth. Steiner aimed to evoke a similar impression via different means, using his lazuré painting technique discussed in Chapter Seven. Like the Baroque frescoes, the motifs of Steiner’s painted ceilings served to enhance the domes’ metaphysical

³⁴ Steiner, Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts, 12.
associations, but the iconography he employed to achieve this drew not only upon Christian references, but also upon mystical and esoteric sources.

10.4 Mystical Influences

Mysticism and the occult are far from being representative of modern architecture as a whole, but given the growing interest they received from all levels of society at the turn of the twentieth century, they cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. This groundswell was a reaction against the rampant materialism of the day, offering refuge from the dehumanisation of technology and rapid industrialisation. Although mystical concepts may seem at odds with the scientific and secularised thinking of the modern age, the resurgence of ancient occult ideas was a cultural phenomenon that, through its transgression of conventional norms, offered space for experimentation, innovation and exploration of the unknown—all concepts that were perfectly consonant with modernity’s struggle to find its own architectural language. The non-rational nature of spiritual insight allowed a certain dynamism in conceptualisation that encouraged creativity and originality.

Interest in the occult did not necessarily require an outright rejection of reason, as Steiner’s own system of Anthroposophy suggests. Steiner’s ‘spiritual science’, as he often called it, aimed to reveal objective, verifiable truths about the spirit world, just as natural science does with regard to the physical world. He perceived the occult as a complementary path into the deep structures of reality that held the potential to reveal what might otherwise be overlooked by purely empirical means. These concerns were illustrated in architectural terms in the work of Dutch architect and theorist, J. L. M. Lauweriks (1864-1932), who took over Steiner’s role as the General Secretary of the German Theosophical Society in 1913 when Steiner left to establish the Anthroposophical Society. Lauweriks held similar mystical beliefs to Steiner, defining art as ‘an enactment of the cosmic drama, which uses symbols to create stirring images that show cosmic events in eloquent, deeply persuasive acts.’

Although Steiner rejected any symbolic interpretation of art, his own reliance on occult symbolism to

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express ‘cosmic events’ is undeniable. Notwithstanding this contradiction, the artistic impulse behind these symbols is instructive. Steiner and Lauweriks were both searching for a means of visually articulating the organic wholeness they perceived within the cosmos. Given this shared artistic urge, it is not surprising that strong resemblances are evident in the organic motifs they employed. This is particularly evident in Lauweriks’ Gallery for the Old Masters at the Cologne Werkbund Exhibition of 1914 (Figures 10.08 and 10.09), and Steiner’s carved timber mouldings in the First Goetheanum of 1913 (Figures 10.10 and 10.11).

These images were removed due to copyright restrictions


Figure 10.09: Colour sketch of ornaments by J. L. M. Lauweriks, Gallery for Ancient Art, Cologne Werkbund Exhibition, 1914. Source: Apke, et.al., Okkultismus und Avantgarde, 680.

This image was removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 10.10: Model of the First Goetheanum interior, detailing the capital and architrave motifs. Source: Biesantz and Klingborg, The Goetheanum, 23.

Figure 10.11: Model of the First Goetheanum exterior, detailing the carved timber moulding above the tripartite windows. Source: Author, 2009.
Both employed shapes that appear to eddy and ripple, as if propelled by some inner motion. The forms fold into, and grow out of one another, expressing the forces of expansion and contraction evident in the organic process of metamorphosis. Their contours and curves have no definitive beginning or end, suggesting a constant state of evolution. Lauweriks’ motifs however, are far more orderly and regular in appearance than Steiner’s. Referring back to Vitruvius, Lauweriks maintained that behind the cosmic order of the universe, there existed a creative mathematics which in turn influenced the ordering of architecture and society. He perceived in nature an organic cell structure that he applied to architecture as a systemised geometry. In so doing, he intended to imbue his work with spiritual significance by drawing upon ancient notions of mathematical constructs as revelations of divinity.

Lauweriks’ mystically inspired geometry was to impart some influence on Peter Behrens, however his theories were most fully embraced by his pupil and fellow Theosophist, Fritz Kaldenbach (1887-1918) who had also worked for a time with Walter Gropius. Prior to his premature death at the age of 31, Kaldenbach had established a reputation as one of the most gifted young architects of the next generation. Wolfgang Pehnt identified a striking resemblance between Kaldenbach’s unbuilt design of 1914 for a county villa (later published in 1920 in Bruno Taut’s Frühlicht magazine) and Steiner’s Second Goetheanum of 1923 (Figures 10.12 and 10.13). The similarities between the massive roof hoods, the central entrance door and window motifs, and the faceted facade treatment, suggest a connection that steps beyond purely ideological beliefs towards a shared, or in Steiner’s case, perhaps borrowed formal language.

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37 Colquhuon, Modern Architecture, 64.
38 Pehnt, Expressionist Architecture, 46.
Further comparisons can also be drawn with Behrens’ earlier *AEG Turbine Factory*, particularly in relation to the roof shape and overall massing of the building. Given the different functional and programmatic nature of the buildings these resemblances may be casual however compelling affinities are to be found in Behrens and Steiner’s attitudes towards the typology of the theatre as a mystically inspired expression of modern architecture. Both conceived the theatre as a temple for the arts—a lofty cultural symbol capable of stimulating spiritual awareness through a synthesis of the arts.39 In 1900 two works on the theatre appeared under Behrens’ name: the book *Fest des Lebens und der Kunst* (*Festival of Life and Art*), and a magazine article containing a proposal for a theatre design and the staging of a drama by German poet, Richard Dehmel (1863-1920), titled *Eine Lebensmesse—Dichtung fur Musik* (*A Mass of Life—Poem for Music*).40 The theatre was never built, therefore all that exists of Behrens’ concept is the plan and written descriptions he published. But in these, Behrens’ mystical persuasion is readily apparent. In one passage he wrote

> Dehmel’s *Lebensmesse*, through its liturgical quality, is a work peculiarly predestined for presentation in such a new theatrical style. Since the poet wrote with this intuition, the work actually inaugurates the new style. If drama has derived from religious cults, then I see a great sign for the

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evolving theatre style in the fact that again poets live who can give us and our times the forms for a Cult of Life.\footnote{Cited in Anderson, \textit{Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century}, 60.}

Behrens’ envisaged his theatre as a ceremonial place with a commanding location on the crest of a hill. He professed

If down below in our familiar environment we had arranged everything to relate to our daily lives, to the logic of our thoughts, and to our material sense of purpose, up here we should be filled with the sense of a higher purpose, a purpose that was merely translated into material terms, a spiritual need, the gratification of our transcendental nature.\footnote{Cited in Pehnt, \textit{Expressionist Architecture}, 141.}

This ideal never came so close to realisation as it did in Steiner’s hilltop colony in Dornach, with the \textit{Goetheanum} as its crowning centrepiece.

As a materialised example of these spiritualised architectural ideals, it is worth considering what influence Steiner’s theatre design may have exerted on those that followed him. Dennis Sharp made a fleeting reference to Walter Gropius’s \textit{Total Theatre} in relation to Steiner’s \textit{First Goetheanum}, drawing attention to the intersecting circles of the floor plans in both schemes, but carried the discussion no further.\footnote{Sharp, \textit{Modern Architecture and Expressionism}, 151.} A more detailed examination suggests that the initial impetus for Gropius’s design may well lie in Steiner’s Anthroposophical edifice. While Gropius is synonymous with the Bauhaus and its ethos of functionalism and industrialised production, in its initial phase during the early twenties it had been dominated by metaphysical and occult influences.\footnote{Rykwert, “The Dark Side of the Bauhaus.”} Gropius had proclaimed that

We do not intend to construct great spiritual organisations but small, secret, self-contained bunds, lodges, workgroups, and conspiracies so as to watch over and give artistic form to a secret, to a kernel of faith, until from the
individual groups a great idea arises ... which will at last find its crystalline expression in a great *gesamtkunstwerk*.45

The mystically inspired attitudes of Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee strongly influenced the Bauhaus curriculum. Itten and Kandinsky had attended Steiner’s lectures and Steiner was also a close personal friend of the artist Otto Fröhlich, one of the first Bauhaus masters.46 Such connections start to reveal a complex web of Steiner’s association with, and hence relevance to the development of the Bauhaus school. By 1923, the Bauhaus had passed through its ‘mystico-spiritualist’ phase, with mechanisation and standardisation gaining predominance. Nevertheless, this early heritage must have all but guaranteed Gropius’s knowledge of Steiner’s architectural endeavours which by that stage had become known throughout Europe. Gropius’s *Total Theatre*, designed in 1927 for the German theatre director and producer Erwin Piscator, goes some way to supporting this contention (Figures 10.14 and 10.15).

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Although the architectural language of Gropius’s *Total Theatre* and Steiner’s *First Geotheanum* was radically different, their planning and design intent were not. Much like Steiner, and Behrens before him, Gropius believed the theatre to be a place of spiritual refuge. He claimed that ‘the theatre must revive sensibility, it must be an active spiritual force, with which man, worn by industrial labour, recharges his own vital processes.’

The intersecting circles of the floor plans represent a symbolic union between the spiritual and secular world that both Gropius and Steiner believed could be achieved through the medium of the performing arts. However, Gropius pushed the device of the intersecting circles further than Steiner by enabling the individual elements of the floor plan to move and rotate, thereby allowing a more complete union to occur. The shifting parts offered any combination of orthodox deep stage, proscenium, central arena stage, or all three simultaneously. Gropius also added to the overall complexity of the geometry by layering an ellipse over one of the interlocking circles, further enhancing the plan’s spatial dynamism. Whereas Steiner’s plan essentially retained an orthodox theatre plan that separated the audience from the performer, Gropius’s flexible

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solution abolished the hierarchical division between the stage and audience, coercing the spectator to actively participate in the event.

The concern for a more interactive experience for the audience was addressed by Steiner, albeit in less spectacular fashion, in his Second Goetheanum. This time Steiner employed a trapezium shaped floor plan that opened wider towards the stage rather than fanning out away from it, as in traditional theatre planning. This created a perspective effect that foreshortened the depth between the spectator and the stage, increasing the audience’s sense of proximity and involvement with the performers. This spatial form, however, had the unintended consequence of creating major acoustical problems that have required considerable modification of the auditorium space to be carried out over many years in order to remedy them. In spite of such flaws, Steiner’s Goetheanums were at least realised. Gropius’s theatre, on the other hand, was never constructed due to financial problems and a growing rift between Gropius and Piscator whereby each claimed the theatre concept as their own. Steiner’s built precedents tend to render the dispute somewhat moot by bringing the issue of creative propriety into question. Although Steiner’s design response to the functional requirements of a modern theatre was far more traditional than Gropius’s solution that sought to transform the way theatre was experienced, the conceptual seed had already been sown by Steiner. This in turn might be traced further back to Behrens, for whom Gropius had worked almost twenty years earlier.

Architectural scholar, Stanford Anderson has noted however, that ideologically Behrens was of a school that included all those who were devoted to Sachlichkeit as a symbol of the times. In terms of architecture Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) was characterised by its apparent embrace of reality, free of any mediating qualities that attempted to ascribe transcendent meaning to a building. Steiner on the other hand, has been ideologically positioned among the pioneers of an alternative, organic stream of modern architecture. The theory of organicism was first applied to architectural theory

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in 1809 by the art historian, Alois Hirt and is generally used to describe buildings that exhibit an empathy with nature.\textsuperscript{51} Within this blanket definition there are many possible bases upon which architecture may be described as organic. It may employ biological, spiritual, philosophical or ecological concepts and it is often a consistency of attitude or outlook, as much as an aesthetic expression that distinguishes it as organic. As such, the notion of the organic provides fertile ground for further investigation into the divergent and reciprocal influences of Steiner’s architectural principles.

10.5 Organic Influences

In architectural theory a hard line distinction is often drawn between the organic and classical canons of architecture. Sigfried Giedion has stated that throughout architectural history there persist two trends—one toward the rational and geometric and the other toward the irrational and organic.\textsuperscript{52} While there may be some justification for this division, it is neither possible, nor desirable to entirely separate them, since the correlations and interactions between them are many. There are parallels and similarities which suggest that classic and organic are not mutually exclusive and often one acts as a catalyst for the other. This is demonstrated in the mixed philosophies and approaches adopted by eighteenth century theorists and architects such as Goethe, Schinkel and Botticher, whose allegiances swayed between the Classical and Gothic tradition, both of which were variously argued to be exemplars of organicism.\textsuperscript{53} Indeed, Goethe oscillated between rapturous accounts of Strasbourg Cathedral and the great classical monuments of Rome.\textsuperscript{54} Rather than creating a radical break from the past, organicism in many respects provided a tool for unifying the need to create a new architectural identity for the modern condition whilst also embracing time honoured values such as spirituality.

\textsuperscript{52} Giedion, \textit{Space, Time and Architecture}, 414.
and nature. This dual nature is apparent in Steiner’s architecture, as well as in his lectures that extol the virtues of both Classical and Gothic styles.

In 1910, architect Carl Schmid-Curtius was commissioned to draw up plans for a building in Munich that was to house the activities of the German Section of the Theosophical Society and provide a purpose built theatre space for the performance of Steiner’s first mystery drama. Steiner played a key role in the conceptualisation of the design, proposing that it should consist of dual cupolas of different sizes that were to intersect with each other in a specific relationship. While the overall concept employed the stylistic language of classicism, the joining of two unequal, partial domes was a conscious break from the wholeness and balance that was a fundamental tenet of classical architecture (Figures 10.16 and 10.17).

**Figure 10.16:** Model for proposed Johannes building in Munich, Carl Schmid-Curtius, 1911.

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Its irregularity and incompleteness lent it a certain organic quality since nature itself is never complete. It is always in a state of becoming as it grows and changes from one mode of existence to another. This is a characteristic that is more readily associated with Gothic architecture than with Classicism.\textsuperscript{56} For example, the influential Victorian art critic and proponent of the Gothic Revival, John Ruskin argued that

\begin{quote}
Nothing that lives is, or can be, rigidly perfect; part of it is decaying, part nascent ... And in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies, which are not only signs of life, but sources of beauty.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

At the same time, the conjoined sub-hemispherical domes also recalled the wide flat central dome and smaller subsidiary domes of the Byzantine masterpiece, \textit{Hagia Sophia} in Istanbul, Turkey (Figure 10.18). Spiro Kostof has argued that this iconic church was based upon a metaphysical rather than classical order, whereby separate parts abandoned their individuality to a larger compositional whole.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Paul Frankl, \textit{Gothic Architecture}, 11.


\textsuperscript{58} Kostof, \textit{A History of Architecture}, 264.
This was an objective that Steiner also pursued, albeit on a far more modest scale, and utilising different techniques. Whereas Steiner sought to dematerialise the building through the melding of its walls, columns and domes into a complete organic whole, the Hagia Sophia employed light as one of the primary means of dissolving matter and creating a sense of spiritual and spatial union. The forty arched windows around the base of Hagia Sophia’s massive central dome create the impression that the dome floats weightlessly above the nave. Rich, decorative surfaces of polychrome marble and gold mosaics refract and reflect light, further enhancing the interior’s ethereal quality. The expression of the spiritual realm in this church would surely have pleased Steiner in both its formal language and its namesake Sophia, taken from the Greek language meaning ‘wisdom,’—an etymological meaning that Steiner consciously used in the name Anthroposophy.

Less grandiose references are also to be found in the Munich model in the small octagonal building located adjacent to the main double-domed structure. Once more Behrens serves as a potential source of inspiration. The first building Behrens had built for the AEG was an octagonal exhibition pavilion for the German Shipping Exhibition of 1908. The strong, simple geometry of this small building expressed the precision and utility of modern industrialisation (Figure 10.19). In tracing Behrens’ own influences Stanford Anderson has suggested that the building was modelled on the prototype of the
Baptistery of Florence which employed the octagon as a Christian symbol of regeneration and rebirth (Figure 10.20).\(^5\) The octagon’s symbolic meaning derives from the number eight and its association with the resurrection of Christ. According to the Epistle of Barnabas, on the eighth day Jesus rose from dead and ascended into heaven.\(^6\)

![Baptistery of Florence](image-url)

**Figure 10.19:** German Shipbuilding Exhibition, AEG Pavilion by Peter Behrens, Berlin, 1907. Source: [http://www.gramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=494](http://www.gramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=494)

**Figure 10.20:** Baptistery of Florence (San Giovanni) 1059-1150. Source: Artstor online database. Image provided by SCALA, Florence/Art Resource, New York.

According to Steiner, the number eight also carried special significance in relation to the Gospel of St. Luke in which he perceived an influx of Buddhist conceptions and in particular, the concept of the Eightfold Path.\(^61\) The Eightfold path is one of the principle teachings of the Buddha, who described it as a set of principles and practices that would lead to the cessation of suffering and the achievement of self awakening through the liberation of the soul from elements that enslaved it from past lives. In his book *Guidance in Esoteric Training*, Steiner presented eight exercises which were an Anthroposophical version of the Buddha’s Eightfold Path.\(^62\)

Drawing from both Buddhist and Christian teachings, the idea of rebirth was central to Steiner’s system of Anthroposophy and was given creative expression in the art of

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\(^5\) Anderson, *Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century*, 98.


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eurhythm. Through its figurative gestures, eurythmy sought to reflect an inner awareness of the various metamorphoses that the human being underwent between death and rebirth. It employed the physical body as an instrument to fashion space through movement. This space was not perceived as three-dimensional, but rather as a qualitative space that expressed the state of consciousness of the human being before they had descended to earth. Steiner believed that it was the memory of this consciousness that inspired architects to create forms in space.63 The symbolism of the octagon was highly consistent with this esoteric notion and provided a formal means of expressing the concept architecturally.

Due to city planning restrictions, the plans for the Munich development were never executed. This ultimately proved fortuitous, for in 1912 Steiner was offered a large parcel of land in Dornach by Dr Groseheintz, a Basel dentist who felt a very close connection to Steiner’s teachings. In Dornach many of the ideas contained in the Munich concept were adapted to the new site. For example, the small octagonal building in the Munich model can be seen to have been translated into the three Eurythmy Houses that were built on the site between 1920 and 1921 (Figures 10.21 and 10.22). While the form of the octagon was still detectable in the floor plan of these houses, it had morphed from a pure geometric shape into a more irregular, organic form. Its eight sides were no longer equal in length and the longest sides had protruding sections that further distorted its Euclidean geometry. These side protrusions also corresponded to the form of an irregular octagon that had been split in half by the main body of the building. The roof folded in and out, following the line of the walls beneath, which splayed out at the top to meet it. The classical arched window lintels of Behrens’ AEG Pavilion were substituted in Steiner’s Eurythmy Houses with groupings of irregular shaped windows that, when read together, barely approximated the curve of an arch.

63 Margarita Woloschina, Eurythmy as the Mystery Art of Our Time, 1952.
http://www.eurythmy.org.uk/assets/mw1.pdf
Figure 10.21: Floor Plan of one of three Eurythmy Houses by Rudolf Steiner and Edith Maryon, Dornach, 1920-1921. Source: Zimmer, *Rudolf Steiner Als Architekt*, 134.

Figure 10.22: Eurythmy houses, Rudolf Steiner, Dornach, 1920. Source: Author, 2009.

The main building of the Munich design was also transformed in the design of the *First Goetheanum*. While still retaining the essential design feature of the intersecting domes, the revised design took on a less classical and more sculptural, organic appearance. The concept of the double dome also underwent a metamorphosis in the *Goetheanum’s* subsidiary buildings. In the *Glass House* for example, the domes were made equal in size but were split apart by a central concave section. In a study of Steiner’s ancillary buildings, Erich Zimmer identified a strong resemblance between the floor plans of the *Glass House* and the city gate at Porta Capuana in Naples, Italy (Figures 10.23 and 10.24).

Built between 1234 and 1239, the city gate consisted of two round towers made up of incomplete circles located on either side of a square middle building which comprised the gate. While the two buildings share no likeness in terms of function or aesthetic, the truncated circles of both plans are almost identical. Zimmer argued that since the city gate building had only become known in later publications, Steiner was unlikely to have known of it and on this basis declared the *Glass House* to be an entirely original design. But regardless of whether Steiner knew of the building or not, his repeated application of devices that found precedent in earlier buildings places his work within the ever-evolving current of architectural custom and tradition. This need not negate the originality or authenticity of Steiner’s achievements. Rather, it serves to emphasise his inventiveness and ability to re-imagine architecture in new and unusual ways.

Steiner’s work not only reinterprets and transforms architectural ideas borrowed from across the centuries, his understanding and adaptation of these ideas also evolves and develops across his own relatively short architectural oeuvre. A comparison of the stylistic elements of the *First* and *Second Geotheanum’s* designed ten years apart...
demonstrates this. Whereas the First Goetheanum employed classical elements such as domes and columns that were ornamented in an essentially Art Nouveau manner, the Second Goetheanum breaks completely from these conventions to exhibit strong Expressionist tendencies that strived towards a more thorough articulation of his organic principles. Similar principles can be discerned in the work of German architect and theorist, Hugo Häring (1882-1958). Häring articulated his theory of organic form building in his essay *Approaches to Form*, published in 1925, the same year construction commenced on the Second Goetheanum. Like Steiner, Häring propounded an expanded notion of functionalism that was concerned with far more than utility and aesthetics. They both demanded that every architectural task be pursued according to its own specific conditions rather than apply a typical or generalised solution. In 1926, the architectural theorist and critic, Adolf Behne, differentiated between functionalism and utilitarianism in his influential book *The Modern Functional Building*, stating that

> Functionalists are concerned with solving the problems of general significance to our culture. A utilitarian only asks: what is the most practical way for me to act in this case? But the functionalist asks: how do I act most correctly in principle? Their attitude inclines toward philosophy and has a metaphysical basis ... There is no question but that the functionalists, even the most *sachlich* ones, could more readily be classified as romantics than as rationalists.

This understanding of functionalism is a far cry from the abbreviated version that has often been associated with the objectivity and anonymity of twentieth century modernist architecture.

Steiner and Häring’s notion of organic functionalism offered an alternative, holistic approach to modernism that was to be explored further by the next generation of modern architects, especially by Hans Scharoun. Scharoun was a friend of Häring’s and

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64 Hugo Häring “Wege zur Form,” *Die Form* 1 (October 1925): 3-5.
subscribed to Häring’s organic outlook. Scharoun also had the opportunity to engage directly with Steiner’s ideas, when he was employed to design a church for a friend who served as a priest in the Christian Community Church that Steiner had played an important role in establishing. The *Church of St John (Johanneskirche)* (Figure 10.25), erected in Bochum in 1966 combines Häring’s influence of organic, asymmetrical spatial forms with Anthroposophically inspired elements such as the faceted roof and ceiling, typical of the faceted rooftscapes and ceilings of Steiner’s *Second Geotheanum* and *de Jaager house* (Figure 10.26).

Figure 10.25: Hans Scharoun, Christian Community Church of St. John, Bochum, 1966. Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Johanneskirche_Bochum.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Johanneskirche_Bochum.jpg)

Figure 10.26: North west elevation of de Jaager house by Rudolf Steiner, Dornach, 1921. Source: Author, 2009.

Scharoun’s most famous work is the *Philharmonie Concert Hall* (1960-63), home to the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra. Scharoun had grand aspirations for this building, hoping that it would be the seed of a cultural centre for a reunited Berlin. The *Philharmonie* was a breakthrough in achieving what Gropius and Steiner had earlier tried to achieve in their respective theatres. The key to its great success was the virtuoso arrangement of the audience seating that was broken up into tiered blocks that entirely surround the orchestra, creating a sense of total immersion for the audience (Figures 10.27 and 10.28).
Scharoun described his social intentions in designing the building as follows:

Here you will find no segregation of ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’ but rather a community of listeners grouped around an orchestra in the most natural of all seating arrangements. Thus, despite its size, the auditorium has retained a certain intimacy, enabling a direct and cooperative share in the production of
music. Here the creation and the experience of music occur in a hall not motivated by formal aesthetics, but whose design was inspired by the very purpose it serves. Man, music and space—here they meet in a new relationship.\textsuperscript{67}

Its complex geometry responded to the demands of acoustics, circulation and sightlines and produced an aperspectival space that generated an almost ethereal atmosphere that enhanced the entire concert experience. In this building Scharoun realised what Steiner had been aspiring towards half a century earlier.

Within the context of these later works, Steiner’s architecture can be seen to form part of an organic tradition that presents a valid alternative to the prevailing rationalist narrative of early twentieth century modernism. This tradition draws upon rich and diverse sources. Anyone seeking to genuinely understand Steiner’s architecture must first come to terms with its varied formal and philosophical influences as well as the multifaceted nature of his thought. Being the author of his own worldview, he struggled to find an architectural language that could express his ideals in one stylistic idiom. This necessitated an eclectic approach that drew influence from a range of styles, together with his own imagination, resulting in highly original architectural solutions. Although his work remains stylistically unclassifiable, it is certainly not without precedent or architectural heritage. Through a process of selection and transformation Steiner applied earlier forms and ideas to the current context he was working in, taking into account the cultural and social conditions of the time as well as specific nature of his own spiritual objectives. Steiner was able to draw from these influences things that others had not previously appreciated. In appropriating and synthesising various influences he was able to establish a sense of continuity with the past while at the same time incorporate a powerful vision for the future. By placing his work within this broader perspective, it is hoped that its depth and meaningfulness will allow it to be recognised as something far more than a curious aberration in the mainstream current of architectural history.

Chapter 11

Reflections on Steiner’s Contribution to Architecture

11.1 Looking Back, Looking Forward

The architecture of Rudolf Steiner presents a curious double face, a Janus head, with one side looking back into the past, yearning for the ideals and forms of earlier times, and the other side turned to the future, seeking an architecture that was entirely unprecedented. In some aspects Steiner’s architecture was strikingly new and original, while in other ways it remained bound to tradition and convention. This thesis has demonstrated that while Steiner was very much a product of the intellectual and social influences of his own time and place, he also produced works from a profoundly internal sense of spirituality. This highlights the importance of examining his work on its own terms, as well as within the broader context of architectural discourse. Steiner’s thought bears deeply and closely upon his art. This in turn has implications for the critical apprehension of his work. In making a contribution to architectural discourse, both in terms of ideology and practice, it is not enough to simply explain what Steiner’s architecture is in relation to its form, space, materials and style. While these are effective means of analysis that have been utilised in this research, they do not provide a complete understanding. To fully appreciate his architecture we must penetrate why it is—its philosophical content and intended meaning, as well as how it is—its tangible, experiential qualities.

Whereas many earlier architectural scholars have dismissed Steiner’s philosophical and occult musings, this thesis has privileged these eccentric details and reconsidered them in light of contemporary understandings of architecture. By challenging old orthodoxies, the non-reductive approach of this research offers a different perspective from earlier interpretations of Steiner’s architecture. Historians now question the previous assumptions of historical and stylistic continuity that Steiner’s work did not easily conform to. It is recognised that discontinuity and difference do not necessarily invalidate work that does not fit within the neat order of things. This thesis has sought to safeguard Steiner’s specificity by resisting the powers of a homogenising architectural discourse, while at the same time acknowledging its
many points of intersection. Breaking down old prejudices can allow the richness of
diverse viewpoints and multivalent approaches to add depth and vitality to
contemporary architectural discourse. By admitting such complexity and fullness,
modern architecture’s historical blind-spots are being redressed. This thesis has
sought to make some contribution towards that effort.

An integrative perspective allows past and present to find a middle ground that offers
the potential to create something new. This requires a diverse and inclusive
approach, which has its own limitations. In this research, a range of Steiner’s theories
and architectural examples have been examined in order to provide an appreciation
of the breadth and depth of his work. The defined scope of this thesis necessarily
limited discussion to those concepts which were considered to be most influential in
relation to Steiner’s architecture. The five key themes selected for detailed
investigation were three-fold polarity; metamorphosis; imagination, inspiration and
intuition; sense and non-sense; and anthropomorphism. While these concepts have
been addressed separately for the sake of clarity, each must be understood in relation
to, and under the direct influence of each other. They also need to be appreciated in
terms of Steiner’s own personal abilities and limitations to articulate these concepts
in both written and built form. At several stages throughout the research process, a
particular topic or theme emerged as an area more than able to furnish material for a
major study in its own right. Steiner’s ideas on colour and geometry are just two
examples of areas of investigation that would reward a much more intensive
examination than was possible in this context. It has been necessary to strike a
balance between expansiveness and nuanced complexity, with the objective being to
carry Steiner’s creations form one century to the next, and from one culture to
another, with as much integrity as possible.

11.2 Architecture Beyond ‘Steinerism’

While it may be true that the distance that now stands between the early twentieth
century and our current time allows the multifaceted and contradictory nature of
modern architecture to be better appreciated, we also live in an age where occult
ideas no longer hold currency. As such, Steiner’s spiritualised conception of
architecture could be seen as banal and irrelevant. In An Art of Our Own, Robert
Lipsey advises that ‘the best rule is to judge a tree by its fruit. Another rule ... is not
to judge the tree until it has had time to produce its fruit.¹ This is particularly apt in Steiner’s case. Although his architectural endeavours were not always successful, and at times his ideas sound somewhat anachronistic, the philosophical and spiritual underpinning of his work continues to be adapted and applied by successive generations of architects throughout the world.

This would come as no surprise to Steiner, who saw his architectural work in terms of a much broader conception of human evolution. As part of this evolutionary process he believed that his work would be carried further towards the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty first century. To some extent this aspiration has been fulfilled by a number of contemporary and award winning architects who draw upon Steiner’s principles as a unique source of inspiration. These include Gregory Burgess in Australia (Figure 11.01), Espen Tharaldsen in Norway (Figure 11.02), Christopher Day in Wales, Peter Hübner in Germany and the late Ton Alberts in the Netherlands (Figure 11.03) to name just a few.

¹ Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own*, 461.
These architects have entered into the genuine intent of Anthroposophy. Rather than drawing from Steiner’s formal repertoire, they seek to create new and original architectural forms that are relevant to their own time and place. This is, of course, what Steiner had always hoped for, recognising that his own efforts were but an imperfect first attempt at a *modus operandi* for modern architecture. He claimed that ‘our building can be no more than something we intend to take further, and those capable of taking our intention further will surely come.’

One of the most prolific architects to have done so is the Danish-born Swedish architect, Erik Asmussen, who designed over one hundred buildings throughout Scandinavia and northern Europe. Asmussen’s most significant buildings are located in Järna, Sweden, 50km south of Stockholm beside a coastal inlet of the Baltic Sea. Järna is home to a thriving Anthroposophical community consisting of Steiner schools, biodynamic farms, an Anthroposophic hospital, college, performing arts centre and a growing number of Anthroposophically-inspired small businesses. In all of Asmussen’s buildings, and particularly his *Vidar Clinic* completed in 1988, he sought to express an inner spiritual dimension through the use of colour, materials, space and form. In endeavouring to create a restorative and healing environment, Asmussen’s *Vidar Clinic* bears a direct relationship to Steiner’s theories on both architecture and medicine. Steiner did not perceive Anthroposophical medicine as an

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2 Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 147.
alternative to western medicine, but rather as an extension of it, encouraging the patient to be consciously involved in the healing process. Anthroposophical medicine recognises three stages of healing and each stage necessitates different environmental qualities to contribute to the healing process. Accordingly, the spatial and structural form of the Vidar Clinic does not follow conventional hospital design. Wards are eliminated in preference of private rooms that offer a variety of carefully considered features designed to respond to individual patient needs. For example, depending on the type of illness, different rooms are painted in different colours according to their perceived therapeutic benefits. Steiner’s notion of the living wall is employed through the use of his lazure painting technique which endeavours to dissolve the rooms’ hard boundaries. The interplay of the walls’ convex and concave forms suggest expansion and contraction, as if the building itself were breathing. Windows are carefully sized, shaped and positioned to allow views of both land and sky from varying bed positions, emphasising the patient’s connection to the earth and the cosmos. Throughout the entire building Steiner’s notion of threefold polarity is also expressed in the dynamic interplay of spatial sequences that rhythmically alternate between public and private, light and dark, small and large, symmetry and asymmetry, which energises and enlivens the building. In turn this physical expression of balance is intended to support and affirm the patient’s own journey towards establishing inner equilibrium through the healing process.

While Asmussen’s work is predominantly centred around a community that shared in his belief of Anthroposophical principles, Hungarian architect, Imre Makovecz, has taken Steiner’s ideas to a much broader international audience. He has also helped to ensure their continuation through the establishment of an informal school of organic architecture set up to guide the work of a growing number of his followers. As a young architecture student himself, Makovecz had been inspired by Steiner and recalls that

In the beginning, I tried to imitate the architect I considered the greatest, like everybody at age twenty. First I followed Frank Lloyd Wright, then Rudolf Steiner. While I was designing Steiner houses with all my energy,
I did not find myself plagiarising. Instead I found something I call living, organic architecture.³

Makovecz’s bold organic forms sparked global attention in 1992 at the Universal Exposition of Seville, Spain with his striking Hungary Pavilion that drew heavily upon Steiner’s work. Like Steiner’s buildings, Makovecz’s Pavilion was designed as an architecture of participation. Visitors to the Pavilion followed a prescribed path through the building that incorporated images, light and sound to create a kind of gesamtkunstwerk that enveloped the observer in a sensory experience which unfolded sequentially by moving through the space. The perfume of the solid timber construction added to the visitor’s immersive experience. Steiner’s notion of threefold polarity was also made evident in the main body of the building with its left and right walls reflecting the east and west of Hungary, symbolically meeting along the building’s central ridgeline.

The exterior of the building was suggestive of an overturned ark, covered in black tiles. Piercing through this large mound were seven asymmetrical steeples—a number which Makovecz, like Steiner, attributed great cosmological significance to. At the building’s core stood a large Hungarian oak tree (Figure 11.04). Stripped of its leaves and soil, dried and bleached, the tree was mounted into a glass floor to visually expose its roots, further articulating the concept of polarity through its powerful expression of life and death, above and below, light and dark.

![This image was removed due to copyright restrictions](image)


The building also invoked anthropomorphic associations, as exemplified by the exposed timber beams of the interior which resemble a huge rib-cage. Makovecz described his buildings as ‘living beings’ stemming from an etymological analysis of the Hungarian language where words such as ‘sole-foot-knee-trunk-spine-rib-wing-forehead-face-eye-eyebrow-etc. refer equally to the appropriate parts of the body and building.’ While such associations bear much in common with Steiner’s anthropomorphic conception of architecture, Makovecz’s work is also rooted in Hungarian culture and tradition. His work represents an intelligent, regionalised and programmatic interpretation of Steiner’s ideas.

Unfortunately though some contemporary architecture built in the name of Anthroposophy is somewhat less rewarding, with its almost apostolic adherence to an outdated expressionistic aesthetic style that has little regard for its temporal or local context. Superficial ‘Steinerisms’ are applied to buildings with limited understanding of the creative task Steiner had set for architects. So evident is this phenomenon that a slang German term has been adopted to describe it. The term *Abe-ecke* refers to the predilection of architects to chamfer the corners of buildings in order to imitate a formal feature that appeared in a number of Steiner’s buildings.

Steiner was strident in his belief that architectural forms must be borne of an architect’s own artistic freedom and individual creativity. He reiterated this point time and again in his lectures and writings. In a lecture delivered at Berne in 1921, he asserted that ‘Spiritual Science does not want to build up abstract symbolical or insipid allegorical art which merely forces didactic teaching into outward form.’ In another example relating to the community of houses he designed in the grounds of the *Goetheanum*, he noted that while the community must strive for a unified solution, one house must not be obliged to be like another, stating that

The houses must be varied and they will have to be very individual in character. Just as there would be nothing organic in putting an arm or

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5 This slang term was explained to the author during informal discussions with the curator of the Goetheanum art collection, Dino Wendtland, and the Goetheanum building administrator, Kurt Remond.

hand where the head ought to be in a human body, so a house that would be right for one site would be wrong for another.7

The stylistic motifs that Steiner employed cannot be simply layered onto the surface of a design. This one-dimensional manipulation of recognisable parts lacks any terms of reference and hence becomes a formulaic set of conventions that are ultimately meaningless. Consequently this sort of approach has resulted in a certain lack of credibility that has prevented Anthroposopically inspired architecture being seen as a genuine prospect for original architectural design. It has largely remained a peripheral movement with work being predominantly commissioned by Anthroposophical clients. To a certain extent this is to be expected, since for many social institutions architecture provides a central framework for their identity and culture. That is, after all, part of the agency that architecture performs. But if Anthroposophical architecture is to find the broader audience Steiner had hoped for, it must be responsive to the changed cultural conditions of our current world. As Thomas Barrie writes in *The Sacred In-Between*

> An unreflective architecture is, at worst, built neuroses. In this context recognising architectural intentions is essential to authentic design. It is only through establishing a critical relationship without prejudices – a critical distance – that we may create places grounded in the multiple context of which they are a part.8

It was not Steiner’s intention to provide a series of ready-made solutions for architects. The tension between architectural freedom and philosophical doctrine requires a poetic and creative solution that even Steiner himself never fully realised. To produce an architecture that achieves wider critical acceptance than its progenitor, while being borne of its ideological impetus, presents an enticing challenge for architects.

This thesis has sought to provide architects and scholars with a way of penetrating Anthroposophy’s philosophical and spiritual basis. While it makes no suggestion that Steiner’s architectural theories provide a universal ethos for architectural thinking and production, it does present a way of considering the potential of Steiner’s

7 Steiner, *Architecture as a Synthesis of the Arts*, 45.
8 Barrie, *The Sacred In-Between*, 217.
outlook for broader application. There is some degree of overlap between Steiner’s theories and various holistic and organic paradigms being applied to contemporary architecture such as Ecosophy, Sacred Ecology and Building Biology (or Baubiologie as it was coined in Germany). Architects who are engaging with such ideas may not identify directly with Anthroposophy, but in developing a deeper understanding of Steiner’s theories, may be encouraged to apply his ideas as soft criterion. In this way Steiner’s theories offer a point of departure that could allow them to achieve a new relevance. This has occurred in the field of agriculture, whereby a growing number of traditional farmers are changing their conventional farming practices to adopt the biodynamic methods presented by Steiner, without necessarily subscribing to Anthroposophy as a personal belief system.

In contemporary architecture, one area in which Steiner’s theories draw interesting parallels is in the field of parametric design. New Zealand architect, Mark Burry, has been a leader in this area of research, using parametric modelling as a powerful tool to extrapolate the complicated geometry of Gaudi’s Sagrada Familia and apply it to the current task of completing Barcelona’s crowning architectural masterpiece. Through the use of this technology, history converges with the present to generate new forms consistent with Gaudi’s original vision. Such technical advancements also offer opportunities for Steiner’s concept of metamorphosis to be taken to an entirely new level; one that Steiner himself could hardly have dreamed of. These parallels go beyond formal analogies. Digital morphing of architectural forms has led to a renewed interest in the intellectual background of metamorphosis as well as metaphysics. The biological process of metamorphosis provides a worthwhile model

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9 Ecosophy is a neologism for the phrase ecological philosophy which explores a diversity of perspectives on human-nature interrelationships. It fosters deep and harmonious relationships between place, self, community and the natural world. Sacred ecology is a developing field of research that contends that ecological sustainability necessarily depends upon a spiritual awareness of the natural world. Building Biology is a building science that looks at the relationship between humans and the buildings they inhabit as well as the relationship between buildings and the natural environment. It seeks to identify and safeguard against factors that can negatively impact human health and biological harmony.


for investigation in the emerging field of biomimetic architecture. At the same time, virtual reality has opened up questions about the nature of physical space and cyber space, microcosm and macrocosm, outside and inside, material and immaterial. The borders of reality are currently being blurred by this technology, making it necessary to redefine our understanding of what reality is. In this digital age, the time is ripe for a reconsideration of the ineffable, numinous and immeasurable in architecture. For contemporary readers cut off from easy acceptance of dogma, a major aspect of Steiner’s appeal lies in his attempt to reach out to the metaphysical world without abandoning the physical world. A certain level of scepticism with respect to Steiner’s occult speculations remains justified however, the complexity and dynamism of today’s architectural scene opens up space for a reassessment of his theories that was simply not possible in his own time. The unfamiliar content of his philosophy may indeed offer new ways of understanding.

11.3 Closing Thoughts

Architecture was for Steiner primarily a tool of experience and inquiry—a probe into the outer reaches of human imagination and creativity. Engagement with his work offers the potential for illumination, connection and perhaps even personal transformation by pointing to other ways of seeing the world. Steiner shows architecture to be an agent through which to discover the hidden depths of human existence that co-exists with its rational, self-evident materiality. Steiner’s architecture may not have impacted the field to the extent that he might have hoped but it does emphasise the essential mystery of architecture to affect, arouse and transform those that come in contact with it. Steiner perceived each of his buildings as an outer manifestation of his inner spiritual work. It is this deep internal dimension, as opposed to its surface symbolism, that this thesis has sought to comprehend. Rather than a nostalgic return to a redundant mysticism, it has endeavoured to respond to the enduring and profound desire of human beings to yearn for transcendence through the medium of architecture, as variously as this may be expressed.

For the critical reader there is ample room for disagreement with Steiner’s ideas. However, by casting light on the inner contradictions of his work, he has been shown here to be a more interesting, vulnerable and relevant figure than he has often been portrayed. In his essay *Exactitude*, Italo Calvino writes ‘the real work consists not in the definitive form, but in the series of approximations made to attain it.’¹³ In the reckoning of Steiner’s contribution to architecture, more pertinent words could hardly apply. His buildings were but an approximation of a much more encompassing agenda. Steiner’s theories will always remain partly ambiguous, unwilling to reveal themselves fully. Their translation into architecture is necessarily incomplete, fraught with approximations and limitations. But therein lies Steiner’s essential uniqueness; the very quality that makes his work so compelling.

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### Appendix

**Illustrated List of Steiner’s Buildings**

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