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INTRODUCTION

The main theme of this book is the architecture of the Goetheanum, the exquisite, startlingly original new building that was under construction at the time, and in the place, at which Rudolf Steiner gave these five lectures—the month of October 1914 in Dornach, Switzerland. Construction had reached the stage of topping off six months earlier; that is, the main structural elements were in place and the roof was covered. Steiner concentrates on the significance of the building's columns and domes, how they are to be looked at, how their spiritual inventiveness is to be read, and how he expects they will be received by anthroposophists and others. He knows that the building is one more challenge to convention, filled with complexities that will probably be difficult for many to understand: “a new style of building that is connected to the mysteries of the cosmos.”¹ In his final lecture in the series, excited by thoughts of the building's leap into the future, he says, “It will be apparent to you from many things that have been said here recently that the art in our building must contain a new element that has not hitherto existed in the evolution of art, but is essential for the further progress of humanity.”

As we read—as we would have heard had we been in that audience—we find Steiner searching for an image that will convey the magical quality of the paintings that will fill the building's two overlapping domes. He pictures Greek, Roman, Renaissance, even nineteenth-century painting, as a statue, its gesture unmoving: “That's how we might describe the evolution of the arts that we can follow up to our own epoch. We can look upon it as something that is standing in a resting pose, and our intention is to speak the magic word that will make it walk, bring it to life inwardly, bring it into movement.”

¹ For a fuller description of the building, complete with over a hundred photographs, see Rudolf Steiner, *The First Goetheanum: Toward a New Theory of Architecture*, CW 290, forthcoming from SteinerBooks.

Clearly, for him the Goetheanum rising out of the hilltop is much more than a place to stage plays or hold meetings. It will embody the sum of what he has learned, what he has taught: “Everything we have absorbed of spiritual science in the course of the years, and a great deal more besides, is expressed in this building.”

When he speaks of the arts in the building, he is most eloquent on painting, looking for a way to describe his new approach. Though what was still most common in the arts at that time was the realistic representation of people, places, and things, there had been astounding eruptions of non-representational painting in the first dozen years of the century. In 1911, for instance, Wassily Kandinsky, an earnest student of anthroposophy, and Franz Marc announced the first exhibition of their new group of artists *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) in these words:

*The great upheaval,
The shifting emphasis in art, literature, and music,
The multifariousness of form, the constructive principle, the
composition of these forms
The intensive turn to the inner realm of nature and, associated
with it, the rejection of the beautification of nature's exterior
—Such are, generally sketched out, the signs of the new inner
renaissance.²*

Around Europe were painters like Picasso, Klee, Léger, Modigliani, Mondrian, all involved to some extent in this great upheaval. This was the revolutionary background against which Steiner was finding his own ways to represent the physical world and the spiritual world together. For him, all was new. The artist, he insisted, must liberate color from what is perceived in nature or in life, must not hesitate to change one color for another. The painter must perceive and experience colors arising “through their own inherent impulse—things will not be as they are in nature, but rather as they are in the spiritual world.”

² Tracey Bashkoff and Megan M. Fontanella, organizers, *The Great Upheaval: Modern Art from the Guggenheim Collection, 1910-1918* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2011), p. 15.

As usual in his lecture series, Steiner has much to say on other topics: the worldwide growth of materialism; the time in the future when not just physical evolution but spiritual evolution will reach its end; the way historical documents conceal the truth of what happened in the past; even the distant prospect that humanity will eventually be resurrected in other planets.

And there are at least half a dozen direct references to World War I in the five lectures. One can continually feel how much Steiner was distracted by this huge conflict that was gradually spreading throughout Europe and shattering its peace. The lectures were given on three weekends in October 1914, ten to twelve weeks after war broke out. For Steiner, even the horrors of the battlefield were outweighed by what happened in the spiritual world. “Never before have I myself seen anything as astounding as what followed upon the assassination at Sarajevo. . . . In the spiritual world exactly the opposite effect was produced than had been produced in the physical world. In the physical world, fear held back the war; in the spiritual world it was an element that hastened on the war.”

The aggressively militant, assertive stance and language of German politicians and newspapers stimulated Steiner to seek peaceful, balanced, reasonable ways of speaking about the war, the apportioning of blame, the description of aims, and the final outcome. He found the press particularly irresponsible, even more than those in government and the armed forces. Steiner was also dismayed by the way the government was pressing the German population to support the uncritical nationalism of its propaganda, and said so: in lecture three of this book, for example, Steiner asserts that “The individual human being stands higher than the nation!” This was an act that required some courage, since though resident in Switzerland he continued to lecture in Germany throughout the war, giving well over two hundred lectures there, half of them in the country’s capital of Berlin.

The theme of peace is a notable feature of the lectures, a powerful counterpoint to the disaster that had started in a part of the continent he knew well and that was now spreading until it surrounded the peaceful country of Switzerland. The incident in June 1914 that had pulled much of Europe into war in the space of five weeks was

the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo, the capital of Austria-Hungary's recently acquired province of Bosnia. They were shot by an assassin of the Black Hand, a revolutionary organization formed by a group that included the intelligence chief of the Serbian army. Their aim was to achieve "the unification of all Serbs," by violent means if necessary.³

Steiner was the son of an Austrian whose work for the Austrian Southern Railway gave him employment around the Austro-Hungarian empire, which at its height incorporated Austria, Hungary, parts of northeast Italy, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia-Slavonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, the northern part of Serbia-Montenegro, Romania, the southwest of Ukraine, west Moldova, and a fragment of Bulgaria. Steiner was born in Kraljevec and raised until age eight there and in other villages in the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia, a nominally autonomous, ethnically Croatian and Serbian kingdom within the empire. When he was eight, his father's promotion to stationmaster took the family to Neudörfel in Hungary, where as a German-speaking Austrian he was again regarded as a foreigner, this time by his Hungarian-speaking school fellows. Treated as an outsider, he knew at first-hand the resentment that citizens who didn't speak German felt for the co-governing Austrians. As Stewart Easton put it in his biography of Steiner, he "as a boy experienced in his own person not only the division between east and west, but more particularly the clash of cultures in the Austro-Hungarian Empire"⁴ —resentment that was most deeply felt by the Slavs inside and outside the boundaries of the empire and that eventually led to the assassination of the archduke.⁵

³ John Simkin, *First World War Encyclopedia* (Spartacus Educational, 2012).

⁴ Stewart C. Easton, *Rudolf Steiner: Herald of a New Epoch* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1980), p. 14.

⁵ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), p. xxviii. Clark added: "The fact that Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia emerged as one of the victor states of the war seemed implicitly to vindicate the act of the man who pulled the trigger on 28 June. Certainly that was the view of the Yugoslav authorities, who marked the spot where he did so with bronze footprints and a plaque celebrating the assassin's 'first steps into Yugoslav freedom.'"

Speaking in 1916, Steiner said “. . . the death of the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria is one of those concealed events of the present day, despite all that occurred on the external physical plane. . . . What rose up as the soul of Franz Ferdinand into the spiritual worlds became a focal point for very strong, powerful forces, and much of what is now happening is connected with the very fact that a unique transition took place between life and so-called death, so that this soul became something quite different from what other souls become.”. . . “You might indeed call him an intense friend of all that belongs to the Slavs. He understood—or perhaps I should say: something living in him of which he was not fully aware understood—what forms would be necessary for the social life of the Slavs if they were to develop as individual peoples.”⁶ But “in removing Franz Ferdinand from the scene, the Serbian terrorists ensured that there would be no voice of moderation in Vienna,” a historian has written.⁷

The first lecture in this book, given on October 10, came ten weeks after the start of the war, when the German army moved into Luxembourg on its way to Belgium and France. In those ten weeks the German and French armies had fought a number of intensive battles, and the Germans had just failed to capture Paris. Casualties on both sides had been huge.

The vast scale and violence of the war astonished the continent. Few adults had any experience of a large-scale war. The last great war, the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, was two generations in the past. It had lasted ten months and the casualties (killed or wounded) had numbered about a quarter of a million. The first great battle of the 1914 war, the Marne, had caused half a million casualties in a week. By November, a month after the last lecture in this book was given, nearly two million men had died in the German, French, and British armies.⁸

⁶ Steiner, *The Karma of Untruthfulness: Secret Societies, the Media, and Preparations for the Great War*, volume 1, lecture 3, Dornach, December 10, 1916. (Rudolf Steiner Press, 2005), p. 56; p. 63.

⁷ Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (New York: Random House, 2013).

⁸ <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/marne1.htm>

The war shocked and disoriented people all over the continent. Gradually all the major powers were drawn in: not just Germany, France, and Britain, but also Austria-Hungary and Russia. Belgium was involved from the very start of the war; the British involvement soon brought in Australia and Canada. The Ottoman Empire and Italy, the United States, even small countries such as Siam, Panama, and San Marino were caught up in the war. Altogether forty countries were fighting in what truly was the first world war.

In Switzerland, which was not in the war, Steiner's Goetheanum had been under construction for almost a year, using a large group of volunteers from many countries to work on the building. When war broke out, the anthroposophists among them decided "we must commit ourselves more emphatically to our common cause," according to the account given by one of the volunteers, the Russian symbolist poet Andrei Belyi; "all of us—Russians, Germans, Austrians, French, Poles—we are all brothers in misfortune, we are all victims of criminal politics." But in October nationalism broke out among the workers. "The first momentum of our spontaneous solidarity was quite evidently broken. . . . [T]he storms in the canteen did not abate. . . . Soon, theoretical debates changed to concrete incidents and endangered the whole life of Dornach." Steiner intervened, not blaming any country for the war but instead giving five lectures "concerning the essence of culture. . . . Everyone was enthused. The doctor had succeeded in smoothing the waves of nationalistic passion. . . . [F]rom then on, the members of the various nations at war with one another lived in peace."⁹ The "five lectures" Belyi refers to are the lectures in this book. At their heart stands Steiner's resonant exhortation to create "an energetic culture of peace."¹⁰

After the war it was asserted that Steiner had influenced some decisions of the German army staff in the early months of the war. What had happened was something more personal. Eliza von Moltke, a theosophist and later founding member of the Anthroposophical Society living in Berlin, knew Steiner and invited him to her house.

⁹ Andrei Belyi, Assya Turgenieff, and Margarita Voloschin, *Reminiscences of Rudolf Steiner* (Ghent, NY: Adonis Press, 1987), pp. 53-56.

¹⁰ See the end of Lecture Two.

She was the wife of Helmuth von Moltke, a high-ranking officer in the German army; through her, von Moltke learned about anthroposophy and found what he called Steiner's "philosophizing" more comprehensible than anyone else's.¹¹ In 1906 von Moltke was promoted to chief of the German general staff, that is, wartime leader of the army, a post he knew he was unsuited for but which he apparently accepted principally because of his friendship with Kaiser Wilhelm II.¹²

For a decade the army had had a plan devised by von Moltke's predecessor Schlieffen for a European war that involved encircling Paris. In July, probably, "[a]t a time when war seemed imminent but was not yet certain," Stewart Easton wrote, von Moltke "had asked Steiner to pay him a visit as soon as he could, as he was anxious for an intimate talk with him. . . . As it turned out, no meeting between the two men could be arranged before August 27, by which time the German offensive was already more than three weeks old. During this period von Moltke had been compelled to make numerous decisions on the basis of insufficient information, and some of them were obviously faulty." The Schlieffen plan when enacted fell short. "The military decisions made by von Moltke on August 27 and then eight days later, when the decisive mistake was made, did lead to the failure of the great offensive and ultimately to the loss of the war." Von Moltke was forced to resign. After the war Steiner told a reporter that he and von Moltke had discussed only personal matters. Even so, Easton wrote, "Steiner was blamed by nationalistic Germans for the defeat of the battle of the Marne, and he was accused of having used his 'magical powers' on General von Moltke."¹³

As the war began to wind down, Steiner shared his hopes of finding

¹¹ T. H. Meyer (ed.), *Light for the New Millennium: Rudolf Steiner's Association with Helmuth and Eliza von Moltke, Letters, Documents, and After-Death Communications* (London: Temple Lodge, 1997).

¹² "Moltke . . . characterized himself to Prince von Bülow: 'I do not lack personal courage, but I lack the power of rapid decision; I am too reflective, too scrupulous, or, if you like, too conscientious for such a post. I lack the capacity for risking all on a single throw.'" Max Hastings, *Catastrophe: Europe Goes to War* (William Collins, 2013), p. 28.

¹³ Easton, pp. 219-223.

how the lives of different peoples and countries could be arranged so that their relations would not lead to future wars. He had discussed these concerns with, among others, a member of the Bavarian state council, Count Otto Lerchenfeld, an anthroposophist who was also concerned about the deep divisions among Europeans. In 1917, as the stalemate on the battle fronts continued and peace remained elusive, Lerchenfeld asked Steiner if he had any idea how a lasting peace could be established. “For three weeks, day after day, he and Steiner worked together over the ideas he had outlined until the entire organic structure for a new social order had been built up,” Stewart Easton wrote.¹⁴ The response Steiner gave was the outline of what later became the Threefold Social Order.

In July of that year Steiner considered how he could influence the Austrian government to start preparing for peace negotiations. He knew members of the government and submitted a memorandum that included this sentence: “When human beings become free, so will the nations become free through them.” The effort was not fruitful, however.¹⁵

The principal concern of these five lectures is the first Goetheanum building, that remarkable, innovative structure, first used in the fall of 1920 and still not completely finished when it was destroyed by fire on New Year’s Eve, 1922. They were given at the start of a murderous war that directly affected Steiner’s life in Dornach and in Germany. The lectures demand to be read because of the insight they give into Steiner’s understanding and creativity in the arts, but the fact that throughout those war years he was seeking for peaceful ways for people and countries to live together gives them an added and special significance.

¹⁴ Easton, pp. 230-232.

¹⁵ Terry Boardman, Afterword to Rudolf Steiner, *Towards Social Renewal: Rethinking the Basis of Society* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999), p. 123.