UNDERSTANDING THE AESTHETICS AND MATERIALITY OF VER SACRUM, THE SEMINAL MAGAZINE OF THE VIENNA SECESSION

by

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Abstract

The following Master’s thesis discusses the cultural-political agenda, the artistic standpoints, and the materiality of the Vienna Secessionist magazine, *Ver Sacrum* (1898-1903). Special attention is given to the composition of the pages, text, and the surrounding illustrations. Despite resembling the prevailing notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, its publishing has less to do with a total work of art and more with a total artistic sensibility. This sensibility is formed by the magazine’s purpose as a promotional magazine of artists campaigning for social, cultural, and political recognition and influence. A critical reading of the magazine’s first volume provides the basic understanding of this artistic sensibility, or *Kunstempfinden*, a recurring and leading concept throughout the issues. *Kunstempfinden*, also suggesting a focus on the creation of individual attitudes and meanings in relation to the arts, unites aesthetics and materiality and serves as a political tactic of the Secessionists. Thus, aesthetics and the work of art itself are understated to the extent that they are there to mediate a prescribed meaning or sensibility. Namely, the magazine devoted itself to a cultural mission of dictating how art, culture, the Secessionist artist, or the Viennese individual should be perceived by society. In these respects, the issues of the magazine exhibit a manifesto, a provocative proclamation expressed in evocative language and metaphors, and a vision of alternative aesthetics to social life. Indeed, many of the texts project a Lukacsian definition of an aesthetic culture: a new sensibility, the occasion of a new mood as part of a new break away from the ordinary. The appearance of technological reproductions around and prior to 1900, as Walter Benjamin points out, shaped the perception of the arts also in the realization of the magazine. The emotional appeals in *Ver Sacrum* substitute the expected aura in a work of art and shift the traditional relevance of aesthetics to a material culture of
aesthetic sensibilities. Since the Vienna Secession establishes *Kunstempfinden* as an artistic practice, process, and event, sensibility (*Empfinden*) itself appears as a defining *telos* of modernity and proves to be a persistent *leitmotif* for the Vienna Secession in communicating their perceived artistic importance.
Lay Summary

The following Master’s thesis discusses the cultural-political agenda, the artistic standpoints, and materiality of the year of issues of the Vienna Secessionist magazine, *Ver Sacrum*, from 1898. The thesis consists of a close reading and analysis of the magazine’s aesthetics (its understanding of artistic appreciation) and materiality (the layout and visual components) as presented throughout this first year. It will be concluded that the magazine introduces the Vienna Secession as a radical group experimenting with (1) art (focusing on artistic sensibilities), (2) culture (transforming the role of the artist), (3) taste (guiding artistic appreciation), and (4) society (organizing a Viennese identity around Secessionist art). These missions served to promote and campaign for the social, cultural, and political recognition and influence of artists. To this extent, the materiality finds its roots in pleasant, symmetrical page arrangements, and its aesthetics in exaggerated appeals to emotions.
Preface

This project on *Ver Sacrum*, the Vienna Secession’s seminal magazine arose after taking Kyle Frackman’s graduate course on “Viennese Modernism” in the first year of my MA program. As part of the course we talked about the Secession movement and visited the University of British Columbia’s (UBC) Rare Books and Special Collections to look at the twelve original issues of this magazine: eleven issues from 1898 (with the November issue missing) and a December one from 1899. At the time Kyle informed us that there were not many scholarly writings on *Ver Sacrum*; therefore, I decided to undertake a critical reading of it and write a seminar paper for his course. That paper became the groundwork for this thesis. The thesis excluded reflections on the missing November issue, the December one, and on the variety of literary works throughout this first volume. Their critical reading created time constrains and difficulties placing them into the practice of *Kunstempfinden* as they provided little and/or irrelevant cultural-political content. The critical analysis of the issues from May to December had to be omitted due to the length required for the writing of this MA thesis. In my view, the exclusion of these does not compromise the development of the thesis argument.

The overall quality of these first-year issues is good: the prints are clear and pages are not torn, but the edges of the front covers are thin and fragile. The benefit to physical and critical examination of an artifact like this is to gain hands-on experience of the early entrepreneurial and social media practices of the Vienna Secession. Although *Ver Sacrum* is digitalized and can be accessed online without any restrictions, a digital image does not show the modifications in size, color, and quality of the paper. Nor does it reveal that news about the organ sometimes appeared in the form of small notification papers inserted or glued to the first page (see the original 1898
October issue at UBC’s Rare Books and Special Collections). Furthermore, a digital image would not adequately show the difference between a *Normalausgabe* (normal issue) and *Gründerausgabe* (founding issue). All *Gründerausgabe* are in a sense special issues because their covers have a dull metal color (“irdischer Metalfarbe” (Nebehay 32)). The magazine is large (28.5 x 30 cm) and square shaped, printed on art print paper or *Kunstdruckpapier* (see Nebehay 32),¹ which further adds its material characteristic. Its size makes it difficult to hold the magazine in the hand and its reading requires one to lay it down on a table and lean above it in order to engage with it. In this respect, the decorative compositions of the pages together with its formal characteristics are able to draw the reader into its content. Such a large size also accommodated the inclusion of posters as loose pages with no page numbers.

In German the magazine is referred to with the word *Zeitschrift*, which translates to magazine, journal and periodical, and in this thesis, *Ver Sacrum* is referred to as an illustrated magazine or magazine. Peter Vergo, Christian Nebehay, as well as the University of Heidelberg’s online database of arts journals, all use “journal.” In my view, however, the English “magazine” adequately captures its purpose as a periodical of articles on and illustrations of the Secession’s particular interest in art, applied art, and the propagation of their cultural significance. It also better demonstrates its additional purpose as a promotional magazine campaigning for social, cultural, and political recognition as well as the influence of artists. Thereby, the magazine captures the emerging advertising-based public sphere and a market that is sponsored by industrial agencies. Because the artists lacked the support of known authorities (*Behörde*) or patrons (*Mäzene*), they relied solely on a “group of well-wishers” (*Wohlabender*)

¹ Also, see the inside of original covers.
According to Nebehay there are two subscribers that have been traced: one industrialist as well as one patron of the arts and private collector. Nevertheless, Nebehay describes supporters of the magazine as friends of artists, which points toward a smaller readership. Given the high price and small number of copies distributed, the magazine turned to the *Großbürgertum*, a small but educated and wealthy audience, an elite stratum of society (mainly concerned with money and property values) (Waissenberger 9; Shedel 38; Nebehay 22).
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(1:2) : always indicates number of issue and page number of *Ver Sacrum*. Volume is always the first one (Volume 1).
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Mindenkinek, aki mosolyogva ébred.
Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

In January 1898, *Ver Sacrum* made its first appearance (but published only until 1903) among other well-known illustrated magazines, such as *Studio* (London), *Pan* (Berlin), and *Jugend* and *Simplicissimus* (Munich). These magazines were popular and known in the arts communities across Europe, each signifying their particular style, yet categorized together and most commonly known as *Art nouveau*. These magazines, as Christian Nebehay outlines, can only somewhat be considered to be *Ver Sacrum*’s forerunners as they included many forms of art from literature to artistic and decorative illustrations. They were, however, more often political, sarcastic, and more easily accessible due to their cheaper price, thus catering better to the larger public. In contrast to these arts magazines, none of them are self-described as highly aestheticized or committed to changing the notion of art and of the work of art in society as *Ver Sacrum* does. Carl Schorske talks about the Vienna Secession (1897) as unique and different in comparison to other secessions such as Munich (1892) and Berlin (1897), where first came the innovation, then the rejection of these by the established authorities, and only then a

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2 For a detailed overview of German-speaking illustrated magazines in *Jugendstil*, see the online library catalogue of University of Heidelberg: [http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/fachinfo/www/kunst/digitlit/artmagazines/dt_zs.html](http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/helios/fachinfo/www/kunst/digitlit/artmagazines/dt_zs.html)

3 The British “Modern Style,” the French “Style Mucha” or “Style Nouille,” the German “Jugendstil” contribute to the problem of defining styles and movements around the turn of the century. (see Nebehay p. 9-14 and Fähnders p. 90-93). *Art Nouveau* is often defined as having the characteristics of “flowing, expressive lines and whiplash curves, flower and leaf motifs, and female figures with long, undulating hair” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms*). *Jugendstil* is more restrained with the use of whiplash curves and natural symbols. The Secession style or *Secessionstil* added rectilinear segmentation, arrangement and other rectangular elements on the pages.

4 As Christian Nebehay argues, *Jugend* is one of the most well-known artistic magazines in the German-speaking *fin de siècle* but it cannot claim to be the sole representative of the creativity of an emerging generation of modern artists (9). In addition to its low price, it was not addressing aesthetes but those who indulged in caricatures, folk songs, and risqué stories with image and text (9). In comparison to *Ver Sacrum*, *Jugend* was sold very cheap, for 30 pfennigs as opposed to 2 kroner, which equaled to 1.69 marks or 169 pfennigs. For the magazines *Pan* and *Simplicissimus*, see also Nebehay, p. 9.
breakthrough of the movement outside of academic institutions (Nebehay III).  

In the case of Vienna, as Schorske writes, “the call for innovation preceded its actual arrival” (qtd. in Nebehay III). The first year and especially the first ten issues well support this statement. In *Ver Sacrum* the Secession exposes itself with a series of alternative proposals for the function and value of art. Extending over several issues of this first year, this collection of articles comprise what I call the “*Ver Sacrum* manifesto” because they publicly declare the (institutional) existence of the Secession and its artistic philosophy. The *Ver Sacrum* manifesto does not define or distinguish good art from bad art. Rather, the function of art seems to blend together with cultural-political values (Viennese identity and artistic workmanship as a profession of the artist, alternatives to exhibition spaces) and with social values (denoting the Secession’s, hence, the magazine’s culture-educational benefits). In my view the “call for innovation” and these values are best demonstrated by their recurring concept of *Kunstempfinden* (German for “artistic sensibility”):


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5See Nebehay’s introductory summary in English in the same book on page numbered III.  
6Ibid.
Kunstempfinden is not a term that I coined, but one that the Secession expands on from the very outset and throughout most essays in later issues. This emphasis on artistic sensibility points towards those innovative and alternative functions and values.

These and similar revolutionary ideas were not uncommon in Europe around the 1890s, when most of the secessions were formed (Nebehay 16; Kleinschmidt 53-58, Fähnders 80-89). As Peter Vergo also notes, “revolutionary artists [. . .] like most other people, congregated in Vienna’s innumerable coffee-houses. Many of the younger, more progressive members of the Künstlerhaus met either in the Café Zum Blauen Freihaus [. . .] or in the Café Sperl” (18).

Because of the strict exhibition rules and favouritism of foreign art over local art, a growing oppositional group of artists (Josef Engelhart, Gustav Klimt, Carl Moll, Josef Hoffmann, Josef Olbrich, Hugo von Hoffmannstahl, and Hermann Bahr, too) eventually left Viennese Künstlerhausgenossenschaft and, on April 3, 1897, founded the Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs (Kleinschmidt 53-58; Nebehay 16). The first year of Ver Sacrum and especially the first issue solidify this revolutionary split and the need for alternative practices and cultural interaction in the Viennese arts scene. The manifesto accentuates a sense of cultural and artistic urgency as well as aesthetic essences that are central to the Vienna Secession’s identity.

The initial essays of the first issue alone are, however, the strongest series of public declarations that formally established the Vereinigung’s existence as an independent union of artists representing the Vienna Secession movement at large. These essays advocate for a self-imposed expatriation from the local art associations (Akademie der bildenden Künste and Künstlerhausgenossenschaft) to embrace their own renewal of culture. Ver Sacrum made up the organ, the symbolic driving force, and the materiality (or the “media of evidence” (Powell 408))
of the Vereinigung. It also represents the agency of the Secession, whose members desired to create their collective identity in Vienna.

Vienna, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was defined by aspects of multi-nationality and instabilities concerning the national identity of the people in the Austrian territories. Thus, contributors to the magazine often refer to an “Austria” and desire an “Austrian” identity for the arts, but they do not openly name or dismiss the empire. The magazine turns out to be emerging from a distinctly revolutionary atmosphere, while rebelliously battling for winning the public’s Kunstsinn, the appreciation of the arts.

As we will see, Ver Sacrum is a product of culture that gives form to the Secession’s understanding of the arts related to

(1) aesthetic value (concentrated in the occasioning of provocative, evocative, religious, and moral moods as aesthetic),

(2) identity,

(3) culture, and, most importantly,

(4) a sense of artistic sensibility.

Ver Sacrum’s function as an arts magazine is to mediate a new artistic selfhood and the idea of

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7 See Larson Powell’s review essay “Media as Technology and Culture” with regard to Wolfgang Ernst’s Chronopoetik. Zeitweisen und Zeitgaben technischer Medien (2013), Andreas Hepp’s Cultures of Mediatization (2013), and Lorenz Engell’s Fernsehtheorie zur Einführung (2012).

8 Some historians often refer to Austria-Hungary as a “multinational Empire” (Robert Kann qtd. in Bronner, et al. 1) or “multipeoples state” (Hans Mommsen, ibid.) to capture the “complexities and contradictions that [. . .] go with the historical territory” (1). These complexities and contradictions most often point toward the “intrinsic instability” between the ruling houses and territories of German Alpine hereditary lands, Bohemia, and the Hungarian-Croatian crown. A discontent with this territorial heterogeneity marks the magazine’s advocacy towards the development and fostering of local Austrian and Viennese artistic production. See section 1.3 below for more detail.

9 The only reference to the Austro-Hungarian Empire can be found on the inside covers, where official information is displayed for advertisement purposes.

10 See the issues January (5, 31) and February (8).
an aesthetic culture as part of a material culture. It advocates for the acquisition of aesthetic and materialistic attitudes for cultural-political reasons: to establish an authenticity (or a kind of aura) in the Secession, which, in turn, secures a social presence and cultural significance for their work. On the one hand, this artistic authenticity is achieved by an excess of evocative language, aesthetic symbols, and metaphors amounting to a vision of the aesthetic culture. On the other hand, the social presence (or significance) is accomplished in material terms, that is, in the materiality of the magazine, as it is the most accessible platform and representation of the Secession that contains many evidential references beyond the written text.11 Sabine Gross explains that attempts to redefine the nature of the book lead to research on the question of materiality, such as investigations on production, materials of production, as well as the interplay between texts and illustrations and the arrangement of the two (147).12 Interpretation will not only be based on text but also on the magazine’s visual, formal, and material properties. Materiality thus refers to “[displaying] the double nature of objects of writing as carriers of information and material artifacts” (Gross 160).13

The new, most accessible realm to encounter artistic value will be the magazine itself and the perceived function and value to which the Secession’s existence is due will be primarily educational (recall “die grosse [sic] Masse kunstempfänglicher Menschen zu bilden” (1:6-7). The mission toward Kunstemfinden displaces art from the less approachable and conventional status to a more accessible one. Such a dislocation of the function and value of art into everyday use

11“Ver Sacrum remains a document of the first importance [. . .] and one without which it would be impossible to obtain a complete picture of the activity of the Secession during the early years of its development” (Vergo 44).
12See her review essay “Matters of Reading, Shapes of Writing: Material Form and Social Practice” (2013).
13Interest in the physical ‘stuff’ of reading and writing . . . fits smoothly into the shift of attention from treasures of verbal art and thought to techniques and tool of knowledge production, to artifacts and their circulation, toward including the study of literature in more broadly defined cultural studies” (Gross 148).
displaces art into a realm marked by a preoccupation with material objects. As follows, an aesthetic value or meaning is necessarily embodied in the materiality of the magazine considered artistic. The overall atmosphere of the magazine is dominated by notions of aesthetics (sensibility, taste, and beauty), as well as an enhanced aestheticized materiality (visually pleasing, appealing forms, prints, and arrangements). There is an abundance of metaphorical significances such as the initial cover page of a tree outgrowing its confining wooden frame, the title *Ver Sacrum* (Latin for “sacred spring”) and the word “secession” itself, all accentuate a moment of transformation claiming sacredness. Yet, the inside of its cover pages includes advertisements for book makers, publishers, design shops, cabinet makers and some issues contained loose prints and posters of artworks. This leads to the materiality of aesthetics and to the ornamentation of the seemingly insignificant surface of the pages. Since the texts are often accompanied by decorations, drawings and sketches of artistic interior and exterior designs, the realized harmony or correspondence between texts and illustrations articulate the overall realization and materiality of the Secession’s *Kunstempfinden*.

Its attempt to bring together or to totalize aesthetics with materiality produces some contradictions. The textual contributions often have vague links to most of the illustrations accompanying them, which suggests some incoherence between the artistic and conceptual synthesis within the magazine. Indeed, as Robert Jensen points out, the rhetoric of the Secession has not been properly studied and “taken too much at face value” even though “from its inception the Secession was rich in contradiction” (199). *Ver Sacrum* is more frequently included into cultural-historical and artistic descriptions of Viennese Modernism than into critical

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14 On the origin, meaning and relevance of *Gesamtkunstwerk* with regard to *Ver Sacrum* and the Vienna Secession, see Chapter 2, section 2.1.1.
readings or analyses with respect to its cultural-political significance, aesthetics, or materiality.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, \textit{Ver Sacrum} has received informative analysis about its production, most notably by Nebehay, Robert Waissenberger, and Maria Rennhofer.\textsuperscript{16} For instance, Nebehay’s comprehensive study \textit{Ver Sacrum 1898-1903} (1975) provides useful references about its editors, the production, its size and price as well as indexes to all artists, their biographies and works of art published in the magazine. Other leading scholars on the Vienna Secession, such as Hans Bisanz and Waissenberger do not seem to evaluate the journal as critically as I did, despite putting together an exhibition of it in 1982/83.\textsuperscript{17} Their exhibition catalogue introduces the magazine as a movement against provincialism (Bisanz et al. 7-16) and provides reflections on its literary contributions (Bisanz et al. 17-22), on the overall cultural-political and artistic goals (Bisanz et al. 23-30) as well as on the Viennese, women’s fashion (Bisanz et al. 31-35).

The most relevant and supportive research that exposes the magazine’s cultural-political content in critical detail is Bernhard Kleinschmidt’s \textit{Die “gemeinsame” Sendung: Kunstpublizistik der Jahrhundertwende} (1989). Kleinschmidt’s study shows the politics of arts (\textit{Kunstpublizistik}) around the turn of the century by critically reflecting on the development and goals of the Secession. For example, his commentaries on the Secession’s criticism of art as


propaganda, its conception of art as a pedagogical approach, and Hermann Bahr as an inspirer
and provocateur are especially helpful in understanding Ver Sacrum’s elusive jumps in tone and
rhetoric. His analysis discloses discrepancies between the magazine’s layout and its various
theoretical, literary, and artistic content. Ver Sacrum’s composition and layout of the individual
issues resemble but are antithetic to the traditional ideology of Gesamtkunstwerk. Kleinschmidt
identifies that, in a broader sense, one of the main questions dealt with was how to meaningfully
harmonize text and image and not only the forms of art as Richard Wagner attempted in his
operas (174). Yet the overall project to supply the text with purely ornamental elements and
enclose it with illustrations so that it still fulfills its own pedagogical, social, cultural, political,
aesthetic, and critical tasks, seems to be a different kind of total work of art.18 Thus, the highly
programmatic aspirations of Gesamtkunstwerk in Ver Sacrum present several inconsistencies.

Expanding on Kleinschmidt’s statement, the attempt to functionalize artistic
ornamentation (i.e. evoking a materialistic attitude) for everyday experience while holding onto
the elevated artistic value of the artwork is where the problematic of Gesamtkunstwerk in the
magazine lies. Both the aesthetic and materiality are presented in the idea of Kunstempfinden;
judging with an artistic sensibility that comes about in the fusion of the former two achieves a
new variation of Gesamtkunstwerk.

The present thesis differs from the work of the aforementioned scholars in its attempt to
introduce (next to Gesamtkunstwerk) Kunstempfinden as the Secession’s leading aesthetic and
cultural-political concept.19 The emphasis on artistic sensibility results in the reading of the

18 See Hans Bisanz essay “Ver Sacrum – Kunstpolitische und künstlerischeZiele” (24, 30) in the exhibition catalogue
put together by him and Waissenberger from 1982.
19 Ver Sacrum and the Secession have been repeatedly introduced as inspired and led by the idea and concept of
magazine in terms of its aesthetics and materiality. To bring together these broader realms, the thesis builds on Georg Lukacs’s essay on “Aesthetic Culture” (1910) and Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1931).20 Kunstempfinden exemplifies Benjamin’s prediction of a reversed function of art: Ver Sacrum’s function as an arts magazine is to occasion aesthetic moods (what Lukacs called the aesthetic culture as part of a material culture). In the form of book decorations, posters, decorative illustrations, front covers and advertisements, the magazine becomes the artistic realization of idealistic, provocative, elevated, pedagogical, and commercial overtones. It advocates for the acquisition of aesthetic and materialistic attitudes for cultural-political reasons: to establish an authenticity (or a kind of aura) of the Secession, which, in turn, secures a social presence and cultural significance for their work.

The thesis’s methodological orientation, therefore, takes place on a tension between aesthetic philosophy and media studies. On the one hand, the magazine is concerned with art in its most traditional sense: with (1) beauty, (2) the sublime, and (3) a sensual or physical

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*Gesamtkunstwerk* (see Klaus H. Carl and Victoria Charles 89; Bisanz et al. 30; Gronberg 57; Shedel 38; Rennhofer 180-183).

20 The term aesthetic culture is generally associated with Schorske’s *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, a collection of former essays published together in 1980. To paraphrase Gluck, it connects the political and social developments with an aesthetic culture, whose defining characteristics were escaping politics, extreme sensitivity to subjective states of art appreciation (such as Kunstgefühl and Kunstempfinden) and psychic phenomena (Gluck 264). Gluck adds that, for Schorske, these were also seen as inevitable responses to the many changes in society as well as in national politics. I understand these changes in terms of the revolutions across Europe, the increased awareness of one’s rights, the increased sense of individualism and the spread of ideas due to technological advancements like printing.

Some of the problems raised around Schorske revolve around whether modernism in Vienna itself could have been reconsidered as “a particular historical achievement” (266). Gluck writes that Schorske’s work is not just a “case history of a local aesthetic culture” (265) but implies a framework for historically understanding modernist cultures in general. Such a framework develops awareness (1) about a certain kind of logic in the psyche or attitude and (2) about making the idea of a modern culture part of one’s identity and everyday life. Whether Schorske’s fin-de-siècle Vienna can or should “continue to have validity as an analytic tool for further research” (Gluck 265) was questioned at a conference Beyond Vienna 1900: Rethinking Culture in Central Europe, 1867-1939 held at the University of Minnesota in 1995. See Steven Beller’s (ed.) “Afterthoughts about Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. The Problem of Aesthetic Culture in Central Europe” in *Rethinking Vienna 1900* (2001).
experience.\textsuperscript{21} It is the capacity of artistic sensibility (\textit{Kunstempfinden}), which the Secession seems to be most concerned about and have expressed as their cultural mission in the first volume. In other words, the Vienna Secession wanted to be identified as something that is “subjective yet universal and necessary” (Kemal on Kant’s theory of aesthetics in Guyer et al.) with a beautifying force that would fulfill the revival and renewal of culture and art, that is, the coming of a \textit{Ver Sacrum} or “sacred spring.” This explains the excessive use of symbols of life, revolution and creativity, such as the tree, the female body, and the notion of the “sacred spring.”

On the other hand, Bernard D. Geoghegan, in his introduction to cultural techniques in German Media Theory, explains that the “methodological orientations” that govern Media Theory sharpens the tension between “humans or machines,” between “discourse or hardware” (66), thus between aesthetics and materiality, too. Placing the close reading of \textit{Ver Sacrum} also into this theoretical approach, I looked at how arrangements in the magazine define the scope and logic of the Vienna Secession as a cultural formation and the kind of knowledge the Secession puts forward.\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{22}Within Media Theory, the magazine can be considered a “cultural technique” (\textit{Kulturtechnik}) mainly because of its association to pedagogy and “to Enlightenment notions of culture as the acquisition of literacy and numeracy” (Geoghegan 77). \textit{Kulturtechnik} is not a guiding theoretical or pedagogical concept of the Secession. Yet, it helps understanding and defining \textit{Ver Sacrum} as a cultural technique of the Secession to address national and cultural identity, artistic taste, and the accompanying artistic sensibility. Geoghegan explains that in the nineteenth century \textit{Kulturtechnik} touched upon many questions such as “national and cultural identity, the establishment and maintenance of experimental systems, the interweaving of nature and technics” (Geoghegan 77). Though \textit{Kulturtechnik} is a media theoretical term, it provides some cultural understanding of the magazine’s aesthetics and materiality.
The allusions to sacredness, to renewal, and to *Kunstempfinden* in themselves do not mirror tensions but rather a unity. The illustrations and page compositions mirror the degree and quality of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) and *Kunstempfinden* (artistic sensibility). James Shedel remarks that “the nature and implications of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* within the context of the Secession” (38) is noticeable from Olbrich’s descriptions, sketches, and images of architectural projects. Shedel remarks and attributes these apparent efforts to creating a unity between design and concept to the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* and adds that “the city as a total work of art [. . .] meant [. . .] the creation of an environment for living as an artistic response to the needs of life” (38). It is precisely this response, the occasion of an artistic response which is overlooked by solely categorizing *Ver Sacrum* under this term. The concept of *Kunstempfinden*, though it resembles the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, necessarily guides the synthesis of the aesthetic goals with the representation of the pages. Yet the unified picture of an artistic ideal dissolves in the many contexts of functions, duties, layout, and illustrations in the magazine. Consider the following:

Bei uns wird nicht für und gegen die Tradition gestritten [. . .] sondern um die Kunst selbst gestritten, um das Recht, künstlerisch zu schaffen [. . .] Unsere Secession ist kein Streit neuer Künstler gegen die alten, sondern sie ist die Erhebung der Künstler [. . .] Das ist der Streit: Geschäft oder Kunst, das ist die Frage unserer Secession [. . .] Nicht um eine Ästhetik, sondern zwischen zwei Gesinnungen wird hier gestritten: ob bei uns die geschäftliche Gesinnung herrschen soll, oder ob es endlich erlaubt wird, nach einer künstlerischen Gesinnung zu leben [. . .] Unsere Secession ist also ein agitatorischer Verein.
So muss sie sich die Agitatoren zum Vorbilde nehmen. (1:10)

The question of *Gesinnungen*, or “sentiments,” connects not to unity and *Gesamtkunstwerk* but rather to the question of an attitude, which could come about (only) through an artistic sensibility.

Sections 1.4 and 1.5 look at how *Kunstempfinden* may relate to Lukacs’s understanding of aesthetic culture and in what way attitudes (similar to *Gesinnungen* presented by *Ver Sacrum*) are integral components of both. As we will see with Benjamin, aesthetics and the work of art as holy creations merged with the issue of mechanical reproduction will result in altering the perception of the value of the former two. Chapter two exemplifies how artistic authenticity is achieved by an excess of evocative language, aesthetic symbols, and metaphors amounting to a vision of the aesthetic culture, and demonstrate how the social presence takes shape in material terms, that is, in the materiality of the magazine as it is representative of the Secession. The purpose of analyzing *Ver Sacrum* today lies not only in examining the magazine as a cultural memory but in providing an early example of such statements as Benjamin’s politicizing art:

“But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics” (224). *Ver Sacrum* tries to transform or curtail the arts as a matter of politics but not the other way. Aestheticizing politics would amplify politics as a matter of an aesthetic principle. Politics as an aesthetic principle is stricter and more constraining than the arts as a political realm. Arts as a political realm give more flexibility for aesthetic questions, principles and forms to be changed, transformed, and applied. That is why *Ver Sacrum* has multiple functions ranging from questions of value, profession, taste, cultural education, and national
belonging. As Geoghegan notes, “in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries a metaphorical understanding of culture as the maintenance and cultivation of human development appeared. This [. . .] bourgeois conception identified culture with competency in reading, writing, arithmetic, and the arts [. . .] proper culturing regimes could make for a more refined and productive human subject” (72-73). In the case of Ver Sacrum, materiality and material culture create accessibility towards aesthetic values (e.g. having artistic taste or being educated through cultural and artistic practices) and cultural-political meanings (Viennese cultural identity of Secessionists). Thus forming material culture around the arts will turn aesthetics into accessible values.

1.2 Lukacs’s Aesthetic Culture and Ver Sacrum

Lukacs’s “Aesthetic Culture” (1910) provides some critical reflections on the emerging aesthetic and cultural tendencies in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.23 At the time of its publication, Ver Sacrum was not anymore in print and the Vienna Secession had gone through a changeover, whereupon the Wiener Werkstätte emerged.24

In his introduction to Lukacs’s “Aesthetic Culture,” Tyrus Miller summarizes Lukacs’s argument that the overemphasis on aesthetics is not only “culture’s definite disappearance” but also “inimical,” i.e. obstructing, to the formation of culture itself. In this respect, Lukacs’s essay is also a reminder of Adolf Loos’s Ornament and Crime (1908), which depicts a negative picture

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23In 1910 Lukács was already working as an aesthetician and literary critic. It is possible that he had known about Ver Sacrum, since the magazine was also sold in Budapest.
24It is unclear whether Lukacs had owned or read any Ver Sacrum issue, but is possible to imagine that he may have heard about it, since the Vienna Secession was still a sensation and had already split into the popular Wiener Werkstätte.
of ornamentation, as a “symptom of the artistic superfluity” (173). Loos proposes that the “[l]ack of ornamentation is a sign of intellectual strength” (175) and that “the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use” (167, emphasis mine). For him, ornamentation seems to function as a form of aesthetics; its presence in culture is just as destructive as Lukacs sees it. Both Loos’s and Lukacs’s arguments about an aesthetic culture stand in complete opposition to the Secession’s manifesto. In my view, this opposition roots in their fear that the functionalization of artistic ornaments risks the development of superficial and mainstream aesthetic values. Such superficiality could lead to an artwork’s lack of authenticity and cultural value.

What also asks for further clarification are the meaning and definition of culture as well. Gluck points out that culture can refer to (1) “canonical high art, as created by exceptional individuals with supposedly privileged insights into the nature of the self and society” (268). It can (2) “imply popular cultural expressions, reflecting the social, ethnic and class identities of particular groups” or (3) the “everyday practices and habitual customs of an entire society, conceived as a symbolic unit.” Lukacs (like Benjamin) considers the technological advancements influential in the conceptualization, formation, and transformation of culture:

Some, when culture is the topic, talk about airplanes and railroads; about the speed of telegrams and the safety of surgical procedures [. . .] But we should never forget that such things are possibilities and comforts—at best, only road to culture, only materials for the forming power of culture. If, however, culture really has an inner forming power, it can form something out of anything. Culture is the unity of life, the power of unity to intensify and enrich life. (Keresztesi-
As introduced, the magazine tried to lay out an exemplar of culture, an alternative aesthetics to social life, which would precisely enrich and create unity in life through an aesthetic culture achievable with the support of Secession. In this sense, the aesthetic culture presented in the magazine can be looked at as a cultural technique.

But Ver Sacrum is no technological gadget, it does not designate speed or any technological, mechanical advancements. It, however, projects a mission that envisioned the formation of culture through art, which implies that inner forming power: “Wir wollen [. . .] die Kunst als eine hohe Culturmission [sic] auffassen und erkannt haben, dass sie eine von den grossen [sic] erzieherischen Aufgaben civilisierter [sic] Nationen ist” (1:5). Culture, for the Vienna Secession, was an important realm to be openly considered and reformed. Art and an aesthetic way of life are seen as defining aspects of culture. However, since culture is volatile and carries the aspect of contemporariness, it stands in contradiction with the principles of aesthetics, which are understood to be fixed standards that transcend time. The Lukacsian inimicality comes about precisely in the coalescence of a volatile culture with aesthetics. Lukacs observes that his present day culture, which could only be called “aesthetic culture,” rather projects the “center to the mutually destructive strivings of people unaware of each other” (Keresztesi-Treat et al. 369). The ambiguity of cultural progress compromises the very purpose and process of aestheticizing. Thus, for the Vienna Secession, cultural progress (see Ver Sacrum’s manifesto in Chapter 2) is about politicizing aesthetics by calling for its educational, social, and ethical benefits. These elevate art to the level of complete practicality. Some of the arguments give prominence to these “benefits” and to nuances of subjectivism in order to elevate
the subjective interpretation of art, in which one gets to acquire an aesthetic appreciation
(Kunstsinn), if not, preferably, Kunstempfinden, the aesthetic sensibility. The cultural renewal of
this kind would ideally transform spectators and readers into quasi-aesthetes (with a sensibility
and appreciation towards art) and, subsequently, their lives into a one-time experience as trade
and occupation (Lukacs in Keresztesi-Treat et al.370).

In this respect, the back of the January issue already contains a subscription paper and a
smaller pamphlet with a brief but all the more assertive declaration of the Secession. The
pamphlet not only summarizes the manifesto but claims the officiality of the magazine:

VER SACRUM ist das OFFICIELLE [sic] ORGAN der VEREINIGUNG
BILDENDER KÜNSTLER OESTERREICHS.
In dieser reich illustrierten Kunstzeitschrift wird zum ersten Male der Versuch
gemacht, Oesterreich [sic] als selbständigen künstlerischen Factor erscheinen zu
lassen.

VER SACRUM ist ein Appell an den Kunstsinn [emphasis added] der
Bevölkerung zur Anregung, Förderung und Verbreitung künstlerischen Lebens
und künstlerischer Selbständigkeit. Als Mitarbeiter betheiligen [sic] sich die
Mitglieder der Vereinigung an dem bildlichen Theil [sic] von VER SACRUM.
Für den textlichen Theil [sic] sind erste Fachkräfte der Literaturwelt gewonnen.

As Gotthart Wunberg appropriately points out, the rhetoric in Ver Sacrum is not only idealistic,
but also esoteric: “Wie weit gesteckt die Ziele waren, wie sehr sie über alle Esoterik
hinausgingen[. . .] wie sehr hier an den “Kunstsinn der Bevölkerung” appelliert wurde” (498).
The magazine aimed to evoke the appreciation of its audience by creating appealing moods.
Wunberg’s wording of “appellierte wurde” denotes the Lukacsian aesthetic cultural tendency, whose task is (not to set a standardized aesthetic form but) “to occasion aesthetic moods” (Miller in Keresztesi-Treat et al. 366). Thus, artistic appreciation is also elicited by describing the arts as part of a public good. *Ver Sacrum*’s propagation of *Kunstsinn*, however, reveals some ambiguity in its proposed universality: “[u]nd da wenden wir uns an euch alle, ohne Unterschied des Standes und des Vermögens [. . .] Kunst für die Reichen und Kunst für die Armen. Kunst ist Allgemeingut” (1:6). Yet *Ver Sacrum*’s promotion of *Kunstsinn* is indeed just appealing, since the Secession artists turned primarily to the wealthy and educated elite.\(^{25}\) Although the Vienna Secession envisioned *Ver Sacrum* with a high level of social functionality (Bisanz et al. 16), their image and success depended on the support from those with wealth. This seemingly deceptive esotericism suggests not necessarily ingenuity but a desperate desire to turn the Vienna Secession into a successful and revolutionary movement.

*Kunstsinn* (a peculiarity of the dominant civic and bourgeois subjectivism at the time, see Kleinschmidt 200) is envisioned as a personal commitment perceptible in subscribing to the magazine or hiring artists and craftsmen associated with the Secession. As *Ver Sacrum*’s manifesto gradually unfolds, it will be more apparent that the new evaluative standards are not concerned with establishing and validating the principles aesthetic judgments. The Vienna Secession has remediated aesthetics into *Kunstsinn* as an inseparable part of a social and cultural education in order to support artists’ recognition and professionalization.

As Lukacs also states, by the end of the nineteenth century, there was a shift in aesthetics

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\(^{25}\) “Gerade für die Entwicklung der Wiener Secession ist aber jene Schichte des Wiener Großbürgertums [. . .] besonders wichtig, denn sie brachte dem modernen Kunstgeschehen nicht nur großes Interesse, sondern auch die finanziellen Mittel. Die Begeisterung, die mäzenatische Haltung des jüdischen Großbürgertums für die Sache der Secession ist von außerordentlicher Bedeutung” (see Waissenberger in Bisanz et al. 16).
and culture, in which aesthetics did not have the notion of an independent essence coming from holy places, such as the church or the king. *Ver Sacrum* demonstrated this shift as they tried to establish a cultural-political significance for artists. The impression of a holy place, a higher ground and rank for their works of art, a new conception of and role for the arts had to be narrated in new terms. The magazine is an essential part of “the process of form-creating itself as a value making source” (Lukacs in Keresztesi-Treat et al. 368): *Ver Sacrum* presented art and the various artistic forms as having an “objective substantiality” (an independent essence).

According to Miller’s interpretation of Lukacs’s essay, that would progressively give way to a short-lived aesthetic effect “in the isolated soul,” (Keresztesi-Treat et al. 366) “that of provoking aesthetic sensations in the inner selves of spectators and readers” (365-366).

This sheds more light onto the problem of aesthetic culture, where artistic creations are seen as sensations efflorescing. In other words, artistic creations are not thought of giving way to independent notions of beauty any more, but started be comprehended as sensations of aesthetic satiability. The kind of cultural mission *Ver Sacrum* propagates points toward such idealistic, artistic sensations attempting to concretize the (abstract) term of *Kunstempfinden*, which, in itself, lacks materiality but is all the more able to characterize and induce sensations of satiability of holy and beautiful art. Therefore, what *Ver Sacrum* seems to have tried to achieve is precisely the mediation of “a leap of faith into a life given over to form” (Keresztesi-Treat et al. 369), i.e. any artistic creation that the Vienna Secession and their artists could possibly create. The Secession’s pursued aesthetic concepts (*Gesamtkunstwerk, Kunstempfinden, Kunstsinn*) with a multiplicity of artistic forms (painting, architecture, sculpture, etc.) are more of an ideal and theoretical rather than practical combination. As Tag Gronberg adds,“*Gesamtkunstwerk* was, in
practical terms, an expensive business, and commissions were few and hard to come by” (57). Aesthetic culture suggests an ironic paradox for Lukacs, and one may see that by its lack of realist perspectives. Indeed, the Secession’s cultural attitude in the manifesto is founded on the preservation of a quasi-holiness, “die heilige Sache der Kunst” (1:3).

1.3 Benjamin and the Materiality of the Aura in Ver Sacrum

Benjamin notes that Marx’s theses (1848) took “half a century to manifest in all areas of culture the change in the conditions of production” (218). In other words, 1898 marks not only the half-century but also the initial year of publishing Ver Sacrum. When Benjamin wrote “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in 1936, film had already surpassed photography let alone lithography, which was one of the major techniques used in Ver Sacrum. These timelines give a better historical perspective when it comes to discussing “the developmental tendencies of art” (218) for the production of Ver Sacrum. Whereas Benjamin explored how photography became film(ic), the present section explores how aesthetics became a matter of materialistic thinking and attitude in Ver Sacrum.

Benjamin introduces art as fundamentally political as a result of producing and creating works of art technologically and mechanically. Conditions of production, especially, if they are (becoming) highly technical and mechanical, flatten out previous conditions of production, (which were less technical or not mechanical at all). Such pre-modern or pre-technological conditions of production were present in “outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery” (218). Thus in his view theses on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction are “useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics
of art” (218).

In this regard, *Ver Sacrum’s* manifesto and the first year of issues will show some political revolutionary demands. As argued throughout the previous sections, artists’ desire to be recognized for their talents and works of art developed into their increased professionalization. On the one hand, such professionalism was supported by the wide availability and common usage of technological and mechanical advancements. It is not just the wider distribution of the magazine, however, which brought professionalism and subsequently clients, but its appeals to artistic sensibility and appreciation of elite patronage too. In other words, the decisive aspect in the Secession’s politics of art is the transformation of the magazine into the material gateway to these (*Kunstempfinden* and *Kunstsinn*) formless concepts and ideas. *Ver Sacrum’s* multiplicity in numbers made them materially accessible. On the other hand, the magazine contributed to the redefinition of the meaning of the work of art, the artist and his or her talent.26 The proliferation of technological and mechanical reproduction influences the possibility to encounter genuine and original works of art.

Politics of art thus suggests that different ways of producing works of art create different conditions of production, too, and these conditions trigger new conceptions about art itself. In *Ver Sacrum*, these introduce art as a necessary ornament in everyday life:


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26 Following Deleuze and Guatarri’s conception of minor literature, Jensen treats Viennese modernism as minor art, whereby one could better understand the peculiarity of *Ver Sacrum* as “of sometimes unwilling dissonance set within yet against [. . .] the ‘major’ artistic language of Parisian modernism” (202). He adds that the shift from public institutions to private patronage and commercial galleries, Parisian modernism meant competition and politics of identity (202-203).

The development of aesthetic culture next to a material culture with the wider availability of printing and lithography and other technology enabled aesthetics to acquire a role in commerce and, thus, in everyday life. Though prints, reproductions and their arrangement were aesthetic, the magazine’s multiplicity and commercial purposes destabilize the traditional superiority of a work of art.

Yet the magazine is presented with a purpose and thus it demands a revolutionary change in the politics of art. *Ver Sacrum* and the Vienna Secession exemplify a new understanding of art that is adjusting to the availability of mechanical reproduction.27 Around 1900 technical reproduction reached a standard that permitted all works of art to be reproduced and it also captured a place of its own among the artistic processes (219-220).28 From a historical point of

27“With lithography the technique of reproduction reached an essentially new stage. This much more direct process was distinguished by the tracing of the design on a stone [. . .] and permitted graphic art for the first time to put its products on the market, not only in large numbers as hitherto, but also in daily changing forms. Lithography enabled graphic art to illustrate everyday life, and it began to keep pace with printing” (Benjamin 219).
28Though Nebehay, Waissenberger, and Rennhofer, too, include that the primary techniques of (re)producing works of art for the magazine were lithographic printing, woodcuts, and drawings, Benjamin gives a clearer historical synopsis about these techniques.
view lithography responded to two social needs. First, it enabled the financial, vocational, and entrepreneurial growth of smaller industries in a field, where previously only a small group of highly skilled individuals could have succeeded. Second, lithography and, consequently *Ver Sacrum* too, made it possible to use images as the means to disperse knowledge and information “for propaganda purposes, and for pure pleasure at a time when social reformers were preaching education through the medium of the senses.”29 The latter corresponds to the Secession’s mission towards the enculturation of *Kunstempfinden*. And by the end of the nineteenth century, lithography was overwhelmingly one of the most popular modes of expressions by mechanical processes.

As Michel Melot describes, it was mainly used by artists working for the “collector’s market” as “its ‘craft’ quality makes it [. . .] economical and easily worked means of reproduction for militant political purposes” (220). The militant political purpose resembles that of the assertive and belligerent language “of” the *Ver Sacrum*’s manifesto:

Unsere Secession ist also ein agitatorischer Verein. (1:10)

Man muss verstehen, sich verhasst zu machen. Der Wiener hat nur vor Leuten

Respect, die ihm eigentlich zuwider sind. Nur durch den Hass kommt man bei uns

zur Gewalt. (1:13)

The Secession too as a cultural-politically “motivated artistic movement [. . .] has seen the production of lithographs, often in extremely primitive workshops” (220). It seems, therefore, understandable that the proliferation of such workshops enabled the Secession to turn to self-publishing by the third year of running the magazine. Initially, *Ver Sacrum* was published by

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29 See Michel Melot’s chapter on “Social Comment and Criticism” in *Lithography: 200 Years of Art, History, & Technique*, p. 207.
Gerlach & Schenk (which, at the time, was a leading book design firm in Vienna), then, in 1899, the Leipziger Verlag E. A. Seemann. From 1900 on Ver Sacrum was already self-published by the Secession and the print and other steps of production were done in different workshops.³⁰

What made lithographs a popular expression was not only its political, economic and educational efficiency. Some have argued that the process could still express and convey artists’ “touch’ and personality without calling for complicated artifice and endless patience” (Porizo 7). In contrast to Benjamin, Domencio Porizo explores this idea as an essential quality that still enables one “to define them as ‘original’ works of art” (7). For Benjamin, “the whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical [. . .] reproducibility” (220), where the original could preserve its authority. In Ver Sacrum’s case, however, it is precisely the reverse: authority, aura, and originality are emphasized in any given issue and in their limited numbers.³¹ Ver Sacrum’s authenticity is materialized through warlike and evocative language that enable their works of art to appear “as if” original in kind and form.

Additionally, the pictures of works of art as well as the essays on art criticism and theory were specifically selected and put together to popularize and persuade the viewer of an artistic aura helping readers acquire aesthetic sensibility. Ver Sacrum translates and transfers the aura into spaces of everyday life, such as into “die innere Ausstattung der Wohnräume” (2:5). The increased availability of artistic elements in everyday life meant the gateway to the aesthetic sensibility and appreciation (Kunstempfinden and Kunstinn). Therefore, realizing these in the form of an artistic magazine that was for sale signified an authentic, artistic accomplishment for

³⁰See Maria Rennhofer’s Kunstzeitschriften der Jahrhundertwende in Deutschland und Österreich, 1895-1914 (107).
³¹Nevertheless, the distribution of copies was limited and had more relevance for those who were able to pay for it.
the Secession and a cheaper solution for the reader to encounter the aura of Secessionist artworks. Thus the distribution of copies amounted to “a unique existence” of the aura (Benjamin 221).

*Ver Sacrum* implicitly stresses on a kind of aura by bringing “things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly” (Benjamin 223). It is not just “die heilige Sache der Kunst” (1:3), but also the means to “die nothwendige Lebensäusserung eines intelligenten Volkes” (1:7). The Secession seemed to understand that their survival and success depended on reaching out to potential readers and clients through their senses that satisfy both their spirituality and desire for material possessions. Thus, Benjamin is right to say that the moment the “criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed” (224) and becomes a matter of political practice. This applies to the Vienna Secession’s *Ver Sacrum*, too, for it used art for the purpose of gaining some cultural-political recognition in order for artists to self-realize in the realm of the arts.

### 1.4 Bahr, Modernity, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire

The idea of modernity has opened up possibilities to expand the sensations of selfhood, i.e. the sensations of one’s individual identity and a subjective perspective beyond traditionally prescribed social identities. In the case of pre-modern people, neither the formation of selfhood nor the expansion of reality to an individual perspective were common ideas. Their existence, as Agnes Heller defines it, was determined by “blood ties” and “domicile.” The reversal of

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32 Benjamin recognizes that meeting the original work of art in the form of a copy, a copy “enables the original to meet the beholder halfway” (220).
disciplinary controls (from kings to institutions) changed people’s opportunities of self-realization from fixed potentials to contingent ones. Heller writes, “the modern person does not receive the destination, the telos, of his or her life at the moment of birth as happened in the pre-modern times [...] the modern person is born in a cluster of possibilities without [...] the framework of a socially determined destination: it must choose the framework for itself” (5). Heller’s conceptualization of an individual person illustrates the historical understanding of the development of self-awareness and speaks to a kind of Selbstbestimmung or self-determination forcefully trumpeted in Ver Sacrum.

Dagmar Lorenz in her Wiener Moderne (1995) outlines the diversity of definitions of modernity that have led to a “Verwirrung des Begriffs” (1). Scholars date the period of modernism differently, varying from 1870 to 1920, 1890 to 1910, or having an initial onset dated to early romanticism, the end of the eighteenth century until around the fin de siècle (1-2). To describe the scope of modernism in its strictest sense would be to talk about Viennese Modernism specifically, as Gotthart Wunberg argues (Lorenz 2). For the purpose of reading Ver Sacrum critically, Hermann Bahr’s work on “Die Überwindung des Naturalismus” (1891) is one relevant indicator for determining how a new movement in a new epoch was perceived. As his title suggests, Bahr conceptualizes a process of changes that leads to a break from the prevailing movements of ideas. He sees naturalism as “eine Pause zur Erholung der alten Kunst; oder [...] eine Pause zur Vorbereitung der neuen” (131).

Modernism is described in terms of an inner drive or urge that conceives and portrays reality and a kind of objectivity different from naturalism. The naturalistic approach is presented as a cultural hypocrisy that could not have remained as the single cultural model and standard
because it was seen as an imprisonment in appearance. With a modernist approach, however, artists started to envision their inner selves, their individuality, and realized or carried out their own (political, cultural, and artistic) wills and decisions. Bahr poetically and allegorically writes:

[D]as Nervöse alleinherrisch und zur tyrannischen Gestaltung seiner eigenen Welt fühlt. Es war ein Wehklagen des Künstlers im Naturalismus, weil er dienen mußte; aber jetzt nimmt er die Tafeln aus dem Wirklichen und schreibt darauf seine Gesetze. (132)

The phrases “Gestaltung seiner eigenen Welt” and “seine Gesetze” denote the concept of eine innere Bestimmtheit since people’s lives were now less prescribed by social class and more contingent upon inner- or self-determination. Bahr uses these assertive statements in his contributions in Ver Sacrum too. He does not distinguish between a pre-modern and a modern person, rather, he sees the decisive differences in terms of artistic epochs, which bear the distinctive ways of thinking, die Denkweisen, and perceptions and sentiments, die Empfindung. Thus, modernity also stands for “das Horchen nach dem eigenen Drang” (131), through which individuals find their way of being marked by the sensations of a personal reality. Bahr identifies a significant reversal of perceptions and roles that require the artist to depict him self and his own worldview and not a mirror image of his environment.

The overcoming of naturalism indicates the defeat of that mirror image, das Ebenbild, which was regarded as the primary source and value of reality. Subsequently, just as much as naturalism can capture an external reality, so can modernism too (driven by idealistic or self-
conscious approaches) capture an inner subjective reality. The defeat of naturalism has meant the transition to modernism: to a new source of reality and to the human “psyche” as well. This fragmented portrayal of reality is also representative of the geographical, social and political fragmentation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

As part of the empire, an enormous multicultural entity, many ethnic groups felt pressured to comply with the mainstream Austrian culture and German language. Vienna was in ongoing transformation by questions of multi-nationality, national identity, citizenship, and local politics. The influx of immigrants, the diminishing political power distribution of the Dual Monarchy, the formation of independent and competitive political groups (within the city of Vienna), as well as regular anti-Semitic movements (e.g. the Anti-Jewish congress in 1882) meant increasing social and political instabilities. More schooling and a variety of professions were available, however, and the national basic law of 1867 brought equal rights to all (including Jews and immigrants). There was a strong presence of culturally and politically driven ideas, as opposed to state or monarchy-led, in communities of practice, such as political parties and fraternity groups. The incentive to push the boundaries and test the limits of an inner personal freedom may be the very product of this multi-ethnic and polyglot environment.

Vienna, as the main capital of the empire, was therefore an essential place for experimenting with new political views, activism, and architectural, cultural, and artistic

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35 Bahr identifies some relevant points in their distinction, namely that while naturalism concentrates on the representation and imitation of external reality, it eliminates the option to create a reality from the “Eigene aus sich,” or to search for “das Geheime” (129). Following this, Bahr implies that reality has developed from being visible into being also invisible, since modernism tries to “gerade dasjenige auszudrücken, worin wir uns anders fühlen und wissen als die Wirklichkeit” (129).

36 For a more detailed overview, see Brigitte Hamann, pages 304-311 and 325-346.
innovations. In summary, the idea of “modernity” encouraged the formulation of ideas and visions independently or as part of a group. Since the sources of reality and aesthetics had gone through a reversal of perspectives, the artist now required a persuasive articulation of his or her subjectivity. This, in turn, expanded the political power and the spectrum of selfhood of artists, which brings us back to Bahr as a central figure in assisting the path towards viewing the arts as the “quasi politischen Anspruch der Kultur” (Kleinschmidt 219).

The initial proposition that Ver Sacrum may be both a campaign and a promotional magazine can also be traced back to Bahr’s commentaries both long before and just before the appearance of Ver Sacrum. His interests in the politics of the arts (Kunstpolitik) go back to his job as a feuilletonist (1892/93) at the Deutsche Zeitung (where he occasionally commented on the Viennese fine arts) and to his Studien zur Kritik der Moderne, a series of theoretical texts published in 1894. In the fourth issue of his Studien he not only attacks the Viennese arts scene for lacking appropriate criticism, but (having called for such inductive criticism as an advocate) he recommends himself as a suitable candidate (Kleinschmidt 215). Later, in 1897, he had written several critical commentaries in support of progressive artists wanting more independence at the Künstlerhausgenossenschaft. Some of these appeared anonymously in the press or as open polemics (later reappearing in Ver Sacrum). The reappearance of his writings in the Secession’s official magazine (so to speak) ratified his until-then only individual

37 Many of the leading figures of Viennese Modernism, like Theodor Herzl, Karl Kraus, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Hermann Bahr lived and worked in Vienna for that very reason.
39 Additionally, in his narrative “Der Roman” (1894) he depicts himself as the apostle of modernity (“Apostel der Moderne”). See Kleinschmidt (215).
40 Bahr’s most notable writings in this vein were “Künstlerhaus 1896” and “Unsere Secession” (Kleinschmidt 216-17).
Nevertheless, with at least four euphoric reviews on the first Secessionist exhibition (March 1898), Bahr solidified his official engagement with the movement. For Bahr the Secession meant “das Individuum zu bilden, eine künstlerische Lösung für die problematische sozioökonomische und politische Situation zu finden” (Kleinschmidt 219). Bahr showed himself patriotic and overly pedagogical and did not shy away from taking on leadership roles either. Bahr’s role in the foundation of Secession strengthened his calling in the Kunstpolitik. He is described as: “Mentor der Künstler, Katalysator der zur Abspaltung der Secession führenden Entwicklung, publizistische Speerspitze der Secession und überhaupt als Anreger der öffentlichen Diskussion” (Kleinschmidt 213). By 1899, Bahr’s critical endeavors were clearly rooted in the objectives of an artistic culture, which would offer an answer to all social problems. Thus, as part of the literary advisory committee of Ver Sacrum, Bahr had an important position to keep in order to live up to his pedagogical and quasi political aspirations.  

Kleinschmidt fittingly connotes the significance of the latter in his title, when he puts gemeinsame between scare quotes: Die “gemeinsame Sendung”: Kunstpublizistik der Wiener Jahrhundertwende. The title is a clear reminder that the cultural mission among artists was led by a desire (1) to constitute a spirit of community, a “Gemeinschaftsgefühl der Vertreter der verschiedenen

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41 He also often spent his time at the exhibition building, where he tried to inspire artists by calling them “Führer des Publicums,” or leader of the public (Kleinschmidt 218).

42 He was often criticized for not being a “real” critic but a follower of “propagandistischer Essayistik” (Kleinschmidt 213), who could write with much euphoria given his personal need for admiration as well. According to Franz Servaes, Bahr had an unusually negative side, his need for admiration (Geltungsdrang), which he identified as (1) a necessary side note to his professionalism as well as (2) the essential driving force in his personality. See Servaes in Kleinschmidt (214).

43 In a letter to his father Bahr writes: “Ich gehe noch immer mit den Leuten in der Secession herum, lasse mich fragen, antworte” (Kleinschmidt 218).

44 To some extent, chapter two reflects Bahr’s political attitude and almost propaganda-like artistic ideology as envisioned for the Vienna Secession.
Künste,” as well as (2) to legitimate their own creativity. The Ver Sacrum issues appearing throughout 1898 mark the seriousness and dedication of Vienna Secession artists, some of whose legacy and profession as artist may have depended on the magazine’s realization and distribution. Whether that could have been the case or not, Ver Sacrum is the Secession’s public declaration that testifies to the artists’ initiation of alternative artistic and cultural-political practices and to taking leadership in cultural production.

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45See Bahr’s remark from May 1913: “unser altes Vaterland auf einmal geheimnisvoll in Bewegung geriet: da trat in allen Künsten eine neue Jugend geschlossen auf, einer gemeinsamen Sendung sich mit Leidenschaft bewußt” (qtd. in Kleinschmidt 9).
Chapter 2: Ver Sacrum’s Aesthetics and Materiality: Kulturpolitik, Kunstkritik, and Culturmission

The real artistic reform that the Vereinigung desired—clearly exposed in their first year of issues—was a type of notion of the arts that was independent of the conventional, state-owned arts institutions. Artists’ withdrawal from the Akademie der bildenden Künste and the Künstlerhausgenossenschaft as well as the creation of their own “exhibition space” in the form of the magazine contribute to the materiality of the Secession aesthetics laid out in the Ver Sacrum manifesto. According to Marian Bisanz-Prakken, each page offered a Gesamtkomposition (German for “overall composition”) in which the various illustrations, badges, initials, and decorative strips were organized mainly horizontally and vertically. In her article “Das Quadrat in der Flächenkunst der Wiener Secession” she explains that the square as a motive of ornamentation came about in the Secession’s specialization in Flächenkunst or stylized planar art.46 Namely, the rectilinear segmentation, arrangement, and other rectangular elements on the pages (such as book decorations, monograms, badges, and picture and text frames) marked a similarity to the British movements and a fundamental difference between Art Nouveau and Jugendstil. The Secession’s strive towards aesthetics found its other striking realization in the design of the pages. As Hevesi also notes, Ver Sacrum showed visible efforts and attempts to develop “sich aus Bild und Schrift zu einem bewegten, wenn auch streng in der Fläche lebenden Organismus” (9). Indeed, the nearly perfect square shape of the pages offered an ideal opportunity for a harmonious design of display, which eventually constructs an apparent

46The popularity of the square motive is most commonly tied to the works of the British Mackintosh Group, whose publications in arts magazines were known since 1897 (Bisanz-Prakken 42).
Throughout this chapter, the materiality and aesthetics of the *Ver Sacrum* manifesto will be introduced.

### 2.1 *Ver Sacrum*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1-4

In view of modernity (marking the turn of the century) and of the series of secessions and arts movements across Europe, the first year of issues accentuate a sense of cultural and artistic urgency accompanied with assertive and abundant metaphorical significance (both visual and literary). On the one hand, the initial cover design, a tree outgrowing and breaking through the pot it was originally planted in, projects and symbolizes this urgency. On the other, the overall artistic and cultural-political trajectory is best summarized by Max Burckhard’s short, opening text and the accompanying book decorations and illustrations around it. This opening article is especially forceful in its promise of art as holy and as a sanctuary. The essences of art and aesthetic sensibility surface as defining pillars of the Vienna Secession and come about as the arrival of the “sacred spring” in the metaphors of the tree and the female body.

The cover of the first issue from January 1898 is, therefore, the best place to start the exploration of *Ver Sacrum*’s manifesto. Its metaphorical meanings not only set the themes and

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47 The application of smaller and larger sized square as decoration is detectable throughout the issues. As Bisanz-Prakken notes, by 1900, the square motives and book decorations took less precedence due to already changing attitudes in the magazine. Consequently, square forms became smaller and the overall picture of the pages (*Gesamtbild*) became calmer. Instead of dominating the front cover completely with decorative forms, it displayed small, square shaped badges in the center, leaving the surrounding blank. Between 1900 and 1903, its importance transitioned to a new function: monograms. Both Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser are considered to be the inventors of the square as a motive of decoration, yet Moser used quadrangular shaped monograms already in 1898 (42).

48 London, Paris, Munich (1892) and Berlin (1897)
tones for most texts and illustrations that will follow. They also show the Lukacsian aesthetic culture, where the occasioning of aesthetic moods forms the lost aura that Benjamin observed. Designed by Alfred Roller, this front page shows a tree in red ink whose roots have outgrown the pot in which it was planted. The pot is not able to hold the tree anymore as the roots have pierced through and opened the walls, and thus the roots are now setting foot in the ground. The canopy of this tree has three (nine-cornered) thick crosses, which in their numbers evoke the holy trinity, yet in their forms are shield-like structures. As Nebehay points out, the three shields stand for painting, sculpture, and architecture (resembling the “holy” unity among them as they stand together, high in the canopy) (16, 22-23). The cover itself and the elevated positioning of these three artistic disciplines suggests an ascribed, higher value, rank, and the notion of (Gesamt)kunstwerk, the fruitful partnership among the different forms of art (Nebehay 22). On the one hand, the tree symbolizes life itself, and on the other, the shields symbolize the fruits of artistic creations of the three disciplines.

Burckhard’s opening text carries on the meaning and relevance of the magazine’s cover page and title. *Ver Sacrum*, Latin for “sacred spring,” designates one of the most important

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49 In my view, the January cover deserves special attention as it shapes the desired public perspective of the Vienna Secession. The covers of the consecutive issues in this first year also have metaphorical relevancies but are less and less engaged in representing the cultural and social position of the Secession. Therefore, not all of them will be commented on.

50 The inside of the front cover informs about the members of the literary advisory board (or, *literarischer Beirath [sic]*): Hermann Bahr (writer) and Dr. Max Eugen Burckhard (director of the *k. k. [kaiserlich und königlich] Hof-Burgtheater*. As editor, Wilhelm Schölermann (writer) is indicated, and as editor in chief, academic painter, Alfred Roller is listed. No advertisements are included on this page and issue yet.

51 This breakthrough attempts to chronicle the social and cultural constraints modernist artists (most famously Gustav Klimt and Theodor v. Hörmann) have experienced. See *Ver Sacrum* (1:8-13) and Nebehay (22).

52 With a different design (by Koloman Moser), the shields reappear twice in the January issue. They emerge on the back-cover where two of them are connected by wriggling or serpentine lines leading into the third. Then, right away on the first page, they are placed above Burckhard’s text enclosing his title “Ver Sacrum.” In the shape of imperfect rectangles (with a slight bend on the bottom sides), the shields are positioned on a wreath in anticipation of religious feelings and a sacred explanation of the magazine’s title.
missions of the Secession: the guarantee of a cultural renewal at a time when some of the practicing artists in Vienna found themselves in opposition to the *Künstlerhausgenossenschaft*.\(^{53}\)

Thus Burckhard depicts a situation of great danger and a state of emergency with the metaphors of the ancient Roman political practice of *secessio plebis* and that of a religious practice of *ver sacrum*.\(^{54}\) *Secessio plebis*, as he adequately described it, refers to the (re)action of Roman plebs who, dissatisfied with conditions, would abandon their city and their work *en masse* to strike, so to speak, for improved conditions.\(^{55}\) Such practice was usually in response to some discontent caused by those in the ruling power.

The term *ver sacrum* refers, however, to a religious offering of a sacrifice, born in the spring to overcome times of conflict or great danger.\(^{56}\) The magazine’s emphasis on sacrifice stresses a moment of transformation that claims sacredness for the Vienna Secession and thereby attributes to it a high opinion and an elevated aesthetic mood:

> Wenn aber eine grosse [sic] Gefahr dem Vaterlande drohte, dann weihte das gesammte [sic] Volk alles Lebende, das der nächste Frühling brachte, den Göttern als heilige Frühlingsspende -- VER SACRUM, und wenn die im heiligen Frühling Geborenen herangewachsen waren, dann zog die jugendliche Schar, selbst ein heiliger Frühling, hinaus [. . .] ein neues Gemeinwesen zu gründen aus eigener Kraft, mit eigenen Zielen. (1:2)

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\(^{53}\)The only exhibition building owned by this exhibiting society had a conservative leader, Eugen Felix. Under his management, some “radical members” became “irritated by the discrimination directed against” them, “especially the painter Josef Engelhart and Theodor von Hörmann” (Vergo 23).

\(^{54}\)“Wenn im alten Rom die Spannung [. . .] einen gewissen Höhepunkt erreicht hatte, dann geschah es wiederholt, dass der eine Theil des Volkes hinauszog [. . .] Das nannte man Secessio plebis” (1:1-2).

\(^{55}\)See John Roberts on the meaning of “plebs” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*.

\(^{56}\)See Jerzy Linderski on the meaning of “ver sacrum” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary.*
With the appearance of *Ver Sacrum* the Vienna Secession demonstrates the path towards a sacred spring, whereby the Secessionist artist becomes the sacrifice hero and savior of Austrian art. Thus the meaning of sacred spring is described as the leading metaphor and emblem of Secessionist art envisioned modern and exemplary.\(^57\)

Burckhard calls the Secessionists a troop of artists, “die Künstlerschar,” the spirit of youth, “der Geist der Jugend,” and a driving force for artistic creation, “die treibende Kraft [...]. für künstlerisches Schaffen” (1:2-3). The desire to leave and the insistence that such withdrawal was out of free will (“freiwillig”) and for the sake of “eine neue selbständige Künstlervereinigung in Wien zu gründen” are determinants of their political willingness to become independent (1:2). The metaphors of *secessio plebis* and *ver sacrum* are powerful in creating a strong resemblance with the ancient Roman plebs. The desire to declare their existence in the face of struggle seems to have dictated the use of these metaphors with ancient and religious references.

In Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s words,\(^58\) *Ver Sacrum*, presenting this spiritual and political manifestation, would be an example of an “institution of sacrifice” (Horkheimer et al. 41). One that is aware that such an act is just a “symbolic communication with the deity” (40) and that the chosen victim is just a “fraud.” For them this marks a historical catastrophe. The Secessionists, however, become and are elevated as the “hearer[s] of the divine substance” (40). This sacrificial rationality is ultimately “the thirst for privilege” (41) and marks the emergence of culture around aesthetics. Because offering a sacrifice was truly symbolic and metaphorical in

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\(^{57}\)“Der Geist der Jugend, der den Frühling durchweht, er hat sie zusammengeführt, der Geist der Jugend, durch welchen die Gegenwart immer zur „Moderne“ wird, der die treibende Kraft ist für künstlerisches Schaffen, er soll auch diesen Blättern den Namen geben im Sinnbilde des VER SACRUM” (1:3).

\(^{58}\)From here on abbreviated to A&H.
the case of the Vienna Secession, too. “[the] theory of sacrifice,” as A&H state, “relates [sacrifice] to the idea of a collective body, the tribe, into which the spilled blood of the tribe’s sacrificed member is supposed to flow black.” Thus *Ver Sacrum* as a metaphor, refers (1) to a reverence for art and (2) to those sacrificing themselves for the *heilige Sache der Kunst* in the hope of gaining social and political recognition (in the community they left). Indeed, the Latin word “sacrum” can mean either “sacrifice” or “sacred.” The metaphor and the magazine both called for sacrifice of ties to the prevailing conceptions of art, while the magazine provided an outlet for cultural renewal.59

It is no doubt that Burckhard’s written contribution sets up a serious tone projecting a holy goodwill and sacrificial calling of the artist. The *ver sacrum* metaphor in particular is far from being something trivial, and reveals the symbolic alienation of Secessionist artists for its readers and society.60 The particular, metaphorical purpose of a sacred spring is to function as an ongoing, leading motif. The sacred metaphor here is not only a literary but a cultural-political figure of speech that historicizes the organ and the existence of the Vienna Secession already from its beginning. The use of Latin demonstrates a strong vindication in this regard.61 As David

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59 Interestingly, A&H describe the meaning of *ver sacrum* as a custom akin to cannibalism, in which the collective could keep itself alive only by letting a few go: “At some times the numerically increased collective can keep itself alive only by consuming human flesh [. . .] Customs from later times, such as the *ver sacrum*, whereby a whole age-group of young men was forced into exile with accompanying rites at times of hunger, bear clear traces of such barbaric, idealized rationality” (41). This is not to state that the Vienna Secession showcased barbaric or cannibalistic tendencies, but to see how “the newest ideologies [may be] mere reprise of the oldest” (42).

60 Metaphor, in its conventional understanding, is a figure of speech that transfers some features of one thing from the context to which it originally belongs, to a different context. It differs from a simile in the sense that a simile focuses on a comparison of two different things, whereas the metaphor blends some features of one thing into a new context.

61 The Secessionist apparent historical authenticity and proclaimed authority also comes about in the Latin title and in the recurrence of Latin words throughout Burckhard’s text and a few pages later. Immediately after Burkhard’s text, a Klimt sketch (1:4) fills up a whole page. The drawing depicts a marble bust of a Roman man next to a marble wall which bears the following proverb: “duo quem faciunt idem non est idem,” “if two do the same thing, it is not the same thing.” Next to this text (the opposite side to the marble bust) stands a woman pretending to be a bust as
Bleich notes,

during the medieval period, authoritative texts were considered valid only if they were written in the one official language, Latin. Those who knew Latin were church members or were trained in universities that were sponsored by the Church. The combination of literacy and the supremacy of the Latin language in the creation of texts lent any text written in Latin a near-sacred, if not altogether sacred, status. Furthermore, the long history of authoritative Latin writing helped to make it seem that anything written was sacred and that anything carrying a Latin name had greater value than something with a vernacular name. Gradually these perceptions took root, leading to the point where any text, even in modern times, could be sacralised.62

The use of Latin shows the Vereinigung’s conscious and thoughtful dedication in proclaiming and establishing an authoritative voice. The Latin created an elevated, spiritual, and mystical mood as it was taken out of its original context. Blending the historical meaning of ver sacrum into the materiality of a magazine leads to a transformation of its true function (see A&H above). Instead of some qualities of the “sacred spring,” the Secession wants the reader to almost literally envision and feel the spiritual presence and arrival of the Secession. The total historical significance of the ver sacrum metaphor and both the figurative and literal devotion evoke devotion similar to God, only this time, the God of the arts is the artists. Burckhard’s elevated engagement well illustrates how the rhetorical turns and figures of speech carry out an almost

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perceptible existence of a holy force. This kind of self-alienation is to help distinguish *Ver Sacrum* from any other artistic magazine and to secure the forthcoming of a prosperous new era for artists. As we will see in the continuation, the magazine takes these goals very seriously and literally by the Secessionists, which contributes both to the understanding of the magazine’s materiality as well as the materiality of aesthetics.

The idea of a “sacred spring” and Burckhard’s text are accompanied by two illustrations worth mentioning. “Ver Sacrum” (1:3), designed by Moser, and “Frühlingstreiben” (1:21), drawn by Maximilian Lenz, transform the creativity as well as productivity of the spring into another gendered form. Both drawings seem to express the Secessionist cultural mission as particularly, uniquely symbolized in the female body. The illustration “Ver Sacrum” depicts an undressed, “naturalized” woman reaching up (or sacrificing herself) with open arms toward the canopy where her hands already disappear among the leaves. Her hands seem to be entangled in this canopy, which rather looks like a labyrinth. Her rough, branch-like hair and unadorned body, upon which the new growth spreads, acts to reinforce the metaphor from where a sacred spring begins. The woman’s figure resembles a sacred entity—that of Jesus’s body on the cross, which is estranged to be admired.63

Furthermore, the drawing of “Frühlingstreiben,” meaning the ado, drive, or urge of the spring, is even more gendered than the one aforementioned. This image has a clearer and an immediate reference to the meaning of *ver sacrum*. The drawing shows a blooming tree standing firmly rooted into the earth. Around it, a group of naked women are holding hands in an almost-closed circle. But their body postures and gestures suggest ambiguity. They look amazed, fearful,
shocked, and ignorant at once. In some cases, they appear to be fleeing away from the tree or just dancing around it. The background depicts more naked women also standing around and holding hands.

Yet this powerful illustration of the sacred Spring seems out of place within the overall arrangement of the pages and neutralizes the message of the text it accompanies: “Eine Anregung für Wien” (1:19-23) pleads for the Vienna Secession’s involvement in the beautification and aestheticization of the city of Vienna. In a harsh manner, the article criticizes Vienna’s changing urban architecture and, in the first-person plural with an encouraging tone, implicitly advises the city council to make artworks publicly available.64 The overall formally sounding public appeal clearly demonstrates the Secession’s dedication towards the “Stilreinheit’ des Baues” (1:19), which, again, underlines their commitment to an aesthetic culture and way of life and thus the materiality of aesthetics.65 This article vaguely matches the theme and content of “Frühlingstreiben’s” depiction of a spiritual gathering of women around a blooming tree.

The January cover, the title of the magazine, Burckhard’s opening text, and the multiplicity of metaphors (for the theme of the sacred spring) enact almost palpable consequences (recalling an aura) and show how the new reality of the Secession is driven by the magazine’s visual language, evocative tones, and symbolic illustrations (inducing aesthetic

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64 “Wir möchten vorschlagen [. . .] die in den städtischen Lagerhäusern angeschmolten, der Öffentlichkeit nicht zugänglichen Bildwerke, Modelle, Wappen und Cartouchen aus alten Zeiten in geeigneter, vor allem aber in künstlerischer Weise aufstellen zu lassen” (1:19).

65 The appeal also outlines educational benefits for both the working class (Arbeitsmensch) and elite citizens (wohlhabende Brügger): “Dann würde doch auch der auf seinem Geschäftsgang dahineilende Arbeitnehmer der erquickenden Wirkung müssen [. . .] und wohlhabende Bürger sich auf diesem Wege Verdienste um die Gesammheit [sic] erwerben, indem sie solche aus freien Stücken errichten lassen” (1:23).
moods). Nevertheless, the content and form of these pages readily demonstrate a preference for artistic sensibilities over total works of art.

2.1.1 The Question of Gesamtkunstwerk in Ver Sacrum

As hinted earlier, the emphasis on Kunstempfinden, which brings both the value of aesthetic and material qualities together, produces a new variation of Gesamtkunstwerk. For Klaus H. Carl and Victoria Charles, this idea of a total work of art in the form of the magazine expressed a “didactic synthesis” (89). Kunstempfinden has a stronger didactic quality in comparison to Gesamtkunstwerk. What dominates is a quasi-aura of devotion towards Secessionist artistic creativity that expresses the artistic sensibility, “der schlummernde Trieb [. . .] nach Schönheit und Freiheit des Denkens und Fühlens” (1:6). In contrast to the visual compositions of the magazine, the textual compositions of this first year do not explicitly mention or argue for the realization of a total work of art but rather the realization of artistic sensibilities by involving many forms of art into one’s everyday life.

As it has been argued, the Secession and Ver Sacrum generally aimed to accomplish transdisciplinary, total works of art (Gesamtkunstwerk). The idea of a Gesamtkunstwerk designates the conceptual, symbolic, and literal enframing of different works and forms of art into another complete and comprehensive artwork. The Wagnerian conception of Gesamtkunstwerk imagined that “all the art should carry equal weight, implying cumulative qualitative gain” (Bridgham 338), for “unless reunited, the separate arts in isolation are doomed to impotence” (337). To the extent that Ver Sacrum collected copies and reproduction of

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66 Scholars, such as Hans Bisanz, Robert Waissenberger, Maria Rennhofer, and Tag Gornberg have all introduced the magazine and the Secession as revolving around this leading concept.
different works of art, from music notes to sketches of interior design and sculptures, it can be seen as a total work of art.67 The magazine illustrates this effort in terms of achieving an overall unity and harmony in the composition of the different components on the pages. The kind of unity between image and content, as already exemplified above, do not always accomplish unity (Gesamtheit). Most importantly, the monthly issues do not (and for obvious reasons, could not) include the forms of art (poetry, music, and dance) originally associated with Gesamtkunstwerk. Nevertheless, in their first year Ver Sacrum published several essays and articles (critical, anecdotal, art historical, cultural-political), ten poems,68 one marionette drama,69 three music notes,70 several posters, lithographs and prints of sculptures (of horses, ancient figures), of drawings (of nature, the urban architecture, countryside), and of sketches (of paintings, interior establishments), and, finally, numerous book decorations.

As Maria Rennhofer writes, the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk denoting the Wagnerian union of artistic forms was not a new invention of the turn of the century. New was the programmatic work towards a total artistic effect, which occupies an integral part in the living space of a people receptive to modern art (180). Underneath the idea of gesamt hides a concentrated impulse to collectively enforce a type of individual identity, the selfhood with art, national identity, taste,

68 “Einem Unmodernem. Epistel” by Hugo Salus (1:2:16-17); “Advent” (two excerpt) by Rainer Maria Rilke (1:3:19) and (1:9:23); “Der Handkuss” by Detlev v. Liliencron (1:4:20); “Ver Sacrum” by Ferdinand v. Saar (1:7:28-29); “Der kleine Sünder,” “Fragefritze und die Plappertasche,” “Tintenheinz und Plätserlottchen” (Kindergedichte) by Paula and Richard Dehmel (1:8:16); a poem as book decoration by Alois Tluchof (1:8:23); Zehn Gedichte by Arno Holz (1:11:1-11); “Weltgeheimnis” by Hugo v. Hofmannthal (1:12:5); “Vorsicht” by Jaroslav Vrchlicky and Alois Tluchor (Trans.) (Sonderheft, p. 32)
69 “Tintagiles Tod” (Marionettendrama) by Maurice Maeterlinck (1:12:15-23)
70 “Verziertes Notenmanuscript,” poem by Stephan Milow, komposed by Josef Reiter (1:7:1); “Wiegenlied” by Liedv. L. Stöhr (1:9:1); “Der Tod krönt die Unschuld” poem by Otto Bierbaum, music by Oskar Fried (Sonderheft 29-30)
criticism, and pedagogy. The sections below will explore how the magazine came to terms by realizing these as its cultural missions.

2.1.2 Kunstempfinden and Gesamtkunstwerk

“[U]nser altes Vaterland auf einmal geheimnisvoll in Bewegung geriet: da trat in allen Künsten eine neue Jugend geschlossen auf, einer gemeinsamen Sendung sich mit Leidenschaft bewußt.”

(Bahr, qtd. in Kleinschmidt 9)

Ver Sacrum’s first year of issues are the realization and manifestation of Kunstsinn, which centers on the idea of Culturmission, Erziehung, and Kunstkritik, thereby giving form to the materiality and aesthetics of the Kunstempfinden. Bahr’s remark from May 1913, just a few years before the dissolution of the empire, portrays the overarching emotional impulses that will go along some of the leading sub-concepts and rhetoric of Ver Sacrum’s manifesto. The articles “Weshalb wir eine Zeitschrift herausgeben?” (1:5-7; no author) and Hermann Bahr’s “Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs. Secession” (1:8-13) collectively reveal the desired significance of the Ver Sacrum magazine and the Vienna Secession. These, as part of Ver Sacrum’s manifesto, offer and prescribe new moral, ethical, or aesthetic norms and goals, but the

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71 It is one thing to bring together many forms of art, but, the attempt to totalize and collate form (material) and content (aesthetics), may be another way to understand Gesamtkunstwerk.

72 The concept of Kunstsinn does not recur as often as Kunstempfinden (1: 6,10) or Kunstempfindung (4:9; 9:24) or empfinden, Empfindung and Empfinden often phrased around the künstlerisches, Künstlerseelein or Kunst (1:6; 2:4, 5; 3:13; 4:9, 23; 5:6:2; 7: 4, 27, 30; 8:20, 21, 23; 9:20; 10:20, 24, 25, 26) or Empfindungsfähigkeit (2:4), nevertheless, it is presented as an important term, a cultural goal, and value of the Vienna Secession. Kunstsinn appears again in the article “Mummenschanz,” in the February issue. There, too, it is used to allude to the scope of an artistic understanding, which according to the author should not be validated at the costs of the applied arts (2:8). The words Culturmission (1:5, 4:4), Erziehung/erziehen (2:4; 7:8; 9: 3, 4, 25), Cultur, and Kunstkritik are key building concepts of the Ver Sacrum manifesto and are often used as a supportive framework of essays and articles validating the formation, existence, and importance of the Vienna Secession.
subjective perception and sensibility towards these will take precedence.\textsuperscript{73}

As Stephen Bronner introduced it, “[s]ubjectivity was what the culture of modernism sought to liberate from the constrains of tradition. […] It was his [Ernst Mach’s] abolition of the abstract I in favor of lived sensations […] that had such an extraordinary impact” (viii).\textsuperscript{74}

Indeed, the magazine invites and asks its readers to wake their senses towards art of their current, modern era to create a culture around aesthetic moods: “ABER JEDE ZEIT HAT IHR EIGENES EMPFINDEN. Das Kunstempfinden UNSERER ZEIT zu wecken, anzuregen und zu verbreiten ist unser Ziel, ist der Hauptgrund, weshalb wir eine Zeitschrift herausgeben“ (1:6).

It is understandable that advocates for and contributors to \textit{Ver Sacrum} would also apply such elevated tones, persuasive rhetoric, and illustrations to further concretize the Secessionist artists’ existential importance.\textsuperscript{75}In this way, the magazine is the agency of the \textit{Vereinigung}, whose members desired to have a defined, aestheticized identity in Vienna. Secessionist art therefore has less to do with beauty and more with the subjective presentation of a collective identity. For instance, the article “Weshalb wir eine Zeitschrift herausgeben?” indulges in offering indispensable (life) lessons for a civilized nation: “Diese Zeitschrift soll […] ein Aufruf an den

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\textsuperscript{73}At the time, Ernst Mach’s \textit{Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen} (1886) was widely read. As a result of being well received, he became an influential thinker for Fritz Mauthner (1849-1923), Hermann Bahr (1863-1934), and even American pragmatist William James (1842-1910), as well as among members in the Vienna Circle. The increasing (self-)awareness of one’s own psychology, perception, and potential individuality has led to radical expressions and realization of repressions. Viennese modernism launched new aspects of language, ones that would lead to visually and cognitively stimulating and frightening works of art, literature, architecture, or psychology. \textit{Ver Sacrum} is an excellent example for demonstrating the phenomenon of modernism through activism and revolutionary practices in the realm of the arts. See Ursula Baatz’s “Ernst Mach and the World of Sensations” (82-92) in \textit{Vienna: The World of Yesterday, 1889-1914} (1997) ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and F. Peter Wagner.

\textsuperscript{74}See the preface to the book \textit{Vienna: The World of Yesterday, 1889-1914} ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and F. Peter Wagner.

Kunstsinne der Bevölkerung sein, zur Anregung, Förderung und Verbreitung künstlerischen Lebens und künstlerischer Selbstständigkeit. Wir wollen [. . .] allem Ungeschmack den Krieg erklären” (1:5). Kunstsinn is proclaimed as an elite manifestation of life, as a “mental” faculty or as the appropriate mindset for the arts that everyone should have.76

The illustrations and book decorations for the article “Weshalb wir eine Zeitschrift herausgeben?” (1:5-7) are insignificant and do not under- or overwhelm the content and theme. On the other hand, the first page to Hermann Bahr’s contribution with “Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs. Secession” (1:8-13) is surrounded with an impressive book decoration by Josef Hoffmann.77 It is comprised of an affluence of berries that embrace his title, hereby guiding the reader’s attention. The opposing page is a mirror image of the former in its planar composition of text and image. The illustration, by Josef Malzewski, depicts two naked people, a young muscular woman and a young adolescent pulling a Pegasus. The Pegasus symbolizing “a means of escape”78 is an insightful reference to Bahr’s essay about the Secessionists’ desire for freedom and escape from constrains of the Künstlerhausgenossenschaft.79

The artists’ desperation to have a say in how their art is exhibited or sold became the incentive to unite artists wanting “das Recht Künstler zu dürfen” (1:10). Peter Vergo explains that the Künstlerhausgenossenschaft owned the only exhibition building in the city and “[i]t was

76“sie [die Kunst] [ist] vielmehr die nothwendige Lebensäusserung [sic] eines intelligenten Volkes, wie Sprache und Sitte” (1: 6).
77Bahr’s essay extends over six pages with a break of two pages: one, including a lithograph of a woman in profile (by Moser) and a completely empty page. The rationale for the former may be deemed to the overall gendered embodiment of the sacred spring. The rationale for the latter is, however, unclear.
79Independence of the self is a key phrase here, given the conservative leadership by Felix. Not surprisingly, Bahr begins with an anecdote about his personal encounter with an Austrian painter, Theodor v. Hörmann, who furiously went on and on about his discontent with the Künstlerhausgenossenschaft. See 1:8.
thus in a position to influence, to a significant extent, not only government policy with regard to the arts, but also the formation of public taste, by means of its annual exhibitions” (18). Consequently, Bahr’s emotionally charged writing lays down a sympathetic ground for rationalizing the awaited genesis of the Vienna Secession and *Ver Sacrum*. In the continuation, he declares the rebellious spirit of their collaboration: “Unsere Secession ist also ein agitatorischer Verein. So muss sie sich die Agitatoren zum Vorbilde nehmen, die bei uns etwas durchgesetzt haben” (1:10). *Ver Sacrum*, as an aesthetic revolt, is upfront in its “agitating” attitude towards achieving their goal. The rhetoric leads to protecting the notion of a personal artistic freedom, of an artistic selfhood.

Thus the Secessionist ideas and ideals are not simply introduced but demanded and “fought” for: “Wir wollen [. . .] den Krieg erklären,” and “[w]ir brauchen dabei in erster Linie die nothwendigen Kräfte der Zerstörung und Vernichtung” (Citation Missing). Although it is a symbolic declaration of war, it gives prominence to creating the vital conditions for strengthening a “[künstlerisches] Leben und [künstlerische] Selbstständigkeit” (1:5-6). The materiality of artistic sensibilities therefore starts with taking ownership of one’s artistic fate, both of a *künstlerisches Leben* and of a *künstlerische Selbstständigkeit*. Accordingly, in this essay Secession artists are portrayed having an exceptional attitude that does not distinguish between old or new art, nor argues for or against traditions: “wird nicht für oder gegen die Tradition gestritten” (1:9). These statements illuminate the existential question and the market value of the artist’s work:

[b]ei uns wird es [. . .] um die Kunst selbst gestritten, um das Recht, künstlerisch zu schaffen. Unsere Secession ist [. . .] die Erhebung der Künstler gegen die
Hausierer, die sich für Künstler ausgeben und ein geschäftliches Interesse haben, keine Kunst aufkommen lassen [. . .] Das ist der Streit: Geschäft oder Kunst, das ist die Frage unserer Secession. (1:10)

Ver Sacrum represents an association of self-determined artists who seem to care for their artworks’ dignity, since the work of art, in the age of mechanical reproduction, had slowly begun to be in danger of becoming a mere product and commodity. On the one hand, Ver Sacrum praises Kunst als Allgemeingut, on the other, it is a heilige Sache, as Burckhard initially formulated. Their statement, “die Kunst als eine hohe Culturmission” (1:5), fortifies this attitude towards holiness and extends the idea of a sacred art to a righteous and ethical act. Bahr’s juxtaposition of Geschäft and Kunst further shifts the focus of the sacred cultural mission to an existential and professional question of the artists themselves: i.e. the freedom of choosing one’s identity: “Fabrikanten” or “Maler” (10). Whereas both Burckhard and Bahr urge the reader and the artist to take an artistic ownership of his or her life in the name of art, Burckhard does it in the form of a personal, religious calling and Bahr in the form of an existential and moral one. Bahr’s rhetoric not only calls upon every individual to value the work of art or to elevate the existential significance of the artist, but also to take an emotional stand (hence the occasioning of mood).

Among all the qualities that define the Viennese Secession, Kunstempfinden and Kunstsinn could be considered as the most basic and distinctive characteristics for conceptualizing their aesthetic independence. The Secession’s justification and promotion of these two deserves being studied in terms of an aesthetic goal. The magazine’s sensual, idealistic, and warlike language set out to solidify not only the Gemeinschaftsgefühl Bahr
recalled in 1913, but an aesthetic culture and an aura built around aesthetic mood in reproduced copies of a magazine. Burckhard’s elevated, religious engagement with art, the idea of art as a *hohe Culturmission*, and Bahr’s warlike and existential imperative well illustrate the rhetorical turns *Ver Sacrum* takes in order to have an impressive effect.

### 2.1.3 Taste and Nationality and the *Wiener Empfindungsfähigkeit*

*Ver Sacrum*’s February issue presents a lack of taste and a lack of aesthetic sensibility (2:4). The magazine’s second opening article already expressed such an outcry over outdated artistic habits and the public’s deficient, artistic sensibility and interest. Thus, Berta Zuckerkandl, a regular contributor to *Ver Sacrum*, picks up on this perceived problem and lays out a harsh criticism about Viennese social life, naming it a mere empty formalism. She condemns the fact that the kind of spirit residing in the average Viennese is that of a philistine, a *Spießbürger* (6). She amplifies her dissatisfaction by comparing the Viennese to a horse that is easily controllable if handled and instructed right and benignly. Though amenable to influence, the Viennese forcefully has to remedy the lack of *Erziehen*, i.e. of instruction, since, as Zuckerkandl writes, contemplation has more advantages than talent:

> Es muss sich förmlich zum Schönen zwingen—muss sich mit eiserner Energie durchringen, um eine *Empfindungsfähigkeit* [emphasis added] zu erlangen, welche der Wiener dank seiner Veranlagung von Haus aus besitzt [. . .] Talent allein genügt eben nicht, es muss in einem festen Boden wurzeln [. . .] So hat Verstandesarbeit bessere Resultate ergeben als Talent [. . .] Ernst und Tiefe muss ihm anerzogen werden, gewaltsam. (4)

The warlike language from the January issue continues with Zuckerkandl and manifests the
importance of an aesthetic taste. In her view, the public not only suffers from poor enthusiasm in taste ("mangelnde Geschmacks-Initiative"), but the furnishing of living spaces is also banal, filled with carelessness, and indifference. She laments some of the interior designers and upholsterers for ignoring their pedagogical role in the transition to a modern taste in art (5).

Still, Zuckerkandl sees a Viennese nation, a Viener Volk that should be the provider of modern art, for, it has a quick-tempered mind, a hot-blooded, lively sensibility, and a keen obedience as part of its mannerism. She adds that a strong, individual sensibility must prevail as part of public morals and customs, as well as in architecture, in the arts and applied arts.  

For this reason, the title of her essay, "Wiener Geschmacklosigkeiten," or "Viennese Tastelessness," is considered quite offensive to her strong sense of attachment to Vienna (Localpatriotismus [sic], 4). Interestingly, Zuckerkandl’s essay opens with a half-page large illustration of Leda by a lake who, according to Greek mythology, was loved by Zeus, shown on the printed image in the form of a swan that makes love to her. Though the overall composition of the page is harmonious, the blue-colored print of this mythological scene is rather odd and loses its connection to Zuckerkandl’s arguments. The story of Leda breaks the unity between aesthetics and materiality.

Somewhat similarly, the cover page of the February issue is not connecting to any of the texts or other illustrations. Rather in continuation of the January illustrations, it is another striking depiction of the female body standing as a metaphor for the birth of “sacred spring.”

80 "Ein leicht erregbarer Sinn, ein heissblütiges, lebhaftes Empfinden [emphasis added] und eine willige Lenkbarkeit sind charakteristische Eigenschaften des Wiener Volkes[. . .] In Sitten und Gebräuchen, im Wesen der Architektur, der Kunst und des so nah verwandten Kunstgewerbes, müsste ein kräftig individualistisches Empfinden herrschen” (2:4).
Two seemingly identical women with giant petals lean forward with their legs open. The petals are falling over their right legs, covering them. However, their private parts are covered with smaller flowers, whose stamens (the male reproductive organ of a flower that produces pollen) are placed at the center of the page. With the choice of the female body, one cannot ignore the intrinsic reference and relevance of its reproductive function signifying creativity and the birth of a renewed culture. The female profile with curls was a typical motif for Moser (Bisanz-Prakken 40). Notwithstanding, *Ver Sacrum* wants to be a mirror of modern, *Viennese* taste in art, in which the Viennese element is one of the highlights of the Secessionist movement. The exclusive attachment to Vienna and not only to Austria-Hungary is part of the Secessionist mentality and is generally noticeable throughout the various articles in the magazine.

One such outstanding remark of local, Viennese patriotism emerges in the third March issue as well, where a short text in a pompous tone introduces Gustav Klimt as an exemplary artist for his distinctive Viennese roots and authenticity: “Der Grundzug der künstlerischen Persönlichkeit Klimts ist seine unverkennbare Rassenechtheit: er ist Wiener nicht nur vom Geburt” (3:1). The word *Rassenechtheit*, or ethnic authenticity, hints at the importance of having a local, Viennese nationality, which should be the essential feature of an artist’s personality (*der Grundzug künstlerischen Persönlichkeit*). Besides featuring many of his drawings (all portraying women with the exception of two) including the book decoration of his short biographical text,

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82 The rest of the images in the February issue are negative or terrifying in their themes. For instance, the poem “Einem Unmodernem” by Hugo Salus (2:16-17) is illustrated by Josef Engelhart’s bizarre, upside-down ‘L’ shaped decorative frames depicting a naked woman and a naked man on both sides. They seem to pray or rather reach out towards each other, yet unsuccessfully because of a divide (also the middle of the book) between them. Ironically, the poem ends with the lines: “Das, was der Nachbar schafft, das ist das Richtige: Die Sehnsucht nach dem Andern = ist die Kunst!” The poem is printed on two pages and thus with the illustrations are mirror images of each other creating a pleasant *Gesamtkomposition*.

83 Zuckerkandl comments that, the sectors of Viennese industries (having more influence and success twenty-five years ago) now work ignorantly with their outdated patterns while an influx of Slovakian goods grows (2:6).
this particular issue also inaugurates him as an honorary member of the Vienna Secession:

GUSTAV KLIMT, Präsident der Vereinigung, wurde seitens jenes Comites [sic] [Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs] [. . .] zum Ehrenmitgliede ernannt.

Dem Comite gehören in der gleichen Eigenschaft die allerersten Künstler aller Nationen an und ist Klimt der einzige österreichische Künstler. (3:23)

Klimt, in becoming the face of the Secession, is now a given ideal and specimen for all artists to follow and admire. The reasons why Ver Sacrum should be treated as a cultural-political declaration of the Vienna Secession lies in their ambition to popularize elite art as part of everyday life and to dictate artistic taste in Vienna, expressed as “Das Heil liegt hier nur im Radicalismus [sic]: die Ausstellungen müssen inhaltlich auf ein höheres Niveau gebracht werden. (3:23), and again:

Aber wir wollen blos die Officiere [sic] einer Truppe vorführen, welche in der allerersten Gefechtsreihe liegt. Denn wir sind Partei und wollen Partei bleiben, solange, bis die stagnierenden Kunstverhältnisse neu beliebt sind und österreichische Künstler und österreichisches Publicum sich ein Bild der modernen Kunstbewegung geschaffen haben. (3:24)

To assume that Viennese taste has to be rescued and enhanced continuously requires a unique rhetoric (1) evoking warlike and alarming emotions while also (2) projecting the power and appearance of a real political party.

The cultural-political messages and goals of Ver Sacrum are not only developing as part

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of additional testimonies (like Zuckerkandl’s) from issue to issue. They also initiate different theoretical explorations as part of a manifestation for their cultural missions. The most common references include Alfred Lichtwark, who demonstrated ways to revive the role of the arts as part of public concern.\textsuperscript{85} His approach to foster an aesthetic culture was through the reconsideration of dilettantism of a higher level, which he eventually called folk art (\textit{Volkskunst}) to emphasize its utilitarian and decorative aspects as opposed to pure aesthetics. The selected articles in the next sections rely on and use Lichtwark’s ideas and cultural-political activism as the primary example to follow.

\subsection*{2.1.4 Envisioning Ästetische Erziehung in \textit{Ver Sacrum}}

Wilhelm Schöllermann’s essay on “Kunstkritik” (4:3-10) announces a complete adjustment to the role of art critic and the task of critiquing art. His critical and philosophical exploration reflects on the critic’s past earmarks of \textit{Unfehlbarkeit} (infallibility), \textit{Gottähnlichkeit} (mirror image of God) and \textit{Herrgottgspeilen} (the play of the almighty) and dismisses them by posing three main questions: (1) To whom is the critique directed, (2) who should be writing it, and (3) what is its ultimate purpose? These, as he argues, constitute the new preconditions and justification of modern art criticism.

Since the critic would be seen as a sincere, participating friend, “ein aufrichtiger, theilnehmender [\textit{sic}] Freund” (1:4:3), Schöllermann describes the advantages of a critic deterring an artist from going astray. The view of the critic as friend prevents his words from being treated as “öffentliche Richtersprüche, die immer die scheinbare Unfehlbarkeit der gedruckten Autorität an sich tragen.” As such, critiquing rather becomes a personal exchange of ideas or an accidental

\footnote{\textsuperscript{85}Just in the first year of issues, Lichtwark is referenced at least six different occasions.}
dispute with the artist, which then allows the critic to widen his understanding and to enrich and consolidate his intuitions. Within these latter two points, as serious considerations of the critic, Schöllermann sees the purpose of the critic as perfectly justified:


The initial, elevated and sacred tones remain; the moral-ethical dimensions from Ver Sacrum’s previous manifestos are also continuously mirrored while giving shape to a new version of art criticism as a form of Culturmission even though only the artist, due to his understanding of the medium and method of creation, may be the best judge of the essence of a work of art.

Yet, the question between the critic’s need for professional familiarity with art and the artist’s unwanted subjective judgment occupies a lengthy dilemma in Schöllermann’s text. He finds it paradoxical that an artist would provide criticism and holds the opinion that an artist should not provide critique, since “jedes Künstlerauge sieht [. . .] eben anders” (4:5). Although an artist has a better understanding of his own artistic techniques, as Schöllermann argues, it is precisely the artist’s technical competency, which obstructs the possibility of the ‘right’ critique. The artist’s artistic Empfinden would be too one-sided, and thus, “ihm in den meisten Fällen seine Subjectivität [sic] im Wege steht” (4:6). Nevertheless, he considers some less talented artists as potentially good critics, if they are not jealous and if they are able to demonstrate their mastery with the pen instead of the brush, for they possess “eine gewisse Garantie fachmännischer Vorkenntnisse.” Schöllermann concludes that those will make ideal critics who
were previously professional artists, and by transferring their productive (artistic) activity into a receptive (critical) one:


The transformation of the critic from a former artist to a friend and then to a learner will now extend to the role of an educator. For the critic, as Schöllermann accentuates, it will come down to educational development or Bildung and not the intensity of his artistic Empfinden or the representation of it, as would be the case for the artist. He points out that the critic cannot have the same receptivity as the artist for nature and art. The critic needs to be part of Bildung as an overarching realm in this profession in order to be able to bring in “die gesitige Überblick” (6).

In this respect the cover page of this April issue deserves some attention, since for the first time a male figure is illustrated. Its closest reference regarding content is that of Schöllermann’s vision of an aesthetic educator who embodies the advocate of Bildung and “die gesitige Überblick” (4:6). This latter image of an overview (Überblick) immediately materializes as the male figure stands tall and with a radiant confidence in the bow of wooden boat looking ahead. This advocate of culturally interesting and meaningful facts, however, conveys the image that Schöllermann also despises: that of the public Moralgeber, who with his scheinbare
Unfehlbarkeit der gedruckten Autorität an sich trägt. It may be an innocent coincidence, but the authority of the print that Schöllermann here denounces is precisely the authority with which his propositions and this cover use to educate the public in artistic sensibility. He holds a personal armor that bears the three, symbolic shields of the artistic disciplines. Empowered by his supposedly reliable artistic sensibilities, he is able to navigate and perhaps even show guidance in the open public waters.

Nevertheless, the shift over to the culturally interesting and meaningful develops a critical point requiring a judgment-free outlook and even an expertise-free background knowledge. As Schöllermann further explains, an independent and judgment-free view happens as part of a harmonious “Wechselwirkungzwischen Empfinden und Urtheilen [sic], zwischen “Empfangen” und “Wiedergeben” because “den Mitmenschen zumBewusstsein zu bringen, istKünstlers Beruf; ihm beimPublicum an die Hand zugehen, der des Kritikers” (4:9). Such reciprocity (between sensibility and judgement, and between receiving and conveying) is, however, a self-engendering (selbstschöpferisch) process. Its fruits may only be seen as part of publicizing aesthetics and in the public’s attention to and interests for artistic events (4:9-10).

The emphasis clearly falls on the moral task of the critic, who by now not only offers constructive criticism and guidance to the artist but a form of Volkkunst, a type of accessible education for the general audience as well:

Wir brauchen eine Volkskunst im weitesten Sinne,eine Kunst, die für jeden da ist, der sie zu erkennen vermag. Und hat der Kritiker einmal ein Kunstwerk erkannt unddie Aufmerksamkeit auf dasselbe gelenkt, so dass es dem allgemeinen

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86In a later issue, Berta Zuckerkandl attempts to view folk art as dilettantism and will also make it as the most successful method for acquiring Kunstempfinden.
Verständnis nahegebracht ist, dann hat er für Künstler und Publicum zugleich etwas geleistet. Dann ist seine Tätigkeit [sic] eine wahrhaft zeitgenössische und aufbauende [. . .] eine positive Wirksamkeit. Und durch diese schöpferische Wirksamkeit wird der Kritiker selber zum Künstler. (4:10)

The idea of acquiring artistic sensibilities (Kunstempfinden) is viewed in terms of their materiality, since the critic’s job is now to provide a general and accessible understanding of a work of art. While the artist rather creates a realm for aesthetic culture, one that evokes Kunstempfinden, the critic now introduces the realm to see its material benefits in terms of “culturell [sic] interessante und bedeutungsvolle Thatsachen [sic]” (4:6). As such, culturally interesting and meaningful facts become aesthetic values in a given work of art, which may be grasped in the form of a long-lasting friendship: “Dann wird auch dieses Werk “zu dir kommen” und ihr werdet eine dauernde Freundschaft schliessen!” (4:10). Hence, Kunstkritik is presented as part of modern enculturation that accentuates materiality. That is, it enhances the accessibility of Kunstempfinden in the form of an intimate friendship with the artwork. Sadly, the accompanying sketches of landscapes, countryside life, and a thief fail to convey this important message.87

87 One by Hans Tichy, one by Rudolf Bachner and eight by Max Liebermann.
Chapter 3: Conclusion

*Ver Sacrum* is to be understood beyond its role as a general *Kunstblatt* of the Vienna Secession. From its preoccupation with shaping an artistic selfhood in its audience, it engendered the relevance of *Kunstempfinden*. The artistic productivity (generated by the artists) and artistic economy (generated by the clients/audience) contribute to the emergence of both an aesthetic appreciation and sensibility, which then improvises and solidifies social presence and an aesthetic-cultural value for the Secessionists and their works of art.

The accomplishment of artistic sensibility, both within the magazine and in its audience, forms a foundational cultural mission in *Ver Sacrum*. The groundwork for *Kunstempfinden* therefore starts with the aestheticization of subjectivity through sensual, warlike, esoteric, and religious language and questions of taste, cultural identity, and activity, the artistic furnishing of personal spaces, and the artistic quality of personal items. Furthermore, because of the role of such evocative rhetoric, *Kunstempfindenis* pre-determined in the materiality of the magazine and in the works of art it displays. The aesthetic sensibility is assumed to exist even before its realization. It is already realized in the essence of the magazine, which is attributed by itself in advance, from the beginning. This contributes to an awareness of the relevance of the material having an aesthetic value in any instance, that is, to occasion mood. As Lukacs’s concept of aesthetic culture states, at the centre prevail the moods and sensations, for which the art lover does not need an authentic work of art with an aura but rather the leap of faith to consider the object “as if” aesthetically pleasing. Indeed, Zuckerkandl offered alternative views from an emerging *echte Amateurkunst* (7:7) that produces cheap, logical, and appealing artistic items.
The value of culturally interesting and meaningful facts proposed by Schöllermann (4:6)\(^8^8\) furthermore supports the theoretical assumption that *Ver Sacrum* did not conceive the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* but that of *Kunstempfinden* comprised of aesthetic cultural thinking and material cultural thinking. While the artist rather creates a realm for aesthetic culture, one which is to evoke *Kunstempfinden*, the critic introduces a realm to see its materialization in terms of culturally interesting and meaningful facts. Artistic sensibility is comprised of simultaneous aesthetic and material thinking that materializes in exploring the aestheticization of subjectivism.

The reasons why *Ver Sacrum* should be treated as a cultural-political declaration of the Vienna Secession lies in the Secession’s ambition to popularize aesthetics as part of everyday experience in order to shape artistic tastes in Vienna.\(^8^9\) In this respect, *Kunstempfinden* as their guiding concept may also qualify as their guiding aesthetic philosophy. Every issue in this first volume has at least one contribution that discusses the arts and *Kunstempfinden* in a new context: whether it is about education, national identity, question of contemporariness, culture, or taste.

\(^8^8\)“Ihr [Kunstgeschichte] eigentlicher Masstab ist weder ein rein kritischer, noch einrein künstlerischer, sondern sie sucht culturell interessante und bedeutungsvolle Thatsachen zu ermitteln” (4:6).

\(^8^9\)“Zum erstenmale wird mit ihr in Wien der Versuch gemacht, dem Publicum eine Elite-Ausstellung spezifisch moderner Kunstwerke zu bieten. Die Absicht, solche kleine, gewählte Ausstellungen zu veranstalten, war einer der leitenden Gedanken bei Begründung unserer neuen Vereinigung” (3:23).
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