

Translations of the Artistic Selfhood in *Ver Sacrum*, the Seminal Magazine of the Vienna Secession

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Abstract

What manifests the Kunstpolitik of Ver Sacrum, the official organ of the Vienna Secession? A critical reading from the first issue (1898) against the background of Viennese Modernism—and its leading cultural characteristics and concepts, such as nerves, the modern, or the coffeehouse—aims at outlining the Secession’s proclamation of artistic selfhood through their overarching aesthetic and cultural-political concept of Kunstempfinden.

Keywords: artistic selfhood and convergence, Vienna Secession, *Ver Sacrum*, cultural politics and the rhetoric of the arts, Kunstempfinden, Viennese Modernism.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna was blossoming into a tumultuous and buoyant central European hub. Despite political instabilities as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, cultural, artistic and literary productions had come to an anthropocentric turn which marked the surfacing of *die Moderne*. As Oskar Kokoschka expressed it, modern man was now “condemned to re-create his own universe” (qtd. in Schorske, xxix). In re-creating, one had to carry across new perceptions of the human psyche and its impressions of its environment into a more visible and comprehensible platform. An increasing (self-)awareness of one’s own psychology, perception and individuality led to radical (artistic and literary) expressions and the realization of social repressions. Viennese modernism launched a new aspect of language; one that would lead to visually and cognitively stimulating and disturbing works of art, literature, architecture, social activities and even medical practices. Not just Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) or Musil’s first novel, *The Confusions of Young Törless* (1906), but also *Ver Sacrum* (1898-1903), an artistic and cultural magazine is an evidential reference point to the conceptualization of human selfhood and personhood. Modernity around the *fin de siècle* celebrates a linguistic turn in the human capability to express the inner *self*. It is thus no wonder that a preoccupation with language and its production caught attention. In an effort to understand *Ver Sacrum* beyond its role as the revolutionary and rebellious *Kunstblatt* of the Vienna Secessionists, what follows is an elaboration of key concepts and cultural characteristics (such as nerves, perspectives,

selfhood, coffeehouses and circles) typical of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. These characteristics are explored against three entries from *Ver Sacrum*'s very first January 1898 edition: Max Burckhard's article "Ver Sacrum," as well as "Weshalb wir eine Zeitschrift herausgeben?" written by an unknown author—presumably to collectively represent all members of the Vienna Secession—and Hermann Bahr's "Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs. Secession." In revealing the significance of *Ver Sacrum* as an illustrated magazine mediating a new artistic selfhood, it is necessary to define and briefly discuss the idea of modernism itself, i.e. to investigate some of the founding arguments that have given prominence to the nuances of human selfhood and its perspectives. Therefore, in the first section, "Bahr and the Emergence of Viennese Modernism," I begin with clarifying the concept of *modern* based on Hermann Bahr's essay "Die Überwindung des Naturalismus" from 1891. The frequent usage of the term *modern* has amounted to an overcoming of previous '-isms' and symbolizes the process of individualization: the growing importance to depict impressions, expressions, depressions and perspectives of the self, or of one's worldview. The structural framework of *Ver Sacrum* as *Gesamtkunstwerk* and its guiding aesthetic and cultural-political concept of *Kunstempfinden* echo Bahr's premonition of such a modern phenomenon. Underneath the idea of *gesamt*, there is a concentrated impulse to collectively enforce a type of individuality, a selfhood, with art: an artwork put together by disparate works of art. Furthermore, as indicated by Klaus H. Carl and Victoria Charles, the idea of a total work of art in the form of a magazine expressed a "didactic synthesis" (89). Indeed, it devoted itself to maintaining and disseminating the importance of artistic freedom and to expressing *Kunstempfinden*, an artistic sensibility: "... der schlummernde Trieb ... nach Schönheit und Freiheit des Denkens und Fühlens" (*Ver Sacrum* 6).ⁱ For the Vienna Secessionists, visual art and other artistic expressions paired with theoretical expressions (essays about art and art theory) were a vital part in communicating their envisioned modern, artistic selfhood through the magazine. Thus, the second section, "*Ver Sacrum*'s Art Rhetoric: Translations of Selfhood" explores how *Ver Sacrum* demonstrated the concept of 'modern, (artistic) selfhood.' The third, "'Modern Talking': The Presence of *gesamt*: Circles, Whirls, and the *Ringstrasse*" puts into perspective the magazine's structural arrangement in relation to other cultural places and phenomena, such as Viennese coffeehouses, dancing the Viennese waltz and the famous *Ringstrasse*. These are noteworthy reference points for fostering individualization and convergence of people in public places. The way the magazine embodies Bahr's idea of a 'nervous urge': the need to express more of one's inner (and artistic) sensibility, further demonstrates the magazine's political venture in campaigning for a particularly Secessionist importance in Vienna.

Finally, despite the crisis of language that preoccupied Vienna at the time, this paper argues that, in the concepts of *Kunstsinn* and *Kunstempfinden*, *Ver Sacrum* exemplifies a persuasive rhetoric proclaiming the necessity to acquire an artistic selfhood. Although other cultural spheres such as coffeehouses, ball rooms, and the *Ringstrasse* also expressed and mirrored a new perception of the world and society, *Ver Sacrum* was a community of practice, an intentionally organized social and cultural platform with an emphasis on the "Ich-

Spektrum" (Polgar 254). The modern environment of this time was a product of *das Ich-Empfindung*. *Ver Sacrum* provided an orchestrated use of language commemorating works of art—and not permitting their essence to disappear, for example, in the art studio, or at the table of a coffeehouse—was a necessary and primary tool for translating a modern artistic self into an even more comprehensible picture of reality for the Viennese (and European) society.

Bahr and the Emergence of Viennese Modernism

As many have concluded, the diversity of definitions of *die Moderne* has led to a "Verwirrung des Begriffs Modern" (Manfred Wagner qtd. in Lorenz 1). Dagmar Lorenz, in her book *Wiener Moderne*, outlines that scholars even date the period of modernism differently, varying from 1870 to 1920, 1890 to 1910, or from early romanticism (the end of the 18th century) until around the *fin de siècle* (1-2). Gotthart Wunberg admits, that to describe the scope of modernism in its strictest sense would be to talk about Viennese Modernism specifically (Lorenz 2). From the perspective of literary criticism, Hermann Bahr's work on "Die Überwindung des Naturalismus" (1891) is a critical indicator for determining the awareness of a new epoch, thus the beginnings of the movement. Given the essay's title, Bahr conceptualizes a process of change, one that leads to a break-through "der jeweiligen – Ismen," (Lorenz 2), and considers the consequences of the naturalistic epoch as "eine Pause zur Erholung der alten Kunst; oder er ist eine Pause zur Vorbereitung der neuen" (131). Bahr defines and considers modernism to be the next prominent age, while naturalism, like an *entr'acte*, or "Zwischenakt" (131), was an unavoidable literary and art movement preceding modernism, suggesting that without naturalism, modernism could not have prospered.

This new art movement is described in terms of an inner drive, or urge that conceives and portrays reality [thus, a kind of objectivity] differently from naturalism. In Bahr's view, naturalism—as advocating for a very objective, realistic and theoretical approach to art and literature—had caused *pain* due to producing (a) imprisonment in what can be seen on the outside, (the external), and (b) slavery to reality and truth: "Gefangenschaft im Äußeren und die Knechtschaft unter die Wirklichkeit machten den großen Schmerz" (132). The naturalistic approach is almost a cultural hypocrisy that could not have remained as the single cultural model and standard because it was just a *Zwischenakt*. With a modernist approach however, people started to think about themselves, their individuality as well as about ways they might realize or carry out their own (political, cultural, 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 [sic]; aber jetzt nimmt er die Tafeln aus dem Wirklichen und schreibt darauf seine Gesetze (132).

Note the phrases “Gestaltung seiner eigenen Welt” and “seine Gesetze,” which seem to indicate that Bahr sensed the rise of an unperceived, yet omnipresent energy that was about to be let loose from the artists, and in doing so, they would construct a worldview in a way that only they could do. It was as if the word ‘nerves’ extended one’s possibilities in life, in his or her consciousness if not in actual fact, giving prominence to an experiential and almost limitless playground for culture, art, and identity.ⁱⁱ Austria-Hungary was an enormous multicultural entity, in which many groups could have felt pressured to comply with the mainstream Austrian culture and German language. The incentive for pushing the boundaries and testing the limits of personal freedom may also be a product of this multiethnic and polyglot environment. Vienna, as the main capital of the monarchy was, therefore, an essential place of experimentation of political views, activism, architectural, cultural and artistic innovations. 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.

With the statement “die Ästhetik drehte sich um” (129), Bahr identifies a significant reversal of perceptions and roles, which required the artist to depict himself, his own worldview and not a mirror image of its environment:

Die Natur des Künstlers sollte nicht länger ein Werkzeug der Wirklichkeit sein, um ihr Ebenbild zu vollbringen; sondern umgekehrt, die Wirklichkeit wurde jetzt wieder der Stoff des Künstlers, um seine Natur zu verkünden, in deutlichen und wirksamen Symbolen (129).

The overcoming of naturalism indicates the defeat of *Ebenbild*, which was regarded as the primary and valid reference of reality. Subsequently, just as naturalism can capture an external reality, so can modernism too, driven by idealistic or self-conscious approaches, capture an inner or subjective reality. The defeat of *Ebenbild* resulted in the transition to modernism: to a new source of reality which included the human ‘psyche.’ Bahr identifies some relevant points in their distinction, namely that while naturalism concentrates on the representation of external reality, i.e. *Naturnachahmung*, *Anspruch auf mimetische Gestaltung*,ⁱⁱⁱ 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 evolved from being visible into also being invisible, in that modernism attempts “gerade dasjenige auszudrücken, worin wir uns anders fühlen und wissen als die Wirklichkeit.” In light of this, representations of the subjective reality appear as fragments, which are not even remotely as consistent, or homogeneous and mutual as the reality of naturalism would expect them to be. This fragmentation, in a way, is representative of the geographical, social and political fragmentation of Austria-Hungary.

Since naturalism is a “Selbstbewußtsein des Unbewußten” (131), one may want to expose the *Unbewußten*, the so called nerves, i.e. “das wilde Begehren, die vielen Fieber, die großen Rätsel,” or, the “Geheimnisse[n], welche im Grunde des Menschen schlummern” (128). As such, Bahr defines nerves as another source of reality, whereby the artist captures

his or her own reality and true self, “das wunderliche Neue [...] im Nervösen” (131). Modernity becomes “das Horchen nach dem eigenen Drang” through which the individual finds his or her way into the center, marked by selfhood and personal reality.

Der beginnende Mensch, ... trug die Wirklichkeit, die Urgestalt der Wirklichkeit, ... unverwandelt in sich, ... jeder Wunsch, jede Hoffnung, jeder Glaube war Mythologie. Als aber die philosophische Schulung über die Menschheit kam, die Lehre zum Denken, da wurden die gehäuften Erlebnisse der Seele an handsamen Symbolen verkürzt: es lernte der Mensch das Konkrete ins Abstrakte zu verwandeln und als Idee zu bewahren (130).

The phrases “[d]er beginnende Mensch” and the “Urgestalt der Wirklichkeit” refer to an earlier time period, when neither the formation of selfhood, nor the expansion of reality to an individual perspective were common ideas. Such was the case of pre-modern people, for example, whose existence, as Agnes Heller defines it, was determined by “blood ties” and “domicile” (“The Contingent Person and the Existential Choice” 5). Pre-modern here is understood in its Foucauldian sense, i.e. the reversal of disciplinary controls (from kings to institutions) that changed people’s opportunities of self-realization as well: from fixed potentials to contingent ones (Gutting). As Heller puts it:

The modern person is a contingent person. ... Yet pre-modern men and women were very rarely aware of this contingency. ... 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 the “contingency” of an individual person amplifies Bahr’s visions of a developing self-awareness, by which experiences [the concrete] were transformed into abstract terms so as to preserve them as ideas (even knowledge or memory). Not surprisingly, the modern person’s political, cultural and social environment had been drastically transforming at the *fin de siècle*. Such transformations included: the influx of immigrants, diminishing political power distribution within the Dual Monarchy, formation of independent and competitive political groups to gain control over the city of Vienna as well as recurrent anti-Semitic movements (e.g. Anti-Jewish congress in 1882). Generally, more schooling and a variety of professions were available and the national basic law of 1867 promised equal rights to all, including Jews and immigrants within the monarchy. There was a strong presence of culturally and politically driven ideas (not state or monarchy controlled) in a variety of communities of practice: such as emerging political parties and fraternity groups.^{iv} As such, both Bahr and Heller aim at presenting the notion that people’s lives were now less pre-assigned by social class and more contingent on inner-, or self-determination: *eine innere Bestimmtheit*. Bahr does not distinguish as explicitly and philosophically between the pre-modern and modern person as Heller does, rather he sees the decisive difference in terms of artistic epochs, which bear distinctive ways of thinking,

die Denkweisen, and sensibility, *die Empfindung*.

In summary, modern persons gradually allowed themselves to formulate, either independently or as part of a group, their understanding of the world and of their situation. Bahr's critical essay conceptualizes an already perceivable phenomenon of change within society. Under the growing command of modernism, art and literature aim to transform the *Ebenbild* by overcoming the naturalism outside of the body and turning inwards in search of it. Since the source of reality and aesthetics have gone through a reversal of perspectives, the artist now requires a persuasive articulation of his or her subjectivity. This in turn expands the political power and the spectrum of selfhood.

***Ver Sacrum's* Art Rhetoric: Translations of Selfhood**

Nerves and psychology are leading themes of the *fin de siècle* and are also widely discussed; it is then not surprising that less attention has been paid to analyzing the magazine *Ver Sacrum* itself. The magazine, in general but especially its first entries, reveals not only political, ideological and ethical manifestos, but is also an outcry against the lack of artistic independence and missing selfhood of the era: "Denn brechen wollen wir endlich mit der alten Gepflogenheit österreichischer Künstler, über das mangelnde Kunstinteresse des Publikums zu klagen, ... sie [die Kunst] [ist] vielmehr die nothwendige Lebensäußerung eines intelligenten Volkes, wie Sprache und Sitte" (VS 6). Art is portrayed as the center of life, or as Robert Waissenberger expresses it: "[d]ie Kunst stand auf einem hohen Thron" (Bisanz et al. 16). *Ver Sacrum's* formation, as a cultural product of its environment and its language, or rhetoric, clearly indicates the realization that any kind of worldview and selfhood depends on the narratives people tell in various settings and ways. Using Richard Rorty's concept that "[t]he world does not speak, only we do," ("Contingency of Language" 6), it is then predictable that advocates of *Ver Sacrum* would apply a persuasive rhetoric to emphasize their existential importance through the arts:

Die beschämende Tatsache, daß [sic] Österreich kein einziges, auf weiteste Verbreitung berechnetes, seinen besonderen Bedürfnissen angepaßtes [sic], illustriertes Kunstblatt besitzt, machte es bisher den Künstlern unmöglich, ihre Kunstbestrebungen in weitere Kreise zu tragen. Dem soll durch diese Zeitschrift abgeholfen werden. Sie will zum ersten Male Österreich dem Ausland gegenüber als selbstständigen künstlerischen Faktor erscheinen lassen, im Gegensatz zu der bisherigen stiefmütterlichen Behandlung, der es in dieser Hinsicht fast überall begehrte (VS 5).

The arts moved beyond a mere creative activity during the European *fin de siècle*, given that the age of modernism opened up possibilities to expand one's selfhood. Art is now viewed as (a) a way of life, and (b) a defining quality or condition of one's identity and *Ver Sacrum* provides one of the most appropriate sources to demonstrate a strong dedication to

the arts. The magazine's idealistic, or utopian language sets out to mediate the translation of the artistic selfhood. Hence, in January 1898, *Ver Sacrum* made its first appearance among other well-known illustrated magazines,^v such as *Studio* (London), *Pan* (Berlin), *Jugend* (Munich) or the Viennese *Allegories*.

Ver Sacrum and its founding organization, the Vienna Secession are excellent examples for demonstrating Bahr's premonition of the arrival of modernism through activism and revolution. Revolution may be understood in terms of the "in-|ner v|-orkings"^{vi} of the individual contributing to this new age: "Aber jede Zeit hat ihr eigenes Empfinden. – Das Kunstempfinden unserer Zeit zu wecken, anzuregen und zu verbreiten, ist unser Ziel" (VS 6). Among all the qualities that define the Vienna Secession, *Kunstempfinden* could be considered as the most basic and distinctive quality (and condition) for conceptualizing their artistic selfhood. The Secession's justification and promotion of *Kunstempfinden* deserves being studied not only in terms of a simple artistic goal but also a condition for recognizing this selfhood. As Wunberg appropriately points out, this side of the Vienna Secession 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" (Wunberg et al. 498). His wording of "appelliert wurde" denotes a kind of deception the Secessionists are willing to offer to attract the trust of their potential audience. Indeed, as the magazine states: "[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" (VS 6). In the midst of their new idealism, one cannot help but see a *contradictio in adjecto*. *Ver Sacrum's* language and definitions of *Kunstempfindung* reveal some contradictions. Waissenberger indicates that the Secession artists turned primarily to the wealthy and educated elite:

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 (Bisanz et al. 16).

Although the Vienna Secession envisioned *Ver Sacrum* as a pragmatic role model (16), their image and success highly depended on the support of the upper class. This deceptive esotericism further suggests arrogance. This is evident in the magazine's second article, "Weshalb wir eine Zeitschrift herausgeben?":

Diese Zeitschrift soll ... ein Aufruf an den Kunstsinn der Bevölkerung sein, zur Anregung, Förderung und Verbreitung künstlerischen Lebens und künstlerischer Selbstständigkeit. Wir wollen ... allem Ungeschmack den Krieg erklären (VS 5).

Here, *Ver Sacrum* calls out for the general population's appreciation of the arts and soon transforms into "die nothwendige Lebensäusserung eines intelligenten Volkes" (6) on the following page. "Kunstsinn" seems to be proclaimed to be both a 'mental' faculty that

everyone should have as well as a mindset for the arts as an elite manifestation of life. With that, *Ver Sacrum* already exhibits a strong determination to frame an ideology of the arts within comprehensible perspectives to the extent that, “die Erklärung einer künstlerischen Unternehmung in Worten gegeben werden kann” (5). The persuasiveness and tone gradually change following the second article by including words denoting violence, war and forceful revolution. The ideas and ideals are not only laid out and demanded, but also fought for: “Wir wollen ... den Krieg erklären,” and “[w]ir brauchen dabei in erster Linie die nothwendigen Kräfte der Zerstörung und Vernichtung” (5; 6). Although this is a symbolic declaration of war, it gives prominence to the vital conditions for selfhood and the artist’s desire for “künstlerische[s] Leben und künstlerisch[e] Selbstständigkeit” in order to become a “selbstständige[r] künstlerische[r] Faktor” (5). Independence is a key phrase here, for the only exhibition building owned by the *Künstlerhausgenossenschaft* had a conservative leader, Eugen Felix. Under his management, the “radical members” became “irritated by the discrimination directed against ... especially the painters Josef Engelhart and Theodor von Hörmann” (Vergo 23). Not surprisingly, the third article of the first edition, Bahr’s writing, is a more detailed ideological reflection on the Vienna Secession. It 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*:^{vii}

Der Hauptmann ... bestürmt mich gleich mit heftigen Reden ... ungestüm mit den grossen [*sic*] Händen fuchtelnd und seine trübe Stimme heiser schreiend, die Genossenschaft schämt, ... immer heftiger, erzählend, was er zu leiden hat, wie sie ihn hassen, die im Künstlerhaus ... um ihn zu kränken und zu bedrängen (VS 8).

Bahr’s emotionally charged flashback lays down a sympathetic ground for rationalizing the awaited genesis of the Vienna Secession and the publication of *Ver Sacrum*. With a revolutionary non-conformist attitude, Bahr exemplifies the earlier complaints of the “stiefmütterliche Behandlung” (5) and of the impossibility of “Kunstbestrebungen.” Nonetheless, Bahr contradicts himself when he compares secessions in Munich or Paris to the one in Vienna. The Vienna Secession artists are portrayed as having an exceptional attitude, which does not distinguish between old or new art, nor argue for or against traditions: “wird nicht für oder gegen die Tradition gestritten” (9). Yet, the picture that Bahr is painting of the Secession stands somewhat in paradox with the rationale presented earlier in the second article: “Wer auf die Alten schilt, ist ein Hanswurst” and “brechen wollen wir endlich mit der alten Gepflogenheit” (6). These apparently incongruent statements point to a tension between the existential and social value of the artist:

[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 (VS 10).

The Vienna Secession represents an association for self-determined artists who care for

their works' dignity, since the work of art, in the age of mechanical reproduction—as Walter Benjamin named it—is at stake, and is in danger of becoming a mere product and commodity. On the one hand, *Ver Sacrum* praises “Kunst als Allgemeingut” (6), on the other, it is a “heilige Sache” (3), as Max Burckhard formulates in explanation of the magazine’s name ‘Ver Sacrum’ (Sacred Spring). Similar to Bahr, Burckhard’s written contribution has a serious tone projecting the extraordinary importance of the magazine and the sacred calling of the artist:

Weil sie [Secession] vielmehr nicht ihre persönlichen Interessen, sondern die heilige Sache der Kunst selbst für gefährdet erachtet hat und in weihevoller Begeisterung für die diese jedes Opfer auf sich zu nehmen bereit war und bereit ist, und nichts will, als aus eigener Kraft ihre eigenen Ziele erreichen, darum hat sie sich unter das Zeichen des VER SACRUM gestellt (3).

What are “eigene Ziele” if not “[persönliche] Interessen”? And, does not “weihevoller Begeisterung” suggest a kind of blind devotion? The translation and transition to artistic selfhood, as outlined in *Ver Sacrum*, also requires a strong will to believe in ‘the arts’ and the idea of ‘art.’ In all three articles, the meaning and scope of art are extended and preserved as new ideas. For example, “die Kunst als eine hohe Culturmission” (VS 5) further reinforces this quasi-religious attitude of devotion and extends to the idea of sacred art encompassing righteous and ethical acts of art. Bahr’s juxtaposition of *Geschäft* and *Kunst* further shifts the focus of the sacred cultural mission to the existential 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/artist to take an artistic ownership of his or her life in the name of art, Burckhard asks us to serve art as if it were a personal religious calling, and Bahr because it is 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 a moral stand—in favor of the artist and the work of art. He explicitly identifies himself with the secessionists (“[b]ei uns”; “[u]nsere Secession”) to avoid sounding neutral, (as one might have expected it in other magazines, e.g. *Pan*).^{viii} For *Ver Sacrum* especially, the selection of words is everything: *art* versus *product*, *artist* versus *manufacturer*, *affirming* the existence of an artistic selfhood versus *denying* it.

Wer malend oder zeichnend das Geheimnis seiner Seele in Gestalten offenbaren will, der ist schon bei der “Vereinigung.” Nicht um eine Ästhetik, sondern zwischen zwei Gesinnungen wird hier gestritten: ... geschäftliche ... oder ... nach einer künstlerischen Gesinnung zu leben. Dieses Recht will die “Vereinigung” für die Maler erstreiten: das Recht Künstler sein zu dürfen (VS 10).

With *Gesinnung*—or, the *Art des Denkens*—Bahr implies that there is a ‘right’ attitude, which also ensures the existential ‘right’ for an individual to choose its identity, to embrace an artistic selfhood. *Ver Sacrum* and its first edition is a declaration of “das ideologische Bedürfnis” (Wunberg, et al. 501) of the Vienna Secession. Given the meaning of secession, whereby one is formally withdrawing from membership of a federation or body,^{ix} these “europäischen Bewegungen artistischer Rebellion” (500) are by default personal political

actions. As Wunberg further notes, “[e]s sei hier nur kurz darauf verwiesen, daß [sic] Unzufriedenheit mit der Hängekommission des “Künstlerhauses” zum Austritt der Jungen, die sich um Gustav Klimt scharten, geführt hatte.”^x The discontent with the “Hängekommission”^{xi} escalated to the point where artists, like Hörmann or Klimt, feared for the preservation of their artistic freedom and selfhood because their identity was connected to the arts. The artists’ desperation to have a say about how their art is exhibited or sold became the incentive to unite artists wanting “das Recht Künstler sein zu dürfen” (VS 10). As Peter Vergo explains, the *Künstlerhausgenossenschaft* owned the only exhibition building of the city: “[i]t was 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). Bahr 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” (VS 10). In comparison to Bahr’s formulations, the wording in the second article is less rebellious and aggressive, nonetheless, it provides smooth transition from sacredness to rebelliousness. Although “Agitatoren zu sein” (VS 13) is quite a frightening attitude, it is also persuading since the sacred, moral and political reasons have already been established for the reader. *Ver Sacrum*, as an aesthetic revolt, is upfront with its ‘agitating’ attitude towards achieving this goal. The rhetoric leads to protecting the notion of a personal artistic freedom, of an artistic selfhood. This calls to mind Bahr’s decisive comment on the modern person, who has learnt to translate the concrete experience into abstract terms, so as to preserve it as an idea.^{xii} *Ver Sacrum* demonstrates this kind of modern *Denkweise* as its creators verbalize art and the artist’s life in sacred, ethical and political terms— as more than just a mere creative activity or a measurable product value.

Consequently, Burckhard’s elevated engagement with art, along with the idea of art as a hohe Culturmission, and Bahr’s existential imperative for the artist well illustrate the rhetorical turns *Ver Sacrum* takes in order to have an impressive effect. Yet, these opening articles are especially forceful in their idealistic promises and justified rationales. As Waissenberger summarizes it, the magazine “jagte einer Utopie nach, nämlich ... kein neuer Gedanke, keine Erfindung des menschlichen Geistes kommt ohne den Glauben an die Utopie aus. Er ist die Kraft, aus der Neues entsteht, unser Leben bewegt wird” (16). The utopia and idealistic conceptions involved a whole range of tasks that the Vienna Secessionists proposed. Hans Bisanz draws on Norbert Greth when identifying a variety of tasks, or “Aufgabenstellungen” in the magazine:

Er [Greth] unterscheidet das Anstreben der Informations- und Erziehungsfunktion (als Ergänzung der Ausstellungen), der Repräsentanzfunktion (gegenüber dem Ausland), der Kritikfunktion (in Streitschriften), der Demonstrationsfunktion (Vorführung von Beispielen der Buchkunst, zugleich als Ausstellungersatz für ausgesprochene Buchkünstler) und der Soziefunktion (Unterhaltung) (Bisanz et al. 23).

With the ultimate goal being to acquire *Kunstempfinden*, when would these duties leave

enough time for the artist to do his or her art? These idealistic goals serve as symbolic anchors to establish a defined social presence and cultural-political influence. *Ver Sacrum* tries to extend the conscious idea of artistic selfhood into actual life.

‘Modern Talking’: The Presence of *gesamt*: Circles, Whirls, and the *Ringstrasse*

It is a necessary detour to look at some of the defining features of the Viennese coffeehouses, the dancing of the waltz and the *Ringstrasse*, separately and in synthesis with the magazine, in order to understand how translations and representations of a modern selfhood may have been accomplished in *Ver Sacrum*. A brief cultural and social overview bridges into the sphere of modern language, contributing to the intrinsic structural intricacies of a work of art that encompasses all, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*:

Bei der als Gesamtkunstwerk konzipierten Zeitschrift wurden nicht nur Sprache, Buchschmuck und Musiknoten ... einbezogen, sondern auch Architekturentwürfe ... wie auch die Schriftkunst ... wie auch Zeichnungen, Gemälde und Plastiken [reproduziert] (Bisanz et al. 30).

The idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* embodies the conceptual, symbolic and physical framework of a circle, including completeness, comprehensiveness, communality, collaboration, alliance and union. One can think of the famous *Ringstrasse*, the waltz, *Burschenschaften*, emerging political parties and magazines. As such, it is worthwhile to mention how other modern concepts—beyond ‘nerves’ and the psyche—led not only to the formation of *Ver Sacrum* but more importantly, the way *gesamt* is articulated. Thus, the magazine is also a product of its social and cultural environment, which testify to its significance when it comes to understanding Viennese Modernism.

1. “[N]ach Ammoniak riechendes Gas”: The Viennese Coffeehouse

The atmosphere of Café Central^{xiii} has a peculiar air, as if it had changed in its usual chemical composition; different from what one would normally call air. In his “Theorie des ‘Café Central,’” Alfred Polgar describes this as “nach Ammoniak riechendes Gas ... bestimmt das geistige Klima dieses Raumes” (254). In Polgar’s eyes, coffeehouses of the late 19th and early 20th century resemble atypical “geistige[s] Klima,” an atypical *Weltanschauung* in itself. Those who shared this *Weltanschauung* of the coffeehouses, failed to see the world since they were rather concerned with their “Ich-Spektrum,” as Polgar puts it. He continues to elaborate that the people who visit the coffeehouse look at their inner world as the center of the universe. Each and every individual’s inner world would then be a separate *Weltanschauung* narrating a strange anecdote, which then determined the overall turbulent and alarming atmosphere of “Café Central”: “Der Centralist lebt parasitär auf der Anekdote, die von ihm umläuft” (256). What Polgar labels parasitic, for example, Stefan Zweig portrays as

“intellektuellen Beweglichkeit und internationalen Orientierung des Österreicher” (*Die Welt von Gestern*).^{xiv} Polgar’s negative tone reveals that the modern person of his time was compelled to organize their inner world in order to make sense of the rapidly changing, unorganized, gradually liberal and versatile outer world:^{xv} “das Café Central stellt also eine Art Organisation der Desorganisierten dar” (256). The word *organisation* not only suggests orderliness but also a conscious convergence of individuals wanting to come to terms with their inner (psychological) and outer (social) world experiences. As Anton Kuh had expressed it: “What is a coffeehouse man of letters? / A person who has the time to contemplate in the coffeehouse what others on the outside do not experience” (qtd. in Segel 2). Viennese coffeehouses symbolically represent the psyche of the people. Though contributors of *Ver Sacrum* would not call themselves parasitic, in a way, it was essential for them to circulate and consume ‘anecdotes’ (visual and written) in the form of a magazine. To go beyond mere contemplation, Vienna Secession needed *Ver Sacrum* to gain support and recognition from the public and to organize events for everyone, “ohne Unterschied des Standes und des Vermögens” (*VS* 6). In retrospect, *Ver Sacrum* appears to have taken note of the popularity of coffeehouses, which not only ascribed to the possibilities of networking, or of collaboration among individuals (mostly men), but that these individuals represented different professions as well as diverse social and economic backgrounds. *Ver Sacrum* and the Vienna Secession exhibit this coffeehouse characteristic and make it clear right from the beginning that they want to include everyone.

Despite the contrasting tones and views of Polgar [*parasitäres Leben*] and Zweig [*intellektuelles Leben*], their coffeehouse testimonies speak to the underlying force directing people’s desire to find recognition and audience for a particular worldview, idea, business, or opinion. As Zweig elaborates, the exchange of ideas, news and information on culture, politics and art were essential:

[I]m Kaffeehaus [konnte man] sich über alle Vorgänge der Welt so umfassend orientieren und sie zugleich im freundschaftlichen Kreise diskutieren ... das Letzte, das Neueste, das Extravaganteste, das Ungewöhnliche, das noch niemand–und vor allem nicht die offizielle Literaturkritik unserer würdigen Tagesblätter–breitgetreten hatte, das Entdecken und Voraussiegen war unsere Leidenschaft (*DWvG*; chapter 4).

Since certain people created tight bonds and met regularly to serve their intellectual, artistic or cultural interests, it is not surprising that associations like the Vienna Secession or the Viennese Circle emerged. *Ver Sacrum*—while exclusively representing the Vienna Secession—became a product of its environment.

Nevertheless, despite their contrasting views, both Polgar and Zweig highlight a notion that coffeehouses enabled the venue for such social gatherings that fostered non-conventional intellectual, cultural, artistic, and literary activities. Despite its negative connotation, Polgar’s allegorical portrayal^{xvi} illustrates that coffeehouses represented a bundle or rings of ideas, a total and cumulative place of ideas, or as Zweig put it, a

“Kollektivität [der] Interessen.” Additionally, the second half of Zweig’s quote above clearly justifies why the Vienna Secession might have felt the need and urge to unite all the arts and create their own forum for official and cutting-edge art and literary criticism. As such, *Ver Sacrum* proves to be a kind of continuation of the coffeehouses phenomenon. However, unlike the coffeehouse guests, editors and contributors of the magazine openly and thoughtfully organized themselves as the Secessionists of Vienna along with their aesthetic worldview of *Kunstempfinden*.

The coffeehouses were not particularly centralizing any specific worldview as much as uniting the people of Vienna. Polgar recognizes, and even mystifies their vital role as an available social space for coming together: “Ob der Ort sich dem Menschen, der Mensch dem Ort angeglichen hat, das ist strittig. Ich vermute Wechselwirkung” (254). Vergo also notes that “more revolutionary artists, who, 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). In the case of the Vienna Secession and their forum, *Ver Sacrum*, it is without doubt that they equally resemble and embody each other. This tight reciprocity—between a social-cultural sphere^{xvii} and the people—produces new ways of speaking and of using language. As a consequence, the coffeehouses, *Ver Sacrum*, Vienna Secession or the Viennese Circle maintained conditions suitable to develop and create distinctive realisations and worldviews. The growing availability of social and cultural interaction and communication fostered individualistic practices, attitudes and ideas in every instance.^{xviii} With the presence of coffeehouses and of *Ver Sacrum*, the selfhood of an individual was now on its way to stand out. Polgar’s emphasis on the omnipresent “Ich-Spektrum” of the coffeehouses is a valid one. As mentioned before, *Ver Sacrum* calls on the mental preoccupation with the arts: “ein Aufruf an den Kunstsinn” (5). Taking up the self-centered, turbulent and nervous characteristics of the coffeehouses, the magazine emerges from a distinctly revolutionary atmosphere, whilst rebelliously battling for its highly trumpeted *Weltanschauung für Kunst*, or for a kind of *Kunstanschauung*.

2. Whirling and the *Ringstrasse*

In comparison to coffee drinking, waltzing presented a similar kind of social activity with its rapid “whirling movements” (Johnston 128) at formal social gatherings, such as balls and pre-Lenten festivities. On the significance of waltz and operetta, William M. Johnston points out that dancing the waltz at these formal gatherings carried a political significance in keeping revolutionary movements somewhat calm: “In actuality, far from fomenting revolution, the waltz may have helped to forestall it, lulling the Viennese” (129).^{xix} The adaptation of orchestral waltz in operettas—as did Johann Strauss, Jr. (1825-1899)—introduced “a new genre that flattered the sensibilities of Ringstrasse Vienna” (129), that is, it helped cover up the sharp disagreements and worrisome class differences that characterized the mid- and late-19th century central European society. The operettas, as Johnston formulates,

portrayed aristocrats, businessmen, and servants mingling in an atmosphere of levity calculated to mask the disappointments of the liberal era. Besides reconciling class divisions, the operetta satirized bureaucracy for its good-hearted 'Schlamperei'. Above all, the operetta exuded narcissistic love for Vienna, using dialect and Hungarian accents to display a wealth of social types.^{xx} (129).

The convivial perspective of society in operettas (e.g., *Das Fledermaus*, *Der Rosenkavalier*) and attending balls to dance the waltz might have persuaded the majority to believe, for example, that there is less need to revolt against aristocracy or political inequality.

Besides its "sensibilities," *Ringstrasse* was a symbolic street for coexistence. Vienna's *Ringstrasse*, as we will see below, connects the political organs of the city with public places and cultural institutions so as to bring the city into completion. *Ver Sacrum* is similar to a public space where "ein Appell an den Kunstsinn der Bevölkerung" (*VS* 31) was made. It presented an all-artistic source for modern enculturation. It provided modern art in a modern city for the modern citizen, who then, ideally, would support the modern arts by transforming their (home) environments and lives to resemble a total work of art, but most importantly, by perceiving the world through art, i.e. by embracing *Kunstempfinden*. The *Ringstrasse* with its impressive and expressive building architecture required *Kunstempfinden*, too, as it was slowly transformed into a special urban environment offering society the cues and clues to transform itself into one of modern individuals. The development of the *Ringstrasse* mirrors an early form of gentrification as it gradually changed the atmosphere around the inner city, with all the major institutions and buildings forming an enclosed circle suggesting unity and collaboration in their differences:

While the Textile Quartier and the area around the Schwarzenbergplatz bore rather prominent class marks, most of the *Ringstrasse* neighborhoods blended the fluid strata of the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie (Schorske 60).

The ring boulevard succeeded in uniting classes, businesses and institutions into symbolic partnership, yet the primary goal of the urban renewal involved rather efforts to beautify Vienna and to show a "visual expression of values of a social class" (Schorske 25) as opposed to, for example, just modernizing infrastructure.^{xxi} Comparably to *Ringstrasse*, the realization of *Ver Sacrum*, also set out to "achieve a strong collective dignity despite their individual pomposity" within the arts (60). A great part of the Viennese modernism was thus perceived through art and beautifying, which further suggests that modern values were to be incorporated in visual representations.^{xxii} The buildings of the *Ringstrasse* were designed by the leading artists and architects of Vienna, each building visually representing their intrinsic values for the public. The urban renewal of Vienna's heart improvised a social renewal of the Viennese resident; as Bahr says it in his essay "Die Ringstraße":^{xxiii} "[m]it der Ringstraße war der Spielplatz der neuen Gesellschaft improvisiert. ... der Ringstraße war rasch noch erst das dazu passende Wien zu liefern" (111). Bahr, displaying a positive attitude, continues to explain that society demonstrated a kind of readiness for a modern change which "irgendwie schon in der Luft lag" and, as such, "der Plan der Ringstraße hätte sonst

nicht keimen können." Similarly, *Ver Sacrum's* foremost declaration is not just a total work of art, but also a total sensibility of art, a kind of *Gesamtkunstempfindung* through improvising a renewal of social values through art. As with the *Ringstrasse*, the magazine, too, occupies a social sphere, which in its structure echoes the concepts of circling, completeness, collaboration, co-existence of upper and lower class—if not in actuality, then symbolically.

Finally, placing the Viennese coffeehouses, the waltz, the *Ringstrasse* and *Ver Sacrum* under one umbrella, they all provide a diversity of ideas and values on many levels, in particular, intellectual, societal, architectural and artistic spectrums. Despite the range of individualism, these social reference points provided coherent, communal, convivial and communicative platforms. With these intrinsic qualities, *Ver Sacrum* aimed to achieve an all-encompassing community of artists and a communal platform for cultural and intellectual interaction in Vienna and internationally.

Conclusion: *Feurige Zungen*, Language and Selfhood

Ver Sacrum demonstrates to artists and the general public how to best transform themselves into independent artists and appropriate art lovers using *die Sprache der Kunst*. This *Sprache* is embedded in the appropriate *Gesinnungen* (sacred, ethical and political) that the Vienna Secession intends to express through art. These came into circulation by means of the magazine, *Ver Sacrum*, which, in turn, reproduced a kind of language that accommodated the process of the enculturation of *Kunstsinn*, (rather than, for example, developing a more diplomatic argumentation). In my view, the three opening articles of the first, January 1898 edition, capture this narrative, which functions as a means to gradually acquire the characteristics and norms of the Vienna Secession. My point is that *Ver Sacrum* not only holds the key *Gesinnungen* in itself, but acts as a material token that enters the social spheres in order to accomplish the instruction of the 'vocabulary' corresponding to these *Gesinnungen*. The magazine's monthly appearance significantly contributes to the gradual familiarization of the *Kunstsinn* and *Kunstempfinden* of the Vienna Secession. As a consequence, the Secession effectively informs about and promotes itself as the "Letzte, das Neueste, das Extravaganteste, das Ungewöhnliche" (Zweig).

Since the Viennese *fin de siècle* is also associated with the intellectual event of the crisis of language, let us, in conclusion, look at *Ver Sacrum* in that light as well. As Wittgenstein formulates "[d]ie Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt" (5.6:86). *Ver Sacrum* reflects on this dilemma, and even exemplifies the Fritz Mauthner-like *Sprachgefängnis*, as the magazine is coming to terms with its justification: "Wir wollen sie [die Begründung für die Zeitschrift] versuchen, soweit die Erklärung einer künstlerischen Unternehmung in Worten gegeben werden kann" (5). Similarly, in Robert Musil's first novel, the character of Törleß also projects this imprisonment within language and, although it ends with a more pessimistic note, on a larger scale, *Ver Sacrum* comes across as a counterbalance

to this pessimism and unwanted restriction of available words, turning it to its own advantage. The magazine, both explicitly and implicitly, provides a kind of solution by focusing on persuading the reader of sacred, artistic values. Interestingly, *Kunstempfinden* and *Kunstsinn*, these key idealistic and important sounding compound nouns look as though it operates as disguised “Parole” (VS 13) for those who wished to have a say in Vienna’s *Kunstpolitik*. On the one hand, limitations of language are resolved by using language differently so as to give a new meaning to art. On the other, translations of selfhood in *Ver Sacrum* are to be understood as idealistic goals and expressions of the desire to become an autonomous and influential artist.

Ver Sacrum (das Organ) represents the Vienna Secession beyond a mere medium of communication. As outlined, it is a *gesamt*-manifesto encompassing their defining ideology of *Kunstsinn*, *Kunstempfinden*, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, *erzieherische Aufgaben*, etc. To become prominent, the Vienna Secessionists needed a unique framework and articulateness in language, *eine Ausdrucksfähigkeit der Sprache*, to distinguish themselves from other decorated magazines, and to secure an endorsement on a political level.^{xxiv} The idealistic attitude extends the limits of a world (*die Grenzen einer Welt*) conventionally available. *Ver Sacrum* became the refuge and loudspeaker of a collective political independency of artists and arts, given the general tension among artists and between artists and the *Künstlerhausgenossenschaft*. As such, besides collaboration, there was also a inclination to resist disagreements:

Beide riefen nach der Kunst, nur jeder mit anderen Worten, jeder in seiner Sprache. Künstler standen gegen Künstler: es war ein Streit der Schulen, der Doctrinen, der Temperamente, oder wie es man nennen will. Das ist doch bei uns nicht so (VS 9).

The magazine demonstrates that art does not speak for itself, and stresses the fact that one has to participate with the words of ideas, repeating them over and over again: “[m]it feurigen Zungen vielmehr ... immer und immer sagen, dass die Kunst mehr ist” (VS 6). The sense of urgency of such statements tells of a fierce and nervous atmosphere present at the time and proves *Ver Sacrum* to be an attempt to develop and practice artistic selfhood.

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ⁱ From here on, when quoted from *Ver Sacrum*, the magazine is abbreviated to “VS.”

ⁱⁱ The idea that one word could extend one’s possibilities at least in consciousness if not in actual fact emerges from Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, p.91. There, in the context of a potential plain crash, the decisive word is “landing.” The narrator contemplates how much a word between “crash” and “crash landing” could matter.

ⁱⁱⁱ On the definition of naturalism, see Walter Fähnders, *Avantgarde und Moderne 1890-1933* p.16-18.

- ^{iv} For a more detailed overview, see Brigitte Hamann, pages 304-311 and 325-346.
- ^v For a detailed overview of German-speaking illustrated magazines in *Jugendstil* see the online library catalogue of the University of Heidelberg.
- ^{vi} A play on words to suggest ‘the inner workings of the nerves.’
- ^{vii} Also called, *Genossenschaft bildender Künstler Wiens*.
- ^{viii} *Pan* presented itself as an impartial magazine for art to allow critical comparisons. See the online library catalogue of University of Heidelberg.
- ^{ix} From the Oxford online dictionary: OxfordDictionaries.Com.
- ^x Here Wunberg paraphrases Christian M. Nebehay’s documentation called *Gustav Klimt* (1969) and Robert Waissberger’s *Die Wiener Sezession* (1971).
- ^{xi} Meaning, “die Kommission, die über Auswahl und Anordnung der Bilder einer Ausstellung entscheidet” (Duden.de). The committee which selected and arranged the works of art for exhibitions.
- ^{xii} “es lernte der Mensch das Konkrete ins Abstrakte zu verwandeln und als Idee zu bewahren” (*Die Überwindung des Naturalismus* 130).
- ^{xiii} Café Central was one of the most popular coffeehouses in Vienna, where many of the city’s leading artists, writers and critics spent time.
- ^{xiv} From here on, when quoted from *Die Welt von Gestern*, the title is abbreviated to “DWvG.”
- ^{xv} By 1860 Austria turned to constitutional government (Schorske 27) and by 1860 leaflets were announcing the development plan of the Ringstrasse (33).
- ^{xvi} “Der Centralist lebt parasitär auf der Anekdote, die von ihm umläuft” (256).
- ^{xvii} Any social and cultural sphere, whether it is a magazine, coffee shop, or—as seen in the following sections—a ball room, where the waltz is danced, or the Ringstrasse.
- ^{xviii} We can think of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s, and Fritz Mauthner’s critique of language, Freud’s unconventional psychology, or Karl Kraus’s ongoing criticism of Hermann Bahr, and other leading authors, like Schnitzler and even Franz Kafka’s unusual, till today ‘haunting’ literature.
- ^{xix} Although the coffeehouse phenomenon was more turbulent and revolutionary in nature, the growing popularity of other social activities such as “sports, dancing, theater, and concert-going” (Johnston 131) led to a convivial existence of social classes.
- ^{xx} The attempts to ease the political tension in the multinational Austro-Hungarian Monarchy did not exclude the adaptation of Hungarian literary works either: “Strauss strove to promote reconciliation between

Magyar and German in the *Zigeunerbaron* (1885), which he based on a novella by Jókai" (Johnston 130).

^{xxi} While Vienna focused more on beautification, Budapest was the second city (after London in 1890) to open its underground metro in 1896.

^{xxii} It was not just the type of space and location (coffeehouses) or social activities (dancing the waltz, going to the opera) which mattered and carried values, but visuality too.

^{xxiii} Bahr's essay spells *Ringstrasse* with an *Eszet* [ß].

^{xxiv} As they had expressed they desired "Österreich dem Ausland gegenüber als selbstständigen künstlerischen Faktor erscheinen lassen" (VS 5).

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