

The Third Space

The First Goetheanum and the First Waldorf School: What had they in common? Is there relevance for us today?

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Excerpted from the full article to be published through the Pedagogical Section Council in the spring of 1998 (available through AWSNA Publications)

The First Goetheanum burned to the ground in the night of New Year's Eve 1922/1923. The building, whose forms and colors spoke the language of the spirit, was no longer there. Ten years of work - selfless, creative work - destroyed in one night!

The year which followed that New Year's night - 1923 - was a year of outer and inner testing, a destiny-laden year for Europe and for the world as well as for the Anthroposophical Movement. Outwardly, it was the year in which the French occupied the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland; the German economy totally collapsed; and Hitler made his first attempt at power. Inwardly, it was the year in which Rudolf Steiner wrestled with the question: Can there be a human community in which each individual member is independent and inwardly free, yet which - as a community - can take responsibility and effective worldly action? Concretely, can the Anthroposophical Society undertake the building of a second Goetheanum in which Anthroposophia, the being of Anthroposophy, can find a home as she once had found in the building that was destroyed?

It is almost impossible for us today to estimate the intensity with which Rudolf Steiner wrestled with those questions during this fateful year. But it was out of the midst of these struggles that he directed the attention of his listeners - the Society's members - to two examples of the way in which Anthroposophy is able, and wishes, to enter into life today. They were: the form and structure of the First Goetheanum and the ways in which the Waldorf School was founded and conducted its affairs. On January 23, 1923, he said to the members in Stuttgart "Perhaps we may say that the Goetheanum in Dornach and the Waldorf School and its procedures show how Anthroposophical activity should be carried on in all the various spheres of culture."¹

From the perspective of the last years of the twentieth century, we look back and we look ahead. The century's lessons have, for the most part, been bloody and unrelenting. What have we learned? To what extent have we mastered the art of building a social structure in which the individual is inwardly and outwardly free, yet the community of which she or he is a member is capable of wise, humane and effective action? Have we achieved this in outer life? Have we understood and realized this fully within the Anthroposophical Society and within the wider Anthroposophical movement? How is it, for instance, within our Waldorf schools? Has Steiner's suggestion to look to the form and structure of the First Goetheanum and to the founding of the original Waldorf School and to its way of functioning, has this suggestion still relevance for us today? In search of an answer, let us first turn to that building which stood for so brief a time on the Dornach hill.

If each dome stood alone, its ground plan would be a perfect circle. Because they intersect, both the circle formed by the outer walls that support the domes, and the inner circle formed by the columns supporting the interior ceilings, form an intangible architectural space that is common to both spheres. This "third" space, however, not only unites but also separates. In this sense it is a "threshold" that can become a key to an understanding of the entire structure.

The two spheres: the sphere of the seven and that of the twelve, are, in them, polarities. One might say, almost irreconcilable polarities, at first glance. Every human being is welcome to enter the sphere of the seven, the auditorium, if he or she wants to hear or see what goes on there. Christian or Jew, Buddhist or Mohammedan, agnostic or atheist, are equally welcome. They have only to take the initiative to come, to observe, and, if they so wish, to participate and understand. Each has the right to be there, to accept or reject what goes on. Here, each is equal.

The smaller, interior space, however, is grounded in the twelve. This space speaks of objective, cosmic realities. Here, hierarchy is at home. It is meaningless to vote whether four times four is twelve or sixteen, or twenty. In this sphere, hierarchy is neither arbitrary nor static, but exists in archetypal lawfulness.

Each sphere has its rightful place and function, yet in each a potential tyranny is hidden. One might say of the sphere of the twelve that it hides a potential “theocratic tyranny,” a tyranny of the truth that becomes dogma. But the sphere of the seven also hides a potential tyranny - the “democratic,” for which every truth is relative, every insight personal and subjective.

In a social organism, how can these potential tyrannies be reconciled? Can they come together in any kind of functioning whole? This is, I believe, where the third space emerges as a saving grace. And in the building, it was just in this third space that the speaker’s stand stood when Rudolf Steiner, or any other individual, spoke to the audience gathered to hear him. The one who spoke may well have achieved a significant truth, perhaps through arduous, dedicated research into the realm of the supersensible. If he is determined to project his truth onto, and into his audience, can he expect that his words will be accepted by his hearers under the larger dome? He may well experience rejection and antagonism because what he has to say comes on as dogmatism, as indigestible nourishment! In such a situation, the speaker has to swallow the bitter pill and realize that as long as the truth is his in this personal sense, it may awaken curiosity, may even be experienced as brilliant, as logically convincing, but it will not be truly fruitful. He has to “let it go” - let it die - and he has to leave his audience free, and be prepared to wait to see whether or not it comes to life, is resurrected, in the hearts and minds of his listeners. (The same thing was, of course, also true for the artist who “spoke” from the stage whether in eurythmy, drama, recitation or music.)

And for the member of the audience who entered the hall with his or her rightful sense of personal individuality, he too had to let go of his right to self-expression, to project his perhaps arbitrary personal opinion, if he, in fact, wanted to hear what spoke from beyond that threshold.

I believe it is not farfetched to say that the building “came alive” when in both spaces, this “mood of the threshold” held sway. One may truly say the building became human in the giving and receiving, in the crossing of that invisible threshold that both united and separated the two spheres. This is basically a rhythmic process, a taking in and a letting go, and the “Representative of Humanity” the Christ Being, lives essentially in rhythm. Lucifer would like to inspire us to cross that threshold and be forever free. Ahriman wants to bind us to the sense world and convince us that there is no other. But the truly human spirit says learn to live in both spheres. When you are beyond the threshold, learn to give yourself over to the laws that hold sway there, but never forget the earth, the needs and laws of its existence. Become a true “journeyman” in search of the only “master” who leaves you free.

But how can we understand that the Waldorf School and its procedures show how Anthroposophy as activity should be carried on in all the various spheres of culture?²

With this, I believe, we find ourselves face to face with a significant riddle. In the same lecture from which we have already quoted, Rudolf Steiner said: “It is superfluous, in the case of the Waldorf School, to ask whether its origin was Anthroposophy: the only question is whether children who receive their

education there are being properly educated. Anthroposophy undergoes a metamorphosis into the universally human when it is put to work. But for that to be the case, for Anthroposophy to be rightly creative in the various fields it must have an area - not for its own but for its offsprings' sake - where it is energetically fostered and where its members are fully conscious of their responsibilities to the Society. Only then can Anthroposophy be a suitable parent to these many offspring in the various spheres of culture and civilization. The (Anthroposophical) Society must unite human beings who feel the deepest, holiest commitment to the true fostering of Anthroposophy.³

Here again we find ourselves confronted with a polarity: "Anthroposophy undergoes a metamorphosis into the universally human when it is put to work" yet, "it must have an area where it is energetically fostered and where its members are fully conscious of their responsibilities to the Society." Are we not back in the two intersecting domes of the First Goetheanum? In order for Anthroposophy to speak freely and fruitfully to the world that enters the auditorium under the large dome it must "undergo a metamorphosis into the universally human" yet it must also have "an area where it is energetically fostered." Isn't this the sphere of the twelve, of the small dome, of the stage?

Surely both spheres are essential if Anthroposophy is rightly to enter cultural life today. But the question with which Rudolf Steiner wrestled throughout that fateful year 1923 was: Is it possible to unite such polarities within the fragile fabric of a human community? Can the community be clearly visible, effective and strong, yet leave everyone, both within it and outside it, inwardly free? This was the question which was finally resolved for Rudolf Steiner in the reconstitution of the Anthroposophical Society at the Christmas Foundation Meeting.⁴ We shall also see, I believe, that it is a question that bears directly on the life and function of our Waldorf schools at the end of the century.

The Anthroposophical Society was, for Rudolf Steiner, to be "the area where Anthroposophy is energetically fostered - not for its own but for its offsprings' sake" To the extent that this fostering is truly successful, the "offspring" will have available to them the living spiritual substance which can "undergo metamorphosis into the universally human" as they put it to work in their particular field of practical life. And how was this Society constituted at the Christmas Foundation?

The Society, as such, was to be as open as any human society could possibly be. Every human being - of whatever religious, racial, national, economic, educational background - was equally welcome to become a member if she or he considers "the existence of such an institution as the Goetheanum in Dornach - in its capacity as a School of Spiritual Science - to be justified."⁵ Yet, within this open, public society an esoteric institution was to be created, subject to its own laws and disciplines, but functioning in full public view. As we know, this was to become the School of Spiritual Science with its various Sections. At its center were to be the esoteric classes in which the pupil - if he or she chooses - might develop spiritual capacities and insights, step by arduous step. The insight and capacities so won, were what the pupil needed if she or he then wished to apply them in a practical field of cultural endeavor. In this sense, the task of the School was, and is, research that of the Society was the cultivation of the life of soul through Anthroposophical study and work

The Independent School of Spiritual Science was inaugurated on February 15, 1924, and Rudolf Steiner was able to complete the establishment of the First Class of the School before he left for England in August. He was unable to do more before his strength gave out at the end of September, when he had to forego all further outward activity.

With the establishment of the School of Spiritual Science, Rudolf Steiner also inaugurated the special Sections, always taking as his starting point the presence of an individual whom he knew and trusted and in whom he recognized a capacity for leadership in his or her particular field. Thus he recognized Albert Steffen as leader of the work in the Humanities (Belles Lettres or Schone Wissenschaften); Marie Steiner

for the Speaking and Musical Arts; Ita Wegman for Medicine and Therapy; Elizabeth Vreede for Mathematics and Astronomy; and Gunther Wachsmuth for Natural Science. Initially, he retained leadership of the Educational or Pedagogical section in his own hands.

The teachers in the Waldorf School asked Rudolf Steiner how they should see their relation with the School of Spiritual Science and received the reply that this was a matter of individual initiative and responsibility. It was Rudolf Steiner's expectation that a teacher, working to fructify his or her teaching out of Anthroposophy, would recognize that, in this sense, he or she "represented" Anthroposophy, and would wish to unite him- or herself with the School of Spiritual Science. Within the Waldorf School, especially as the School grew and the number of teachers increased, it was natural that those who felt themselves united in this way with the School of Spiritual Science and its Section, would wish to create a space within which the deepening of the spiritual scientific foundations of the education could be the central task. In the Waldorf School this community of teachers came to be known as the *Interne Konferenz*, and in the English-speaking world, as the College of Teachers, sometimes also as the Council.

Within a single, living social institution - a school - that includes children, teachers, parents, board members, alumni, friends - we find an organ whose members carry an "esoteric" responsibility. How is this to be understood? What does "esoteric" in this context actually mean?

Two human beings may stand side by side and may speak exactly the same words. Yet those spoken words can be experienced almost as if they belonged to two totally different languages! In one case, the words, and the thoughts they describe, spring from inner experience, they have been "lived," "digested," perhaps "suffered," "wrestled with," and have, as a result, become the speaker's own. In the other case this has not happened. The words are abstract, perhaps brilliant, but they have not been transformed. They are "anonymous," and one may even wonder who, in fact, is speaking?

If one recognizes this distinction, then one can also realize that the process can be carried further in meditation and inner exercise. But the essential distinction is the same. And if one keeps this characterization clearly in mind, then one can think of a "college of teachers" as carrying an essentially esoteric responsibility, both within and on behalf of the school organism as a whole. Following the analogy further, the primary function of a "college" would seem to be the process of transformation through which, one might say, the "raw material" of Anthroposophy becomes both completely individual and universally human. To the extent that this process of transformation is achieved, what flows from the college into the organism as a whole will be health- and strength-giving, will be a guidance and nourishment that is gladly received, and will help to build confidence that elusive and intangible foundation on the basis of which the organism lives and thrives.

From this point of view, a college is not primarily an administrative organ. Yet an organism - a community, an institution, a school - needs to be "administered" just as my liver, my stomach, my lungs need to find their proper function within my body as a whole. In this sense, the life of my body needs administration, needs a continuous balancing flow of forces and functions to keep me alive and well. And within this mysterious and wonderful interplay, one organ, in particular, seems always to keep the whole "in mind" Isn't the heart this central organ in whose unnoticed, tireless, rhythmic pulsing the "awareness" of the whole organism ebbs and flows? On the tides of the blood, life and nourishment reach every living cell and return, not only with their spent forces, but also with a magical awareness of "how it is" with the organs everywhere. In the flowing blood and pulsing heart the organism as a whole senses its own life which is then reflected in the nerves that bring the message to human consciousness.

If there is reality in this interpretation, may it not then be that a college of teachers within the bodily organism of a school acts as the sensing heart whose nourishing blood flows to every cell and returns with news of the state of health of every organ? And isn't this, in fact, what we mean by administration? When

it works well, the organism experiences confidence - the confidence that each individual is in the right place, at the right time, freely performing the essential function for which each is individually responsible on behalf of the whole.

And in this context, what might we call “anti-administration?” My answer would be bureaucracy! If the organism is afraid that one organ has too much power it sets up rules and regulations to curb and control the invasion, and eventually, what do we have? Paralysis! Which may take the form of endless hours of discussion in which nothing gets decided, but everyone has had his “fair share.” Or, the “boss” knows so well exactly how everything should be that the limbs and organs have built resistance to protect themselves from the too powerful directive flow!

Within the “administration” of the living organism, there are certain “techniques” that contribute positively to its well being. The art of delegating responsibility is one of these. If the underlying confidence is there, then a single individual, or two or three, may well be entrusted to act on behalf of the whole, even to make independent decisions with which all will have to live. But such delegation, to be productive, must be definite, accountable, and freely given and received. And even consensus - sacred Waldorf “decision by consensus” - need not be immutable! Not infrequently, one quiet, inconspicuous member may express just the thought, or characterize the situation, around which instant recognition gathers, and the deed is done!

But there are conditions without which nothing seems to work well. The sky seems always cloudy. No fresh wind blows. Especially within the college it must be possible to say what is on one’s heart, no matter how awkward this may be. And this becomes possible if one knows that what is shared will remain within the collegial circle. If there is a “leakage” in heart or lung, the whole body is affected and the discipline of confidentiality within an institution is a very real source of health and strength.

Once again, even such aphoristic indications lead us back to the building on the Dornach hill. Where there is “autonomy” we find social health. If the insight that has been gained within the college - if the “raw material” of Anthroposophy has been thoroughly transformed - it can be allowed to “die” as it passes through the intervening space and one can have confidence that it will be recognized and accepted by those who find themselves within the auditorium beneath the larger dome. And if they realize that the answers to the very questions that may have brought them there in the first place require a space in which they can be freely and authentically researched, they will recognize that they must let go their habitual ways of thought, their preconceptions and subjective demands, if they are to cross the middle space and experience the answers for themselves.

In the great sculpture whose presence was to have pervaded the entire structure from east to west, the adversaries each seek power, power to subject the human being to their will. The third figure, however, does not directly battle, he strides forward and, thereby, creates a space. And in this “space” the will-to-power finds itself in “nothingness,” and it too must die if it is to be resurrected. And in doing so, it is freed to be and do what it actually longs to do - to contribute out of itself what it alone can give, without which also the whole remains incomplete!

If humanity is to learn brotherhood, it will do so through a true economy: if we are to learn true human justice, we can do so only as we learn to meet each other as human being to equal human being. But for these two ideals to happen, we must learn to practice freedom, And the ground on which to practice freedom is the ground of cultural, spiritual life.

As the Goetheanum rose on its hillside in northwest Switzerland - angle point of European destiny - during the First World War, men and women came together freely from warring nations to help build it. Theirs was a cultural, spiritual, artistic deed.

When Emil Molt asked Rudolf Steiner if he would found and guide a school for the children whom he well knew needed it, his question was a cultural deed, asked in freedom, and the response was equally free.

In both the building and the school, their architect/designer recognized that polarities are essential to life. But he also knew that polarity calls for a “third space” in which power dies and can rise transformed. This is the risk inherent in every truly creative act. But it is also the risk that can lead to what is uniquely individual and at the same time is universally human.

Notes

¹ Rudolf Steiner: *Awakening to Community*. Anthroposophic Press, 1974. Rudolf Steiner: bid, p. 10.

² Rudolf Steiner: Ibid, p. 10

³ Ibid, p. 11.

⁴ Rudolf Steiner: *The Christmas Conference*. Anthroposophic Press, 1990.

⁵ Rudolf Steiner: *The Life, Nature and Cultivation of Anthroposophy*. Anthroposophical Society in Great Britain, 1976. Par. 4, p. 5.

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