

A Postcard from Stuttgart: Rudolf Steiner's 150th Anniversary Exhibition 'Kosmos'

John Paull

Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford

john.paull@anthro.ox.ac.uk

It is easy to imagine that Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) would be delighted with the new exhibition Kosmos Rudolf Steiner. It is a major retrospective exhibition of his life and ideas. Kosmos appears 150 years after Steiner's birth, and this is a timely anniversary to present the man and his ideas, fresh to a new audience.

Steiner spent the last difficult months of his life writing instalments of his autobiography, but death intervened and his account only reaches to 1907 (Steiner, 1925). Those missing final eighteen years were a period of great creativity and productivity, and they are well represented in Kosmos.

Visitors may be drawn by curiosity, and others will be drawn by familiarity. Whether it was art, agriculture, architecture or anthroposophy, whether education or eurythmy, furniture or well-being, Steiner touched it, and his touch has endured.

Kosmos Rudolf Steiner is, first and foremost, a celebration of a life lived with intensity, purpose and zest. Students of Anthroposophy would perhaps be surprised, even disappointed, if this exhibition was linear, it's not, it is really two exhibitions in one. There is, firstly, Rudolf Steiner, *Alchemy of the Everyday*, which presents exhibits, and artefacts of the *Zeitgeist* of Steiner. Then there is Rudolf Steiner and Contemporary Art, which will perhaps appeal to those with some taste for contemporary art.

To describe the two exhibition catalogues (Brüderlin & Groos, 2010; Kries & Vegesack, 2010) as 'exhibition catalogues' is an exercise in understatement. Both

are lavish coffee-table books, each is comprehensively illustrated and complemented by informative essays. They are art-quality hard-cover works with sumptuous full-colour illustrations, and either book, in its own right, would be a fine asset to any library. There are two versions, English and German, of each book. The museum has also published an accompanying book *Rudolf Steiner in Stuttgart* (Neider & Schukraft, 2011) which is only available in German, however it is copiously illustrated with photographs and documents.

The Museum hosting *Kosmos* in Stuttgart, Germany, is the spectacular Kunstmuseum, a modernistic glass cube occupying a prime position at the head of the city's square, the Schlossplatz (**Plate 1**). A visitor to the Kunstmuseum can look



through the museum's walls of glass over the square and out to the escarpment on which stands the original Waldorf School. The Waldorfschule was founded in 1919. With a current enrolment of approximately 1000 students, it is

still a showcase for Steiner's ideas on education. For the energetic, the world's first Waldorf School is a manageable uphill walk from the Kunstmuseum.

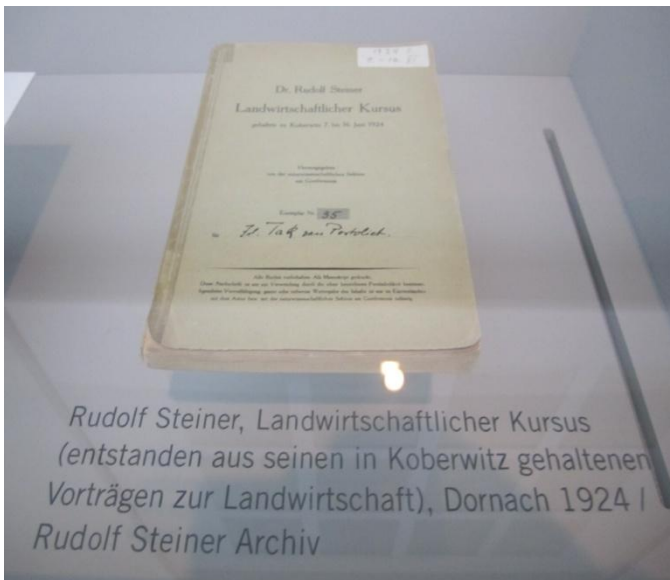
Kosmos occupies four levels of the Kunstmuseum. Art is on the ground level. From level one to level three, *Alchemy of the Everyday* is a treat for all who are interested, intrigued, enamoured or bewildered by Steiner. This exhibition was assembled by the Vitra Design Museum, near Basel (which is close by to Dornach and the Goetheanum). One consequence of this proximity has been that "over the years we have gathered together a substantial amount of anthroposophic furniture from diverse estates in Dornach, and drawn attention to the distinctive features of the anthroposophic aesthetics" (Kries & Vegesack, 2010, p.15) (Plate 2). Other



Plate 2



Plate 3



material is on loan from the Rudolf Steiner Archive, Duldeck House, Dornach (Plate 3), including a first edition of the Agriculture Course (Plate 4).

Plate 4

The design museum provenance of Alchemy means that the exhibition offers a rich experience of 'anthroposophic furniture' and design generally. Steiner's architecture is

represented by photographs and models - including of the first timber Goetheanum and of the present reinforced concrete Goetheanum. Many of Steiner's blackboard drawings have survived and Alchemy presents a selection of these as well as Steiner's colourful pastel drawings.

Stepping through levels two and three with the exhibits of art, furniture, architecture, and literature a visitor reaches level four and the final phase of Steiner's life. On this final level are exhibits of education and agriculture. Alchemy is at its thinnest when we arrive at the last of Steiner's impulses. Nevertheless, there are photographs of Koberwitz, and of early biodynamic stirrers. There is a copy of the first German edition of the Agriculture Course (Steiner, 1924) which is numbered

and inscribed on the cover with the name of the recipient - as were all the first edition copies (Plate 4).

One last flight of stairs brings the visitor to the Cube Restaurant. Occupying the top floor of the Kunstmuseum, it offers spectacular views over Stuttgart - as well as coffee and cake. Kosmos Rudolf Steiner has bilingual information panels throughout, in both German and English; however many individual exhibit labels are in German only. Kosmos Rudolf Steiner is a visual feast offering an exhibition worthy of the Renaissance man that is Rudolf Steiner.

Where Next? After Stuttgart, the exhibition moves to Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany, 15 October 2011 to 1 May 2012. It is in Germany but it is just a 10 km drive from Basel in Switzerland. Further venues are planned.

References

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Captions:

Plate 1. The exhibition, Kosmos Rudolf Steiner at Stuttgart's stylish Kunstmuseum, appears prominently in the Schlossplatz, the city square.

Plate 2. Anthroposophic furniture, with a photo of Duldeck House (Dornach, built 1915) at the rear, and a model of the Goetheanum's heating plant (built 1914) on the left.

Plate 3. Steiner's books and ephemera are showcased on the left, and the photograph shows him at work sculpting 'The Representative of Humanity' (c.1919).

Plate 4. The first issue of the Agriculture Course issued in 1924 in German.