The Survival of Friedensreich Hundertwasser: Consistencies and Contradictions

by

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INTRODUCTION

Friedensreich Hundertwasser is now perhaps Austria’s most famous contemporary artist and architect, and has won recognition from major institutions around the world—from local and national governments to the United Nations to Vogue magazine—for his contributions to culture, ecology, architecture, and diplomacy. Even in Vienna, a city with a rich cultural tradition and the home to the magnificent buildings left behind by the Hapsburg Monarchy, Hundertwasser’s first architectural project, Hundertwasserhaus, is the second most visited tourist attraction in the city, after Schönbrunn Palace. In all of Austria, Hundertwasserhaus still ranks third among the nation’s tourist attractions, after Salzburg Castle and tied with Grossglockner, Austria’s highest mountain.¹ Original Hundertwasser paintings are immensely expensive, even by the standards of the art market, and his prints continue to be in almost insatiable demand.² However, Hundertwasser had emerged onto the stage of international art approximately twenty years before he achieved such success. While he was always convinced that he would one day achieve popularity and fame as an artist and activist, the rest of the world took a couple decades to warm up to his ideas and his paintings.

While evolving from an anonymous artist to a successful one over the course of a long career is hardly an unusual story—few artist are lucky enough to become eminent overnight—in Hundertwasser’s case, this transformation is particularly remarkable because his initial appeal as an artist stemmed from his marginality and

lack of success. Hundertwasser’s paintings, like everything else that he did, were extensions of his philosophy, in addition to being aesthetically pleasing. In his explanation of Hundertwasser’s ambitions beyond his art, his longtime friend and biographer Wieland Schmied explained, “With Hundertwasser, everything was far more complex… He believed he had a mission to fulfill in this world. He was inspired by his calling. He had a message and never tired of proclaiming it in never-ending variations. He continually confronted us with his manifestos, forcing his ideas upon us.”¹ His paintings were the original variation through which he communicated his guiding philosophy to the public, and at each of his exhibitions, he never missed the opportunity to accompany his painting with a manifesto explaining the message behind it. For Hundertwasser, the message was most often a condemnation of modern society; whether he criticized consumerism, capitalism, mandatory education, or modern architecture, his aim was always the same: to inspire his audience to enact change to help realize his vision for a postmodern utopia, which prioritized individual autonomy, creative freedom, and natural beauty above all else. He denounced any established institution, organization, group, movement, or ideology, and claimed that they diminished the power and the originality of the individual.

As a result, his biographers thus far have defined him as a “rugged individualist,” who operated on the margins of society and culture. Schmied goes so far as to assert, “Even Hundertwasser’s staunchest friend would not have been able to view his effect on people in a consistently positive light—probably not even the artist

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himself would have done that.°°° Hundertwasser had a habit of offending people and provoking hate and scorn with his philosophy, since his condemnation of the established institutions, governments, ideologies, and movements was initially very harsh. Yet, later in his career, collaboration with some of the establishments and groups which he originally condemned became an essentially component of realizing his utopian vision. Hundertwasser thus appeared to be a very contradictory figure, for he based his career on a philosophy of individuality and marginality, only to become a mainstream success and to be celebrated by established institutions and governments around the world.

Hundertwasser’s transformation from a harsh critic of the modern world into a major public figure within it raises questions about Hundertwasser’s adherence to his own philosophy. If Hundertwasser was such a staunch opponent of established institutions, why did he work with so many of them later in his career? How could he reconcile his guiding philosophy with his acceptance of high profile projects, many of them funded or granted by governments and major organizations? Why did these associations wish to work with Hundertwasser after he had slandered their kind so publically? Why did Hundertwasser transform so radically over the course of his career?

So far, the literature examining Hundertwasser’s transformation has largely consisted of biographies and portraits of the artist, many of them written by his close personal friends and fans of his work. Wieland Schmied and Pierre Restany have both written several books on Hundertwasser. Both also happen to be art critics who met

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Hundertwasser during is early career and maintained close relationships with him throughout the rest of his life. Joram Harel, too, was one of Hundertwasser’s closest friends, though he only met the artist in 1972, and took it upon himself to compile a book entitled *The Yet Unknown Hundertwasser*, which combines the artist’s life story, as well as some contributions from members of the museum community that analyze portions of the artist’s life and work. All three of these biographers and friends have explained the phenomenon of Hundertwasser’s success by asserting that his philosophy consists of slow-acting parables. Pierre Restany argued, “Time, moreover, is on his side. Many statements deemed cranky, many acts considered irresponsible, have subsequently proved their full value. If one watches the metaphors that nurture Hundertwasser’s acts and speech, one notices that they are anticipatory fables endowed with a delayed-action morality: they are veritable ‘parables’.5 In other words, Restany believes that Hundertwasser’s philosophy has not changed, but has merely been proven to be less controversial and more appropriate over time; thus his ideas have not changed, but the world has simply warmed up to them. Restany viewed his understanding of the phenomenon of Hundertwasser’s success as a result of his privileged relationship with Hundertwasser, for he continued, “At bottom, Hundertwasser speaks to his epoch as Christ spoke to his, with the aid of parables which begin with simply expressed pure obvious truths. His close friends are, like the apostles, the first to appreciate their essence.”6 While not all of Hundertwasser’s biographers were lucky enough to be among his “apostles,” they subscribe to the theory of Hundertwasser’s parable-driven

6 Ibid.
success. J.F. Mathey, author of his own work *Hundertwasser*, made a similar assertion in 1986: “Hundertwasser is always unique and true to himself. His work reveals not so much a series of stylistic experiments as a continuous growth scarcely interrupted by the short lived burst of a bud in May or the splitting of the ice in the thaw.” Mathey thus maintains that Hundertwasser’s philosophy and artistic development evolved in a linear manner, instead of making a distinct turn at any point.

The notion of Hundertwasser’s philosophy unfolding in slow acting parables comes from Hundertwasser’s own theory on the development of his work, which he called the *Verzögerungsmechanismus* (delay mechanism) or the *Vorurteilsfalle* (prejudice trap). Many of Hundertwasser’s biographers, including Wieland Schmied, historian and museum director Robert Fleck, and editor of Hundertwasser’s work *Hundertwasser—Beautiful Paths, Thoughts on Art and Life* Walter Schurian, expand on the theory of slow-acting parables and explain Hundertwasser’s theory that the controversy invoked by his initially provocative ideas served as a delay mechanism, which allowed him to remain in the public eye due to his conflicts with those who criticize him. In the work *Beautiful Paths*, Schurian explains, “Nothing helps the truly positive to achieve a greater impact than the negative intention to hold it back… Having to admit that what had been judged to be negative is in truth positive, is a difficult realization which leaves a much deeper mark than when the positive is recognized immediately as being positive.” Therefore the delayed effect of realizing

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that Hundertwasser’s seemingly absurd idea is actually quite true makes a more intense and longer lasting impact on a person. In his elaboration on the delay mechanism, Schmied explains, “Even self-imposed obstacles do more good than harm; and the harder opponents try to stop something, the less successful they will be.”

Fleck, too, illustrates that Hundertwasser’s controversial ideas and rhetoric stemmed from his desire to remain a relevant public figure, for in his publication *The Topicality of Hundertwasser’s Painting* in Joram Harel’s compilation *The Yet Unknown Hundertwasser*, he states, “He devised a deliberately independent position to the museum world and was in turn ostracized by the art world; his was a voice critical of the art and architecture establishment, but at the same time he was forced to maintain his public role by constantly opting for new polemical attacks that increasingly focused on the political domain.”

Fleck thus expands even further on the theory of the delay mechanism in Hundertwasser’s works and asserts that his actions in the political sphere partially come from his desire to inspire controversy, even after he ceased to operate within the realm of museums and art critics. Such works suggest that by employing his Verzögerungsmechanismus theory and remaining controversial, Hundertwasser attempted to retain his marginal status as an outsider of the political and artistic communities, even though his art and collaboration on political and social projects were in high demand.

While the existing literature examining Hundertwasser’s life and career contends that Hundertwasser’s philosophy did not take a definitive turn, it does note

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that his activities as an artist and public figure changed. In his examination of Hundertwasser’s change in activity, Mathey points out that the pace at which Hundertwasser painted slowed considerably. Between 1950 and 1970, Hundertwasser created approximately seven hundred paintings. Yet, by the time of his death in February 2000, his Œuvre-Catalogue ended with work 1003. Since the catalogue included all of his works since 1954, including those which were not paintings, Mathey’s claim that little more than a hundred paintings have been added to the total of seven hundred in 1970 appears to be entirely accurate. Schmied provides an excellent explanation for such a change in the pace of Hundertwasser’s painting, for he claims that beginning in the late-1960s, Hundertwasser transformed from a painter into a utopian: “Hundertwasser was the hero of at least two seemingly separate stories: that of the painter and that of the utopian. The common denominator was the penchant for philosophy shared by the painter and the utopian. The painter had already reflected on God and the world, life and art. The utopian went further and made an effort to turn it into reality.” Schmied insists that Hundertwasser the utopian was indeed hiding beneath the surface of the painter the entire time, and that Hundertwasser the painter never ceased to exist; chronologically, Hundertwasser the utopian came to dominate the artist’s life story beginning in the mid-1960s. Restany concurs that beginning in the late-1960s and reaching fruition in 1972, Hundertwasser evolved from a painter into a visionary naturist who devoted himself to the defense of

the human condition and the practical search for a better life on earth.\textsuperscript{14} Restany acknowledges that, also in 1972, Hundertwasser added two additional elements to his philosophy, which addressed the needs of the social and ecological environment beyond the individual, yet he does not mark such an addition as a transformation, but as merely an extension of that philosophy. Harry Rand, author of yet another biography entitled \textit{Hundertwasser}, agrees that after a certain point, the artist “busied himself with thoughts of sewage, traffic, architecture, diet, urban planning, humus toilet, the foresting of roofs, a waste-free society, clothing, energy, identity, and the other notions that undergird modern life.”\textsuperscript{15} Ultimately, though they acknowledge that Hundertwasser began to take on new socially and ecologically conscious projects after a certain point in his career, Hundertwasser’s biographers collectively deny that Hundertwasser’s philosophy changed. In their opinion, Hundertwasser’s success did not emerge because the artist changed, but because the broader public began to see truth in his original message as time progressed.

This idea requires one to view Hundertwasser as a godlike figure. However, to claim that Hundertwasser’s philosophy unfolded slowly, in an entirely linear manner is incorrect. While Hundertwasser’s vision for a peaceful future based in nature and beauty did not change, his strategy for how to achieve such a society did. He did not intentionally provoke scorn and hatred of established institutions only to become accepted by them later as his convictions became applicable to concrete acts of change. Hundertwasser only developed his theory of \textit{Verzögerungsmechanismus} later in his career as a means of bringing more cohesion to his ideas and actions. In truth,

\textsuperscript{14} Restany, \textit{Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins}, 19-20. 
\textsuperscript{15} Harry Rand, \textit{Hundertwasser} (Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1993), 83.
Hundertwasser altered and reinterpreted his philosophy throughout his career to reflect the needs of his time. In doing so, the artist did not completely abandon his original convictions, but instead responded to what he viewed as the crises of the world in a manner that could achieve gradual change in the present. Hundertwasser’s ideas were thus somewhat topical, and evolved as time progressed.

By the examining his writings, speeches, interviews, manifestos, and projects released throughout his fifty-year career, this work contends that Hundertwasser’s philosophy certainly evolved as time progressed, partially as a reaction to what he saw as the crises of his time, and also so that he could collaborate with groups and organizations that were willing and able to extend the reaches of his influence. Hundertwasser did not entirely abandon his origin vision for the future as his philosophy developed. However, his strategy for ensuring the survival of individual autonomy and mankind as a whole in the context of the modern society certainly changed over the course of his career. Between the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies, Hundertwasser changed from being a painter to being an artist-activist. His world perspective broadened and his philosophy began to address mankind’s social and ecological problems through collective action. This transformation allowed Hundertwasser to inspire and create change more quickly and to a greater extent than he might have otherwise achieved if he had restricted himself to painting and advocating for change only through the action of each individual. Therefore, this work will demonstrate that Hundertwasser’s philosophy did change during the late-1960s and the early-1970s from a manual for the individual’s survival in the modern world to a survival guide for mankind and the earth to survive as a whole.
Hundertwasser did not completely abandon his beliefs in individualism, but he realized that in order to enact the change that the world required for survival, he would have to learn to collaborate with others.

The first chapter briefly examines Hundertwasser’s life before his career as a painter began and identifies the origins of his postmodern philosophy. It identifies the two most influential aspects of his early life in the development of his philosophy as his experience as a half-Jewish, half-Aryan boy in Vienna during the Anschluss and the Second World War and his relationship to his friend and fellow painter René Brô. Hundertwasser attributed his survival of both the war and its aftermath to his status as an outsider of both the Jewish and Aryan communities. After Hundertwasser had already begun to appreciate his individuality and marginality, he met René Brô in Italy, who introduced him to another level of individualism. Under Brô’s influence, Hundertwasser began to build on the individuality that he inherently felt by physically setting himself apart from the rest of the world through his self-designed clothes and the general practice of self-sufficient living. Most importantly, the first chapter will demonstrate the inherent hope and positivity of Hundertwasser’s philosophy that would later set him apart from the other postmodernists of his time and contribute to his survival as a public figure when his contemporary movements faltered. The examination of Hundertwasser’s early life also demonstrates the genuine nature of Hundertwasser’s conviction, for it shows that his starkly principled philosophy grew out of beliefs and experiences, not the desire to be provocative.

The second chapter places Hundertwasser’s philosophy in the context of the other postmodernists in post-war Europe during the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-
sixties, who also fused artistic expression and political activism. By outlining Hundertwasser’s original philosophy, this chapter sets up a point of comparison for the evolution of Hundertwasser’s principles over the course of his career. This chapter will provide context for that philosophy by comparing him to his fellow artists and activists who became involved in a form of protest and critique called Happenings. Hundertwasser partook in some of the first Happenings on European soil. While a Happening is a difficult art form to define, it essentially consists of a performance meant to alter the audience’s perception of reality and modern society.

The Happenings, Fluxus, Situationist International and Provo movements, along with somewhat independent artists such as Hundertwasser and German sculptor Joseph Beuys, employed these expressive social critiques as a call for societal change in which individuals would assert their individual, creative autonomy against the tides of consumerism and further industrialization. Through a comparison between Hundertwasser and the other cultural-political postmodernist movements of the period, this chapter will show that Hundertwasser rejection of modern society and plan to incite change in the future were not unique to him but part of a broader avant-garde and countercultural movement of the period. However, this chapter will also address the fact that Hundertwasser’s strategy for making his utopian vision a reality set him apart from his peers.

The third chapter examines the period during which Hundertwasser’s strategy for creating his postmodern utopia began to transform. Hundertwasser’s gradual acceptance of collective, non-violent actions for steady change became the key to his success and set him up for opportunities to have a greater impact on the world in the
near future. Joseph Beuys had a similar revelation about the benefits of communal action during this period that supports the idea that Hundertwasser’s transformation from artist and societal critic into an artist-activist helped to maintain his influence on culture and politics. Most importantly, this chapter demonstrates that Hundertwasser’s principles and overall philosophy did make some definitive departures, based on the historical context of the global uprisings of the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies, and that his strategy for the survival of the individual, mankind, and the earth had to adjust to the emerging crises of the new decade.

The fourth chapter analyzes the final version of Hundertwasser’s philosophy and his involvement in high-profile projects in collaboration with governments and major institutions. His selective collaboration with governments, politicians, educational establishments, diplomatic organizations, and media institutions demonstrates that his desire to extend his own influence and enact constructive and widespread change triumphed over his convictions of unyielding individualism. The protection of individual autonomy remained one of Hundertwasser’s primary goals, but he reconciled that goal with his understanding that collaboration could accomplish significant change much more effectively. The chapter shows that Hundertwasser did not remain famous and successful due to his continuous provocation, but in fact, quite the opposite is true: Hundertwasser’s desire to exert his own influence contributed most to his lasting fame and success, for he never would have been granted the opportunity to create such high-profile and influential projects if he had not developed a willingness to cooperate with others.
Overall, this work will demonstrate that Hundertwasser was not a completely contradictory figure, but he still became something of an opportunist as he reacted to the practical needs of his time and capitalized on his success as an artist. While the idea that an opponent of rational, functional, and practical forms of architecture and production succumbed to practicality in the development of his philosophy seems strange, the phenomenon grew out of his prioritization of effective change and the extension of his own influence over the adherence to his rigid principles.
HUNDERTWASSER’S EARLY LIFE

The motifs of postmodernism and survival that would later permeate Hundertwasser’s fundamental philosophy have their origins in Hundertwasser’s struggle for survival and recognition throughout his early life, before his career as an artist began. In his 1950 diary entry, later entitled “I Love Schiele,” Hundertwasser expressed a fear that he, like his idol and fellow Viennese painter Egon Schiele, would leave the world on earth and no longer be able to express his ideas. In the entry, Hundertwasser pleaded, “One should not kill me. Schiele should still be alive. I would tell him wonderful things from my journey. Perhaps it is better that I cannot tell him things, for now I have to tell and give it to everybody. One should not kill me beforehand.”¹⁶ Even before Hundertwasser entered the artistic community, he clearly felt that he had a mission to change the world with his ideas and his works of art. Yet, in 1950, he had not yet had the same opportunity as Schiele to showcase his paintings and convictions to the world. Instead, as a survivor of the Great Depression, the Anschluss and the Second World War, and the destruction and devastation of its aftermath, Hundertwasser feared that his vision for a better future would not only never become reality, but would never even be heard.

CHILDHOOD

Born Friedrich Stowasser in Vienna on December 15, 1928 to a Jewish mother and an “Aryan” father, Hundertwasser’s life would only be wrought with struggles in the years ahead. While he would not have been old enough to be aware of and

interpret the politics of the inter-war period, his memories of his early childhood could easily have been quite bleak. Hundertwasser’s father was unemployed technical engineer, who had served with distinction in the Austrian army and died while undergoing an appendectomy only days after Friedrich’s first birthday.\textsuperscript{17} Hundertwasser’s mother then became a single, Jewish mother living in the dominantly Catholic Austria and Hundertwasser’s character formed under diminished circumstances and his mother’s exclusive emotional and intellectual instruction.\textsuperscript{18} Hundertwasser was therefore born into a position where he was an outsider, with no distinct group, ethnicity, or identity.

The poverty of the period deeply impacted Hundertwasser for the rest of his life. In the artist’s account of his early childhood, he stated,

\begin{quote}
We were poor, there was only a kitchenette, which made my mother very angry. Our second flat in the Brunhildengasse nearby wasn’t much better. Who could guess that these lodgings were luxurious compared with those awaiting us in the years to follow? After we had heard the words of Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg – “God protect Austria” – in the radio on 11 March 1938, my mother told me that we had to expect hard times from then on. I was to understand the reason for these words very much later.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Decades later, Hundertwasser’s close friend and biographer Wieland Schmied noted, “His thoughts constantly revolved around the ideals of frugality, self-sufficiency and complete independence from other people.”\textsuperscript{20} Due to the poverty and intense hardships that Hundertwasser experienced before and during the war, he continued to feel the desperation to survive on as little as possible later in his life. In his Color

\textsuperscript{17} Harry Rand, \textit{Hundertwasser} (Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1993), 10.
\textsuperscript{18} Rand, \textit{Hundertwasser}, 10.
\textsuperscript{19} Walter Schurian, \textit{Hundertwasser-Beautiful Paths, Thoughts on Art and Life} (Munich: Langen Müller, 2004), 49-55.
\textsuperscript{20} Schmied, 11.
Poem in 1957, Hundertwasser declared, “I do not like cherries because I have to throw away the stalks and spit out the stones. …I like to eat potatoes (with peels, and you must not pour away the cooking water from vegetables and potatoes, you should drink it). I do not like colors in tubes or pots, in bowls or cuts, because I have to throw away metal and porcelain.”

Hundertwasser soon translated his extreme rationing and frugality into a plea for minimal, subsistence living and much later in his life, he reinterpreted his desire to live minimally as an early call for environmental conservation and conscious consumption.

During the war, Hundertwasser not only felt the profound the impact of poverty, he also became the recipient of personal subjugation as the Third Reich occupied Austria. Despite Elsa Stowasser’s attempt to protect her son from discrimination by baptizing him in 1937, Hundertwasser still felt the harsh effects of the Nuremberg Laws, which took effect in Austria after the Anschluss by the Third Reich in 1938. In his description of Hundertwasser’s uniquely unfortunate circumstances after the Anschluss, art historian and biographer Harry Rand states, “Perversely, converts were the target of more rapid liquidation. To try to preserve her Jewish family, Stowasser’s mother enrolled him in the Hitler Youth.”

Such an assertion may not be entirely accurate, for the probability that a half-Jewish boy whose Christian parent was deceased was able to join the Hitler Youth was quite unlikely quite low. However, Hundertwasser has since produced a certificate of proof that he was once in the Hitler Youth and he attested to the fact that his membership helped to save the lives of him

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21 Schurian, Hundertwasser—Beautiful Paths, 129-130.
22 Rand, Hundertwasser, 10.
and his mother. In his interview with Georg Markus, Hundertwasser recounted the three occasions on which SS officers knocked on his door, and he was persuaded them to leave by wearing his Hitler Youth cap and swastika armband and presenting his father’s and his uncles metals from the First World War. Unfortunately, Hundertwasser’s half-Aryan status and Christian surname could only protect him and his mother for a prolonged period of time, since, on the SS’s third visit, the officers abducted his aunt and grandmother from the apartment that the four family members shared. In his analysis of his and his mother’s miraculous survival, Hundertwasser asserted, “Our survival was due to the fact that chiefly full Jews were deported. I was protected by being half Jewish, and my full Jewish mother was protected because she had a half Jewish son.” Thus, Hundertwasser believed that his status as a partial-outsider of the Jewish community and the odd-ball in his family ultimately saved the lives of him and his mother.

On the occasion of the end of the war, Hundertwasser again attributed his survival to his status as an outsider. In his account of his last day in the Hitler Youth, Hundertwasser recalled,

After I had passed the radio operator’s exam, our bell rang and some colleagues from the Hitler Youth wanted me to join them to go to war. The Russians meanwhile had reached Burgenland. In an attack of madness, which later turned out to be cleverness, I declared: I cannot go with you, I am half Jewish. The colleagues from the Hitler Youth went away shocked, but didn’t report the affair in the general chaos of war. My “confession” to be half Jewish saved my life. When the shooting started in Vienna, I saw a detachment of my friends of the Hitler Youth, fifteen, sixteen years old like

24 Schurian, Hundertwasser—Schöne Wege, 49-55.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
myself, marching in the direction of the St. Stephen’s cathedral with bazookas
over their shoulders. And none of them returned alive.  

Whether or not Hundertwasser’s memory is entirely accurate, for such a fact would
be almost impossible to prove, the fact remained that Hundertwasser believed that his
status on the margin of both the Jewish and Aryan communities saved his life during and after the war. For Hundertwasser, being an outsider, a unique individual amongst the masses, became an asset for survival.

Hundertwasser’s childhood revelation of the power of the outsider served as the basis for Hundertwasser’s later postmodernist doctrine, emphasizing the assertion of individuality and personal autonomy as the key to survival in the modern world. In the conclusion of his reflection on his life during the war, Hundertwasser argued, “My youth as a double outsider – without a father and being half Jewish – has naturally contributed to my reflecting a lot and becoming aware. I became a lone wolf, a fighter for certain matters which seemed important to me. During my childhood I didn’t have the chance to feel part of a group and thus remained a solo combatant.”  

Hundertwasser’s individualism and obsession with survival both emerged during his youth under the Third Reich. Perhaps he felt that if individualism, autonomy, and self-sufficiency helped him survive the most catastrophic war to date, those same principles could compose an effective strategy for survival in the modern era.

27 Schurian, Hundertwasser-Beautiful Paths, 49-55.
28 Schurian, Hundertwasser-Beautiful Paths, 49-55.
RENÉ BRÔ AND HUNDERTWASSER

While Hundertwasser attributes his birth as a painter to his longtime friend and fellow artist René Brô, his accounts of his early travels with Brô also reveal Brô’s strong influence on the development of Hundertwasser’s Three Skin Philosophy, as well as his distrust for authorities and institutions. In 1948, just a year before he met Brô for the first time, Hundertwasser dropped out of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna after only three months of study because he felt that the institution had nothing left to teach him. Although he felt that established educational institutions would not provide him with the guidance that he needed, Hundertwasser was still in need of direction, and he found such direction a year later in René Brô. In his description of Hundertwasser’s first encounter with Brô and his Friends Micheline and Bernard, he recalled, “It was the summer of 1949. They were all three wildly different from other human beings. They behaved, perfectly naturally, as if on them alone depended the rebirth of humanitarian, religious and artistic culture throughout the world. They represented a programme, a universal ideology which had been created by themselves. I had never seen anything like it.”

Hundertwasser immediately adopted this mentality. Instead of simply thinking of himself as a survivor, existing on the margin of established communities, he began to think that he could change the rest of the world for the better.

Brô and his fellow travelers also taught Hundertwasser to express his internal individuality in his outward appearance, specifically his clothing. Throughout that

summarize 1949, as the four aspiring artists travelled through Italy towards France, Hundertwasser admired the Chinese coolie hats and elegant, homemade clothing that Brô, Bernhard, and Micheline wore, as well as their self-designed sandals. In his description of their appearances, he proclaimed, “They constituted in themselves a travelling exhibition of the fashions of ages yet to come. There was nothing of the Bohemian picturesque about them—their behavior was as earnest as that of a pioneer, of someone from a better world that was infinitely more beautiful and more just.”  

From 1949 on, Hundertwasser, too, resolved to design his own clothing as a means of defining himself to and distinguishing himself from the rest of the world.

Perhaps most importantly for the development of Hundertwasser’s guiding philosophy, Brô taught Hundertwasser that change was attainable through small, achievable steps at the individual level. Throughout their travels through Italy together, Hundertwasser reached an epiphany: “To achieve supreme order through beauty was no longer a Utopia, but a well-defined path, a concrete and viable procedure.” Such a revelation became the defining feature of Hundertwasser’s later career as an artist and activist. Hundertwasser was no longer content to exist and survive on the margins of modern society; he wanted to change the established order, and in order to do so, he simply followed the path that Brô laid out for him, with a few adjustments. In Wieland Schmied’s characterization of Hundertwasser’s aspirations and goals, he stated,

Hundertwasser’s was a life reformer, a world improver. He proclaimed his doctrine of salvation. He made huge demands and suggested to us that we were very close to their fulfillment. He dreamed of an intact world and

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
believed that his utopia would be easy to turn into reality, that all it would need was a little good will, a little bit of effort from us all to attain it.\textsuperscript{32}

Hundertwasser’s optimism about the feasibility of attaining his utopian goals stemmed from his early relationship with Brô and the hope that Brô’s unique lifestyle and ideology impressed on him.

**HUNDERTWASSER’S EARLY PAINTINGS**

During their travels through Italy—from Florence to Siena to Assisi—Brô and Hundertwasser influenced each other’s painting profoundly. They both wished to create an alternative to the abstract art of the post-war period and sought together to create a new color scheme, combining old Italian techniques with their own form of color chemistry.\textsuperscript{33} Their aspirations resulted in a naïve style of painting that was neither abstract nor entirely representative, and used vivid and bright colors. They also agreed to exchange signature elements of their styles. Hundertwasser permitted Brô to paint round-topped “soul-trees,” which he had modeled off of the trees he saw at an exhibition of Walter Kampmann’s work a year earlier. In turn, Brô allowed Hundertwasser to incorporate round heads and almond-shaped eyes, placed high on the forehead, which he had derived from the face of his girlfriend Micheline. Even after their careers took different paths, Hundertwasser and Brô both retained these images as indicative motifs in their paintings.

At the end of the summer Hundertwasser, Brô, and their companions arrived in Paris, where they remained from October 1949 to July of 1950 and stayed with the photographer Austin Dumage and his family, who were friends of Brô’s. While in


\textsuperscript{33} Fleck, “The Topicality of Hundertwasser’s Painting,” 18.
France, Hundertwasser and Brô painted a mural together, called *Paradise—Land of Men, of Trees, Birds, and Ships* (Fig. 1), on the wall of the small Countess Castiglione Hunting Lodge in St. Mandé.

![Mural](image)


This mural illustrates the fusion of the two artists’ styles, for it incorporates the vivid colors, “soul-trees,” almond eyes, and round faces that the two artists agreed to share. This mural also demonstrates the childlike quality of painting that Hundertwasser and Brô shared, for it lacks perspective and appears not to adhere to the laws of gravity.

The techniques of representation that Hundertwasser and Brô shared in their mural became defining elements of Hundertwasser’s signature style. Hundertwasser’s most famous painting of the nineteen-fifties, *European Twirling his Moustache* (Fig. 2), provoked a widespread debate within the artistic community. In his reflection on the initial reaction to the painting, Hundertwasser recalled, “In 1951, it was incredible that a painter who had attended the Art Academy would intentionally paint in such a
childlike way, abandoning perspective. That caused a great scandal at the time.”34 The innocent style that Hundertwasser and Brô shared brought Hundertwasser attention and renown throughout the artistic community, in both negative and positive forms. Yet notices was what Hundertwasser intended to evoke with his works; he wanted to draw attention to the counter agenda that his artistic style presented to the popular abstract art of the period.35

Although Brô and Hundertwasser both employed similarly definitive naïve styles, their careers followed different trajectories as time progressed. In contrast to the awareness that Hundertwasser’s paintings received, Schmied asserts, “René Brô was never so good as he was when he was when working with Hundertwasser. His later paintings, which were exhibited in the nineteen-sixties in the French pavilion at the Venice Biennale, only made a week impression.” Hundertwasser also spoke later about the lack of recognition that Brô received, and recounted his attempt to boost Brô’s spirits by telling him about the most devastating reviews that he himself had received, only to be met with the reply, “Me too – I would like to have some bad critical reviews.”36 Brô never received the level of attention that Hundertwasser did, even early on in their careers. In his

analysis of the divergence in their career paths, Fleck argues, “In subsequent years, René Brô remained loyal to this ostensibly naïve idiom with figures set flat on the canvas… Hundertwasser by contrast, not least influenced by Viennese Art Nouveau, which he also rediscovered at this time, set about devising his own iconography.”

Hundertwasser built on the elements of style that he and Brô had developed together, and in doing so, he created works that resonated with a wider audience and increased his popularity.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, Hundertwasser built on the artistic and philosophical foundation that he laid throughout his childhood and during his time with Brô. Throughout the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties, expanded on Brô’s ideas for an alternative lifestyle and his own distaste for the state of modern Europe during and after the Second World War and created a postmodern philosophy that fit in with the ideas of many countercultural and avant-garde movements of the period. However, the individualism and simplicity that his early childhood experiences and his relationship with Brô imparted on him would continue to set him apart from his contemporaries.

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EARLY CAREER

Hundertwasser emerged onto Europe’s post-war cultural scene not only as a painter, but as a harsh critic of modern society in the twentieth century. At his first one-man exhibition for the Vienna Art-Club in 1952, Hundertwasser delivered his opening speech, “My Aspiration: To Free Myself from the Universal Bluffs of our Civilization.” As the name implies, the speech critiqued and provided an alternative to what he saw as the flaws of the twentieth century. These flaws were both cultural and political. In the realm of politics, Hundertwasser was greatly dissatisfied with the demoted status of the Western European States in comparison to the superpowers of the United States and the USSR, as well as the diminished importance and influence of individual persons as the world became divided between two dominant political blocs, both of which he claimed favored collective action and mass-production at the expense of individual autonomy. Hundertwasser also argued that in the twentieth century, the artistic institutions, as well as the art itself, became less accessible to the public. Not only were the works extremely expensive, and thus remained exclusively in museums or in the homes of wealthy collectors, but the forms and concepts behind the works became more difficult for the broader public to interpret as forms of abstraction became the dominant genres of artistic expression.  

The flaws of the Twentieth Century were therefore centered around the fact that individuals had very little influence over politics or culture, or even the day-to-day aspects their own lives.

During this period, Hundertwasser, along with his contemporaries in the artistic avant-garde movements of Happenings and Fluxus and the countercultural

movements of the Situationist International and Provos, developed postmodernist philosophies, which fused artistic expression and political action in their attempt to create an alternative society. According to British philosopher and author Sadie Plant, the goal of these postmodernist philosophies was “to convey our departure from the modern period in which we experience ourselves as autonomous subjects capable of making judgments, expressing desires, and acting upon the world.”³⁹ While the Fluxus and Happenings movements focused on artistic actions as a means to create a post-modern society, and the Situationist International and the Provos concentrated their efforts on inciting societal change through political action, all four groups employed overlapping methods of grass-roots activism and artistic expression in their attempt to involve the general public in the departure from post-War capitalist society. Hundertwasser, too, wished to create a survival guide, which would provide the broader public with a strategy for perseverance and change “in a capitalist world which seems immune to transformation.”⁴⁰ Although Hundertwasser shared a similar philosophy with the Fluxux and Happenings movements, as well as the Situationist International and the Provos groups, Hundertwasser never joined a party, group or movement.⁴¹ Thus, the question remains: How were Hundertwasser’s beliefs, methods of communicating with the public, and visions for the future remain distinct from those of his contemporaries?

Hundertwasser aptly distinguished himself from other artists and activists of his time by asserting that his societal critique remained “positive,” while the

commentary of his contemporaries carried a “negative” message, meaning that as
Hundertwasser proposed constructive ways to reach his goal of a postmodern society,
his peers focused on destroying the society that existed in the present. In this
distinction, Hundertwasser demonstrates a precise and surprising level of self-
awareness, for Hundertwasser’s emphasis on a strategy for survival, broken down
into simple steps for the individual, separated him from his peers, who aimed no
farther than criticism, rebellion or revolution with their calls for change.
Hundertwasser’s message was certainly not purely positive; he put forth a great deal
of harsh criticism. However, his ultimate goal was always to work gradually towards
his vision of future society, not simply to destroy the society that existed in a rapid
fashion and then figure out how to reconfigure the remains. Although Hundertwasser
was not the only artist to focus on establishing his vision for the future through
gradual change in the present, his penchant for individual change as opposed to
collective destruction and revolution set him apart from the dominant postmodernist
movements during the first phase of his career.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In order to understand the ideas and movements which influenced
Hundertwasser and his contemporaries, one must examine the roots of the
postmodernism. Opposition to modern, industrial society existed long before the birth
of Hundertwasser or any of his contemporaries. In Germany, the origins of the
critique regarding the evolution of industrial society and its effects on the individual
date back to the late nineteenth century, when some members of the middle classes
rejected the nation’s growing military and industrial strength as a trajectory of
progress. Instead, they developed “Kulturpessimismus,” in which they rejected the terms of late-nineteenth century industrial development and favored a return to a traditional past.\textsuperscript{42} Nietzsche ranked among these critics, and identified “the moral and logical problems posed by the rationalist outlook on life.”\textsuperscript{43} Instead of proposing that one should adhere to an industrial life geared towards production, he developed the idea of the “superman,” who belonged to the German tradition and accepted the world as a realm of human instinct, flesh, and physical realities. Such a man experienced the fruitfulness of life.\textsuperscript{44} One of Nietzsche’s contemporaries, Julius Langbehn, a historian and philosopher, sought to revive a ‘true German past,’ which included lost ‘German virtues,’ such as individuality, subjectivity and simplicity.\textsuperscript{45} These movements in support of the traditional elements of German Romanticism re-emerged periodically throughout the twentieth century; in the nineteen-twenties, and again after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, by the nineteen-fifties, the rejection of modernity and industrialization was far from a novel idea.

The goals and strategies of the artistic avant-garde of the nineteen-fifties and sixties, like those of the post-war anti-modernists in general, were not entirely unique to their time. The industrial fabrication of mechanical production, which emerged as a result of the late-nineteenth century Industrial Revolution, allowed for the production and reproduction of objects. As a result, the artists of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century felt that their separation from the experiences of everyday

\textsuperscript{43} Papadakis, \textit{The Green Movement in West Germany}, 31.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Papadakis, \textit{The Green Movement in West Germany}, 32.
\textsuperscript{46} Papadakis, \textit{The Green Movement in West Germany}, 32-33.
life—their autonomy—was being threatened by the increasing pressure placed upon them to participate in the new, industrial society.\textsuperscript{47} The Dada Movement, which emerged around 1910, questioned the role of art in society, as well as the nature of artistic work.\textsuperscript{48} In 1917, Marcel Duchamp made a huge stride in the democratization of art with his idea of “readymades,” in which he chose commonplace objects and exhibited them as art without making any alteration besides the addition of his name. For example, Duchamp displayed an ordinary urinal as an object of art, under the title \textit{Fountain}.\textsuperscript{49} The underlying, somewhat humorous idea of Duchamp’s “readymades”, that everything or nothing was art, would later have an extremely strong, acknowledged influence on the avant-garde artists and movements which emerged in the post-war period.\textsuperscript{50} The presence of strong industrial market forces, the questioning of the role of art in society beyond the aesthetic, and the blurring of the line between art and non-art had already been established before World War II. Yet, the post-War context would later put a new spin on anti-modernism.

Although the ideas of the countercultural movements and artistic avant-garde after the “Great Divide” of the world into American-Capitalism and Soviet-Communist camps were not new, modernity’s critics in Western Europe faced greater challenges than they had during the industrial revolution or the inter-war period. In summary of Andreas Huyssen’s \textit{After the Great Divide}, historian Mike Sell states, “The earlier avant-garde was confronted with the culture industry in its stage of inception while postmodernism had to face a technologically and economically fully

\textsuperscript{47} Proctor, \textit{Against Autonomy}, 2.
\textsuperscript{48} Proctor, \textit{Against Autonomy}, 3.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
developed media culture which had mastered the high art of integrating, diffusing, and marketing even the most serious challenges.” The media had become a dominant method distributing culture and its message. While the press, television, and radio played a huge role in drawing public attention to the countercultural and avant-garde movements of the period, it also held control over the primary method of the movements’ communication with the broader public. The postmodern artists and activists of the period therefore had to consider both the message they meant to communicate with their work, as well as how the press would portray the event. In addition to the challenges of global media and culture, which developed rapidly during the post-war period, the anti-modernists faced transcontinental superpowers and their dominating economic and political systems.

Even outside of the countercultural and avant-garde movements, Europeans had begun to resist the post-war modern world, dominated by foreign superpowers. In particular, during the post-war period, the division of the world into two separate economic and political blocs led many Western Europeans to question the safety of their traditions, values, cultures, and powers as individuals. According to the conservative elite of the period, “the final decline of the West was now at hand under the joint onslaught of Americanism and Bolshevism.” Europeans in general also faced the task of creating an alternative way of life to the two utilitarian models of


civilization perpetuated by the Soviet Union and the United States, who fought constantly for the “mind of Europe.”  

In the article “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” historian Alexander Stephan explained the reasoning behind the opposition to American capitalism and consumer culture in Germany:

Anglo-Saxon mercantilism, with its utilitarian model of civilization, has triumphed over German values and traditions, while washing machines, refrigerators, and electric shavers usurped the place of humanism, intellect, and insight. Technology, the big cities, and tourism are described, without mincing words, as “extermination camps for the individual.”

In Germany, among other nations, the Western version of modernity involved a consumer culture based on mass-produced goods. Some critics of the time held that this increased importance of consumption produced alienation and challenged European cultural autonomy, since the model for the new consumer society came from the United States.

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, American government programs aided the infiltration of American popular culture in countries of mainland Western Europe, such as France and Germany. The Office of Military Government United States (OMGUS), its Information Control Division, the U.S. information centers, and the United States Information Agency spoke directly to the German people through reeducation programs and promoted the American way of life. America’s Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) also sought to conduct “psychological warfare” against the Soviet Union by promoting American high

53 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 77.
54 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 72.
55 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 74.
culture throughout the NATO states. Even the Radio in the American Sector (RIAS) organization became a propaganda weapon for the United States to combat the Communist ideology through the promotion of capitalist ideals and American culture.

However, as time progressed, Americanization and the presence of capitalist and consumer culture no longer depended entirely on the presence of propaganda campaigns to remain a prominent force in Europe. Initially Europeans resisted the merging of high and low culture, which a consumer-based culture promoted. But, beginning in the nineteen-fifties, consumerism, which already dominated public culture in the United States, replaced the U.S. government’s cultural programs as the disseminators of American culture across the Atlantic. Within this free market context emerged a form of self-Americanization, which was part of a global blending of art, commerce, and modernization. As Stephan explains, “Increasingly, supply and demand, not abstract definitions of style and quality, began to determine the production and distribution of culture.” The state no longer promoted culture to the same extent, and therefore economic success and general popularity largely determined which elements of culture triumphed, and which faded into oblivion.

The post-war context created a greater challenge to the avant-garde artists than previous periods, for the technologically and economically fully developed media culture and the uncontrolled diffusion of culture exacerbated the difficulty of

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56 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 77.
57 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 73.
58 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 75.
59 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 74.
60 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 78.
61 Ibid.
proposing and spreading an alternative form of art and society. As markets extended their influence further into the lives of individuals, styles of abstraction dominated institutionalized art scene of the period. In the United States, the presiding artistic landscape consisted of abstract expressionism. Their counterparts in Europe found themselves caught between the “hot gesturality of tachisme and art informel, or the cold tastefulness of latter-day geometric abstraction.” In both cases, avant-garde artists often felt that the terms of artistic production were largely defined, and excluded to the established artistic community, since the nonrepresentational nature of the art made it difficult for those untrained in the examination of art to decipher. Western Europe during the post-War period thus presented artistic avant-garde and countercultural movements with the challenge of bringing accessible forms of culture to the public that were free of the alleged contamination from either the museum or commercial culture.

HUNDERTWASSER’S INITIAL PHILOSOPHY

Hundertwasser’s initial philosophy identified the problems of modern, industrial society as the disenfranchisement of the individual and the perpetuation of mass culture, politics, and economics, which had intensified during the post-War period. In his opening speech for his Second Art-Club exhibition in 1953, Hundertwasser lamented about the uniformity and lack of creativity that he saw in post-War Europe: “We are born into a grey column on the march, proceeding into the colorless, the meaningless and the collective. The column of the march is called

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63 Ibid.
Europe.” Slowly, but consistently, Hundertwasser envisioned that Europeans were ‘progressing’ together, monotonously and anonymously, towards a future that they did not design for themselves. He foresaw modern, industrial society eliminating variation and uniqueness even beyond Europe, until the point when “the European looks like the Oriental; when the Japanese looks like the French, when the airport in Nairobi looks like the airport in Alaska, when apples taste like plums and meat like cheese, when you cannot tell the difference between different systems in politics and governments.” As early as 1954, he decided that his mission as an artist extended beyond creating art which resonated and engaged views; he needed to draw attention to the dangers he recognized in this form of mass-existence. Communists, Fascists and Americans, as well as the modern architects, had “compressed [the Europeans] into geometric rectangles,” and Hundertwasser strove to provide his fellow Europeans with an informal survival manual, so that each individual could save him or herself from the dangers of forfeiting their individual autonomy to the dominating political, economic, and cultural institutions of post-war Europe.

In Hundertwasser’s eyes, the threat to individual autonomy began with a child’s entrance into the traditional schooling systems, for he blamed the modern education model for the lack of creativity and individuality in post-war Europe. In his Second Exhibition text in 1953, Hundertwasser also stated, “We crush the last bit

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of life, rebelling, true, spontaneous and varied life within us and within our children, first through the poison of our educational system and later on through general leveling. Our educational system is methodical killing.”67 While Hundertwasser’s language was certainly hyperbolic, his underlying sentiment remained that as soon as children become preoccupied with learning and repeating the knowledge and ideas of others, they ceased to prioritize and focus on their own, creative or innovative thoughts. According to Hundertwasser, this early stunting of creative growth only perpetuated the cycle of modern development, for “The people produced by such education are incapable of assuming the intended responsibility for themselves and for us all. Official and universal progress is thus based on a fundamental error.”68 Therefore, in order to escape the perpetual cycle of modern society, Hundertwasser advised his fellow Europeans not to participate in the current education system and instead take personal responsibility for their autonomous, individual education.

Forms of mass education did not end upon graduation from any formal institution of education, for Hundertwasser also instructed his fellow Europeans to be suspicious of any information or guidance put forth by an established institution. At his 1961 personal exhibition in Tokyo, Hundertwasser proclaimed, “This beautiful country is not only threatened by the frighteningly progressing communist world, but also by the Western world… Remember that radio, newspapers, movies, commercials, television and all these things are means to submit man under the

68 Fuchs, Hundertwasser, and Rainer, 50-51.
yoke.” In other words, any direction given by the media should be met with distrust, since Hundertwasser defined them as “instruments of subjugation” that interfered with original, autonomous thought. In order to preserve the autonomy of thought, Hundertwasser proposed that his audience abstain from participating in any organization, association, or group linked to any sort of religion, philosophy, political party, trade union, school, the military, or any other collective body which might diminish the power and freedom of an individual.

Hundertwasser felt that participation in capitalist consumer culture created another form of collectivism, which inhibited individuality and personal responsibility, due to the alienating qualities of labor within a capitalist economy. An essential component of capitalist expansion involves the division of labor, in which an economy grows by increasing output through specializing and trading. However, this division of labor created a separation between the laborer and the final product, as well as an alienation between the consumer and the good, because each individual does not play an active role in the production of a good from start to finish to consumption. In Hundertwasser’s critique of the alienation of labor, he explained his view of the essential problem with this form of production,

When you work you do not know what you are working for. You work on parts. You do not know what purpose the parts serve (you know but you do not know directly) so you do not know, and the man, who puts the parts together, does not know either. Nobody knows it because they have no love

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70 Hundertwasser, Fuchs and Rainer, “Pintoratium,” 50-51.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
for these things which they make “en masse” or for the things which they put together since the things are all exactly alike.73

Since the laborers had no personal investment or even a concrete idea of the final products which they produced, nor were they likely to be using these products personally, the value or “love for” each item declined in a capitalist system, according to Hundertwasser.

The intention behind capitalism’s division of labor is to ultimately make production more efficient, and thus make a greater abundance of goods available to the population at a lower cost, but in Hundertwasser’s view, convenience and abundance of consumer goods had an adverse effect on individual happiness. In his critique of modern society’s obvious consumerism, Hundertwasser accused all revolutions, “capitalist and communist alike,” of being based on the desire to “keep up with the Joneses,” and declared, “it is this urge to have what the neighbors have that leads exactly where nobody wanted to go: namely into misery, endless misery, into horror. And the misery of uniformity which is at first to be smiled at, then becomes burdensome and finally becomes unendurable, intolerable.”74 The accumulation of more and more consumer goods resulted not in happiness, but in increased uniformity and diminished individuality.

For Hundertwasser, the problem of uniformity and overly rapid production extended itself into the realm of modern architecture, which he ultimately viewed as a microcosm of the flaws of modern, industrial society. First and foremost, Hundertwasser saw rational architecture as destructive, and therefore representative

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74 Ibid.
of modern society’s preference for “rapid explosion,” as opposed to natural, gradual evolution. 75 Even during the inter-war period, the industrialization and modernization had already begun with the building of Europe in the rational, functional architectural style of the Bauhaus School and other forms of International Style architecture, which spread throughout Europe before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Hundertwasser abhorred these rational, geometric buildings, composed of countless straight lines, which Hundertwasser famously deemed “godless,” due to their prioritization of structure and function at the expense of humanizing and decorative elements. 76 However, Hundertwasser loathed more than the aesthetic and symbolic qualities of these buildings, for he believed that they also contributed to the destruction and dismissal of the past. In his Mouldiness Manifesto: Against Rationalism in Architecture, Hundertwasser asserted,

> The irresponsible vandalism of the constructive, functional architects is well known. They simply wanted to tear down the beautiful stucco- façade houses of the 1890s and Art Nouveau and put up their own empty structures. Take Le Corbusier, who wanted to level Paris completely in order to erect his straight-line, monstrous constructions. Now, in the name of justice, the constructions of Mies van der Rohe, Neutra, the Bauhaus, Gropius, Johnson, Le Corbusier, Loos etc. should be torn down, as they have been outdated for a generation and have become morally unbearable. 77

Just as architects like Mies van der Rohe and Adolf Loos had seen the traditional, pre-World War I styles of architecture as symbolic of the failed imperial systems in Austria and Germany, Hundertwasser saw the work of the Modernist architects and artists of the inter-war period as representative of the failed Social Democratic

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75 Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Friedensreich Hundertwasser: for a more human architecture in harmony with nature (New York: Taschen, 1997), 45.
76 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 18.
political and social systems. In their attempt to distance themselves from the pre-industrial, imperial period of European history, the modernist architects of the twentieth century had torn down and destroyed ornate, beautiful and historical buildings, only to replace them with uniform structures of efficiency.

Hundertwasser even objected to the rapid paving over and rebuilding which took place after the war, since it also erased the past far too quickly. In his 1957 speech My Eyes Are Tired, Hundertwasser criticized the reconstruction of post-war Vienna: “Two years ago, there was still a nice little bomb crater on Obere Donaustrasse… Now I come back and find it has vanished. The City, or whoever it was, shouldn’t be so proud of the smooth sidewalk. The war brought earth into the city; instead of holding on to it, they are raping it more than before.”

Instead of supporting the immediate rebuilding of the damaged cities, he advocated that cities throughout Europe pour a “decomposing solution” on the modern structures and allow mold to decompose them on their own. Then, only after the old structures had properly undergone “critical weathering” would they be ready to be rebuilt or remodeled into something new. The slow, gradual nature in which the cities would be transformed would then mirror the evolution of the natural environment, which did not develop more quickly than human understanding.

Hundertwasser saw the root of modern architecture’s uniform and “oppressive” character stemming from the alienation of its production. He asserted that utilitarian structures were alien to everyone involved in this construction: the architect, the bricklayer, and the tenant. The architect, no matter how gifted, could

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78 Hundertwasser, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, 45.
not possibly predict the precise needs of the future tenant. The bricklayer had no freedom to diverge from the architect’s original design, and also had no personal investment in the particularities of the final product, for he would not inhabit it. Finally, the tenant would move in, having no involvement in the buildings design and construction, and therefore his home would be inherently alien to him. As an alternative to this form of production which he found alienating, Hundertwasser proposed that the architect, bricklayer, and tenant establish a collaborative trinity: “Only when architect, bricklayer and tenant are a unity, or one and the same person, can we speak of architecture. Everything else is not architecture, but a criminal act which has taken on form.”

In order to avoid living in a standard, uniform residence, which Hundertwasser compared to “confinement in cubical constructions like chickens or rabbits in cages,” the artist encouraged his audience to take on personal responsibility for the individuality of their homes, and thus assert their architectural autonomy.

Hundertwasser based his survival guide for the modern period on the adamant defense of individual autonomy. In his mind, any form of mass-existence or uniformity could pose a threat to personal independence. The artist felt that any force of standardization, whether it stemmed from the education system, the government, the media, or even the architectural environment, should be resisted. As a means of eventually reaching his utopian vision, Hundertwasser outlined his strategy for maintaining one’s immunity from the forces of modern society.

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80 Hundertwasser, “Mouldiness Manifesto,” 98.
81 Ibid.
82 Hundertwasser, “Mouldiness Manifesto,” 96.
HUNDERTWASSER’S PAINTINGS

The spiral that became a dominant motif in his paintings during the nineteen-fifties and sixties reflected Hundertwasser’s desires to shield the individual from the surrounding society and to evoke slow, gradual change that were already present in his philosophy. Before 1953, Hundertwasser’s paintings already included spirals prefigured within other motifs. For example, his “soul-trees” often contained concentric circles or spirals, but the spiral was not yet its own motif. However, after watching the French film in 1952 entitled Images de la Folie, which addressed art created by the mentally ill, Hundertwasser stated, “In it, I saw for the first time the uncanny powers of a drawn and painted spiral.”83 Beginning with his 1953 watercolor Der Berg und die Sonne—Erstes Spiraloid (The Mountain and the Sun—First Spiraloid), the spiral emerged as a signature motif unto itself in Hundertwasser’s paintings.

On one hand, the spiral often symbolized Hundertwasser’s wish to isolate himself. In his discussion of the relation of spiral images to Hundertwasser’s life, Schmied states, “It became a bulwark, it served to shut his paintings off from the outside world…it encouraged the forms to shut themselves off and curl in on themselves; it implied a self-contained world left to its own devices.”

Hundertwasser’s 1954 painting *Ein Stück Deutsche Erde* (A Piece of German Soil, Fig. 3) conveys the feeling of isolation and self-containment that Hundertwasser wished to convey through his paintings. Even the smaller spirals surrounding the larger, central spiral seem to be leaning away from the edge of the painting and they do not continue beyond its edges. Such a sentiment of self-containment and isolation were consistent with the pleas for self-subsistent living and individual autonomy present in his early philosophy.

Hundertwasser’s spiral motif also conveys his desire for slow, gradual change that he had adopted from René Brô and built on in his own philosophy. In a 1961 interview, Hundertwasser described root of his spiral:

> My spiral resulted from my attempt to attain goals slowly… Tachism had destroyed all forms. Confronted by this strange and unexplored landscape, it was necessary to give oneself new rules and forms. One of these forms alone

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is significant—the form which corresponds to the effect created when opposites begin to move. Their movement is the spiral. \textsuperscript{85}

Hundertwasser’s 1961 painting \textit{Homage au Tachisme} (Fig. 4) demonstrated Hundertwasser’s attempt to transcend Tachism with his spiral motif. In his analysis of the painting’s meaning, Schmied states, “It is a homage to Tachism using non-Tachist means, the homage of someone who has been through the experience and transcended it, but who remembers it with gratitude and who shows his companions of old what a path leading into the future could look like.”\textsuperscript{86} Although Hundertwasser appreciated the irregularities characteristic of Tachism, he distrusted the spontaneity of the artistic style. \textsuperscript{87} Hundertwasser’s ambiguous feelings towards Tachism and his attempt to surpass it serves as a metaphor for his theory for change; he distrusted the extemporaneousness of revolution and outright rebellion, but felt that he could transcend the idea of revolution and enact significant change through gradual, concrete steps.

**HUNDERTWASSER’S UTOPIAN VISION**

From the onset of his career, Hundertwasser remained optimistic about the ability of art to transform society, and even boasted that he and a few other avant-garde artists could no longer be held back by their “European bluff-civilization,” as

he claimed, “Art is now gaining certain tasks which science and religion pretended to be able to solve, but these tasks have definitely exceeded their competence.”

Unlike the doctrines of modern science and many organized religions, the new wave of avant-garde art, which emerged during the 1950s, intended to be accessible to and inclusive of its audience, and it invited the individual interpretation of the public. In his work introducing his theory of transautomatism, which highlighted the importance of the viewer’s active participation in and processing of artistic works, Hundertwasser declared, “Only the creative (spirit) as the responsibility of each individual can fight our new illiteracy: the tragic impotence of the contemporary eye.”

While, according to Hundertwasser, the industrial world of post-war Europe had done its best to stamp out individual autonomy and creativity, he believed that the individual will and creative spirit of each person still had the power to transform his or her surroundings. For the artist, the ability to incite change did not require extraordinary intelligence, education, or power; in fact, those attributes only served to hinder a person’s inherent creativity.

Hundertwasser’s vision of a future utopia was similarly simple and accessible. Hundertwasser envisioned a post-industrial world where man would relate to his exterior community and environment through, as art historian and critic Pierre Restany explains, a “relationship forged by osmosis, starting from successive levels of consciousness, and concentric to his inner self.”

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90 Restany, Hundertwasser: the Painter-King with the Five Skins, 10.
Hundertwasser’s original Three-Skin Philosophy illustrates, each person has concentric layers in which he or she relates to exterior reality.

The First Skin is one’s natural epidermis and everything within it, meaning one’s individual truth and understanding. One discovers his or her first skin through personal reflection and understanding. As Hundertwasser’s previously outlined critique of modern the modern education system illustrates, mandatory schooling and the absorption of “decaying knowledge” hinder the early-onset of this understanding. In Hundertwasser’s vision for post-modern society, the education system would be “home to all creative persons without discrimination as to arts, artistic persuasion and philosophy, architecture, poetry, film, music, etc.”91 The replacement of mandatory schooling with an environment designed to foster individual creativity would serve as “the point of departure for a spiritual revolution.”92 Children would discover and build on their own inherent creativity and abilities from an early age, and thus establish their personal individuality and truth. This First Skin would lay the foundation for the means in which each person could self-sufficiently pursue happiness throughout his or her life.

Even in his early career, Hundertwasser took a few small steps towards providing his alternative form of education to others. In 1959, Hundertwasser founded his own academy with his fellow Austrian artists Ernst Fuchs and Arnulf Rainer, called the Pintorarium. Though the founders were all artists, the academy welcomed “all creative persons without discrimination,” whether they chose to study art, philosophy, architecture, poetry, film, music, or any other form of creative

92 Ibid.
expression. There was no form of hierarchy at the Pintorarium, for even the founders did not occupy a position of supremacy. Instead, the founders intended to create an environment where each person’s individual creativity would prosper: “The fundamental principle of the Pintorarium is individual autonomy. Emulation is prohibited.” Later that year, Hundertwasser accepted a position as a guest lecturer at the Academy of Fine Art in Hamburg, where he employed a similar method of hands-off teaching, or rather “un-teaching.” On his very first year at the Academy, Hundertwasser announced to his students,

Listen, it will be better if you go home, because if you have talent and if you come here to learn you will lose everything you have, but if you are not gifted, that is even worse because you will learn things which will not fit you, and you will spoil your life. The only way to become an artist is through your own creative activity and this you can do only when you are with yourself at home and never at school.94

The announcement served as a disclaimer and allowed Hundertwasser to proceed about his duties at the academy with a clear conscience. Having explicitly warned his students of the dangers he perceived in institutional education, he could establish his classroom as a place within the Academy where the normal rules of formal education did not apply. He instructed his students to work independently on whatever project they chose, and those who preferred to work elsewhere, such as the zoo or in their own homes, he permitted to leave. Although Hundertwasser obviously did not achieve a comprehensive reform throughout the entire system of formal education, he did what he could with the opportunities presented to him to provide alternative forms

93 Ibid.
of creative education to those who wished to follow him, and in doing so, he felt that he had allowed at least a few individuals to realize the personal truths of their First Skin.

Once one had discovered his or her own ideas, abilities, and desires, Hundertwasser argued that one could portray these unique qualities to the rest of the world through his or her Second Skin: clothing. From 1949 and onwards, Hundertwasser resolved to design all of his attire, from his clothes, all the way down to his socks and shoes. As the Figure 5 demonstrates, he constructed both his summer and winter shoes himself, from scraps of materials that he sewed together himself. He did not expect others to replicate his own style of clothing, but rather encouraged his audience to construct their own clothing out of materials which spoke to and represented them as an individual, and as one wore these expressive items of clothing, he or she immediately communicated his or her individuality, uniqueness, and personal tastes. Even though making one’s own clothes and shoes would not stop the assembly lines from producing large quantities of uniform products, Hundertwasser’s idea of the self-made Second Skin gave his audience the opportunity to take a small step towards removing themselves from the consumer culture.

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97 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 37.
The Third Skin in which one relates to his or her exterior reality is through architecture. For the near future, Hundertwasser advocated for legislation that would allow the tenant of any building, whether he or she owned or rented it, to personalize the interior of his or her residence, as well as the exterior within an arms reach out of each window. Hundertwasser hoped that in a later, post-modern society, a unity would exist between the tenant, the brick-layer, and the architect of a building, in which the construction of a residence would not be finished until after the tenant had moved in and contribute his or her personal ideas to the project. The trinity between the architect, mason, and tenant would promote a feeling of responsibility of each person for his residence and surroundings, as well as humanize and individualize architecture and the landscape of each city. Hundertwasser envisioned that the personalization of one’s Third Skin would be empowering, as he described in his *Mouldliness Manifesto*: “From the street, everyone can see: there lives a man who distinguishes himself from his neighbors, the pent-up livestock!”

At first glance, Hundertwasser’s vision for a postmodern utopia appears to be cumbersome and labor intensive, since his Three-Skin Philosophy based on individual self-subsistence, combined with his criticism of a more complex capitalist society rooted in the division of labor, essentially required each individual to assume responsibility for all aspects of his or her survival (i.e. food, clothing, shelter, education). However, the primitive nature of Hundertwasser’s utopia, with its emphasis on a return to a pre-industrial self-sufficiency, makes it appear to be feasible on an individual level. As Wieland Schmied explains, “All of Hundertwasser’s

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projects, no matter how perplexing they may have seemed at first, had one thing in common: they were eminently do-able. And at the same time, they radiated a naïve charm which had an immediate appeal. In this sense, people often connected with them emotionally before their intellect was ready to follow suit.” Whether or not Hundertwasser’s proposal for a return to a pre-industrial economy was feasible on a global level, the artist’s steps for taking back one’s individual autonomy were quite simple in the sense that they did not require particular skill or aptitude. By Hundertwasser’s standards, one did not need to be a licensed architect, or even build a sound structure in which to live, since he believed that the crumbling of one’s house would simply serve as a learning experience for the individual’s next attempt at construction. As Hundertwasser’s own handmade shoes demonstrate, one did not have to be a skilled seamstress or cobbler to create adequate attire. Rather than emphasizing perfection as the signifier of success, Hundertwasser focused on creativity and individual empowerment as the means to creating his vision of a postmodernist utopia, and thus no one was excluded based on skill or intellect.

Hundertwasser’s language was similarly easy for the broader public to understand. Hundertwasser was not himself particularly intellectual. Despite his constant effort to communicate his ideas verbally through speeches and manifestos, he preferred to learn from pictures, rather than written words. In Hundertwasser’s reflection on his own lack of exposure to philosophy, history, politics, geography, or any other subject of academic study, he recounted, “I never read anything except

102 Schmied, Hundertwasser, 1928-2000, 60.
illustrated novels, crosswords, Simenon and Winnie the Pooh.” As Hundertwasser’s critique of Western Europe’s educational system illustrates, he was also not particularly concerned with intellectual pursuits or any sort of hierarchy of knowledge, and therefore his writings and speeches were not full of an abundance of references, concepts, and established theories which an uneducated person could not understand. While, as the examination of Hundertwasser’s contemporaries will soon demonstrate, not all countercultural and avant-garde movements of the post-War period communicated their ideas in a manner which the broader public could understand. As Schmied explains, “Hundertwasser achieved what the classical topos of contemporary art has long been advocating: the creation of a language that can be readily understood by the people,” and he did so “without the gift of eloquence and unaided by the critics.”

Hundertwasser’s strategy was not only ‘do-able’ in the sense that it allowed individuals to take small, independent steps towards the eventual creation of a new society, but because he communicated his suggestions for practical action in a language that others could understand.

While, just like the postmodern futures that his contemporaries proposed, Hundertwasser’s utopia did not appear to be feasible in the near future, his clear messages for constructive, small-scale change distinguished him amongst his peers. As the next section will demonstrate, the language of the members of the Fluxus, Happenings, Situationist International, and Provo movements was often riddled with irony, mockery, or complicated intellectual theories that the broader public found difficult to decipher.

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THE ART OF HAPPENINGS

Although Hundertwasser insisted that he belonged to not established group, movement, or ideology, he participated in the widespread use of Happenings as a means of critiquing modern society and calling for the creation of a postmodern utopia, along with the artists of the Fluxus and Happenings movements, as well as the activists of the Situationist International and Provo movements. A Happening is an inherently difficult term to define. Allan Kaprow, an American visual artist living in New York City, first used the label in 1957 when he gave a presentation of one of his collage performances at sculptor George Segal’s New Brunswick farm to a group of students, critics, and fellow artists. Kaprow felt that this new form of art needed its own name, and he chose “happening” because his piece “was just supposed to happen naturally.”105 This newly labeled form of art gained public recognition in 1959, after Kaprow put on “18 Happenings in Six Parts” as his cooperative Reuben Gallery in New York. Soon, artists in Europe and Asia began to imitate the form in their own style.

Kaprow’s early characterization of a Happening as “events which, put simply, happen,” did not give a concrete definition of what constituted a happening, and even the artists who put on Happenings could not find words that could adequately define what they felt the art form constituted. In his analysis of Happenings’ artists early attempts at defining the style, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins concluded, “These attempts show the beginnings, when everyone agreed what a happening was, even if nobody

knew how to verbalize it.” However, prominent artists involved in the early performances of Happenings, such as Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Al Hansen, Michael Kirby, Dick Higgins, and Wolf Vostell agree upon the fact that it is a form of performance. In his final definition of the art form, Dick Higgins further explains the nature of the performance: “the Happenings ‘developed as an intermedium, an uncharted land that lies between collage, music, and the theater. It is not governed by rules; each work determines its own medium and form according to its needs. The concept itself is better understood by what it is not, rather than what it is.” This form of fluid, inter-media performance depended more on the concept behind the work than the content or action within the actual piece. Allan Kaprow insisted that a Happening should be performed only once and “evolve as a collage of events in certain spans of time and in certain spaces.” Based on these somewhat disjointed characterizations of a Happenings, one can conclude that it consisted of a performance, specific to the location and people involved in it, and communicated a concept absent in reality and deeper than the aesthetic qualities of the production. The fact that Happenings were performances designed to communicate a greater message united them as an artistic genre or ethos, and thus they became a flexible tool which the avant-garde artist, and later activists, could use to communicate an individual critique of his or her immediate surroundings.

Although there was certainly a group of artists who defined themselves as Happenings artists, other avant-garde movements, independent artists, and

107 Ibid.
countercultural groups also employed the art form as they demonstrated their distaste for modern society. In fact, Hundertwasser performed one of the first Happenings at the Academy of Fine Art in Hamburg. In December 1959, Hundertwasser staged a Happening, later called *The Line of Hamburg* (Fig. #), along with authors Herbert Schuldt and Bazon Brock, during his guest lectureship at the Institute of Fine Arts in Hamburg. According to Hundertwasser, the idea for such an act of rebellion came from Brock, a renowned member of the Fluxus movement, who was greatly disappointed “that the great Hundertwasser was here as a common professor.” He proposed that the three artists should draw a never-ending line, in accordance with Hundertwasser’s philosophy of the organically drawn line and the continuous spiral. Hundertwasser and the two poets set out to draw *The Line of Hamburg* (Fig. 6) as a protest against the T-square straight line, and thus they intended to promote one of the core elements of Hundertwasser’s artistic philosophy.

The actual drawing of the line of Hamburg was not entirely shocking. Before his staging of the event, Hundertwasser sent out one thousand invitations and distributed a copy of his manifesto surrounding the action to the rest of the faculty at the academy, and thus neither the event, nor the messages conveyed by it, came as a

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112 Hundertwasser, “The Line of Hamburg,” 64.
113 Ibid.
surprise.\textsuperscript{114} In his account of the event, Hundertwasser describes how he began to paint a line approximately one centimeter from the floor, which would rise horizontally up the walls as he worked. As Hundertwasser commenced his work, moving on his hands and knees across the floor, the crowd could barely see him or understand what was going on. Instead of a grand manifestation with a speech and from a pedestal, Hundertwasser worked silently as he gradually altered the environment of his classroom with only a paintbrush. In Hundertwasser’s own interpretation of the crowd’s reaction, “They expected a show, an explosion and not a silent evolution. And thus everybody left. It was curious: here they were in the very center of a manifestation and they did not realize it.”\textsuperscript{115} Even the students left prematurely, for they were not permitted inside the academy between eight p.m. and eight a.m. This particular Happening became a performance of three artists with no remaining audience.

However, the effect of the Happening was not entirely lost to the public, for scandal soon broke out. Porters held back those who sought to enter the performance at a later point, and an uproar ensued, resulting in some physical injuries and the dismissal of the crowd from the building. The press made the affair public, and information of the scandal reached the director of the institute the next day all the way in Rome, courtesy of the international press.\textsuperscript{116} After two days and one night of drawing, the director ensured Hundertwasser, Brock, and Schuldt that they would face arrest if they did not cease their drawing of the line, and thus they were never able to complete their act. Hundertwasser decided to resign the next day, and the

\textsuperscript{114} Hundertwasser, “The Line of Hamburg,” 65.
\textsuperscript{115} Hundertwasser, “The Line of Hamburg,” 67.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
institute began to remove the line immediately with razor blades. In his description of the press coverage of the event, Hundertwasser asserts, “The press, stupid like always, did not understand the signification of the ‘experiment’. For them it was just one more scandal.”  

Although The Hamburg Line did not entirely succeed in delivering Hundertwasser’s underlying message of silent, organic evolution to his audience or the greater public, he employed the Happenings technique in an attempt to communicate a message that was central to his philosophy as an artist. He may not have achieved the precise result that he wanted through his Happening, but he participated in the movement in a manner that was unique to him as an artist and individual.

Hundertwasser’s second Happening, called the Nettle Campaign, also allowed Hundertwasser to advocate for a cause in which he truly believed. In Connection with Alain Jouffroy’s Happening, entitled Anti-Process, Hundertwasser organized his evening of “Stinging Nettles” in 1960 in Paris. Hundertwasser addressed the crowd with the announcement of the central message of his Happening: “One can live happily without money. Be independent and self-sustaining. Don’t get exploited.” He repeated each line twice, as he cooked three bags of stinging nettles in a copper pot on stage. He elaborated, “Do you know how easy it is to live without money? All you have to do is eat stinging nettles…stinging nettles grow everywhere. They are entirely free, free of any cost.” The artist, along with an assistant, handed out paper plates and plastic spoons to the audience, before they distributed a stinging

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118 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 25.
120 Ibid.
nettle to each member of the crowd.¹²¹ Upset that none of the audience members wished to try the nettles, Hundertwasser demonstrated their edibility by eating one himself. Unfortunately, some detergent had been left behind in the pot and contaminated the nettles, so Hundertwasser became sick on stage, and in doing so, rendered his message of self-subsistence from the natural vegetation within a city less effective.¹²² While the delivery of Hundertwasser’s message may not have been particularly convincing, he at least attempted to communicate his idea of living off of the land in a straightforward, and simple manner, thus keeping his personal beliefs and style intact throughout his use of Happenings.

HUNDERTWASSER AND THE HAPPENING AND FLUXUS MOVEMENTS

Within the artistic community, the Happenings and Fluxus artists were also both involved in the performance of Happenings as a means of criticizing what they saw as the flaws of modern society, and the two groups are even quite difficult to distinguish from one another at times. In his explanation of the Fluxus manifesto, historian Mike Sell states,

As a manifesto it describes not so much a movement or an organization as a shared matrix of conceptual paradoxes and structural contradiction in which individual artists might work. It creates a theoretical and performative space in a claustrophobic system of state power, bureaucratic stultification, and commodity saturation. It does not transcend the contradictions, nor does it ultimately define its theory or its performance structures in any final way. Like Higgins and Kaprow, Maciunas defines the Happening in a negative fashion.¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid.
¹²² Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 25.
In this instance, Sell uses the terms Happening and Fluxus almost interchangeably, for they were distinctly different movements, he would not use the ideas put forth in the Fluxus manifesto to explain the nature of a Happening. However, in her work *Fluxus Experience*, Hannah Higgins, the daughter of prominent Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, clarifies this confusion: “Happenings artists like Jean Jacques Lebel, Allan Kaprow, and Carolee Schneemann (in particular) occasionally shared the program with Fluxus artists…The proximity of these artists’ groups to each other produced useful cross-fertilizations of ideas for both.”

Both the Happenings and Fluxus movements were international and based upon an absolute connection between life and art. Fluxus artists employed Happenings, among other techniques of artistic expression, to achieve the movements’ common goal of changing post-war society through art, but the two groups cannot be accurately categorized as one in the same. While neither Hundertwasser’s biographers, nor the examiners of the Happenings and Fluxus movements label Hundertwasser as a primarily “Fluxus” or “Happenings” artist, his position as a member of the artistic avant-garde of the period led to his participation in the “cross-fertilization of ideas” among the two movements.

Hundertwasser and the artists of the Fluxus and Happenings movements shared the somewhat hyperbolic notion that civilization was teetering on the brink of catastrophe. According to Fluxus composer, musician, artist, and writer John Cage, within capitalist society, “Many forces, competitive self-interest and devotion to efficiency among them, have brought mankind and the earth itself to the edge of

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This notion that modernity has brought the world to the verge of destruction coincides with Hundertwasser’s idea that modernity had set in motion the ruin of mankind. Hundertwasser famously stated on several occasions that “the straight line leads to the downfall of humanity.” To understand such a statement fully, one must know that Hundertwasser felt the straight line represented uniformity, mass-production, and the oversimplification of truth, which he believed was indicative of modern society. Such a message of impending doom brought urgency to the artistic movements and individual artists, such as Cage and Hundertwasser, striving to create an alternative society to that of the Western, capitalist world, by proclaiming that if they did not act, life and the world would end.

In order to bring about change and create an alternative society, both Hundertwasser and his contemporaries in the Happenings and Fluxus movements sought to critique modern, consumer society through the democratization and redefinition of art, and therefore the philosophical basis of such goals overlapped. In 1954, Hundertwasser developed his theory of “Transautomatism,” which did not expect the observer to decipher a single, precise meaning that the artist had previously determine, but instead encouraged his audience to consciously engage in individual, creative thought about a work of art. In his essay “Arte come Transautomatico,” published in the journal Arti Visvie in 1955, Hundertwasser asserted,

The “viewer” can no longer remain an impartial referee standing outside, because the title of the work is no longer existent, and especially because the

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129 Schmied, Hundertwasser, 1928-2000, 386.
viewer himself has become creative. For only through the “viewer’s” creative ability of seeing can internal creative films evolve which are only valid and make the work relatively visible for this particular “viewer.”

In the creation of this individual, internal film, the “viewer” became active, rather than passive; he or she created her own meaning and interpretation of the piece, instead of accepting the meaning intended to be fed to the general audience.

Viewer participation also became paramount in the works of Happenings and Fluxus artists. When asked to define a Happening, visual artist and Happenings performer Claes Oldenburg states, “The term invented by Allan Kaprow loosely used to refer to my…work and the others in a medium one way or another expanding the materials of the artist to included events in time and people.” According to Kaprow himself, the movement made the line between life and art “as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct as possible.” Happenings involved the audience in their performances, with the intention of breaking down the barrier between the artist and the audience to the point where the observers became active participants in the creation of the work. For example, in Kaprow’s first public Happening, called *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* (Fig. 7), Kaprow divided the audience into several small groups and separated them with partially opaque flats. This action guaranteed that none of the

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spectators, and perhaps not even the artist or his assistants, could see the work in its entirety. Accounts of the period have noted that the performance involved a malfunctioning slide show, people marching in a rigid, single file line, a fragmented dialogue of two women, and jarring sound of violins and ukuleles being played badly. However, as Kaprow intended, there was no single, unifying, or overarching description of the piece. Each person or group experienced a different performance, and thus he put pressure on the audience members had to rely on their own ability to narrate their personal observation of the event.\footnote{Sell, “The Avant-Garde of Absorption,” 14.} By engaging the viewers in the creation and interpretation of their art, Hundertwasser, along with the artists of the Happening and Fluxus movements, democratized art and engaged in a direct dialogue with the people; the established cultural institutions, museums, and art critics were no longer essential for the exhibition and interpretation of culture.

Despite Hundertwasser’s the similarities their common ideas about viewer participation in art and their condemnation of modern society, there were some very distinct differences between him and Fluxus and Happenings artists. Those artists who did not preach a return to simplicity, and a subsistence off of minimal resources, became caught up in the “work “ aspect of the pieces they produced. The Happenings community was not autonomous from the fully developed commodity spectacle or the fully developed leisure industry perpetuated by the modern capitalist, consumer society, which had rendered work and leisure inseparable.\footnote{Sell, “The Avant-Garde of Absorption,” 17.} Allan Kaprow even went so far as to assert that, by the nineteen-sixties, “the artist has become
indistinguishable from the white-collar worker.” In his elaboration of this claim, Kaprow explains,

Like anyone else, [artists] are concerned with keeping the rooms warm in winter, with the children’s education, with the rising cost of life insurance...Their actual social life is usually elsewhere, with clients, fellow artists, and agents, an increasingly expedient social life for the sake of career rather than just for pleasure. And in this they resemble the personnel in other specialized disciplines and industries in America.¹³⁵

Understandably, artists such as Kaprow sought to use the profits from their art as a means for leading an ordinary life, and their desire to remain a part of ordinary society led to their participation in the capitalist system which they intended to critique. Hundertwasser, on the other hand, refused to participate in such a system on stubborn principle. He adamantly refused to join the ranks of the white collar worker: “You go to work with a necktie on every day and the like. Why? For fear of being noticeable, for fear that something might happen... Why, what for, what can happen to you? That you won’t get paid or something?”¹³⁶ Hundertwasser’s relationship with consumer society was far less complicated than those of other Happenings artist, for in his advocacy of self-subsistence, of sewing ones own clothes, building ones own home, and educating oneself meant that he was, in fact, somewhat autonomous from the consumer society which he sought to criticize. Although he was not wholly independent of the capitalist system, his relationship with it on an individual level was much simpler than those of other Happenings artists, who did not desire to return to a traditional, pre-industrial means of survival. In fact, Happenings artists did not express what kind of society they wanted for the future. Instead, they simply drew

attention to what they saw as the problems of their era, without providing any constructive means of inciting change.

The message behind Hundertwasser’s art was also less complicated than those of many of his peers in the Happenings movement. While Hundertwasser’s happenings did not involve the use of consumer commodities to critique the capitalist system, his peers often employed objects indicative of consumer society in order to redefine them. In contrast, Hundertwasser’s condemnation of the same bourgeois overconsumption and decadence in his Nettle Campaign involved presenting his audience with the alternative to rich, expensive food: free, nutritious spinach made of stinging nettles. Perhaps Hundertwasser lacked a sense of humor about the “destructive forces like the bourgeoisie and commercialism,” for the consequences of them were too great and too pressing for him to spend time mocking them. Instead, he focused on directly providing an alternative lifestyle through his art, based on self-subsistence and simplicity.

Like the Happenings artists, the artists of the Fluxus movement also employed element of irony and used objects already associated with the lifestyle of the bourgeoisie in their critique of the modern, capitalist society that Hundertwasser avoided. George Maciunas, the leader of the movement, described it in his document FLUXETHOS as “simple,” “natural,” “nontheatrical,” and “prankish,” and in doing so, blurred the line between the individuality of artistic gesture and the standardized products of mass-manufacture capitalism, and also obscured the distinction between

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intentionality and accident. In other words, the audience could not easily ascertain when the artist was being genuine and serious, and when he or she was mocking the spectacle of the surrounding society. In his work *A Child’s History of Fluxus*, Dick Higgins articulates in the simplest manner possible the distinction between Fluxus art and the products of consumer society by explaining the movements defining principle and realization: “Hey—coffee cups can be more beautify than fancy sculptures. A kiss in the morning can be more dramatic than a drama by Mr. Fancypants. The sloshing of my foot in my wet boot sounds more beautiful than fancy organ music.” With this idea in mind, one can infer that the genuine, serious elements of Fluxus art occurred in moments championing simplicity, and the “prankishness” of the movement showed through whenever the artists employed something “fancy” or decadent. However, this integration of standardized products of mass-produced capitalism into the individual gesturing of the artist could have easily confused members of the audience who were not familiar with the principles behind Fluxus art. In contrast, Hundertwasser’s message of altering and personalizing products of consumer society made his attitude towards them quite clear: “When you buy something like that step on it first – or when you buy a dress cut right into it and trace out a hole or do something to distinguish it from the other clothing articles in the same series… And when you have done that you have won back a great deal of freedom.” As the Fluxus movement became more and more difficult to distinguish from bourgeois society as it grew in popularity and acquired imitators who utilized

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the same materials for different ends, Hundertwasser’s relationship to capitalist, consumer goods remained easy to define. The Fluxus movement’s dependence on context to identify an object as bourgeois or anti-bourgeois rendered it difficult to distinguish from the society which it wished to critique. In contrast, Hundertwasser’s assertion that all consumer goods must be altered, personalized, or ignored altogether separated him distinctly from capitalist, consumer society.

Although Hundertwasser and the artists of the Happenings and Fluxus movements shared the common goal of creating a postmodern society through direct communication with the broader public, both his message and its deliverance were much simpler than those of his contemporaries. For Hundertwasser, modern, industrial society was not something to mock, but something to actively change. As Hundertwasser’s use of Happenings demonstrated, he viewed the performances not only as a chance to criticize capitalist society, but also as an opportunity to begin the process of change. Hundertwasser thus distinguished himself from his peers in the Happenings and Fluxus movements by abiding by the ‘eminently do-able’ nature of his own philosophy.

Hundertwasser was certainly not alone in loosely engaging in the exchange of ideas within the community of avant-garde artists, and Joseph Beuys serves as an excellent example of another artist who operated somewhat independently within the Fluxus and Happenings movements. While Beuys, unlike Hundertwasser, definitively participated in the Fluxus movement from 1962 to 1965,\(^1\) he still attempted to create a theory, which extended beyond the actions and Happenings of

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\(^1\) De Domizio Durini, *Felt Hat*, 26.
the movement. Like Hundertwasser, the primary goal of his actions within the Fluxus and Happenings movement was to illustrate an evolutionary principle in artistic expression directed towards a new order of human society. For example, in 1966 at Galerie Rene Block in Berlin, Beuys performed his Happening Eurasia Siberian Symphony, in which he created a symbolic synthesis of East and West—a contentious and serious issue in Germany during the Cold War—by combining objects from both regions into one work of art. However, details of the synthesis are intentionally unclear, for Beuys wanted to force his audience to make his or her own associations based on the special arrangement of the blackboard, chalk, hare, felt hat, pieces of fat, and poles, as along with the deliberately uncomfortable temperature of the room at 42 degrees Celsius. Other Fluxus artists created depersonalized performances, employing techniques such as mockery, irony, and “prankishness” to blur the line between intentionality and accident, and in effect, distanced themselves somewhat from accepting full responsibility of the message of the work. In contrast, just as Hundertwasser employed the deeply personal motif of the spiral in The Line of Hamburg, Beuys’ Aktionen entailed intentional, pre-determined, and complicated choreography, and thus communicated his ideas to the audience in a sincere manner, regardless of how outlandish or controversial they might be. Similar to the way Hundertwasser distributed manifestos and gave speeches to accompany his actions, “Beuys extended the notion of ‘performance’ to include the audience’s

142 De Domizio Durini, Felt Hat, 28.
143 Ibid.
145 Proctor, Against Autonomy, 10.
participation in political, economic, and philosophical debate.” While the Happenings of other avant-garde artists were often ambiguous, unplanned, and thus difficult to interpret, Hundertwasser and Beuys designed their actions to be direct reflections of their personal artistic philosophies, and for those who were not already familiar with their ideas, the two artists accompanied their performances with discussions and further explanations of the messages behind their work. The earnestness, seriousness, and precision with which they regarded their work drew a definitive line between Beuys and Hundertwasser and the society which they sought to critique.

The seriousness with which they approached their Happenings may have something to do with their status as Europeans, specifically as Austrians and Germans. The Happenings and Fluxus movements originated in the United States, where the divide between high and low culture was not so distinct. Historically, the German government subsidized music, theater, artwork, and literature, so that these important elements of culture could be pursued without having to consideration the popularity or profitability that the work ultimately produced. The high culture of the United States, in contrast, was subject to the laws of the marketplace, just like popular culture, and thus the same separation between “high,” refined culture and “low,” culture did not exist to the same extent. In fact, European cultural traditions tended to dominate the cultural life of America’s elites after World War II. Although there were certainly forms of American high culture that were authentically American

146 Ibid.
147 Stephan, “A Special German Case of Cultural Americanization,” 75.
148 Ibid.
and won the respect of the European elites, such as Abstract Expressionism, Austrians and Germans such as Hundertwasser and Beuys may have held more discerning standards as to what they considered to actually be art. However, this seriousness with regards to art should not be mistaken for snobbery or exclusivity. Just because they considered something to be of “high culture,” did not mean that they intended it to be discernable only the community of critics and collectors. In fact, such a community of museum critics, who Hundertwasser developed an intense distaste for throughout his career, did not exist in Germany the way it did in France. In his discussion of the non-existent critical reception of Beuys’ early work, art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh argued, “The reason is that art criticism in Germany—as far as the contemporary arts are concerned—has with only two or three exceptions, simply not been developed.”¹⁴⁹ The earnestness with which Hundertwasser and Beuys regarded art did not stem from their reverence of institutional and critical recognition, but rather from the German tradition that art should be created for the sake of contributing to culture, regardless of the reception by the market. Perhaps he value that Germans and Austrians put on serious culture set Beuys and Hundertwasser apart from their American peers, for they felt that they were contributing to long lines of German and Austrian cultural traditions, in which humor, mockery, and profitability were not acceptable elements.

Hundertwasser and Beuys also possessed similar ideas about what the democratization of art truly entailed. While, in general, the Fluxus movement sought to overthrow serious culture by demonstrating that “anything can be art and anyone

can do it,” both Beuys and Hundertwasser disagreed with the assertion that everyone has the creative ability to become an artist. As Hundertwasser made very clear to his students at the Institute of Fine Arts in Hamburg, artistic talent cannot be taught, for it requires an inherent individual creativity that not everyone possesses.  

Beuys, too, did not believe that each individual should create traditional works of art, even in the form of Duchamp’s “readymades.” For these two members of the avant-garde, the democratization of art meant that art should be accessible both physically and conceptually to the broader public as “vehicles’ of conceptual dissemination.” Through this “conceptual dissemination,” the artists hoped that they could encourage the greater population to assert its individuality, for just as Hundertwasser encouraged his audience to take initiative and alter their mass-produced commodities to reflect their individuality, Beuys “asserts that everyone can and should strive to apply creative thinking to everyday activities, both public and private.” Both Beuys and Hundertwasser interpreted the democratization of art as the inclusion of the broader public in the active viewing of art, through which each individual could become empowered and assert his or her individual creativity. Again, Hundertwasser and Beuys did not possess the same casual approach to art as their American peers. Art could not be anything, as Duchamp asserted. To the two European artists, art could and should become a central aspect of everyday life, but that did not mean that art and ordinary objects could be one in the same.

150 Proctor, Against Autonomy, 3.
152 Proctor, Against Autonomy, 4.
153 Proctor, Against Autonomy, 6.
154 Proctor, Against Autonomy, 4.
Perhaps Beuys and Hundertwasser also held similar opinion of who was qualified to create traditional artwork because of their comparable ideas of the responsibility of the artist, which extended far beyond the creation of pleasing aesthetics. As early as 1954, Hundertwasser recognized that his responsibility as an artist was ultimately to draw attention to what he felt were huge dangers present in society. Beuys, too, grew to believe that his most important work as an artist involved the communication of his ideas,\textsuperscript{155} to which the aesthetics of his work was secondary. For both artists, their works first and foremost served as a vector for espousing their ideas and a platform from which to speak to the public.

Although Hundertwasser and Beuys shared many of the same views, their ideas originated from drastically different places. Hundertwasser was not a widely read person and preferred books devoted to images to novels.\textsuperscript{156} He dropped out of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna after only three months because he felt that the Academy had nothing left to teach him, and was instead, stifled his talent.\textsuperscript{157} Beuys, on the other hand, was widely read and highly educated. During his youth, he was immensely interested in literature. His favorite topics ranged from philosophy, to anthropology, to folklore and Nordic mythology.\textsuperscript{158} Between the ages of twelve and nineteen, Beuys read the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, listened to the music of Wagner and Satie, and read the writings of Goethe, Schiller, and other established authors.\textsuperscript{159} Beuys originally studied medicine, but turned to art as a means of finding truth and expressing his individuality, for he found science to be very

\textsuperscript{155} Proctor, \textit{Against Autonomy}, 6.
\textsuperscript{156} Schmied, \textit{Hundertwasser, 1928-2000}, 60.
\textsuperscript{157} Schmied, \textit{Hundertwasser, 1928-2000}, 34.
\textsuperscript{158} De Domizio Durini, \textit{Felt Hat}, 19.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
limiting.\textsuperscript{160} Hundertwasser became an artist because painting was the only activity through which he could adequately communicate and understand ideas, while Beuys had dabbled in almost every form of intellectual engagement and ultimately found art to be the most fulfilling means of sharing ideas and conveying individuality.

Although Hundertwasser and Beuys were certainly not identical in their beliefs or forms of artistic expression, they occupied a common position somewhere between avant-garde artist and alternative political activist. Their ideologies sprang from different types of knowledge and intellectual exploration, yet they arrived at the similar conclusion that the role of an artist did not stop at aesthetic creation or the inspiration of critical though, but had expanded to include strategies of direct action for change. The next chapter will explore the ways in which Hundertwasser and Beuys extended their influences as artists into the realms of politics, social relations, and natural environments.

**HAPPENINGS IN COUNTERCULTURAL MOVEMENTS: THE SITUATIONSIST INTERNATIONAL AND THE PROVOS**

*The Situationist International*

Although the Situationist International later distanced itself from the postmodern avant-garde artists, they shared the same belief in the fusion of art and everyday life and use of performance to critique modern society as Hundertwasser, as well as the Happenings and Fluxus movements. In 1957, a few critics of the post-War consumer, capitalist society in France joined together to establish the Situationist

\textsuperscript{160} De Domizio Durini, *Felt Hat*, 22.
International. In many ways, the ideology of the Situationist International involved a reapplication of Marxism to the post-War period. However, in this reapplication, the SI reestablished the terms of class society, defining the proletariat as those who take orders and the bourgeois as those who give orders. Therefore the revolution that would arise from such a society would be a revolution against the proletariat’s lack of control, rather than its material poverty. The Situationists also included creativity, desire, pleasure, and radical demands of the imagination to their revolutionary platform, thus reflecting the influence of Dada and surrealism, and distancing itself further from traditional Marxism. With the redefinition of the divisions inherent to capitalist society in the post-War context as an issue of autonomy, along with the addition of aesthetic and creative elements to their revolutionary project, the SI created a political movement which shared many common principles with Hundertwasser’s postmodernist worldview, caught between an artistic and a political movement.

In order to achieve similar goals, Hundertwasser and the Situationists both utilized performances to critique modern society. While Hundertwasser’s performances fall into the category of Happenings, the Situationists applied the term Situation to their stagings. In Guy Debord’s text *Report on the Construction of Situations*, the self-styled leader of the movement described situations as “the concrete constructions of momentary ambiences of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality,” in which the material environment of everyday life reacts

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with the behaviors given rise to by the environment, and thus radically transform it.\textsuperscript{164} Debord’s characterization of a \textit{situation} strongly resembles Dick Higgin’s comprehensive definition of a Happening as a theatrical composition “in favor of maximum exploitation of the performance environment.”\textsuperscript{165} For example, before 1962, the Situationists would engage in weeklong, unplanned strolls, called \textit{dérives}, in which they would pass rapidly through ambiances within the urban environment in order to invoke and display the emotional effects that a wide variety of urban spaces had on individuals. While there was nothing unordinary walking through the city, the speed at which they moved and the transparency of their emotional reactions meant to make the spectators notice and consider the effects of the modern city on their own temperaments.

In a similar manner, Hundertwasser’s Happening \textit{The Line of Hamburg} took an ordinary environment and made it seem absurd by altering his behavior. As he drew the line, he ordinary classroom into a spectacle through the simple act of a professor of art performing his duty of instructing his students in the techniques of painting. The only absurdity in his behavior involved the area in which he was painting: the walls and floors of his classroom. Although the director of the institute did not permit Hundertwasser to complete his statement, the artist’s action still utilized the ordinary environment of the classroom and the normal activities within it to make the statement that the limits and regulations within capitalist society were too confining. Just as Situations illustrated the SI’s view that the perceived reality of


\textsuperscript{165} Higgins, “The Origin of Happenings,” 271.
capitalist society was ultimately a spectacle or illusion, Hundertwasser’s Happenings demonstrated is belief that the rules and regulations of modern society were arbitrary, for they could be broken quite easily through basic artistic expression.

Also like Hundertwasser, the Situationist International based their critique of capitalist society largely in the alienated nature of mass production and consumption within it. Just as the SI predicted that the unrest and rebellion within capitalist society would come from “those who take orders,” and that “rebellions against the powerlessness and mediocrity of ordinary life become the motor of a revolution which springs not from material poverty but from absence of control,” Hundertwasser also believed that the lack of control over one’s life in the working class would sow seeds of dissent. In his critique of the alienation of labor, Hundertwasser proclaimed, “Whoever carries out plans programmed in advance by a superior is unhappy, has to be unhappy, can never be happy...Work does not bring freedom, it brings slavery. Because the way people work today they do not work for their happiness but rather they work for their unhappiness.” At the end of his speech *Real Freedom*, Hundertwasser predicted that such unhappiness in consumer society would bring about the next revolution against the assembly line and in favor of freedom. Both the philosophy of Hundertwasser and of the SI predicted that absence of control and lack of freedom among the working class, or any class which did not give orders in capitalist society, would bring about the change necessary to create a postmodernist society.

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168 Ibid.
The SI and Hundertwasser also share the belief that capitalist society’s emphasis on consumption contributed to the dissatisfaction and unhappiness of the individual. Hundertwasser’s condemnation of the desire to “keep up with the Joneses”\(^\text{169}\) as a barrier to ultimate happiness coincided with the Situationist International’s assertion that the images of happiness advertised within capitalist society could only be achieved through an unsustainable, perpetual consumption. The SI argued that, in a capitalist society, “The promises of self-fulfillment and expression, pleasure and independence which adorn every billboard are realizable only through consumption, and the only possible relation to the social world and one’s own life is that of the observer.”\(^\text{170}\) However, they asserted that desires created by advertisements and consumer trends could never be satiated, since “commodities circulate as ends in themselves; goods which are one day presented as unique and ultimate products, the very best and the very latest goods, are replaced and forgotten the next.”\(^\text{171}\) Hundertwasser and the SI possessed a common faith in the idea that the satisfaction provided by consumer goods was only fleeting, and that the passive consumption of uniform, mass-produced objects ultimately led to misery and unhappiness.\(^\text{172}\)

According to both Hundertwasser and the Situationists, the uniformity and impersonality of modern society extended into the realm of architecture, rendering such structures unlivable. In their critique of the modern city, the Situationists lamented that the mass-planned architecture of the 1960s promoted the development

\(^{169}\) Ibid.


\(^{172}\) Hundertwasser, “Real Freedom,” 127-130.
of homogeneous structures distributed amongst “’temples of frenetic consumption’, shopping centers, leisure centres, new towns, and environments which continually declare: ‘On this spot no one will ever do anything—and no one ever has.’ In other words, they felt that these cities designed on a massive scale were deliberately impersonal, and forbade anyone for making their own mark and disrupting the organized uniformity. Such areas of the city increasingly became “places to look at rather than to live in.” Hundertwasser’s philosophy dovetailed precisely with such an assertion, for in his Mouldiness Manifesto, he repeatedly complained that the architecture of the 1950s was “criminally sterile,” due to the fact that the building processes ceased entirely before the tenant ever moved in.” In the eyes of both the SI and Hundertwasser, the separation between the tenant and the construction of their personal spaces further contributed to the alienation and the unhappiness characteristic of modern society.

Not only did commonalities exist amongst Hundertwasser’s and the SI’s critiques of modern society, but they possessed the common goal of establishing a postmodern society in which creativity replaced consumption as an individual’s means of communicating with the world. In alignment with Hundertwasser’s vision of a new society where “’art’ exists neither as an undersupplied commodity nor as spiritual edification, but is instead omnipresent,” the Situationists believed that their movement would bring about “the final push towards the transformation of everyday

174 Ibid.
175 Hundertwasser, “Mouldiness Manifesto,” 103.
life from a realm of bland consumption to free creation,” where the distinction between the aesthetic and the everyday would be erased. In both visions for a future society, the substitution of art and creative expression for passive consumption was central.

However, the postmodern utopia that the SI wished to reach through political activity was distinctly different from the postindustrial utopia that Hundertwasser hoped to create through artistic action. Hundertwasser imagined that postmodern society in which individuals would alter their mass-produced goods and allow their modern structures to mold and decompose, thus returning the products of the industrial world to the evolutionary process of nature. He believed that individuals could become independent by returning to a pre-capitalist world of self-subsistence and surviving off of the land. However, the SI’s denunciation of modern society “left no room for calls for a return to nature or any precapitalist age.” Instead, the Situationists’ vision entailed the use of the creativity, technology, and knowledge developed within capitalist society to abolish work, satisfy desire, create situations, and overcome all the problems posed by the perpetuation of outmoded social and economic relations.” In other words, the Situationists felt that capitalist society served as a jumping off point from which a new postmodern society could be developed, whereas Hundertwasser considered modern society to be “progress” in the wrong direction.

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181 Ibid.
Hundertwasser and the Situationists possessed common critiques of modern, industrial society and similar theories of how capitalism had brought about such problems, but they ultimately differed in their ideas for the creation of a postmodern world. The SI’s means of inciting revolution and change were not ‘do-able’ on the individual level as Hundertwasser’s were and even though they hoped to bring about a future utopia in which each individual could take control over his or her life, their method of provoking revolution did not abide by those same principles. Essentially, the SI promised eventual autonomy in a mysterious postmodern utopia, whereas Hundertwasser encouraged the citizens of the world to assert their own autonomy and independence immediately.

The Provo Movement

Although the Provo movement emerged after Hundertwasser’s career as an artist began and the Happenings, Fluxus, and Situationist International movements arose, they possessed similar ideas and strategies for change that Hundertwasser and his contemporaries also shared. The Provo movement was a little known, short-lived countercultural movement which arose during the mid-1960s in the Netherlands. Like both the original SI and Hundertwasser, Dada had a profound influence on their philosophies and means for critiquing modern society. As self-proclaimed anarchists, the Provos were primarily political activist, rather than artists, yet they valued art and creativity as a means of inciting change. Therefore, the Provos fought alongside Hundertwasser and his other contemporaries in the battle for the creation of a

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postmodern society in which individuality and free creativity reigned in place of institutional hierarchies.

Also like the Hundertwasser and his contemporary movements, which fused social and political critiques with forms of art, the Provos drew attention to their ideas through the use of Happenings. Robert Jasper Grootveld, also referred to as the “Prophet of Amsterdam,” employed Happenings to illuminate his theories against addiction and consumption even before the Provo movement arose. After he aligned himself with the Provo movement, such Happenings became a regular ritual for the group. One example of a Provo-style happening occurred on July 27, 1966, when the group presented their White Bicycle program to the citizens of Amsterdam. The Happening consisted of Grootveld speaking about automobiles as the “asphalt terror of the motorized bourgeoisie,” drawing from member Luud Schimmelpennick’s Provokatie #5, he characterized the habit of driving as a religious cult, in which “the consuming masses paid homage to the auto-authority, for whom carbon monoxide was an incense.” As Grootveld announced a campaign against capitalist private property and in favor of the publically owned bicycle, other members of the movement painted black bicycles white behind him. Like Hundertwasser’s Nettle Campaign, the messages behind the Provo’s early happenings were fairly straightforward and simple. Hundertwasser wanted individuals in Paris to live off of stinging nettles when they could not afford food, so he presented them with a spinach of boiled stinging nettles and suggested that they try it; the Provo’s wanted

185 Kempton, *Provo*, 47.
187 Ibid.
the citizens of Amsterdam to use bicycles instead of cars, so they acquired bicycles and presented them to their fellow citizens as public property for anyone to use. Both parties not only provided a clear explanation of the message behind their Happenings, but through their Happenings, Hundertwasser and the Provos presented the public with tools to achieve the change of which they preached.

The founders shared Hundertwasser’s goal of provoking a critical examination of the realities of modern society, as well as his frequent use of hyperbolic language, since their original goal was to “burst the smooth façade of a society that debases human beings by turning them into machines of conspicuous consumption.” The editorial written by leaders Roel Van Duyn and two other Provo leaders credited under pseudonyms further explained that the group felt such opposition because “capitalist society is poisoning itself with a morbid thirst for money…bureaucratic society is choking itself with officialdom and suppressing any form of spontaneity. It’s members can only become creative, individual people through anti-social conduct…militaristic society is digging its own grave by a paranoid arms build-up.”

Hostility towards capitalist consumerism, bureaucratic hierarchies and regulations, and militarism was not particularly unique to the Provos, for Hundertwasser, as well as the other previously mentioned Fluxus, Happenings, and SI groups assumed similar stances on the problems inherent to modern society.

The Provos’ “White Plans” programs for reforming the city of Amsterdam aligned with Hundertwasser’s vision for reforming modern society, and in some areas, their ideas were a few steps ahead of Hundertwasser’s. The White Schools

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Plan proposed that students be allowed to provide input for expanding options for democratically organized education, and would thus create the grass-roots education reform that Hundertwasser had spoken about in his introduction of the Pintorarium. The White Bicycle Plan and the White Chimney Plan suggested that the city limit car traffic in central areas and install incinerators in chimneys for the sake of reducing pollution, a proposition which Hundertwasser would not make for a few years to come.

Although Hundertwasser and the Provos held several ideas and means of public communication in common, their ideologies and strategies for inciting change were inherently different. Hundertwasser’s individualism and intense distrust of established institutions and governments, both democratic and communist, may seem akin to anarchism. However, just as Hundertwasser did not believe that the sudden, violent revolution proposed by the SI was the best strategy for creating a postmodern society, he did not agree with the Provos that a brutal attack on the governments of Europe would generate effective change. In their editorial announcing the emergence of the Provo movement, the authors stated, “We believe that non-violent dissidence is only incidentally appropriate to our ends because it is not happening on a large scale. When slogans and gestures fail we have to turn to action and attack. We believe that only a revolutionary Left movement can bring about change!” The Provos thus believed that a revolution would consist of collective violence against authority; in contrast, Hundertwasser felt that the most effective form of rebellion involved

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191 Ibid.
asserting one’s individual autonomy by making personal alterations to mass-produced goods and uniform modern architecture.

The Provos’ stance on the use of violence as a means of achieving change contributed to the group’s confrontational character. Their “traditional genre Happenings” soon evolved into “protest Happenings,” in which the set off smoke bombs and engaged in violent conflicts with the police. The police arrived at Hundertwasser’s drawing of the Line of Hamburg because of the media controversy that it had aroused, but he, Brock, and Schuldt ceased to draw for fear of being arrested. The artists certainly had no intention of provoking police violence. On the other hand, police provocation was perhaps the Provos’ earliest and most effective tactic. For months, the Provos goaded the police into attacking them, and as images of police brutality against the demonstrators and innocent bystanders began to circulate, the Provos aroused support for their movement, and developed from a small fringe group into an expanding and influential political movement. Hundertwasser may have acquired some of his renown for being controversial, but his contention and subsequent press coverage never arose from violent conflict in the manner that the Provos gained recognition.

The Provos shared Hundertwasser’s criticism of modern, capitalist society and vision for a postmodern society in which individual autonomy and nature would be protected, but the two parties disagreed on the role of violence in inciting change. Hundertwasser believed in the natural evolution of society into a postmodern utopia.
through the independent, peaceful action of individuals, whereas the Provos wished to provoke immediate change through a violent social and political upheaval.

Hundertwasser’s ideas were not only ‘eminently do-able’ because they were easy to achieve on an individual level, but also because they were also ‘do-able’ in the sense that the cause and effect of the changes he proposed were easy to comprehend. Ultimately, Hundertwasser survived this period without joining any groups, movements, or organizations with comparable postmodernist philosophies due to his theory of an individual’s relationship to his or her exterior. His Three-Skin Philosophy provided a step-by-step process through which one could assert his or her individual autonomy, and when broken down into ‘do-able’ steps that take place slowly over time, the upheaval and remodeling of the modern world does not appear to be entirely impossible.
TRANSFORMATION

As time progressed from the nineteen-sixties into the nineteen-seventies, Hundertwasser’s career not only as an artist, but also as a public figure and activist, began to thrive. During that same period, many of his contemporaries in the countercultural and avant-garde movements of the late nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties began to dissolve or fade from prominence. As modern society presented its critics with new challenges during the transition of one decade to the next, Hundertwasser, the Fluxus and Happenings artists, the Provos, and the Situationists each transformed some combination of their philosophies, strategies, and goals for change to address the new issues of the period. Since both Hundertwasser and his contemporaries of the previous decade evolved during this momentous time, the question remains: Why did Hundertwasser survive, and even thrive within this period, while the movements of his peers began to crumble?

They key to Hundertwasser’s newfound success during this tumultuous period lay in the expansion and slight alteration of his strategy for survival. In 1972, Hundertwasser’s Three Skin Philosophy became a Five Skin Philosophy, which also included the social environment and the natural environment as additional Fourth and Fifth Skins. In the years immediately leading up to this addition—beginning approximately in 1966—Hundertwasser’s writing, manifestos, and actions began to reflect his recently developed acceptance of collective action, as well as his newly realized concern for social and environmental causes. However, his vision for collaborative revolution never adopted the chaotic, sometimes violent tactics of spontaneous, explosive action that the uprisings of 1968 that some of his peer
movements employed. While the Happenings and Fluxus movements did not accomplish constructive change because they remained purely critical, the Situationists and the Provos inspired widespread revolts, which also did not bring about the change for which they had hoped. In contrast, Hundertwasser found a middle ground between pure criticism and pure revolt by encouraging his ever-growing audience to start a revolution, in which they would work together to take steps towards gradual change. Therefore, when the tide of uprisings and revolt died down, Hundertwasser’s message remained ‘do-able,’ because his chance to create lasting change had not passed.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: 1968

In 1968, uprisings throughout the world seemed to signify that the upheaval of modern society that the postmodernists had long predicted was finally on the horizon. Contradictory to Hundertwasser’s hope that change would come about slowly from individual choices and actions, world-wide movements spontaneously erupted in 1968. As one observer noted, “The year 1968 almost looks as though it had been designed to serve as some sort of signpost. There is hardly any region of the world in which it is not marked by spectacular and dramatic events which were to have profound repercussions on the history of the country in which they occurred and, as often as not, globally.” 198 Essentially, the widespread criticism of and pandemonium against the modern world that the artistic avant-garde and countercultural movements

of the period had been waiting for was finally here; they had been proven right—at least for a very short while.

In a single year, groups that the Situationists would have categorized under their definition of the new proletariat—meaning that they were not the ones in control of production, but rather the ones who took orders—engaged in widespread protests throughout the world. The fact that the Tet offensive in Vietnam, the Prague Spring, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the May events in France, the student movement in West Germany, the uprising at Columbia University, the pre-Olympic massacre in Mexico City, and the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago all occurred in 1968 was not purely a coincidence. In his analysis of 1968 on a global scale, historian George N. Katsiaficas asserts, “These events were related to one another… the global oppositional forces converged in a pattern of mutual amplification: ‘The whole world was watching,’ and with each act of the unfolding drama, whole new strata of social actors entered the arena of history, until finally a global contest was created.”

Students, workers, and civil rights activists, among many other marginal groups seeking change, took action, and an intense struggle erupted between the global uprisings and the global reaction. Televisions, radios, and newspapers circulated news of events and the messages of those behind them throughout the world, causing an international connection between social movements. For example, the student revolt in France in May 1968 generated a general strike of approximately ten million workers throughout the country, which in turn sparked demonstrations of support in Berkeley, Mexico City, Tokyo, Berlin, and Buenos Aires.

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Aires, and even led to general strikes held by students and workers in Spain and Uruguay on their own behalf. In effect, the strikes and protests of 1968 were globally contagious, and so was the backlash against them.201

After 1971, the worldwide revolts began to lose their impetus. Katsiaficas labels the year “a pivot around which protests appeared to lose momentum as ‘repressive tolerance’ shed its tolerant appearance.”202 By that time, the Fluxus, Happenings, Situationist, and Provo movements, too, had lost their relevance. The rebellions of 1968 had given support to their claims that modern society was in need of serious change, but the failure of the revolts to overthrow the existing systems indicated that their strategies of revolt could not effectively bring an end to modern society. Hundertwasser’s career as an activist for social and ecological change, on the other hand, had only just begun. Instead of depleting the momentum of his ideas, the incapability of the 1968 uprisings to overthrow governments and institutions only supported Hundertwasser’s claims that the reshaping of modern society must take place gradually and organically.

**BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT**

*Career*

Between 1967 and 1972, Hundertwasser’s personal and professional life took drastic turns that had a great impact on the expansion of his philosophy. At the end of the nineteen-sixties, Hundertwasser became a popular international artist, and his travels to exhibitions around the world gave him the chance to broaden his perception of the globe and the challenges that faced it. In only a period of six short years,

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Hundertwasser’s career took him around the world. He had always been somewhat of a nomad, for he had already spent considerable amounts of time in Austria, France, Italy, Germany, Morocco, Tunisia, Gibraltar, Brazil, and Japan. However, such travels had taken place over the course of almost twenty years. In the year 1967 alone, Hundertwasser visited Uganda, the Sudan, and Switzerland, as well as a few of the countries listed above. The next year he traveled to Berkeley for a museum exhibition at the University of California before he sailed from Sicily to Venice on the old salt hauler “San Giuseppe T” as a deck hand. He returned to the United States in 1969 for his exhibition tour of some of the countries major cities, including Santa Barbara, Houston, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. Between 1969 and 1972, Hundertwasser lived and worked on his boat Regentag in the Venice lagoon, and from 1970 to 1972, he collaborated with filmmaker Peter Schamoni on the documentary Hundertwasser Regentag. Such extensive travels signify two important developments for Hundertwasser: first, that his career had taken a successful turn, and he had achieved a new international renown outside of Western Europe; second, he had seen parts of the world which he had not previously chartered outside of his native Europe, and had done so as a renown artist, rather than an anonymous traveler. In a sense, the world had opened up to Hundertwasser, embraced him, and shared with him a new perspective.

Not only did Hundertwasser receive opportunities to present his ideas and his artwork around the world, but he also asserted himself and seized a wider variety of opportunities to spread his message to a broader audience. One example in which Hundertwasser took advantage of an opportunity to promote himself occurred in
1972, when he appeared on the popular German Television show Wünsch Dir Was (Make a Wish), where he presented his architectural models, adorned with vegetation and free of straight lines. Finally, Hundertwasser had the opportunity to reach viewers in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland in a single appearance, and impart upon them his ideas for what he felt was a more human, natural, and unique form of architecture. In that same year, the documentary about Hundertwasser that he and filmmaker Peter Schamoni had spent the last two years working on premiered in Cannes, France. The film followed Hundertwasser as he sailed on his boat Regentag between 1970 and 1972, and included interviews about his views and philosophy, as well as footage of the artist’s travels. For the first time, Hundertwasser was more than just an artist with outlandish ideas; he became a public figure to be heard and examined. Hundertwasser’s painting still remained a key component of his popularity, but after his transformation, he became a symbol onto himself. Since he had only recently become widely famous outside of the artistic community, he still retained an air of novelty, uniqueness, and unorthodoxy. He began to toe the line between being too idiosyncratic to listen to and too acceptable to warrant attention. Hundertwasser was now a subject of intrigue.

Personal Life

1972 also marked a transformative year for Hundertwasser’s personal relationships. While Hundertwasser sailed the world on his boat Regentag, his mother, Elsa Stowasser, died. Hundertwasser had been an only child, and his father had died when Hundertwasser was only a year old.\(^{203}\) Sixty-nine of Hundertwasser’s

maternal relatives died during the Holocaust and the Second World War, and therefore, the death of his mother left Hundertwasser with no family and forced him to open up to the remainder of his social environment. Without an immediate family, Hundertwasser became more sensitive to the identity problems associated with a group, community, or nation.

Coincidentally, in that same year, Hundertwasser’s friendship and professional relationship with Joram Harel began. Harel became Hundertwasser’s close friend, agent, and proprietor, and thus alleviated him of all material constraints. Harel also alleviated Hundertwasser of his professional and technical limitations by persuading him to work with qualified specialists who could put Hundertwasser’s ideas into practice. For example, Harel presented Hundertwasser with the opportunity to work with the Austrian post office and engraver Wolfgang Seidel, whose expertise transposed Hundertwasser’s large-scale designs into actual printed stamps. The next chapter will explore the architectural and special design project that Hundertwasser became able to undertake with the help of professionals, including buildings, stamps, posters, postcards, license plates, and clothing, among other new forms of artistic realization. Harel’s connections, wealth, and support provided Hundertwasser with the resources to extend his artistic vision beyond the realm of painting, and to become a creative activist outside of the world of art.

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PAINTINGS

Hundertwasser’s paintings also deviated a bit from his established repertoire this period, both in their appearance and content. Between 1966 and 1967, Hundertwasser began to incorporate unstylized elements into his paintings, mainly portraits. His 1966 work *Missed Spring* (Fig. 8) provides an excellent example of Hundertwasser’s use of direct representation in art. While he painted the scene in the background and the raindrops in the foreground in his usual naïve and colorful style, the woman’s complexion is pale and almost realistic. Her eyes represent a significant departure for Hundertwasser. Instead of being simple, flat, almond-shaped eyes, this woman’s eyes are detailed, realistic, and look three-dimensional. Perhaps the new perspective in his painting was indicative of the less simplistic and more realistic perspective that he began to acquire during this transformative period in his life.

Hundertwasser painted another uncharacteristic and informative work in 1966 entitled *The Way to You* (Fig. 9). The title itself is atypical for Hundertwasser. In his analysis of the title, Schmied asserts, “Nothing seems less suitable for Hundertwasser’s painting than this title. Up until this time, in an art centered around monologue and monomania, there had never been any sort of way to any you. With every line he drew he isolated himself from the world, shut himself in.”

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movement and direction implied in this painting were unusual for Hundertwasser, since as Schmied argued, he had never been on his way to anything or anyone. Hundertwasser had previously depicted his ideas for the future and his critiques of the present in his paintings, but he had not focused on illustrating the path between those two conditions. In his discussion of Hundertwasser’s nomadism, Schmied states, “Wherever he was, he had reached his destination. Although he had no one particular home, he felt at home anywhere where there were trees.” However, this image not only portrayed a journey, but it depicted a journey to another person. Such a transformation in this painting could possibly be linked to his recent acceptance of collective action, which the next section will examine further.

**ALTERATIONS TO HIS PHILOSOPHY**

Despite the insistence of his biographers that Hundertwasser’s core philosophy did not change throughout his career, but rather his means of expressing his core ideas took on a new form, Hundertwasser’s speeches, manifestos, and texts reveal that his philosophy took on a new perspective between 1967 and 1972. During those years, Hundertwasser adopted collaborative, globally-oriented elements into his philosophy which were not fully present during his early career. While Hundertwasser had spent the majority of his career in the nineteen-fifties and early-nineteen-sixties critiquing modern, capitalist society and suggesting ways in which

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his audience could transform it on an individual level, Hundertwasser’s ambitions began to grow during the transition from the nineteen-sixties to the nineteen-seventies. and he started to believe that collective action could incite change, without necessarily diminishing the power of the individual.

While Hundertwasser called for rebellion and action on an individual level from the onset of his career, he only began to explicitly call for a collective revolution for in 1966, with his speech Real Freedom. He concluded the speech with the proclamation: “The last revolution was for freedom from exploitation, from hunger, from poverty. And—here—it has been successful. The new revolution is for freedom from systematic annihilation of humanity, freedom from the assembly line that leads to death.” In the following years, Hundertwasser built on this idea of a new revolution against modern, industrial society, and explained that the world was overdue for a new revolution, since the past revolutions against hunger and in favor a freedom had already taken place, yet he still felt that civilization continued to function improperly. He still insisted, “Now an enslavement is beginning which is worse than the ones we have experienced so far.” In order to combat such “enslavement,” Hundertwasser proposed, “do not destroy, do not rebel, do not flee, just change and everything will be alright.” His vision of revolution was not frantic or violent, nor did it involve an immediate upheaval, but it did require instantaneous

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212 Ibid.
action on both the individual and group level in order to put the evolution of steady, natural change in motion.

Although Hundertwasser had originally warned his audience about the compromising effect of groups on individual autonomy, he realized that collective action was necessary in order to set his revolution in motion. He believed strongly that such a revolution could not exclusively stem from the artistic community, for in his 1967 Nude Speech, he announced, “There is no point in a couple of artists doing something worthwhile and not all the people, as I said before. It is embarrassing that I…[and] only a very few, do anything. When I look out the window, I would like to see something beautiful is happening. I mean that out of pure egoism.”

Rather than simply encouraging everyone to take a proactive role in societal change on his or her own, he pressured his audience to persuade those unaware of or resistant to the idea of revolution to join his cause. He maintained that individual action was of the utmost importance, and even went so far as to say that an individual’s mere presence has the potential to change his or her surroundings, but individual action was no longer enough; the problems of the world required widespread collaboration in order to be rectified.

Even though Hundertwasser initially advised his followers to be suspicious of government institutions, he began to suggest that the members of his new revolution work towards legislative reform in addition to their extra-institutional efforts to incite change. Hundertwasser suggested that revolutionaries help annul the building laws

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215 Ibid.
and regulations which he found to be criminal.\textsuperscript{216} Hundertwasser also called on the government to pass a law requiring citizens to spread a one meter layer of soil over the entire surface of their roof when building a new house, thus forcing the entire population to start growing roof gardens as a means of combating pollution and deforestation.\textsuperscript{217} Hundertwasser no longer believed that modern society could change to a sufficient degree exclusively through the actions of individuals, and instead began to admit that the movement could achieve its goals more quickly with the aid and support of the government.

Hundertwasser’s views on regulations and safety standards also grew to be less outlandish and chaotic during this period of transition. One should note that Hundertwasser by no means transformed completely into a practical and realistic person during this new phase in his career. He continued to make unrealistic propositions. For example, in his attempt to combat pollution within cities, he proclaimed that the government must issue a building ordinance forcing architects to add on four stories of forest and meadows to a building for every one story of human dwellings.\textsuperscript{218} Such a decree would be wildly impractical, for it would required a ten-story apartment building to devote only two stories to human residences, and reserve the other eight floors for vegetation. However, his harshly critical views on safety regulations became much more relaxed in the late sixties. While in his 1958 \textit{Mouldiness Manifesto}, Hundertwasser insisted that each individual must build his or her own home, despite the risk that the structure might later collapse. He even went

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{216} Hundertwasser, “Los von Loos,” 58-61
\textsuperscript{218} Hundertwasser, “Los von Loos,” 58-61.}
so far as to state, “one should not and must not shrink from human sacrifice which this new mode of building demands, perhaps demand.” In contrast, in his 1968 speech *Los von Loos*, Hundertwasser explained that man had a right to construct and alter his or her own residence, under the condition that neither the neighbors nor the structural stability of the building suffered as a result. While Hundertwasser did not succumb entirely to rationality during his period of transformation, overall, his proposals began to take into account the realities of maintaining a functional society, such as safety regulations and slight government intervention. Hundertwasser did not become a strong proponent of government intervention in the personal lives of individuals, but he began to acknowledge the government’s role in protecting the physical safety of its people.

Although Hundertwasser’s works of art had already included strong naturalist themes and images, Hundertwasser’s concern for the natural environment began to manifest itself in projects outside the realm of art beginning in this period of transition. In his work *Forestation of the City*, written in 1971, Hundertwasser began to directly address the issue of pollution. He criticized the pumping of gas and oil to the earth’s surface and the rapid burning of fossil fuels that had taken millions of years to develop, and described the resulting smog as “a state of hell, as it was before and in which man is killing himself.” In order to counteract the damage done to the environment by industrialization, Hundertwasser proposed his plan to

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219 Hundertwasser, “Mouldiness Manifesto,” 94.
223 Ibid.
implement roof gardens. According to his idea of one’s “Tree Duty,” meaning one’s obligation to integrate natural vegetation into architecture, Hundertwasser proclaimed, “the horizontal belongs to nature, the vertical to man… free nature must grow wherever snow falls in winter.” Such a concept later proved to be paramount for his future career as an architect.

Hundertwasser also began to express his concerns about man’s production and treatment of other forms of waste, other than those created by the burning of fossil fuels. Also in *Forestation of the City*, Hundertwasser outlined a plan to localize the treatment of waste by providing manually operated garbage disposals, which would allow individuals to turn garbage and excrements into compost at their own residences. The compost could then be used to fertilize each person’s roof garden. Hundertwasser explained that the plans significance lay in its ability to make the cycle of waste production, treatment, and eventual reuse more direct, for waste would no longer have to be transported long distances by a “toxin producing sewer system.”

Hundertwasser’s transformation culminated in 1972 when he added two new “skins” to his Three Skin Philosophy, which encompassed his new interest in man’s social and ecological environment that had been building at least since 1966. Hundertwasser’s recent concern with collective action manifested itself in the Fourth Skin of his philosophy, which dealt with an individual’s social environment and identity, whether that environment pertained to the group, community, or national

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224 Ibid.  
225 Ibid.
level. Pierre Restany contributes this addition of a social skin to the death of his mother and the entrance of his agent and proprietor Joram Harel into his life, outlined in the previous section. He argues that the death of his mother, his one remaining family member, made Hundertwasser more sensitive to community and identity problems, while Harel persuaded him to consider the concept of collaboration to help him address the problems he faced more practically. However, as the examination of Hundertwasser’s speeches and writings demonstrates, he had already begun to consider collaboration a necessity for success in the mid- to late-nineteen-sixties. Hundertwasser explained the reasoning behind his call for collective action in his famous appearance in 1972 on the popular TV-show, Wünsch Dir Was (Make a Wish), in which he stated, “To survive, each of us has to act.” Hundertwasser’s addition of a fourth, social skin to his philosophy grew out of his desire to survive as an artist, activist, public figure, and individual. He felt the urgent need to free himself and others from what he saw as the problems of modern society, and he realized that he needed assistance and support in order to enact change.

Hundertwasser’s Fifth Skin, the global environment and the relationship between ecology and mankind, also developed as a result of his will for himself and his fellow man to survive in the face of the modern, industrial world. As evidenced by the platform of the Provos, discussed in the previous chapter, other fringe activists had begun to express concerns about pollution and environmental degradation as a result of industrial production and capitalist consumption by the mid-1960s.

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226 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 63.
227 Ibid.
228 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 65.
However, by 1972, public awareness of environmental problems grew due to the increase in knowledge of the destructive effects of nuclear power stations and chemical factories, as well as the gradual increase in air, water, and land pollution.230 Hundertwasser was not impervious of such knowledge, and due to the heightened awareness of the destructive effect of excessive energy use on the natural environment, the artist’s desire to integrate nature into the urban landscape for aesthetic reasons evolved into an inclination to incorporate vegetation throughout cities in order to protect and preserve the earth’s natural ecological system. The mold that Hundertwasser wished to use to round the right angles and warp the straight lines of modern architecture in his Mouldiness Manifesto became a means of regenerating the natural environment that had been so obviously damaged.231

During the transformative period of 1967 through 1972, Hundertwasser added to his philosophy by addressing more than the potential of the individual to change his or her own world, and began to include strategies for mankind as a whole to enact global change to solve the growing problems of the social and natural environment. He no longer juxtaposed the individual and his interior against the external world, but instead argued that the social and natural environments are extensions of each person, for they make up the fourth and fifth skins of every individual. His philosophy did not lose its ‘do-able’ nature, but still expanded the realm of action beyond art and beyond the Three Skins of the individual.

230 Papadakis, The Green Movement in West Germany, 63.
231 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 79.
FADING OF THE AVANT-GARDE: THE END OF HAPPENINGS AND FLUXUS

Happenings

As Hundertwasser’s career took on new dimensions, the Happenings movement began to fade. Despite their popularity in the late-nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties, by 1968, Happenings had more or less disappeared.²³² Happenings originally rose as an avant-garde movement, and the Happenings artists therefore identified themselves with fringe, ‘non-artistic’ methods of expression and performance. They adopted forms of display which other groups had improvised and employed materials formally used in capitalist production.²³³ Thus, as the previous chapter discussed, the line between art and everyday objects was already intentionally blurry, and the vagueness and irony of the group’s language made distinguishing and defining the movement even more difficult. As the performances by Hundertwasser, the Fluxus artists, the early Situationists, and the Provos demonstrated, independent artists, other marginal artistic groups, and countercultural and political movements employed Happenings in their critiques of modern, industrial society, even when they did not align themselves entirely with the Happenings movement. As a result, distinguishing between members of the specific Happenings movement and members of the avant-garde who had merely chosen to borrow the performance technique became increasingly difficult. Ultimately, the ambiguity of the movement’s boundaries, message, and membership rendered the group prone to chaos, complexity, and confusion.

The ambiguity and vague distinction between the Happenings movement and the remainder of modern society set it up for critique. In Mike Sell’s discussion of the movement’s lack of autonomy from the leisure industry and commodity spectacle, he asserts,

The urge among Happenings artists to overcome the guilty terror and omnipresent uncertainty infusing the relations among commerce, art, and the everyday virtually guaranteed that the Happenings would be the object of critical scorn, particularly by those whose contempt was indebted to a romantic insistence on art’s lack of commerce with, well, commerce.234

The Happenings had sought to divulge the intrinsic nature of capitalist society’s production and consumption through performative subversion.235 Yet the blurred lines between life, art, and commodity, which the movement created, made such subversion difficult to identify. Hundertwasser felt that the performative subversion of the later Happenings perpetuated the values which they sought to critique: “The avant-garde modern artist is stumbling upon ruins and destroys values which he himself is responsible for, desperately looking for something he can still destroy. In that way the arts became perverse.”236

The tendency for Happenings artists to focus on the subversion of capitalist objects in their performances not only rendered the message of their art confusing, but also detracted from the art form’s ability to provide a constructive strategy for change. Hundertwasser ultimately did not even consider Happenings to be a form of art, for in a letter to Wieland Schmied, he argued, “My manifestation and actions cannot be compared with the intellectual acrobatics which followed. In contrast to

234 Sell, ““The Avant-Garde of Absorption,”” 17.
the Happenings which came later, my actions were positive ecological messages. I have never repeated them, never declared them a form of art, and never wallowed in them year after year.” In other words, he believed that the later Happenings did not have a purpose, for they were not art and delivered to practical message. Art historian Henry Geldzahler agrees that as early as 1965, the new Happenings possessed an air of staleness. As time progressed into the late-sixties and early-seventies, only Alan Kaprow persisted as an exclusively Happenings artist. The other early practitioners of the movement eventually returned to more traditional forms of artistic expression, such as painting, sculpture, and collage. Essentially, the movement had already lost its members, momentum, and sight of its goal due to the inapplicable, confusing, and fleeting nature of the art form.

**Fluxus**

The Fluxus movement suffered from many of the same complication that the Happenings artists endured. Since many Fluxus artists employed Happenings, they naturally became subject to the same fizzling and criticism outlined in the previous section. Despite Dick Higgins’ insistence that the nature of the Fluxus movement was simple, its messages and mediums possessed the same problems as those of the Happenings movement. In his work *A Child’s History of Fluxus*, Higgins argued, “You could always tell the real Fluxus thing from the fake ones because the real ones

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239 Ibid.
stayed simple, while the fake ones had fancy names attached to them.”

However, to the uninstructed observer, the distinction may not have been so obvious. As part of their attempt to subvert objects of capitalism for their own purposes, Fluxus artists opened Fluxshops from New York to Amsterdam to Nice, which, according to Sell, “mediated the economies of performative flux, rule and command, and bureaucratic infrastructure, hypothetically opening those economies to subversive and highly local appropriations and diversions.”

The performative texts and commodities sold at Fluxshops appeared to belong to the flood of goods in capitalist society. The prefix “Flux” even denoted a similar corporate imprimature for Fluxus commodities as the “Mc” does for McDonald’s products. Like the Happenings artists, the Fluxus movement was not independent from commerce or the highly developed media culture.

By 1965, many of the original Fluxus artists became independently successful, and thus outgrew the movement in many ways. This angered the group’s spokesperson and founder, George Maciunas, who wished to maintain some control over and cohesion within the group. When some Fluxus artists collaborated with artists outside the movement on a large performance called Originale, he encouraged other Fluxus artists to protest the performance, and insisted that the parties participating in the Originale no longer belonged to his movement. In effect, he

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242 Ibid.
caused a split within the movement, which many consider to be the death of Fluxus.\(^{243}\)

The Fluxus movement experienced a very similar demise to the Happenings movement. Instead of following a similar trajectory to Hundertwasser, and proposing more concrete ways of creating change and distinguishing itself from the public sphere, the Fluxus movement did not solve its issue of ambiguity and developed no new plans for inspiring change besides their hackneyed concerts, Fluxshops, and Happenings. Many of its most prominent artists outgrew the movement and went on to create flourishing careers of their own, but the Fluxus movement ceased to make a significant impact as a unit by the end of the 1960s.

**Joseph Beuys**

During this period of transformation, Joseph Beuys followed a similar trajectory as Hundertwasser, in the sense that his focus moved further beyond the world of art and took on more pronounced collective and ecological perspective. Like Hundertwasser, Beuys noticed the necessity for collaborative creative action in order to affect real change. In his advocacy for social transformation, Beuys explains that the success of the task depends on the creative efforts of all persons, whether they be ordinary citizens, rebels, or conformists: “This most modern art discipline—Social Sculpture/Social Architecture—will only reach fruition when every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor or architect of the social organism...Only a conception of art revolutionized to this degree can turn it into a

politically productive force, coursing through each person and shaping history.”^244

Just as Hundertwasser sought to elicit the help of anyone willing to support his causes, regardless of their overall social and political beliefs, Beuys’ plans for political and societal change were immensely inclusive. Both artists were originally staunchly independent and individualistic, yet they became willing to collaborate with a wide variety of people in an attempt to bring about the gradual change they desired.

Although Beuys was more than willing to collaborate informally towards change, he also began to organize formal political groups starting in the late-nineteen-sixties. In 1967, Beuys founded his first political organization, called the German Student Party (DSP), as a reaction to the death of a student from Berlin during a protest rally. He decided to act as the spokesman for the students enraged by this death.\(^245\) Three years later, in the spring of 1970, Beuys founded another political organization, called the Organization for Non-Voters and Free Referendum, primarily for the purpose of broadening the scope of the DSP.\(^246\) Again, in June 1971, Beuys founded another political association, called the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum, which had nothing to do with the his other political parties and their goals, but instead simply wished to facilitate a more direct participation of ordinary individuals in the democratic government.\(^247\)

Although Beuys’ creation of various political parties and associations during this period did not directly mirror Hundertwasser’s call for the public to directly engage in politics on a collective level, both artists had developed the common goal of encouraging the public to be active in

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[^247]: De Domizio Durini, *Felt Hat*, 42.
politics. Both Hundertwasser and Beuys in effect had evolved from artists interested in politics into direct activists.

As Beuys increasingly assumed the role of an activist, he, too, addressed the issues of the natural environment. Beginning in 1971, Beuys began to stage political protests for ecological causes. He named his first protest against deforestation *Overcome Party Dictatorship Now*, during which he and his fellow activists swept the floor of a forest in Düsseldorf and painted white crosses and rings on all of the trees designated to be cut down. During the same year, Beuys organized a demonstration to appreciate threatened wetlands along the Zuider Zee that he called *Bog Action*. He followed *Bog Action* with one hundred days of public discussion at the 1972 Documenta 5 in Kassel. The days of colloquy covered topics from the rights of ethnic and women’s groups, to urban decay, to peace, to ecological issues, such as nuclear energy and its alternatives. As Hundertwasser’s act of defiance involved by integrating natural environments and vegetation into the urban landscape, Beuys’ ecological activity assumed the form of political protests. Although their techniques of environmental activism took distinctly different forms, both artists began to draw attention to the topical issue of protecting the natural environment in the early nineteen-seventies.

As the Happenings and Fluxus movements continued to rely on outdated forms of critique and expression, Beuys, like Hundertwasser, adopted political activism as his new form of creating society change. The two artists turned activists by no means abandon their artistic origins for the realm of politics, but they began to

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employ both art and politics to achieve their postmodern vision. Beuys, like Hundertwasser, began to occupy a unique position between provocation and constructive activism; he was both edgy and acceptable.

**THE EXPLOSION OF REVOLT: THE END OF THE SI AND THE PROVOS**

After 1962, with the take over of the Situationist International by Guy Debord, the SI progressed in a direction completely contradictory to Hundertwasser’s, for the group resolved to focus on the development of theory and dispelled any for of direct action from its members. Therefore, as Hundertwasser focused on making gradual steps towards concrete change, the Situationists concentrated on developing increasingly abstract theories to support upheaval and revolt. According to Debord, “those who really want to shake an established society must formulate a theory which fundamentally explains this society.”

Situationist theory became immensely complicated: some early positions were later refuted, and even later texts include contradictions, unsolved problems, unfinished projects, and blatant mistakes.

Under Debord’s leadership, the group even required its members to be “possessed of genius” in order to join or avoid expulsion, for those who were incapable of comprehending Situationist theory could not share the group’s vision. While Hundertwasser strove to make his ideas more applicable to reality, the Situationists’ theory grew increasingly complex and difficult for the broader public to comprehend.

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Hundertwasser and the Situationists increasingly disagreed on the acceptance of eclecticism within a single movement. While Hundertwasser believed that individuals with different outlooks could join together to achieve a common goal, the Situationist sought to consolidate their membership to a limited number of people with very specific common beliefs. Hundertwasser’s manifesto founding his school, the Pintorarium, serves as an example of his attitude on collaboration amongst individuals with divergent views: “The undersigned representatives of fundamentally differing schools of the paint brush and thought resolved to join hands and, despite grave differences in our view of the world, found the Pintorarium together.”  

Together, Ernst Fuchs, Arnulf Rainer, and Hundertwasser joined forces to create an academy of the arts which encompassed their common views for educational reforms, despite their divergent artistic styles and political beliefs. In contrast, the SI feared that the presence of different philosophies within the group could compromise its success. In his explanation of the SI’s exclusivity, Debord stated, “The fact is that we want ideas to become dangerous once again. We cannot allow people to support us on the basis of a wishy-washy, fake eclecticism.” In accordance with such a policy, the SI expelled its members dedicated to artistic works in 1962 so that the group’s residual core could distance its political practices from the “realm of art-as-object and performance-as-spectacle.”

The Situationists’ solution to their problem of limited numbers and overall inactivity was to offer theoretical support to already existing movements looking to

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253 Jappe, Guy Debord, 84.
ignite a revolution.\textsuperscript{255} For example, in 1967, the Situationists distributed their essay “On the Poverty of Student Life” at Strasbourg University in France. Many attribute this act with the incitement of the 1968 student revolts in France,\textsuperscript{256} since the events of May 1968 strongly resembled the SI’s prediction of a ‘wildcat strike.’\textsuperscript{257} Even the preface to the official \textit{Situationist International Anthology} notes that the Situationists methods of agitation were influential in the events of the May 1968 revolts,\textsuperscript{258} though the group did not participate in them directly, nor any other oppositional actions of the period in which other groups had made independent use of Situationist ideas.\textsuperscript{259}

In the immediate aftermath of 1968, the Situationists basked in the glory of the fruition of their theory and gained considerable strength.\textsuperscript{260} They even admitted new members and set up international sections in France, Italy, Scandinavia and America. However, the original Situationists soon realized that their movement was in decline.\textsuperscript{261} The core members blamed the crisis on “the great number of people, chiefly students and intellectuals, who contemplate and endorse the radical attitudes of the Situationists without being capable of giving this endorsement the least practical expression.”\textsuperscript{262} However, in reality, the SI’s failure lay in the truth that its theory never spread far beyond the “disparaged milieu of the students and intellectuals.”\textsuperscript{263} While the Situationists insisted that their theory could provide a method of action for other oppositional movements, their theory did not apply to the

\textsuperscript{255} Jappe, \textit{Guy Debord}, 95.
\textsuperscript{256} Kristin Stiles, \textit{Performance Art}, 681.
\textsuperscript{257} Jappe, \textit{Guy Debord}, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{258} Knabb, \textit{Situationist International Anthology}, ix.
\textsuperscript{259} Jappe, \textit{Guy Debord}, 94.
\textsuperscript{260} Jappe, \textit{Guy Debord}, 101.
\textsuperscript{261} Jappe, \textit{Guy Debord}, 102.
\textsuperscript{262} Jappe, \textit{Guy Debord}, 102.
\textsuperscript{263} Jappe, \textit{Guy Debord}, 103.
working and minority groups also struggling against authority for change during the same period. The Situationists’ essential problem was therefore the fact that their movement and ideology were not more inclusive and applicable, not that the addition of greater numbers to their ranks had diluted their original vision.

The Situationists even tried to apply their theory to the period’s problems of environmental degradation. In *The Veritable Split in the International*, authors Guy Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti address the issues of pollution, ecological catastrophe, and the use of nuclear energy. They explained these complications as a new phase of capitalism, in which “the reality of industrial production, however, was not cyclical but cumulative, and this reality ‘returns in the form of pollution.’” They predicted that science would not be capable of preventing the looming ecological disasters, and thus “capitalism has at last furnished the proof that it cannot develop the productive forces any further.” Therefore, in the qualitative sense of Marxist theory, the degradation produced by capitalist society would lead to its overthrow. However, in the situation of the natural environment, the SI theory still does not apply entirely, for how could a violent revolution and overthrow of existing society solve the problems of pollution and environmental damage?

As Hundertwasser’s philosophy increasingly expanded to address the issues of the new decade, the Situation tried to apply their existing philosophy to new problems to which they did not relate. The SI continued to explain how its theories applied to the political unrest and environmental degradation of the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies, yet the actions of other groups never fully enacted the

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264 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
Situationists vision for revolution, and the Situationists themselves refused to engage in direct action or put their vision into practice on their own. Most importantly, the SI’s association with the 1968 uprisings rendered them politically toxic and barred them from any broader acceptance in the future. As Beuys and Hundertwasser acquired simultaneously acceptable and controversial reputations that would later allow them to reach a wider audience, while still retaining some of their avant-garde character, the SI completely isolated itself.

Provos

The influence of the Provos, like that of the Situationists, quickly depleted after they became associated with violence and revolt. The success and momentum of the Provo movement ceased abruptly after the Battle of Amsterdam on June 14, 1966.\(^{267}\) The Battle of Amsterdam consisted of a series of riots generated by a labor dispute, in which the workers, Communist Party, Provos, their supporters, and the police were involved. Upon the riot’s end, the city lay in a state of destruction, as Kempton describes, “The streets became choked with burning automobiles and roofing-company tar wagons. Gangs of youth ran back and forth through the narrow streets, with police in hot pursuit. Someone drove around a truck full of stones for use as ammunition by the rioters.”\(^{268}\) In addition to the generally wrecked appearance of the streets, dams, the press offices of Der Telegraaf, and police property were heavily damaged. Seven foreign tourists, as well as numerous rioters and policemen were injured during the events.\(^{269}\) The Provos and the Communist acquired the blame for the Battle’s chaos, destruction, and injuries. While both groups later condemned

\(^{267}\) Kempton, Provo, 109.
\(^{268}\) Kempton, Provo, 102.
\(^{269}\) Kempton, Provo, 103.
the riots, and insisted that they were merely sympathizers with the events, rather than the masterminds behind them, their reputations could not be redeemed. The Provos only survived as a significant group for seven or eight weeks after the riots before becoming irrelevant.²⁷⁰

According to the leaders of the movement, the Provos could not regain their former strength because the novelty and their ability to provoke had diminished. As Van Duyn declared, “We aimed too short.”²⁷¹ He argued that after the June 14th riots, all demonstrations were fated to become repetitive and bathetic. The Happenings demonstrations and confrontations with the police continued, but the paled in comparison to the monumental Battle of Amsterdam, and the group could not come up with a plan for a new trajectory of provocation.²⁷² By mid-November 1966, the Ministry of Justice was faced with numerous complaints of police brutality, even from innocent bystanders who had fallen victim to unjustified police attacks. These charges should have bolstered the Provos’ platform, with its strong condemnation of police brutality. However, the Provos could still not generate publicity nor an active response to this growing discontent to the authorities.²⁷³ The Provos even tried to concentrate their activities on protesting the war in Vietnam, but by that time, other groups had already taken leadership of the peace movement, and the Provos’ actions did not contribute any new perspective to it.²⁷⁴ In other words, the Provos believed that their movement died due to their failure to generate novel ideas. They had simply used their best tactics too soon.

²⁷⁰ Kempton, Provo, 104.
²⁷¹ Kempton, Provo, 105.
²⁷² Ibid.
²⁷³ Kempton, Provo, 107.
²⁷⁴ Kempton, Provo, 105.
However, if one examines the nature of the Provos even during their times of great success, the group never had a significant chance of remaining relevant for a prolonged period of time. The Provos most memorable and triumphant demonstrations were the protest of the Crown Princess’s royal wedding and the Battle of Amsterdam, and in both of those instances, the group did not act alone. Instead, they formed a Fuse Group, combining the forces of workers, students, and any other group battling the Dutch bourgeois society of the period, and spontaneously launched a revolution.  

Such a revolution is unstable by nature, for it possesses no leadership or direction. Eventually, a Fuse group faces the need to enact some form of discipline and cohesion in order to survive. Yet, once a Fuse Group becomes predictable and becomes an official organization, it loses the revolutionary momentum which once provided its strength.  

“It is only in becoming predictable that the Fuse Group loses its momentum, by becoming an organization.” Thus, circumstance had presented the Provos with a difficult choice: “After June 14th, Provo faced reorganization as a political party, a political journal, or possibly a cult or a discussion group…They were conscious of the institutionalizing factor and chose not to “become old news.” When faced with the option of entering the realm of everyday politics that they detested so strongly or dissolving as a group, they intentionally chose dissolution.  

At first glance, the Provos’ strategy of uniting likeminded groups opposed to authoritarianism and bourgeois society may not seem distinctly different from

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Hundertwasser’s new tactic of employing collective action against modern society, regardless of whether the activists share entirely common goals for change. Yet, Hundertwasser did not face the challenge of organization that tormented the Provos. Hundertwasser’s vision of collaboration did not involve a permanent alliance. For example, Hundertwasser worked alongside Ernst Fuchs and Arnulf Rainer to found the Pintorarium, but the three artists did not remain united in all of their activities and they did not depend on each other to continue to be relevant. As a popular artist, Hundertwasser did not depend on a group or movement to remain in the public eye, nor did he need to employ violence to draw attention to himself. His philosophies and goals were clear, and, as the next chapter will illustrate, he was able to pick and choose which projects and which organizations he wanted to work alongside to achieve a common goal. The Provos, on the other hand, did not possess the luxury of autonomous action. They could not enter the realm of politics and continue to operate independently. For the Provos, organizing meant compromising their anarchist beliefs and becoming a part of the institution, which they sought to break down, while Hundertwasser was able to work alongside governments, as well as other individuals, groups, and movements, without becoming a career politician.

Hundertwasser survived, and even thrived during the transformative period between the late nineteen-sixties and the early nineteen-seventies because of the expansion of his philosophy to include topical social and environmental issues and his acceptance of peaceful collective action. While the Provos became associated with violence and their unyielding anarchist principles rendered them political pariahs to established institutions and the broader public, Hundertwasser’s pacifism and topical
message made him an interesting, but seemingly harmless public figure. As the examination of his later career will show, Hundertwasser’s position on the border between controversial and acceptable proved to be a valuable asset.
LATER CAREER

For a person who had spent the first two to three decades of his career preaching against established institutions, Hundertwasser received a great deal of recognition and support from national governments, important media sources, educational institutes, and environmental organizations throughout the last twenty years of his life. From his native Austria alone, Hundertwasser received the 1980 Grand Austrian State Prize for the Arts, the 1981 Austrian Nature Preservation Prize, two Gold Medals of Honor from the City of Vienna and the State of Styria, the Tourism Prize from the Viennese Chamber of Industry in 1996, and finally the Grand Decoration of Honor for Services to the Republic of Austria in 1997. The Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, from which Hundertwasser had dropped out after only three months because he felt that the Academy had nothing left to teach him, even granted him the opportunity to be the head of his own school within the Academy. The nations of France, Germany, New Zealand and Japan also awarded him prizes for promoting tourism, protecting the environment, and contributing to culture. In the United States, Washington, D.C. declared November 18th to be Hundertwasser Day and San Francisco later dedicated an entire week to the artists. Both of those annual celebrations in honor of Hundertwasser also promoted campaigns of environmental awareness. Recognition and offers of collaboration from prominent governments and private institutions gave Hundertwasser the opportunity to complete the high-profile and large-scale projects that would establish the majority of his legacy.

Through both publicity and high-profile projects, Hundertwasser was able to reach the public more directly in the latter phase of Hundertwasser’s career.
Although such a means of communication may have directly contradicted Hundertwasser’s earlier principles on several accounts, it allowed him to take larger and more impactful steps towards his vision for the future. Some of Hundertwasser’s projects of activism adhered to the artist’s most idealistic aspirations, but many of the contributions to his dearest causes involved taking more practical actions, in lieu of exclusively fighting for change in accordance with his most unyieldingly principles. In doing so, Hundertwasser received a great deal of criticism for “selling-out” or compromising his essential character. However, in Hundertwasser’s eyes, working within the confines of the actual society in which he lived, rather than the quixotic realm of his utopian vision, allowed him to enact applicable change, which furthered his ultimate goal of contributing to the survival of the individual, mankind, and the earth.

Hundertwasser reconciled his partial departure from his original principles by reinterpreting his philosophy through his theory of vegetative evolution. As the section examining the changes in his philosophy will demonstrate, Hundertwasser reinterpreted his initial strategy of enacting gradual, concrete steps towards to change as a process inspired by the slow, natural evolution of the ecological environment. In his explanation of how his vegetative methods of painting and ideas for change were unique, Hundertwasser stated, “One reason why other people do not want to paint vegetatively or want to take to a vegetative way of life is because it begins too unpretentiously, it does not have great éclat or drum roll; on the contrary it grows quite slowly and simply, and that does not appeal to our social order, people want
instant results based on the slash and burn principle.” Later on in the same text, Hundertwasser continued,

I want to show how basically simple it is to have paradise on earth. And everything that religions and dogmas and the various political creeds promise is all nonsense. And there of course I come into conflict with society which completely misunderstands that. They believe that it is eccentricity, just a publicity stunt, but they forget that that is part of myself, that that is my natural form of expression.

So long as Hundertwasser lived in accordance with his vegetative style of life, he continued to believe that he was an outsider of mainstream society. Even though his environmental and social concerns were not as controversial as his earlier advocation for unyielding individual autonomy and he worked alongside major institutions and governments to address them, Hundertwasser continued to feel that he was a marginal and controversial figure because his “vegetative style of life” and “natural form of expression” still did not fit into the norms of modern society.

Hundertwasser also explained his deviation from his initial principles of stark individualism by asserting that he had employed a “delay mechanism,” through which he intentionally made his ideas controversial in the beginning and waited for the impact of those ideas to resonate with the broader public and then become widely appropriated and accepted as true. In other words, Hundertwasser insisted that his ideas had not changed, but that the remainder of society had just realized their applicability as solutions to the world’s contemporary problems. As a further examination of his transformed philosophy will soon show, Hundertwasser’s ideas did not gradually unfold in a linear manner, but instead transformed a great deal as he

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280 Ibid.
reacted to new developments around the globe and gained opportunities to spread his message through his fame as an artist.

Despite what Hundertwasser claimed, he was not decades ahead of his time in his ideas or strategies for mankind’s survival. Instead, his ideas and actions evolved at the forefront and in accordance with the topical issues of his time. Hundertwasser then took advantage of his topicality and accepted opportunities to extend his own influence and reach a wider audience with his progressive message. One should not go so far as to assert that Hundertwasser entirely sold out, but his actions during the latter phase of his career certainly indicated a departure from his initial principles.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF HIS NEW IDEAS**

The development of Hundertwasser’s concern for the social and ecological environment arose during a time when the green and peace movements were growing around the world. Throughout the 1970s, public awareness of environmental problems began to grow due to the destructive effects of nuclear power stations and chemical factories, as well as the gradual increase in air, water, and land pollution.\(^2\) At the same time, the Cold War continued to keep tensions high, as the threat of nuclear war between the superpowers persisted. While the term “green party” could apply to parties in support of ecological protection alone, for Left-leaning green parties in Western Europe drew support from a network of social movements in which the environment was only one concern among many concerns, such as peace

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and civil liberties. Collective organizations even emerged that provided support for both the green and peace movements. For example, in 1971 in Germany, the Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz (Federal Association of Environmental Action Groups) united decentralized groups so they could work together towards common goals within the green and peace movements. While a proper examination of the green and peace movements is a topic unto itself, this extremely brief mention of these parallel movements seeks to demonstrate that Hundertwasser’s new perspective during this period was not his alone. As the examination of his high profile projects will later demonstrate, the topicality of Hundertwasser’s social and ecological concerns certainly played a role in his survival as a prominent artist and public figure during this period, for they coincided with the interests of powerful individuals and the broader population alike.

The Hundertwasser accepted collective action as a viable means of change at a similarly opportune time. By the nineteen-seventies, governments and established institutions faced the problem of reintegrating the 1968 Generation back into the realm of political participation. As the previous chapter notes, Hundertwasser had only begun to speak of a revolution beyond individual acts of rebellion in 1966. Four years later, Hundertwasser would certainly not be the public figure who would help to encourage young people to vote and support the political parties that they had fought violently against only a few years before. However, Hundertwasser was an ideal candidate to reach out to the younger generation and involve them in progressive

campaigns that governments and established institutions supported as well, such as ecological and pacifist efforts. Having been born in 1928, Hundertwasser was still a member of the World War Two generation. Yet, he was still an intriguing figure on working on the forefront of topical issues that concerned the post-war generation. As a popular figure in his own right, Hundertwasser was in a perfect position to mediate between the older generations running the established institutions and the younger generation participating in grass-roots activism. One should not go so far as to say that Hundertwasser was unanimously popular—he certainly had an array harsh and vocal critics—but he was a cohesive figure in the sense that he possessed the qualities necessary to unite two starkly divided generations. Therefore, Hundertwasser was not the only one who gained an advantage from the commissions for high-profile projects from governments and prominent organizations. The establishments, in turn, benefited from Hundertwasser’s ability to attract the attention of the younger generation and others who refused to participate in organized politics. In essence, Hundertwasser and the establishments formed a mutually beneficial relationship in which they helped one another to reach a wider audience on behalf of causes in which they both believed.

**HUNDEWASSER’S REVISED PHILOSOPHY**

After Hundertwasser transformed from a painter and artist into an ecological and social activist, he reinterpreted a great deal of his initial philosophy in light of his latest insights. In his writings of the nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties, Hundertwasser admitted that his vegetative perspective of the world had not always been apparent to him. Although his paintings had represented the natural process and
the value of nature visually since the nineteen-fifties, he only realized decades later that this vegetative model could unite his entire philosophy. In his 1984 letter to J.J. Aberbach, Hundertwasser argued, “This process of creative becoming and responsible evolution is very slow and in its beginning stage seemingly inconspicuous like a very young tree. I am also trying to consequently reconcile my painting and my life, my works and my activities.” His strategy for societal evolution and creative change from an ecological perspective had only recently developed and happened to coincided with Hundertwasser’s philosophical approach to the survival of man from the beginning of his career. Once Hundertwasser reoriented his perspective, he realized that the vegetative model of survival and evolution gave cohesion to his vision. In his most succinct description of his recipe for the survival of mankind in the latter phase of his career, Hundertwasser proclaimed, “It is the duty of mankind to finish all disputes between man and to conclude a treaty with nature, the only superior power the human race depends on for its own survival.”

His career as an activist primarily addressed the Fourth and Fifth Skins of his philosophy, the Social and Ecological environments.

Along with the reorientation of his global perspective came Hundertwasser’s redefinition of the role of an artist. Hundertwasser by no means abandoned the stance that the artist should take responsibility for social change, since he continued to lack

faith in the political and intellectual institutions of his day and asserted that “in our society… all other fields are apparently a failure.” 288 In fact, Hundertwasser extended the role of the artist, and insisted that he or she not create a connection between human beings, but a bridge between man and nature: 289

The painter is not only a painter; he must also be an ecologist. The painter must be a revolutionary; he must stand at the vanguard of what will help human progress, and that can’t happen in this day and age without nature and ecology. Without ecological awareness and without combating the throw-away and consumer society, positive creativity is not possible. 290

While, as the two previous chapters discussed, Hundertwasser had always seen the role of the artist to also be that of an activist, from the nineteen-seventies on he specified that such activism must take the form of ecological protection, for he believed that a peace treaty with nature was the key to mankind’s survival. 291

Hundertwasser’s idea of a peace treaty meant resetting civilization behind sustainable “environmental barriers,” and thus allowing the land, vegetation, and bodies of water to regenerate. 292 According to Hundertwasser, man extended himself beyond his natural environmental barriers in his use of fossil fuels, since they required extraction from far beneath the earth’s surface. He insisted that vegetation had taken millions of years to bury the life forms that later became fossil fuels beneath the earth’s surface and thus allowed man to live on earth, and when man extracted such materials, consumed their energy, and released them into the

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290 Hundertwasser “Tape-Recorded Letter to the Students,” 173.
291 Ibid.
atmosphere, he disrupted the earth’s natural process of decomposition and containment of waste.\textsuperscript{293} He viewed the use of nuclear energy as an even greater offense, since he insisted that the materials it produces remain lethally dangerous for 500,000 years after the extraction of its energy,\textsuperscript{294} and such toxic materials certainly did not fit into his vision for a healthy and natural cycle of life and decomposition on earth. Instead, he claimed, “There is no energy crisis. There is only an immeasurable waste of energy.”\textsuperscript{295} He suggested that man both use less energy, and devote his time, funds, and energy towards renewable and less harmful methods of energy generation, such as solar energy.\textsuperscript{296} He also argued that, “If we want to survive, we must bring nature into things, i.e. let other energies do their work besides us.”\textsuperscript{297} He believed that the natural and spontaneous growth of vegetation on the roofs and inside homes could be very useful for regulating the temperature, absorbing pollutants, consuming unwanted noise, managing moisture levels, and adding decoration, and thus rooftop gardens and trees integrated into the structure of a building, called “tree tenants,” could naturally assume the tasks on that humans normally perform by expending non-natural energy.\textsuperscript{298} Hundertwasser therefore proposed that man remain behind self-imposed energy barriers and adopt more sustainable forms of energy consumption so that the earth could begin to heal.

\textsuperscript{293} Friedensreich Hundertwasser, “The Sacred Shit—The Shit Culture,” in \textit{Friedensreich Hundertwasser} by Harry Rand (Cologne: Taschen, 1991), 177.
\textsuperscript{295} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{296} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{298} Friedensreich Hundertwasser, “Tree Tenants are the Ambassadors of the Free Forests in the City,” \textit{Hundertwasser Foundation Official Website}. \url{http://hundertwasser.com/text/view-1.3.2.16?subtype=hw} (Accessed January 23, 2013).
Remaining behind environmental barriers not only meant the responsible use of energy, but abstinence from the manipulation of the natural environment. In Hundertwasser’s mind, the manipulation of water systems also disrupted the process of ecological regeneration in a manner that threatened man’s survival. He even went so far as to suggest that the authorities be indicted for draining of marshes, regulating of rivers, and destroying riverside wetlands. In the 1990s, Hundertwasser deemed the invention of genetically modified organisms to be an instance where mankind had overstepped the boundaries of nature: “Now man has the arrogance to manipulate the essence of living organisms which depend upon each other in an intertwined, well balanced fantastic system which has functioned perfectly for millions of years… Man has no right to transform the essence of life in complete ignorance of the long-term consequences.” Hundertwasser clearly believed that maintaining the delicate balance of an ecosystem served as the key to mankind’s long-term survival, and any short-sighted manipulation of it, whether it came from the overuse of fossil fuels and nuclear energy or the alteration of the organisms and water systems, would lead to the downfall of mankind.

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300 Ibid.
Hundertwasser’s Spiral, which had served as a motif of nature in his paintings since the 1950s, came to represent the cycle of life that the artist believed would ensure mankind’s survival by setting him back behind his “environmental barriers.” Hundertwasser’s 1975 painting *Grass for Those Who Cry* (Fig. 10) illustrates the relationship of the spiral to the natural environment. The colors of the spiral are nearly indistinguishable from landscape surrounding it, and the fact that the spiral does not end, but instead continues and fuses with the nature outside of it, emphasizes the link between nature, the spiral, and the cycle of life. In his 1982 Letter to his students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Hundertwasser explained, “One of the most important secrets of nature is how it works, that is, how the cycle works, the cycle from life to death. That is why I used the symbol of the spiral, for example, which is a symbol of life and death, of expansion and concentration.”

Within an individual’s lifetime, he believed that the cycle of life could be maintained by localizing the process of man’s consumption and excretion of waste. As he spoke about his views on ecology, Hundertwasser stated, “We must see to it that we humans do not disturb the cycle. The cycle from eating to shitting functions. The cycle from shitting to eating is interrupted.”

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the use of “humus toilets” as a solution to the break in the cycle of consuming food and excreting waste, since they eliminated the need for a water-intensive and expansive sewer system. It therefore allowed individuals to compost some of their kitchen waste and all of their personal waste in their own homes, giving them the opportunity to fertilize their roof gardens or other forms of natural vegetation with that compost. The food that one consumes and excretes could then again fertilize the plants from which people retrieved their produce. Hundertwasser proposed a similar system of at-home system of water purification using Swamp Grasses, Water Lilies, and other water hyacinths. In doing so, man could remain within Hundertwasser’s perceived environmental barriers by recycling his food, water, and organic waste to directly produce new food for consumption repeatedly throughout his or her lifetime.

Hundertwasser’s Spiral representing the natural cycle of life and death also applied to the entirety of an individual’s lifetime, for he came to believe that man should return to nature and himself be recycled after his death, and thus continue to live through nature. In a 1984 letter to a friend, Hundertwasser outlined his ideas for a new kind of cemetery: “The cemeteries of the future will be ‘Nature reserves’, without walls. The dead will be buried only as deep as the tree planted on the graves can profit from the deceased. The dead do not die, but continue to live on in the form of trees. An actual rebirth, a veritable resurrection takes place. Cemeteries will turn

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305 Ibid.
into forests of life.”

After he worked with the New Zealand government on multiple conservation projects and established residence there, Hundertwasser even attained special permission from the government of New Zealand, granting him the right to be buried on his own land. Hundertwasser therefore focused on the survival of mankind, each individual, and the earth as a whole through the maintenance of the natural, sustainable cycle of life.

In order for the natural cycle of life to function, Hundertwasser maintained that mankind must settle its disputes and thus cease unnecessary forms of destruction. For Hundertwasser, this meant maintaining long-term peace by eliminating political and military divides throughout Europe. Throughout the majority of the post-war period, Hundertwasser felt that the iron curtain served as a destructive divide, which contributed to military conflict and made the border countries into targets of violence and destruction. He firmly believed that Austria’s neutrality served as one of the country’s greatest assets, since it protected the centrally-located country from becoming a strategic region to attack. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hundertwasser viewed the European Union as the new dividing force in Europe, since it segregated European countries into members and non-members. In his campaign against Austria joining the E.U., Hundertwasser claimed, “The politicians who now bear the responsibility are puppets of business

310 Ibid.
311 Ibid.
interests and pay hypocritical lip service to environmental awareness and cultural consciousness. They adopt measures which destroy the environment and culture and make our future doubtful."  

Just as Hundertwasser believed the delicate ecosystems present in nature, which developed over thousands of years, were essential in assuring stability in nature, he maintained that the social and cultural systems of nationhood and identity that have developed over the course of history were an essential component of political and cultural peace and stability.

After Hundertwasser reinterpreted and added to his initial philosophy, his actions and ideas encompassed an odd mixture of consistencies and departures from the beliefs and strategy for survival that he espoused during his early career. He still preached that consumerism threatened the survival of mankind, yet he expanded his condemnation of its effect on individual autonomy to include its alienating effects on social relations and its destructive effects on the environment through the promotion of overconsumption. He continued to assert that the suppression of creativity began upon a child’s enrollment in the system of mandatory schooling, but when the directors of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna offered him the opportunity to become the head of a master school for painting at the Academy, he decided to implement his hands-off teaching method within his own school at an existing academy. While at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg Hundertwasser undermined the common practices of the Academy, staged the Line of Hamburg protest, and ultimately resigned due to the confining nature of the position,

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312 Ibid.
Hundertwasser’s experience at the Academy in Vienna was not so tumultuous. The Academy gave him greater leeway with his teaching style most likely because he had become a world-renowned artist and had cultivated an excellent relationship with the city of Vienna. In return, Hundertwasser did not intentionally undermine the wishes of the Academy. Hundertwasser still retained the same goals of ending consumerism and reforming education, but he addressed goals using very different means than he would have employed earlier in his career.

In a similar manner, Hundertwasser refused to relinquish his powerfully individualistic rhetoric, even though it did not entirely match his actions. In his address of the audience at the 1981 International Gardening Exposition in Munich, Hundertwasser proclaimed, “Paradise cannot be sought and found, paradise cannot be impounded and not built by authorities. Paradise can only be made by the individual, with his own creativity, in harmony with the free creativity of nature. Then we finally regain our good conscience about nature.” The emergence of his utopia continued to depend on individual action and autonomous creativity in his speeches, despite the fact that Hundertwasser had also added collective action to his strategy for enacting change.

Hundertwasser also continued to remain hopeful about the possibility for change in the near future, even though some of his actions demonstrated that he had accepted the confining parameters for change of his time. As he spoke on the future of ecology, Hundertwasser argued, “Each of us is creative, we do not need to travel

far because paradise is just around the corner." However, as the later examination of his architectural projects will demonstrate, Hundertwasser accepted that he could not adhere to all of his original principles or ideals if he wanted to design buildings. Hundertwasser did in fact recognize that his idea of paradise could not be attained in the near future, but he was often reluctant to admit that in his speeches and writings.

**HUNDERTWASSER’S LATER PAINTINGS**

Hundertwasser’s paintings, as well as his recently adopted forms of artistic expression, displayed an odd combination of his initial artistic style and traditional motifs with some distinct departures from his original artistic process. Wieland Schmied defines the period from approximately 1970 onward as “the period of synthesis.” Schmied’s assertion is correct in the sense that Hundertwasser combined the motifs and styles that he had developed in the previous decades in his newer paintings. However, some of his later paintings included ideas that Hundertwasser had only proposed in the nineteen-seventies.

Hundertwasser’s 1994 painting *The 30 Days Fax Painting* (Fig. 11) serves as an excellent example of the way in which Hundertwasser certainly added to his original repertoire of depiction. Like Hundertwasser’s paintings from the 1950s, *The 30 Days Fax Painting* is immensely colorful and lacks perspective or adherence to the natural law of gravity. It also incorporates Hundertwasser’s favorite motifs: almond eyes, round faces, “soul-trees,” houses, ships, spirals, and windows. Yet, the painting also includes defining ideas from the second phase of his career, such as roof gardens.

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and tree tenants. *The 30 Days Fax Painting* also includes a critique of environmental degradation and pollution, since the houses without roof gardens towards the top of the painting emit thick streams of smoke. A highway laden with cars also seems to separate the lushly colored bottom half of the painting, where man and nature are inseparable, from the bare top half of the painting where man has cleared away the vegetation and left only bare orange earth. The man in the top left corner of the painting thrusts his arm in the direction of the polluting houses, as if he is saying “look what you have done.” The message of the painting combines the phases of Hundertwasser’s career and gives them cohesion, but not all of those ideas were present in his philosophy or artistic style before 1970.

Perhaps the most ironic quality of this painting has to do with the fact that Hundertwasser produced this message of environmental conservation through the compilation of illustrations from faxes that he sent from New Zealand to Vienna over the course of thirty days. Every day for a month, Hundertwasser sent a fax to a woman in Vienna with whom he was close containing his latest fragment of the preliminary drawings for the painting. After every fax had been sent, the artist transposed the drawings onto primed paper, mounted the papers onto canvas, and
painted them. While a series of faxes would not have caused any catastrophic damage to the natural environment, even by Hundertwasser’s standards, the fact that he used a modern machine, electricity, and double the amount of paper necessary to produce a painting seems rather paradoxical, especially coming from a man who once cringed when he ate cherries because he regretted having to waste the pit.

As the examination of his artistic endeavors beyond painting will show, Hundertwasser continued this pattern of utilizing elements of his past, while still departing from some of the defining principles from the earlier phase of his career. In his stamps, flags, license plates, conservation posters, media campaigns, and architecture, Hundertwasser included his famous motifs from his paintings in the nineteen-fifties, yet the topical, recently developed Fourth and Fifth Skins of his philosophy seemed to inspire the major themes of his later works. His process of creation for these works also seemed to depart from his early ideas of individualism, for they largely required group collaboration to become a reality. Ultimately, Hundertwasser’s later works seem to favor the new elements of Hundertwasser’s philosophy that allowed him to spread his ideas and establish his legacy, though they still incorporated the naïve style, bright colors, and spirals that had distinguished Hundertwasser during his early career.

**HUNDERTWASSER’S HIGH-PROFILE PROJECTS**

While there was certainly an ideological gap between Hundertwasser’s early rhetoric and his later actions, Hundertwasser did not completely abandon his original anti-establishment ideals by partaking in these projects. In his defense of

Hundertwasser’s success, Schmied states, “He repeatedly rejected projects he was invited to accept… Standing alongside Hundertwasser, the man with the golden touch, there was also Hundertwasser, the naysayer, the man who was a difficult partner for all concerned, who would not touch anything that did not conform to his ideas.”

Hundertwasser took advantage of his newfound fame and recognition to fight for the causes for which he held great concern, since, despite what Hundertwasser believed throughout his early career, many established organizations and their members shared common goals with him. Hundertwasser did not blindly accept any lucrative or attention-grabbing project, regardless of its implications, but he did concede some of his autonomy and his initial anti-establishment beliefs in order to create a mutually beneficial relationship with a few institutions that shared at least part of his vision.

Stamps

Throughout the several occasions that Hundertwasser designed postage stamps for national governments and the U.N., Hundertwasser did not have to make a great deal of artistic or ideological concessions. However, his agreement to work with these institutions demonstrates a major departure from his original individualism. The fact that Hundertwasser received the commissions to design these stamps also serves as an example of his topicality, since before his transformation, the issues of diplomacy and social harmony were not Hundertwasser’s primary concern. Yet, as nations began to notice Hundertwasser and Hundertwasser adopted his interest

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in the social environment, the mutually beneficial opportunity for them to collaborate arose.

Hundertwasser himself had collected postage stamps as a child, and felt that they provided him with a sense of hope and human connection from far away places. In Hundertwasser’s explanation of the significance of postage stamps, he proclaimed, “Postage stamps are the measure to the cultural standing of a country. The tiny square connects the hearts of the sender and receiver, reducing the distances. It is a bridge between people and countries. The postage stamp passes all frontiers.” In essence, for Hundertwasser, the postage stamp served as a tiny cultural diplomat; circling the world and helping people of all culture communicate and connect with one another. He even went so far as to attribute his career as a painter to his early affinity for postage stamps because they inspired him to both create beautiful artwork and “to conquer the world with it.”

Given his admiration for postage stamps as both works of art and symbols of social connection, Hundertwasser was honored by his invitation by the Austrian Post Office to inaugurate its “Modern Art in Austria” series. In accordance with his individualistic and innovative character, Hundertwasser did not design a typical stamp. In fact, a German post office worker famously refused to honor one of Hundertwasser’s stamps, despite its Austrian postmark, and returned the postcard to the sender along with the note, “This is not a stamp.” As Figure 12 shows,

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323 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 67.
Hundertwasser’s first stamp for the Republic of Austria did not contain any traditional marks of patriotism or national culture, but instead featured Hundertwasser’s signature spiral in the form of a tree, which he embellished with bright pastels. Hundertwasser collaborated with engraver Wolfgang Seidel to complete the project, and they formed a lasting partnership as a stamp design team. The production of Hundertwasser’s first stamp allowed him to accomplish his aspiration of designing a stamp that would travel the world and redefine modern art in his own style, yet he could not have attained such achievements without the help of a professional expert in the technique of engraving or the opportunity from the Austrian government to work with its national postal system. Hundertwasser therefore decided to accept an offer to accomplish his life-long goals of designing stamps and extending his influence, in spite of the fact that collaboration with the Austrian government and a professional engraver compromised his autonomy. Such a decision does not mean that he partook in a project that completely contradicted his original ideas, but the fact remains that he achieved one of his goals by working alongside the bureaucrats, politicians, and technological experts that he once denounced as a whole and who had once failed to notice him.

In 1979, Hundertwasser designed three stamps for the Republic of Senegal on behalf President Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, who Pierre Restany described as “the great humanist apostle of Negritude.” Senghor had been a fan of Hundertwasser since he had visited the painter’s first exhibition in Paris. The two had even met briefly at a private viewing of Hundertwasser’s paintings when Senghor

\[324\] Ibid.
was a young teacher of grammar, but Hundertwasser had since forgotten the meeting. In 1977, Senghor opened the Salzburg Festival by citing Mozart, Rilke, and Hundertwasser as the three representatives of “Austria as the expression of universal civilization.” Clearly, Senghor was a true fan and believer of Hundertwasser’s utopian and artistic vision. He even honored Hundertwasser with emphatic words of support: “Rooted in the realities of his time, he creates, beyond those realities, a world more beautiful but also more just…The painter Hundertwasser reveals to us with a new vision, a new consciousness of the world.” The three stamps that Hundertwasser designed for Senegal—“Black Trees,” the “Head,” and the “Rainbow Windows” (Fig. 12)—included motifs from his early paintings, yet served the message of a harmonious social environment from his later career. By the 1970s, Hundertwasser and Senghor possessed a common humanist vision for the world, and thus Hundertwasser’s acceptance of Senghor’s offer to design stamps for the Republic of Senegal did not require him to make great sacrifices, other than the technicality that their partnership meant that Hundertwasser collaborated with a politician.

Hundertwasser also designed several stamps for the United Nations in support of its peaceful diplomatic endeavors. On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1983, Hundertwasser designed six stamps, entitled “Treaty with Nature”, “The Right of Creation”, “Homo Humus Humanitas”, “Window Right”, “The Second Skin”, and “Right to Dream” (Fig. 325 Ibid. 326 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 68.
In his salute to the efforts of the U.N., Hundertwasser announced, “I salute this big endeavor of the United Nations to edit unique stamps of high quality because who else should and must give a spreading example of the world for a better life on earth in beautifulness, in harmony with the creativity of nature and man if not the United Nations, representing the hope of the people of this world where the longings of all people meet.”

As both the titles of the stamps and Hundertwasser’s announcement illustrate, the UN and Hundertwasser held the common goal of promoting world peace and diplomacy, and thus their joint effort to honor and advance their common objective did not require an extreme compromise from either Hundertwasser or the United Nations. Hundertwasser designed another three stamps for the U.N. in 1995 on the occasion of the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen. The fact that Hundertwasser sustained a positive relationship with the UN, one of the world’s largest and well-established organizations, illustrated the concession of his initial idea that all institutions should be met with distrust.

Yet, again, he utilized his relationship with the institution to fight for causes which he had come to hold dear. In this instance, Hundertwasser had clearly shifted his priorities and began to focus on the social environment as a whole, instead of the pure individualism that he once prioritized.

Hundertwasser also applied his renowned philatelic production to other opportunities to promote organically formed cultures and national identities. He designed stamps on behalf of the small countries of Cape Verde, Cuba, Luxembourg,
and Lichtenstein in support of the preservation of their unique cultures and national identities. He also created a stamp for the European cultural fair *Europalia*, when Austria hosted the event in 1987.\(^{330}\) The stamps continued to represent Hundertwasser’s longstanding artistic style, yet his philatelic actions still demonstrated that Hundertwasser had departed from his original philosophy in order to focus on its newer elements.

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Flags

Hundertwasser continued to promote his Fourth Skin Philosophy of social peace and harmony through his designs for Flags. However, no governments commissioned Hundertwasser to create a flag on their behalf. Instead, Hundertwasser’s flags represent his attempt to assert his influence into international politics and diplomacy without an invitation from an established institution.

Hundertwasser designed his first flag in 1978, as a plea for the resolution of the violent struggle in the Middle East between the Israelis and Palestinians. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict deeply impacted Hundertwasser, not only because it involved unnecessary violence and deaths, but because he felt a deep connection to both cultures. As a half-Jewish man, he naturally felt a connection to Israel and the suffering that the Jewish people had experienced throughout the Holocaust and the Second World War. Yet, he also felt a deep attachment to the Arab world, for his travels in Morocco and Tunisia awoke the idea of an earthly paradise in Hundertwasser for the first time, and thus profoundly influenced his utopian vision.\(^{331}\)

In 1978, Hundertwasser designed a

*Peace Flag for the Holy Land* (Fig. 13), which he accompanied with his *Peace Manifesto*, with the intention of reconciling the strife between the Jewish and Palestinian people. In his *Peace Manifesto*, Hundertwasser declared, “The abstract and unnatural and unstable borders between the Arab and Jewish people

become irrelevant and disappear…Two religions are represented. Two peoples are united for a new destiny. It is a flag of good will. The flag of tolerance towards the faiths and lifestyles of the other community.” In 1979, the Austrian Federal Chancellor, Bruno Kreisky, sent the flag and accompanying manifesto to the Middle-Eastern heads of state. King Hussein of Jordan and President Bourguiba of Tunisia replied to Hundertwasser with personal letters of thanks and appreciation. Shimon Peres, the Prime Minister of Israel, gave Hundertwasser a more direct reply, explaining that adopting a flag of peace would ‘be to put the cart before the horse.’ Peres was correct in explaining that achieving the peace that the flag symbolized was too complicated to be reconciled by simple tokens of good will. There was really no practical purpose for the flag; no one had commissioned it. Hundertwasser’s heart was in the right place in the sense that he wished to solve a conflict that had grasped with world’s attention, but his emblem of support did not possess the power to overcome such deep-seated unrest.

335 Restany, Hundertwasser, 72.
Hundertwasser also designed flags for New Zealand and Australia, not for the purpose of reconciling actual conflict, but as an attempt to cultivate a sense of cultural unity and identity between the settling and aboriginal populations. \(^{336}\) *Koru-Flag for New Zealand* and *Uluru-Flag for Australia* incorporated natural symbols from the countries’ environments, with which Hundertwasser hoped the colonial and aboriginal cultures in New Zealand and Australia could both identify, and thus create a cohesive and distinctive identity in both countries. For the *Uluru Flag* (Fig. 14), he featured the famous Ayers Rock in the form of a red half-circle. For the *Koru Flag* (Fig. 15), he depicted the *Koru*, the bud of the giant fern tree *mamaku*, in the form of a green spiral. The *Koru Flag* actually became accepted as a cultural symbol in the northern tip of New Zealand and can still be seen flying above gardens, houses, and local businesses. \(^{337}\)

Two decades later, Hundertwasser designed a flag for the independent East Timor, as “a symbol of hope beauty and happiness,” \(^{338}\) after the country experienced a spike in violence from the Indonesia army and its supporters against the people, as a

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result of their overwhelming vote for independence at the U.N. General Assembly.\textsuperscript{339}

In his manifesto accompanying the flag, Hundertwasser wrote, “Emerging from the horrors of oppression and manslaughter, a visible sign of pride and development into a bright and colorful future.”\textsuperscript{340} The Flag for East Timor was an act of good will, and was not meant to have an effect, and it did not hold symbolic significance to a wide array of people long after its original unveiling.

With the exception of the Koru Flag, Hundertwasser’s flag designs did not establish his legacy as his stamps did. Although his fame prompted politicians to respond to his gestures, his flags have not been adopted widely as symbols of peace and cultural unity. Without the promotion from established institutions, Hundertwasser did not have the same level of influence in the realm of international politics.

\textit{License Plates}

The fact the Hundertwasser became concerned with the style of Austria’s license plates is atypical in light of his early rhetoric against bureaucracy, uniformity, and standardization. Yet, in the late 1980s, Hundertwasser started a grass-roots campaign encouraging the Austrian government to return to its pre-war style license plate, which would more obviously distinguish Austrian cars from those of other European countries. Perhaps the suggestion that Austrian citizens individually alter their own license plates would have been more characteristic of early Hundertwasser. However, as he neared the final decade of his career, Hundertwasser’s standards for

creating change had evolved. His ability to magnify his impact through collective action had made him more ambitious, and he began to address issues of individuality on a national scale.

In his attempt to defend the heritage and cultural identity of his native Austria, Hundertwasser campaigned heavily for the state of Austria to return to its pre-Anschluss license plate design. Between 1930 and 1938, Austria’s license plates featured white writing on a black background, until Austria had to adopt the automotive regulations of the Third Reich. The Socialist’s bill based the need for the change on the increased brightness and reflection that the white plates with black writing offered. However, between 1988 and 1989, Hundertwasser devoted his efforts to proving that Austria’s original black plates were at least equally, if not more reflective as the German-style white plates, on which the multination 3M (Minnesota Scotch) held a monopoly.341 His campaign caused such a media frenzy that the Austrian parliament decided to vote on the matter. In the end, the Volkspartei voted in favor of the socialist plates, and thus Hundertwasser’s license plate designs would not be implemented. Hundertwasser still gleaned a partial victory from the crisis he invoked in government, since he demonstrated his ability to awaken of public opinion on the issues of national identity and inspire change at the grass-roots level.342 However, the fact that he chose the standard design of license plates—symbols of bureaucracy, regulation, and uniformity—as a means of asserting a nation’s cultural uniqueness still marks a departure from his initial anti-establishment beliefs.

341 Restany, Hundertwasser: The Painter-King with the Five Skins, 74.
342 Ibid.
Since Hundertwasser had presented his stance on ecology to the world through his 1972 appearance on Wünsch Dir Was and his notable public speeches and manifestos, he began to receive offers to collaborate on high-profile projects to promote the protection of the natural environment. Through his collaboration with national and local governments, politicians, and independent environmental organizations, Hundertwasser was able to design posters for a wide variety of ecological campaigns. Hundertwasser’s first opportunity to directly contribute to an ecological cause presented itself in 1974 when the nation of New Zealand accepted his designs for its “Conservation Week” poster campaign (Fig #). Like the designs for Hundertwasser’s many stamps, these posters were almost indistinguishable from a copy of one of Hundertwasser’s paintings, except for the “Conservation Week” title at the top and the “August 3-11, 1974, New Zealand” printed at the bottom. As Figure # illustrates, the almond eyes, the “soul-trees,” the spirals, and the bright colors present in his initial Conservation Week poster denote Hundertwasser as its creator.
Six years later, Hundertwasser’s trip to Washington, D.C. to plant 100 trees in Judiciary Square presented him with the opportunity to deliver another distinctly Hundertwasser-esque poster, entitled “Plant Trees—Avert Nuclear Peril”, to Ralph Nader for his anti-atomic campaign. That same year, Hundertwasser devised the poster “Arche Noah 2000—You are a Guest of Nature—Behave” on the occasion of his participation in the second Symposium on Ecology in Berlin and his lecture tour at technical universities in Vienna. In the following years, Hundertwasser designed “Save the Whales” and “Save the Seas” posters for Greenpeace, a “You are the Guest of Nature” poster for D.C.’s Centre for Environmental Education, a poster for the campaign to conserve the Hainburg wetlands, called “Hainburg—Die freie Natur ist unsere Freiheit”, and the poster “Among the Trees You Are at Home” in support of the afforestation of the desert in Israel. Through the creation of these posters, Hundertwasser was able to contribute to a wide array of ecological projects and work in collaboration with the governments and private organizations that valued them. Hundertwasser’s vibrant style of art proved to be useful in drawing attention to issues which he had grown to hold dear, for the colors and intricate design of the posters made each one difficult to miss.

Although Hundertwasser’s participation in the promotion of ecological conservation around the world hardly seems self-serving, his actions still fit into the pattern of partial contradiction that marked the second phase of his career. Though, again, his designs retained his lasting naïve style, spirals and other characteristic motifs, and use of bright colors, he still contradicted his earlier condemnation of

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politics and its powerful figures by working along side bureaucrats, career politicians, and established activist groups as he designed these posters. He even contradicted his later rhetoric, since even in his 1997 plea to dissuade Austria from joining the European Union, he continued to insist that politicians only feigned interest in the preservation of the environment, while they really remained “puppets of business interest.” Yet his newfound belief that an artist should also be an ecologist and the fact that designing such iconic posters would allow him to reach a wider audience gave him an incentive to contradict his own rhetoric.

*Media Campaigns*

Despite Hundertwasser intense distrust of the media throughout his early career, television and film appearances became in integral means through which he communicated his idea of his Third and Fifth Skins to the world. As the previous chapter noted, Hundertwasser made a documentary along with filmmaker Peter Schamoni as they sailed together on his boat *Regentag* between 1970 and 1971. They titled the documentary *Hundertwasser Regentag*, and the film captured an insightful collection of Hundertwasser’s principles and philosophical convictions. In 1972, the film premiered to the public in Cannes. Also in 1972, Hundertwasser made his first widely broadcasted television on the popular television show *Wünsch Dir Was* (Make a Wish) and presented his ideas for “tree tenants”, “widow rights”, and roof gardens in architecture to an audience of millions. Almost two decades later, Hundertwasser again made an appearance on television in New Zealand in a thirty

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minute documentary called the “Living Treasure Programme”, which depicted his contribution to ecology in architecture through the filming of his lectures in Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Auckland, and Blenheim that year. Only a year later in 1991, Hundertwasser again appeared in a television documentary, this time in Japan, that outlined Hundertwasser’s contributions to ecology through architecture. Television and films proved to be a useful tool for Hundertwasser to mobilize collective attention and support for his causes of individual expression and ecological protection.

The print media also gave Hundertwasser a platform to draw attention to missions that he held dear. As the media frenzy surrounding Hundertwasser’s drawing of the Hamburg Line, described in the second chapter, demonstrated, the press was a useful tool for attracting attention to Hundertwasser’s stints of activism, even if the artist complained that the press frequently misunderstood and misrepresented the event. Later in his career, Hundertwasser was able to publish numerous manifestos and letters in print. Yet, his newfound fame also gave him the opportunity to explain his philosophy to the public in collaboration with established media institutions. In 1982, Vogue magazine in Paris invited him to design a suit and conduct an interview on his Second Skin Philosophy. In the interview, Hundertwasser criticized the fleeting nature of fashion, and stated, “I am against conformism, against fashion, which changes every year. That was not so in former times. Fashion has only existed for about a hundred years; until then there was just

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348 Ibid.
clothing.”349 Throughout the article, he explained how he made each article of his own clothing, down to his mismatched socks. He explained, “That clothing is supposed to be symmetrical is one of those misconceptions of our typified society. In former times clothing was never completely symmetrical.”350 Hundertwasser elucidated that what the public deemed as his “creative clothing” really harkened back to clothing’s traditional means of self-production and style, and also reshaped his “Second Skin individuality.”351 For the popular fashion magazine, Hundertwasser’s appeal to return to independent, expressive, and unique forms of style may have simply served as an edgy interview, in which the magazine stepped out of its usual realm of couture and instead outline an artist with entirely contradictory beliefs. However, for Hundertwasser, the interview served as a platform from which he could reach a wide array of people on the topic of man’s Second Skin who may not have been attuned to those same teachings during his earlier, more anonymous portion of his career.

Hundertwasser’s utilization of the media to promote his message embodies yet another combination of consistencies and contradictions that characterized the second phase of his career. Hundertwasser utilized television, newspapers, and even a fashion magazine to address his original concerns for humanity, creativity, and individuality in clothing and architecture, yet he spread these ideas using the media that he had instructed his audience to meet with distrust during the 1950s and 60s.

350 Ibid.
351 Ibid.
Hundertwasser’s architecture perhaps his most enduring and famous legacy, for his housing project Hundertwasserhaus and his museum KunstHausWien are among the top most visited tourist attractions in Vienna. In fact, upon his visit to Vienna, Prince Charles of England requested first to visit Hundertwasser village, where both buildings reside. During the 1980s and 1990s, Hundertwasser undertook a wide variety of architectural projects, from hot spring spas, to child daycare centers and museums, to multi-denominational churches, to roadside restaurants, to the facades of waste incineration plants. However, due to the constraints of this work, and the author’s limited knowledge of architecture, this section will only examine his first and possibly most famous work, Hundertwasserhaus.

For Hundertwasser’s first attempt at architecture, he designed Hundertwasserhaus (Fig. 17), a public housing project in Vienna. As Hundertwasser had lamented in the past, architectural projects involve a great deal of consensus and approval from authorities and proprietors, and thus this project served to be Hundertwasser’s most challenging venture at collaboration yet. In his speech at the laying of the house’s cornerstone, he claimed, “The house was created in the lion’s den, so to speak, at the headquarters of the bureaucratic enemy, who not only turned out to be a friend, but an enthusiastic collaborator for a good cause. And this bureaucracy showed what it was capable of… there were no compromises.”

Hundertwasser had clearly entered the project with some amount of hesitation, and

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struggled a great deal to construct a building that truly embodied his organic vision of architecture, free of straight lines and full of vegetation. He succeeded in 1986 due to the help of a few Viennese public servants, who shared his goal.

In a city with less open-minded officials, Hundertwasserhaus would have most likely never reached fruition. Five years after Hundertwasser appeared on the popular Television show *Wünsch Dir Was* (Make a Wish), making his aspiration to become an architect clear to the world, the mayor of Vienna, Leopold Grazt, reached out to the artist in a letter on December 15, 1977, and offered him a plot of land upon which he could “build a house in line with [his] ideas and wishes (with trees and grass on the roof).”

The mayor’s attitude about the project was quite blithe, for in his answer as to why he offered Hundertwasser the chance to build his own public housing project, Grazt replied, “Why not? Here is an original man with some unusual ideas, but he believes in them and when he presents them to us, he is thoroughly convincing. Why not take him at his word? Why not put it to the test and see what happens?” However, Grazt’s experiment did not take place for a few years. The initial architect assigned to assist Hundertwasser failed to see eye-to-

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355 Ibid.
eye with the artist, and repeatedly presented him with models that resembled an ordinary, geometric structure, ridden with straight lines, and only conceding a few terrace gardens and some decorations on the façade. While such presentation offended Hundertwasser, the original architect’s desire to adhere to traditional building practices was understandable. Building the house that Hundertwasser envisioned involved undulating walls, uneven floors, irregular windows, tree tenants within the structure, irregular tiles, and roof gardens. Due to creative differences, Hundertwasser and the original architect went their separate ways in the fall of 1981, and a free-lance architect and employee of the Administration Department 19 of Vienna volunteered to assist Hundertwasser in creating the housing project that he imagined. The Alderman for urban development and renewal, Fritz Hofmann, also took an active role in making Hundertwasser’s dream come true.\textsuperscript{356} Thus, only with the help of Pelikan, Hofmann, and Gratz could Hundertwasser’s aspiration to become an architect become reality, softening his prejudice against bureaucrats to embrace longstanding architectural partnerships.

The elements of the housing project proved to be extremely important to Hundertwasser, down to the very last detail. Hundertwasser refused to use concrete, with the exception of a few essential elements of the building’s structural support, or any basic skeletal structure. Instead, he insisted that the house be constructed entirely of bricks, laid one-by-one in a deviating line. The walls were thus undulating, and the floors slightly uneven, but not to the point where they posed a risk to the inhabitants’ safety. Hundertwasser made sure that the floor did not exceed a gradient

of ten percent and remained smooth, while he guaranteed that the tiles would not be unevenly laid by more than a single millimeter.\footnote{Hundertwasser, “The Uneven Floor,” Hundertwasser Foundation Official Website. \url{http://hundertwasser.com/text/view-1.3.2.10?subtype=hw} (Accessed January 23, 2013).} In adherence to his strong belief in “window rights,” Hundertwasser designed thirteen different types of windows, of different sizes and stained and varnished in four different colors.\footnote{Schmied, Hundertwasser, 1928-2000, 308.} Naturally, Hundertwasser also included “tree tenants” in his design. He had them “dwell” on small balconies incorporated into the building’s exterior, in stainless-steel stands with one cubic meter of soil, behind the outer wall and in front of the innermost windows.\footnote{Schmied, Hundertwasser, 1928-2000, 308.} Finally, roof gardens became an important element of the building. A variety of vegetation grew in a layer of hummus approximately fifty centimeters to one meter thick inside a heavily insulated concrete shell, including fruits and vegetables fit for consumption,\footnote{Schmied, Hundertwasser, 1928-2000, 312.} as well as grass, bushes and trees.\footnote{Schmied, Hundertwasser, 1928-2000, 308.}

Hundertwasserhaus therefore gave Hundertwasser the opportunity to play an integral role in the structure and details of the building’s interior, and let him put many of the architectural elements which he had preached about for decades into practice, rather than simply allowing him to decorate the façade as the original architect intended.

Although Hundertwasserhaus accomplished a wide array of Hundertwasser’s artistic goals for architecture, as well as a few of his ecological goals, the artist repeatedly emphasized that the housing project was not an “organic” or “eco-house,” despite the rhetoric that the media frequently used to describe his work.\footnote{Schmied, Hundertwasser, 1928-2000, 312.} Many of
the ecologically friendly elements of architecture that Hundertwasser wished to implement could only be put into action after future technological development in renewable energy production and resource regeneration. To the great relief of the tenants, Hundertwasserhaus included no hummus toilets, biological water-processing facilities, or installations for collecting and processing biogas. The house therefore did not fulfill the artist’s dream of a self-sustaining residential unit. The house also did not manage its own energy needs, for photovoltaic panels for the collection of solar power or turbines for gathering wind power were still in the experimental stage of development. As a result, the house could not realistically include solar-generated hot water, heat-exchange mechanisms, or supply its own electricity, lighting, and heating.\footnote{Ibid.} Rather than being a realization of Hundertwasser’s architectural dream, Hundertwasserhaus more accurately constituted a step in the right direction towards his vision for the creative and eco-friendly architecture of the future.

Like Hundertwasserhaus, the majority of Hundertwasser’s buildings were not embodiments of his architectural ideal, but progressive steps in the direction of his ideal. As a result, Hundertwasser received a great deal of backlash from environmentalists, accusing him of harming the earth with his supposedly ecologically conscious architecture. Hundertwasser’s answer to the harsh reaction he received after he designed the façade of the Spittelau district heating station serves as a prime example of Hundertwasser’s general attitude towards his architectural projects and their relationship to the environment. In response to concerned citizen Hannes Minich’s accusation that Hundertwasser was in fact contributing to pollution
by aiding in the construction of the waste incineration plant, Hundertwasser replied, “your letter lacks a practical alternative for today.” In Hundertwasser’s mind, protests alone were not helpful to the cause of environmental protection, and that the only way to solve the problems of waste dumps and energy generation plants was to become a waste-free society, which used only sustainable and natural sources of energy. Instead, “Only a new society, respecting the true ecologically-creative values which we establish ourselves, can bring about gradual change.” However, since such an era had yet to dawn, Hundertwasser’s waste incineration and heat generation plant was the least harmful way of attending to Austria’s energy production and waste-processing problems. Ultimately, Hundertwasser explained that the incineration of waste would prevent Austria from pursuing more harmful forms of energy production, such as the burning of coal or the generation of nuclear energy, and the plant’s filter would significantly reduce the environmental harm of the waste’s emissions. The heat extracted would heat ten to fifteen percent of Vienna, and his design would absolve the industrial site from remaining a terrible eyesore. Like Hundertwasserhaus, but perhaps to a more sinister degree, Hundertwasser’s design for the Spittelau heating plant constituted a step in the right direction towards his utopian vision, but was not a perfectly ecologically sound construction.

His propensity for bringing cohesion to his actions in their aftermath makes his choice to collaborate on the design of the Spittelau waste incineration plant difficult to analyze. Perhaps Hundertwasser agreed to design the plant’s façade

365 Ibid.
366 Ibid.
merely because wanted to remain controversial, or maybe he wanted to put his
creative mark on yet another object. He could also have been honest when he said
that he was simply helping to promote the best viable option for Austria’s natural
environment as the nation struggled to address its growing waste management and
energy needs. However, what his involvement on the design of the Spittelau waste
incineration plant definitively demonstrated was his willingness to compromise his
originally strict anti-establishment principles. The parameters for change of his time
dictated that Hundertwasser’s goals could not be realized in their entirety, and
although Hundertwasser’s high-profile projects provided him with excellent
opportunities to assert his influence and promote his message, they do render him a
somewhat contradictory and inconsistent figure.
CONCLUSION

Despite what the existing literature claims, Hundertwasser’s philosophy did change over time. His vision for the future did not change drastically, but his means of reforming the world certainly took a distinct turn after he became a well-known figure. As official institutions and organizations began to recognize the artist and offer him opportunities to collaborate on high-profile projects, Hundertwasser’s general condemnation of establishments weakened.

In spite of the fact that commissions from established institutions increased Hundertwasser’s personal wealth, monetary gain did not drive his collaboration with them. While the specifics of Joram Harel’s financial resources were difficult to uncover, Pierre Restany notes that Harel was independently wealthy and became Hundertwasser’s patron in 1972, “thus relieving the artist of all material constraints.”367 Hundertwasser was no longer a starving artist, and he continued to design his own clothing, build his own home, and live largely from the vegetation that he grew or found himself, so the desire for more money and more consumer goods were not an incentive for Hundertwasser to compromise his innermost principles and beliefs. In fact, Hundertwasser used his newfound financial prosperity to fund many of his larger projects. For example, he volunteered to remodel the severely run-down Church of St. Barbara in Bärnbach, and when the fundraising campaigns proved to be insufficient, Hundertwasser donated a substantial amount of his own money to the project and designed posters to generate funds worldwide.368 Hundertwasser was also willing to give many of his original paintings away for free to those who could not

afford them until he found that not one of those paintings remained in the original recipient’s possession for more than a matter of weeks. 369 Money was certainly not the driving force behind his choice to collaborate during the latter phase of his career, for he undertook plenty of projects that did not promise any financial gain.

Instead, through his collaboration with governments, institutions, and professional experts, Hundertwasser hoped to spread his message and establish his legacy. As Hundertwasser mentioned in his diary entry about Egon Schiele, he believed before his career as an artist even began that he had a message to share with the world and he hoped desperately that he would not die before he achieved such a feat. By 1975, he believed he had achieved his goal of communicating his message to the world: “I have succeeded in throwing windows open. How I succeeded is difficult to explain. On no account by force, nor by calculation, nor by intelligence, nor necessarily by intuition, but almost as though sleep-walking. The work of the artist is very difficult because it cannot be done by force, diligence or intelligence.”370

Although Hundertwasser may not have been able to articulate why his art was so successful, his success as an activist certainly required intuition and diligence, for his topicality and ability to seize upon the opportunities of his time contributed to his widespread success. Beginning in the late nineteen-sixtiess and early nineteen-seventies, Hundertwasser simultaneously became famous as an artist and adopted the ecological and social concerns that major institutions and governments had only just begun to recognize. Without Hundertwasser’s intuition that the ecological movement

370 Restany, Hundertwasser, 74.
would become a major force of his day or his willingness to capitalize on his fame as an artist to attract the attention of establishments and powerful individuals to his causes, Hundertwasser would not have had the opportunity to undertake many of his most well-known and influential projects.

Although he was not alone in his anti-modernist beliefs in the nineteen-fifties and 60s, his rhetoric pitted the individual against the collective and the establishment. There was really nothing in his plan for change in which an organization or person with influence could collaborate. His proposals to end or reform mandatory education, eliminate building regulations, terminate mass production, and have the population adopt a lifestyle of near self-subsistence were unlikely to appeal to governments, media organizations, or established organizations involved in maintaining the laws and economic system that Hundertwasser sought to destroy, and Hundertwasser was not trying to appeal to them.

The global uprisings of the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies demonstrated that widespread revolts against the establishments were certainly a possibility, but were unlikely to enact lasting change. The result had to consist of a complete overthrow of modern society and its supporting institutions, or an eventual suppression of the revolts. As history demonstrates, the latter occurred and the likelihood that a direct confrontation with the prevailing economic and political systems would succeed in the future became even less likely. While Hundertwasser favored gradual, concrete steps towards change over a spontaneous revolution, he still wished for the same results as the revolutionaries of his period, and their unsuccessful confrontations with the establishment had shown that modern society, government,
and economics were there to stay for some time to come. The popularity of individualism was not necessarily on the decline, but the events of the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies certainly demonstrated that grassroots, individual action alone would not bring modern society to an end as Hundertwasser originally hoped.

Lucky for Hundertwasser, the nineteen-seventies through and the nineteen-nineties would provide him with other opportunities to be influential on behalf of causes in which he genuinely believed. Along with a large portion of the rest of the world, Hundertwasser reacted to the environmental and military threats of the period. Beginning in the nineteen-seventies, the general public became increasingly aware that the state of the natural environment was being threatened, and further scientific studies only contributed to ecological concerns in the coming decades. The threat of nuclear war continued to loom, and the increased use of nuclear energy only exacerbated the fear that the nuclear waste from energy production and production of nuclear weapons were linked. Hundertwasser shared these fears, and added them to his existing rhetoric criticizing modern society as a whole. Hundertwasser appeared to be a perfect advocate for the increasingly relevant causes of ecology and social peace, for the concern for the natural and social environment were natural extensions of his existing philosophy. Finally, Hundertwasser adopted concerns that governments, politicians, and prominent organizations wanted to support as well.

Established institutions were also in need of Hundertwasser’s help due to the divide between the wartime and post-war generations. As a member of the wartime generation, and an avant-garde figure who abstained from participating in the
uprisings of 1968, Hundertwasser was not a dangerous person to entrust with power and responsibility. Yet, he was still edgy enough to attract the attention and support of the younger, anti-establishment generation. Hundertwasser therefore served as a mediator between the establishments and the grass-roots activists, and brought them together to address certain issues.

Coincidentally, Hundertwasser’s traveling exhibitions and newfound relationship with his friend and manager Joram Harel had accelerated his career as an artist and made him famous around the world by the early-1970s. Hundertwasser’s renown was no longer excluded to the community of museums and art critics. In fact, those institutions increasingly ignored him as he developed a following outside of the artistic community and began to communicate directly with the public. From the nineteen-seventies on, Hundertwasser was a public figure, who attracted attention with his paintings, projects, and antics. He thus became useful to established institutions that wished to draw attention to new causes and concerns. As a result, Hundertwasser and a few institutions which saw eye to eye with him on the issues of architecture, social harmony, or ecology were able to develop a mutually beneficial relationship, in which the institutions would provide resources, and Hundertwasser would use his talents and following as an artist as part of the strategy for the dissemination of the message.

Hundertwasser’s transformation from an individualistic, fringe artist into a more cooperative successful artist therefore occurred because his fame as a painter and adoption of topical issues into his philosophy happened to occur within the same very short period of time, roughly between 1968 and 1972. As he became famous, he
attracted the attention and commissions of local and national governments, the United Nations, television and print media organizations, and universities, among many other organizations, despite his earlier claims those institutions were all pillars of a failing modern society. After Harel persuaded Hundertwasser of the benefits of working with established organizations to realize their common goals, the artist, too, was attracted to the offers by these institutions to spread his message to an even larger audience. The once intensely individualistic and unknown artist transformed into a successful one not out of greed or because he “sold out,” but because he could not turn down the opportunity of achieving his original and ultimate goal: influencing the world with his ideas and establishing his international legacy.
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