CYRIL LAWLOR COETZEE

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TITLE: GOETHE'S THEORY OF COLOURS : RUDOLF STEINER'S FOUNDATION FOR AN IMPULSE IN PAINTING

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MY INDEBTEDNESS TO THE HUMAN SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL FOR THE AID OF A BURSARY IS GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED

He to whom Nature
begins to reveal
her open secret
will feel an irresistible yearning
for her most worthy interpreter,
Art

GOETHE

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INTRODUCTION

In his influential treatise, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Wassily Kandinsky refers to Goethe's "prophetic remark" made in connection with the relationship between the arts in which Goethe had asserted that "painting must count this relationship her main foundation". Kandinsky went on to say that Painting in his day stood "at the first stage of a road by which she will, according to her own possibilities, make art an abstraction of thought and arrive finally at purely artistic composition".[1]

What he seems to have been suggesting is that form, colour and sound are differentiated expressions of a unifying spiritual content, that this spiritual content lives also somehow in the human soul and that it is the new task of the artist to awaken original creativity from out of this spirit by working consciously in creative empathy with the laws implicit in form, colour and sound. The extent to which this view of creativity is indebted to Goethe is only fully realised when it is discovered how closely Kandinsky's writings on colour recapitulate his. In an unpublished essay: Goethe's Theory of Colours : Its relation to some aspects in the history of Art, Michael Grimly argues that not only Kandinsky in Germany but also Chevreul, the colour-theoretician who was, in France, the leading light, in a technical sense, both of Delacroix and of the Impressionists simply repeats in his writings on Colour many of the ideas that Goethe had already formulated.

Writing about the "Spiritual Revolution" implicit in the new impulse in Art which he heralds Kandinsky mentions the growing lack of trust among his contemporaries in the methods of materialistic science "when it deals with those questions which have to do with 'non-matter' or matter which is not accessible to our minds".[2] He mentions M M Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society as a significant initiator of the reaction against this materialism. Interestingly, it was Rudolf Steiner who was the leader of the German branch of this society, and his lectures were attended regularly by Kandinsky, Mondrian and Jawelensky. Steiner's lifelong concern was the further development of Goethe's thinking. His preoccupation with Western (particularly Scientific) roots eventually

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1 Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, trans. M.T.H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), pp.27-28.

2 Ibid., p.13

caused him to lose favour with the Theosophical society from which he broke away in 1912 to form his own society. At the age of twenty-one he had been invited to edit the Scientific writings of Goethe for the new Kürschner edition of 1898 (Paul Overy[3] speculates that it was through this edition that Kandinsky familiarised himself with Goethe's Theory of Colours).

The following questions serve as pointers to the thesis of this essay and may be formulated in this order. Firstly: were not Klee, Kandinsky, Mondrian and many of their contemporaries early spokeman of a current of artistic pursuit that persists today, that may be best be described as a pursuit of the spiritual in an age of materialism? Secondly: Has not a new wave of materialism in some senses obscured the fact that this was the original motivation of early Modern Art? Thirdly, if Goetheanism as it was formulated and presented by Rudolf Steiner represents the real germ of this pursuit of the Spiritual as the Early Moderns first undertook it, can we today, by returning to re-examine Goetheanism, in any sense renew that original undertaking in the face of this new wave of materialism?

It is this re-examination of Goetheanism, the Theory of Colours and its application to painting that will form the main body of this discussion. However, Chapter 1 will examine the first two of the above questions. Thereafter follows a chapter which will examine the central ideas of Goethe's Theory of Colours. The third will focus on his *method* of studying Nature, on the epistomological implications of his Scientific Method, which provides a foundation for further discussion of the relationships between exact observation and free creativity, between Nature and Art, Sense and Idea, Matter and Spirit, Substance and Form, which are the concern of the fourth chapter.

Once this general picture of the creative interrelationship of Cosmos and Man has been described it will be possible (in the fifth chapter) to form a conception of how the painter becomes aware of these creative dynamics by working (and participating) in the field of colour powers.

The final chapter will be given to a discussion of Rudolf Steiner's contribution to the theory of colour and to the colour exercises for painters which he pioneered.

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3 Paul Overy, Kandinsky and the Language of the eye, (Paul Elek, 1969), p.101.

CHAPTER ONE

THE QUEST FOR THE SPIRITUAL IN MODERN ART

Is it true to say that the early Moderns were essentially in pursuit of a new relationship to the spiritual in Art? The crucial utterances of many of those artists working from around the turn of the century until the second world war indicate that they were.

Matisse sought the spiritual by working towards an Ideal of beauty which is timeless: "What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter".[4] De Chirico, on the other hand, shows a fascination for that quality of the spiritual that is mysterious, that surprises us with the unexpected. Part of the fascination for him seems to lie in the strange sense of the unpredictable that he feels in connection with the power that animates things, with the fact that this power seems to unite itself with us when we are creative, although in another sense we feel it to be alien, threatening:

> I remember one vivid winter's day at Versailles. Silence and calm reigned supreme. Everything gazed at me with mysterious, questioning eyes. And then I realised that every corner of the palace, every column, every window possessed a spirit, an impenetrable soul... At that moment I grew aware of the mystery which urges men to create certain strange forms. And the creation appeared more extraordinary than the creators.[5]

Max Beckman, in a manner characteristically Germanic defined his artistic aspirations in terms of the way in which the spirit reveals itself to thought: "What I want to show in my work is the idea which hides itself behind so-called reality. I am seeking for the bridge which leads from the visible to the invisible, like the famous Cabbalist who once said:

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4 Henri Matisse, "Notes of a painter", trans. Robert Goldwater and Marco Trreves, in Artists on Art : From the 14th to the 20th Century, ed. Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves (London : John Murray, 1976) p.413.

5 Giorgio De Chirico, "metaphysical Art", in Goldwater and Treves, Artists on Art, p.440.

'If you wish to get hold of the invisible you must penetrate as deeply as possible into the visible'".[6]

From a comparison of these three utterances one can begin to glimpse a consistent element in modernism: Every artist defines his pursuit in terms of the bias of his particular personality, which is apparently wholly different from everyone else's. But on the other hand it is always something transcendent, physically intangible, but spiritually vital that is seen to motivate the artistic pursuit.

Although Modern Artists would seem to be reacting in this way against the Scientific view of man as a creature built up deterministically by the cause and effect laws of a material necessity, many of them embraced science inasmuch as it offers man a more conscious thought-relationship to the workings of nature. Mondrian, for example, wrote in 1937:

> The Laws which in the culture of art have become more and more determinate are the great hidden Laws of nature which Art establishes in its own fashion. It is necessary to stress the fact that these Laws are more or less hidden behind the superficial aspect of nature. Abstract art is therefore opposed to a natural representation of things. But it is *not opposed to nature*, as is generally thought."[7]

What are these laws that are "not opposed to nature" and yet somehow behind or higher than the material laws of cause and effect? We must assume that these are Spiritual Laws that are being referred to. Mondrian, like other modern artists, wishes to study Laws, to do so as seriously and consciously as a scientist, but he is not content only to preoccupy himself with external sensory observation. Important to realise in this connection is the fact that the term "Abstraction" as applied to the work of these artists has been misleading. When these artists do not reproduce the countenance of physical reality it is not because they simply enjoy 'abstracting it' in the sense of simplifying it, but because they wish to penetrate to and work in accordance with the

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6 Max Beckman, "On his painting', in Goldwater and Treves, Artists on Art, pp.447-8

7 Piet Mondrian, "Figurative and non-Figurative Art", in Goldwater and Treves, Artists on Art, p.428.

concealed laws or powers behind the physical countenance. Léger made this clear in a talk which he gave in 1935 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York:

> Subject-matter being at last done for, we were free.... This freedom expresses itself ceaselessly in every sense. It is, therefore, possible to assert the following: that colour has a reality in itself, a life of it's own; that a geometric form has also a reality in itself, independant and plastic.
>
> Hence, composed works of art are known as 'abstract', with these two values reunited.
>
> They are not 'abstract' since they are composed of real values: colours and geometric forms. There is no abstraction".[8]

Many of the assertions of the Futurists, although often crudely programmatic, give expression to this sense in which the artist saw himself as working in harmony with the Scientific consciousness of his time. Boccioni wrote that one of the innovations of Futurism was "the translation of objects according to the *lines of force* which characterize them, by means of which an absolutely new plastic dynamism is achieved.".[9] Another Futurist, Gino Severiri, wrote: "One of the main causes of our artistic decline lies beyond doubt in the separation of Art and Science. Art is nothing but humanized Science".[10] Elsewhere he wrote:

> "An art which does not obey fixed and inviolable laws is to true art what a noise is to a musical sound. To paint without being acquainted with these fixed and very severe laws is tantamount to composing a symphony without knowing harmonic relations and the rules of counterpoint".[11]

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8 Fernand Léger, "The New Realism", in Goldwater and Treves, Artists on Art, p.424.

9 Umberto Boccioni, "Futurist Manifestoes", in Goldwater and Treves, Artists on Art, p.437.

10 Gino Severini, "Art and Imitation", in Goldwater and Treves, Artist on Art, p.437.

11 Ibid., p.438.

Franz Marc, Paul Klee and Kandinsky were artists who saw themselves as exact metaphysical scientists. Their statements imply that they saw their works to be created through precise observation on a mataphysical plane through the use of metaphysical organs of perception. Franz Marc wrote:

> Only today can art be metaphysical, and it will continue to be so. Art will free itself from the needs and desires of men. We will no longer paint a forest or a house as we please or as they seem to us, but *as they really are.*[12]

But, one may ask, how seriously can we take this kind of science that wishes to speak of higher observation on metaphysical planes and which doesn't seem to distinguish between the content of man's subjective creations, on one hand, and objective observations of a content that is definitely external to man on the other? For surely this is the crux of the matter, the issue over which Art and Science have come to be viewed as resting on different assumptions about reality. How is it possible for someone to speak of something as being governed by objective laws, laws which ramify through the Natural World, creating and building it up, if he is himself creating this something on a canvas?

In the writings of these men we find suggestions of an answer. In his lecture On Modern Art delivered at the museum in Jena in 1924, Paul Klee said that the artist

> does not attach such intense importance to natural form as do so many realist critics, because, for him, these final forms are not the real stuff of the process of natural creation. For he places more value on the powers which do the forming than on the final forms themselves.... Then he permits himself the thought that the process of creation can today hardly be complete and he sees the act of world creation stretching from the past to the future. Genesis eternal![13]

The idea which necessarily follows from this is the Goethean one, that man is a co-creator with Nature: that in the process of creation man

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12 Franz Marc, "Aphorisms", in Goldwater and Treves, Artists on Art, p.445.

13 Paul Klee, On Modern Art, trans. Paul Findlay (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1948), p.45.

discloses something that was before this act simply concealed from him behind nature's external (physical) countenance. Human creativity is a process that is real in the same sense that Nature's creativity is: through exercising it the individual human being progressively unites his creative activity with the ordering-processes of World-Reality. In other words there is a higher spiritual level of reality which creates within nature and which man is able to consciously engage with in his own nature during the act of creation, as a higher part of his being. The distinction between our subjective wills and the 'will' of Nature that outwardly appears to be so absolute is progressively cancelled as we move toward freely creating out of that vital impulse which is, at once, the creative foundation of ourselves and of the world.

Werner Haftmann has written eloquently of this affinity between Klee and Goethe and quotes the statement which the latter made in a letter to Herder in 1787 where Goethe speaks of his pursuit of the primal form of the plant. In inward creative possession of this primal form "one could go on interminably inventing plants which, even if they do not in fact exist, might well do so without being *merely painted or poetic shadows and apparitions, for they would have an inner truth and necessity*"[14] (Italics my own).

The early modern artists mentioned above, all possessed an intuition that the artist finds his relation to the World-Reality (Spirit) or World-Harmony in the *act of creation itself* and that because of this inward simultaneity with Nature's will his works are not any longer reproductions but *Productions*. As Corrigan[15] pointed out in relation to the contemporary scene, the theory of Art changes from being 'centripetal' to being 'centrifugal'. Cézanne did not say that Art reproduced the harmony of Nature, he said: "Art is a harmony *Parallel* to Nature" (Italics my own). There is no essential difference between the gist of this remark and Paul Klee's: "Art does not reproduce the visible: it renders visible"[16] or Braque's remark: "One does not imitate

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14 Werner Haftmann, The Mind and Work of Paul Klee (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., Mcmliv), p.155.

15 Corrigan, "The collapse of critical judgement", quoted in E. Verwey, "Criterial in Art Criticism" (Typewritten), p.16.

16 Regrettably I am unable to cite sources for precisely this statement of Paul Klee's or for the previous one of Cézanne. A very similar remark of Klee's, however, is cited in Hans L. Jaffé, Klee, Twentieth-century masters (London: Hamlyn, 1971), p.28.

appearances: the appearance is the result".[17]

We can now move on to the second question: How have contemporary currents deviated from or maintained this pursuit?

Perhaps the most striking development that can be seen to take place as we move from an examination of early modern to contemporary modern art is an increasing tendency for artistic productions to be either *extremely* conceptual (to the point of aridity) or else an extreme manifestation of will-force (to the point of actual bodily violence on the part of the artist). A moderate dualism of this kind is inevitable inasmuch as human beings are naturally creatures both of Thought (conception) and of will (active involvement) and even in early Modern Art this natural dualism was evident in the two major orientations of cubism-constructivism, on one hand, and Expressionism on the other. But in contemporary art there has been an increasing tendency for artists to be committed either to conceptualising to such an extent that they consider material activity of any kind inhibiting and unnecessary, or to be so committed to 'action' that new 'happenings', revolutions and even suicides are foregrounded with an hysterical compulsion that precludes creative effectiveness (in an affirmative sense) in the broader context of culture. The dialectical 'play' between thinking and acting that Schiller saw to be the necessary condition for art to be nurtured in human feeling is here seen to be paralysed. The two poles which define the zone of 'play' in which creativity is engendered are torn asunder and remain impotent extremities, pointers to a prosaic epoch in consciousness. This is the negative aspect, that which makes us ask what became of all the rhetoric about the spiritual goals of art among the modern pioneers.

Before going on to consider the sense in which the pursuit of these goals *can* be seen to have continued we may remind ourselves what we have observed. The early modern artists were seeking

1) A new Freedom from the inhibiting shackles of the external, merely physical aspect of Nature, and
2) A more conscious (and Scientific) union with the inner, Spiritual Laws and workings of Nature.

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17 Georges Braque, "Reflections on Painting", in Goldwater and Treves, Artists on Art, p.422.

The first is the expression of a reaction against materialism and the second of a striving to develop Spiritual Creativity through conscious thought. In contemporary art both of these quests can be seen to remain, even if they are only unconsciously motivated and pursued often through desperate measures, as conditions seem to make it much more difficult for artists to fulfill them.

The first, the reaction against materialism expresses itself most conspicuously in those artists whose work amplifies what was, in early Modernism, the Expressionistic current: in the work of the action-painter Jackson Pollock and his more figurative French and English counterparts, Jean Debuffet and Francis Bacon. The existential torment of the individual alienated in an increasingly mechanistic world is their almost pathological preoccupation. What in the work of these figures still remained a reaction against or commenting upon materialism has in Psychedelic art a further development: the artist becomes an escapist, reaching, with the aid of drugs and stimulants for spiritual dimensions and thus renouncing, in despair, any self-consciously responsible passage to these dimensions.

The second of the original aims, the quest for a more conscious (and Scientific) engagement of thought with the Laws of Nature is also still pursued, but it runs into barren terrain for the same reason: the world-conception implicit in the general consciousness of present humanity is dominated by a Science which formulates hypothetical explanations of the Universe based *purely* on the evidence of the physical senses. The eminent Scientist, the late Professor A Eddington characterised this tendency in his Philosophy of Physical Science: "ideally, all our knowledge of the Universe could have been reached by visual sensation alone - in fact by the simplest form of visual sensation, colourless and non- stereoscopic".[18]

When Paul Klee or Goethe spoke of 'inner Laws of Nature' their meaning was not restricted to those cause and effect patterns that are crudely visible to the physical eye, but the Scientific assumptions that our generation has imbibed at school, often in the form of Dogmas, work on the unconscious minds of the young. Long before their critical powers

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18 A Eddington, Philosophy of Physical Science, quoted in Ernst Lehrs, Man or Matter (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., mcmliv), p.29)

are mature enough to question these Dogmas the half-conscious view that the world is a soulless machine and a random absurdity has left it's mark on them.

The Abstract formalism of American artists is only superficially akin to the formalism of Klee or Mondrian: a more strongly materialistic way of seeing is implicit in their aggregates of rectilinear shapes. In minimal art, in the neutral blankness of forms which have neither intrinsic vitality nor point to a vitality beyond themselves, Formalist-structuralism celebrates only the conceptual elimination of conception: abstract thought has abstracted itself to death. John Barth, America's principle exponent of the Post-Modernist "Literature of exhaustion" characterizes this paralysis in this passage from his novel Lost in the Funhouse where the narrator of the story is discussing his inability to write a story. The elaboration of this realisation of impotence forms the whole content of the work:

> The final possibility is to turn ultimacy, exhaustion, paralysing self-consciousness and the adjective weight of accumulated history.... Go on. Go on. To turn ultimacy against itself to make something new and valid, the essence whereof would be the impossibility of making something new. What a nauseating notion.[19]

Perhaps the positive aspect of these arts is ultimately in the fact that they make us question again our assumptions and Dogmas, that through such questioning a transformation may take place in our thinking habits. Man's ability to create, his vitality, his Art is surely dependant on the vitality of his thought. Surely they have been wrong who have said that our art is dead because it turns to ideas for it's starting point. It is dead Art, not because it turns to these ideas as such, but because these ideas themselves are dead.

Duchamp made us realise that what is fundamentally created in an artwork is not a *material artefact*: increasingly critics and historians of Art like Corrigan, Gablik and A. Hauser are seeing the primary importance of our contemporary art to lie in the fact that it points to a trans-

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19 John Barth, Lost in the Funhouse (New York : Bantam Books, 1968), p.106.

formation in cognition and in consciousness. Many more scientists and writers are detecting a new impetus toward more spiritual avenues of thought in contemporary culture. The works of Theodore Roszak (Where the Wasteland ends) Maralyn Ferguson, (The Aquarian conspiracy), Fritjoff Capra (The Tao of Physics) Lyall Watson (Supernature) and countless others point to this trend. The physicist, Sir James Jeans, in A new Background for Science, wrote:

> The external world has proved to be farther removed from the familiar concepts of everyday life than nineteenth-century science has anticipated, and we are now finding that every effort to portray it brings us up immediately against concepts which we can neither picture, imagine, nor describe .... Physical Science sets out to study a world of matter and radiation, and finds that it cannot describe or picture the nature of either even for itself.[20]

He says later "that the stream of knowledge flows toward a non-mechanical reality,... that corporeal matter becomes a creation and manifestation of mind".[21]

Another celebrated scientist, Werner Heisenberg, in a famous address (published under the title: Changes in the foundations of Natural Science) speaks of Goethe as the prophet and herald of a new attitude to Science:

> The renouncing of life and immediacy, which was the premise for the progress of Natural Science since Newton, formed the real basis for the bitter struggle which Goethe waged against the physical optics of Newton. It would be superficial to dismiss this struggle as unimportant; there is much significance in one of the most outstanding men directing all his efforts to fighting against the development of Newtonian optics.[22]

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20 James Jeans, A New Background for Science, quoted in Ernst Lehrs, Man or Matter, p.64.

21 Ibid.

22 Werner Heisenberg, Changes in the foundation of Natural Science, quoted in Ernst Lehrs, Man or Matter, p.28

Further, Heisenberg remarks:

> If one should wish to reproach Goethe, it could only be for not going far enough - that is for having attacked the *views* of Newton instead of declaring that the whole of Newtonian physics - optics, mechanics and the Law of Gravitation - were from the devil.[23]

Rudolf Steiner, at the age of twenty-five, published a work entitled: A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception in which he laid the epistomological foundation for his life's work in Anthroposophy, the 'Goethean-Science' which he developed. In this book of his a method of thought is formulated which illuminates and gives direction to the genuine, though often obscured, currents of striving in the culture of our century, and, still more pertinantly, of our "exhausted generation".

Rudolf Steiner often spoke of Goethe's Theory of Colours as the model, in terms of its *method*, of how a scientific treatise should ideally be constructed. He also said that it could very profitably be read by painters. It contains countless empirical observations of colour occurrences which point implicitly to Laws of Creation, or natural compulsions, which the painter can allow to speak to him and lead him into co-creation with her. For Goethe, Art is "Science applied to action": what more appropriate paradigm can there be for artists today, seeking their way between the extremes of arid conception and pathological activity.

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23 Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FOUNDATION OF GOETHE'S COLOUR THEORY

Some of the essential differences between Goethe's theory of colour and the Newtonian one, which continues to dominate scientific orthodoxy today, are hinted at in the remarks which Goethe makes in the introduction to his work. He does not begin with a hypothesis about what colour is. He contents himself with examining how it arises:

> Definitions... we would for the present evade, and would appeal to our inquiry itself, where we have circumstantially shown how colour is produced. We have only therefore to repeat that colour is a law of nature in relation with the sense of sight.".[24]

From the outset Goethe stresses the fact that colour is not something which can be spoken of apart from human experience. He was concerned about the fact that:

> The theory of colours... has suffered much, and its progress has been incalculably retarded by having been mixed up with optics generally, a science which cannot dispense with mathematics; whereas the theory of colours, in strictness, may be investigated quite independantly of optics.[25]

Newton and his successors belong to a current of scientific pursuit which strives to speak of phenomena as they are apart from subjective human interferance. Necessarily, therefore, in their treatment of colour they seek to exclude considerations involving the colour-seeing faculty of the eye. This school is primarily concerned to make optical phenomena accessible to measurement and mathematical treatment so that it can be spoken of as part of a unified body of mechanical interdependant Laws. Each colour is associated with a particular number, the wavelength of which is then thought of as constituting the 'real' basis of the colour, colours as we see them being thought of as mere 'illusions of the senses'.

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24 Johan W von Goethe, Theory of colours, trans, C. L. Eastlake (U.S.A.: M.I.T. Press, 1973), P.Liv.

25 Ibid., p.287.

In Goetheanistic Science, which rests on entirely different epistomological grounds, the rôle of the human senses is given a different status. If we turn to Goethe, therefore, for a more artistically satisfying and usable explanation of colour phenomena it is not to say that his conception is scientifically invalid. Here it is the evolution and explication of his colour theory that is to be treated: discussion will be directed at a later stage to the question of how the theory stands in relation to the broader goals of Art and Science.

Goethe indicated that it was actually through his desire to discover objective laws of aesthetics that he turned to a study of colour. Goethe noted that, except for a general distinction between *warm* and *cold* colours, artists resisted concepts and theories about colour, although in areas like perspective and other aspects of draughtsmanship a theoretical training was held to be of immense importance.

Initially he had no reason to dispute the Newtonian doctrine of colours in which the basic claim about colour was the idea that colours, in their totality, are contained in the light, except that such a theory did not deal with the qualities of colours as they are actually experienced. As Goethe points out in his Introduction:

> To the practical man, to the dyer.... our labour must be altogether acceptable.... The conclusions of men are very different according to the mode in which they approach a science or branch of knowledge....
>
> Again.... in entering this theory from the side of painting, from the side of aesthetic colouring generally we shall be found to have accomplished a most thankworthy office for the artist.[26]

Therefore it was with a view to answering different kinds of questions than he felt had been answered by the Newtonian doctrine that Goethe decided to examine colour phenomena for himself. For this purpose he borrowed some prisms from Büttner, a physicist in Jena. When he came to use these prisms he was immediately struck by the fact that if one looks through one of them at an unbroken white surface, the uniformity of the

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26 Ibid.

white does not fragment into colour-phenomena as one would expect in terms of the claim of Newton's theory. Only where something dark interrupted the white surface, at the point where the dark shape bordered on the light, did a colour phenomenon appear. Goethe wrote of this experience:

> It did not need any long consideration for me to recognize that a boundary or edge is necessary to call forth the colours, and immediately said aloud, as though by instinct that the Newtonian doctrine is false".[27]

At once Goethe set out to trace the error in the Newtonian doctrine by systematically redoing all the experiments layed out in Book I of Newton's Optics. He hoped that by rearranging the experiments in a different way he could discover how the facts might confirm the view that the spectrum arises not out of the mere splitting up of light, but rather out of a dynamic relationship between light and darkness. Goethe was convinced that the various colour phenomena are the secondary expressions of variations in the Primary relationship between Light and Darkness. In order to clearly define colour relationships he saw his task as one of studying them in Nature to see how they naturally arise. He asked himself the question: where do colour occurrences in Nature arise out of light and darkness? Through the various kinds of experiments which he undertook with different colour phenomena one can consistently trace this guiding idea.

Goethe distinguished three modes in which colour appears and devoted each of the first three parts of his treatise to one of these modes. He considered, in the first instance, "colours, as far as they may be said to belong to the eye itself, and to depend on an action and reaction of the organ".[28] In this section he examines the behaviour of the eye under different conditions asking, for instance, what occurs when light and darkness act on the eye. Colour phenomena of this class he termed *Physiological colours*. Secondly, he examines what he calls the *Physical colours* which are those to be "perceived in, or by means of colourless mediums".[29] These originate in material processes and endure only until these processes finish. Examples of such colour-phenomena include

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27 Quoted in Ernst Lehrs, Man or Matter, p.246

28 Goethe, Theory of Colours, p.lV

29 Ibid.

the *Catoptrical colours* (those caused by reflection of light), the *Paroptrical* (those arising through diffraction), the *Epoptical* (those colours which arise on the surface of bodies which would otherwise be colourless, for instance the play of colours on a soap-bubble or on oil as it floats on water). Thirdly, he examines that Class of colours which we can consider "as belonging to particular substances"[30] which he calls the *Chemical colours*. Here he asks the question: What causes material objects to be coloured as they are?

He thus moves, in his examination, from considering colour in it's most fleeting form and in immediate relation to human physiology, to considering relatively transient external manifestations and finally those colour phenomena which are fixed or permanent.

In the Fourth and Fifth parts of the treatise he goes on to discuss, respectively, the General Characteristics of colour as they have emerged from observation and the Relation to other pursuits of the discipline of colour theory. In the final (Sixth) part he deals with what he calls the Moral (or sensory-ethical) associations of colours. Here he discusses colour as it is psychically experienced by human beings.

This last section together with the first one, The Physiological colours are the ones that have the most direct bearing on artistic considerations, and it is on the basis particularly of these ideas that Rudolf Steiner developed his colour-exercises for painters. Here colour can begin to be understood as a language or script through which nature expresses her utterances or laws. The explication of the laws of this language in the form of Ideas is the task of Goethe's theory: learning the laws of this language so that it can become a medium for artistic creation is one of the tasks of the painter. For as Goethe writes,

> .... the eye sees no form, inasmuch as light, shade and colour together constitute that which to our vision distinguishes object from object, and the parts of an object from each other. From these three, light, shade, and colour, we construct the visible world, and thus, at the same time, make painting

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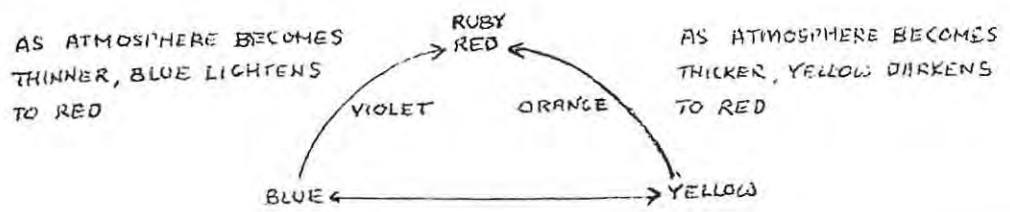
30 Ibid.

possible, and art which has the power of producing on a flat surface a much more perfect visible world than the actual one can be.[31]

Reserving discussion of these two parts until we examine the specific tasks of the painter let us turn to a discussion of the dioptrical phenomena. Here Goethe describes natural observations which, simply through the way they are set down, point conclusively to the basic secret of the relationship between Light and Dark, on one hand, and colour phenomena on the other. He observes first that space is filled with a "light-transmitting, semi-transparent medium" which varies between a state of extreme opacity (when the atmosphere is densely white) and a state of pure transparency. He then says: "At whatever point short of opacity we arrest the thickening medium, it exhibits simple and remarkable phenomena when placed in relation with Light and Darkness".[32]

It is this atmospheric medium, lit by the sun, that makes the sky, which is actually Dark, look blue. Similarly it is the atmosphere which makes the sun, which is actually light, look yellow. The sky is lightened to blue and the sun is darkened to yellow by the same medium. And the more dense the air (with moisture) the whiter the blue becomes and the darker the yellow. Out of the primary polarity of Light and Dark the opposition of Blue and Yellow was seen by Goethe to arise as a secondary polarity. He observed that by acting in one instance as a lightening and in the other as a darkening element Air could bring about an interplay of Light and Dark. In blue and yellow, therefore, Goethe finds the basic polarity of colour phenomena. While blue is the colour closest to darkness, yellow is the colour closest to light. He notes further that, in the case of the sun, the denser the medium becomes through which it is seen, the deeper the yellow colour grows until, passing through orange we arrive at a ruby-red. On the other hand if one examines the dark sky through an ever more transparent medium it deepens from blue into violet (and again towards ruby-red).



31. Ibid., Lii

32 Ibid., pp.60-1.

Goethe then traces this pattern through various related observations, for example that of smoke (also a semi-transparent medium) which appears yellow or reddish before a light ground, but blue before a dark one. Another example is the following: "Panes of glass throw a yellow light on objects through those parts where they happen to be semi-opaque, and these same parts appear blue if we look at a dark object through them".[33]

Goethe calls this leading pattern of appearance a "primordial and elementary phenomenon", and goes on to state what should be understood by this term. He uses it to refer to "those higher rules and laws"[34] which explain the insulated phenomena which in their first appearance to us seem arbitrary. They are not given to us as mere hypotheses but are, rather, gradually laid bare for higher perception:

> Such an original phenomenon is that which has lately engaged our attention, we see on the one side light, brightness; on the other darkness, obscurity: we bring the semi-transparent medium between the two, and from these contrasts and this medium the colours develop themselves, contrasted in like manner but soon through a reciprocal relation, directly tending again to a point of union (Red).[35]

To express that quality of semi-tranparency in mediums which enable them to act in one case as lightening, in the other as darkening elements Goethe used the phrase "Trübe" which Ernst Lehrs suggests become adopted as a term among English practitioners of Goethean Science, as no English word closely approximates its meaning. After establishing that Light, Darkness and Trübe were necessary for colour to appear in space Goethe examined the question of how the prism, as a 'Trübes-medium', brings light and dark into interplay where they meet at a boundary.

He noted that if one observed a border phenomenon through a prism where the lighter mass was nearer the base of the prism the colours blue and violet would appear at the edge. Contrariwise, if one observed a similar

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33 Ibid., p.33

34 Ibid., p.72

35 Ibid.

border where the dark mass was near the base of the prism the colours yellow and Red would appear. Ernst Lehrs writes that "where the colour blue appeared darkness could be seen lightening by a shifting of the border between light and darkness in the direction of darkness". Where yellow appeared one could see "light being darkened by a shifting of the image in the direction of light" [Diag. A].

Goethe's original conception of yellow and blue as representing polar ends of the spectrum was based on observation of nature but it was borne out by further observation with the use of the prism, whereby the two ends of the spectrum could be observed to arise as independant border-phenomena. In his treatise, Goethe includes diagrams which show that if one observes the manner in which a light beam meets a prism, it can be seen that it is in fact the border-relationship between the light areas (of the beam) and the dark areas above and below it that determines the colour appearances [Diag. B]. It is only where the narrowness of the aperture through which the light is directed to meet the prism causes a proximity of the two edges that the two spectral appearances coincide or overlap to make a continuous band of colours. Therefore, because green was the result of this overlapping or uniting of yellow and blue it appeared to Goethe erroneous to simply place the green into the continous band of the spectrum, in line with them, as if it were an occurrence of the same type as is customary in the tradition of Newtonian Physics.

This realisation that green is a colour arising midway between blue and yellow and holding, as it were, a kind of balance between them confirmed Goethe's intuition that objective laws of nature come to expression within us through the way in which we psychologically experience colours, for just as in blue we experience a certain coldness and in yellow, a certain warmth, in green we feel ourselves in a condition of rest or neutrality.

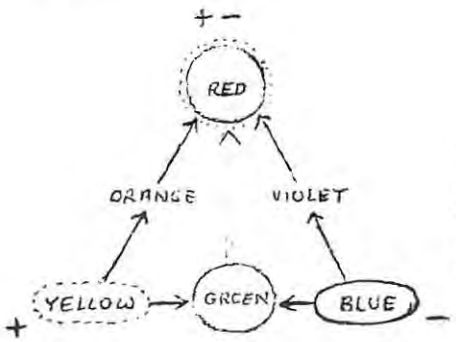
It occurred to Goethe that this particular spectral band was not the only possibility that could arise from an arrangement of the two independant border phenomena. It was also possible to conceive of a kind of 'negative spectrum' in which the order of the two borders is reversed so that two light areas enclose a dark one [Diag. C]. The spectral appearance now moves from blue, at one side, into violet, across an uncoloured area of darkness in the centre toward red and into yellow.

When an overlapping or uniting of the two ends occurs in this case, another colour appears. Goethe observed this colour to be *"pure red"* or *"peach-blossom"*. This he places opposite to green and declares it also to represent an equilibrium. But whereas green arose out of the union of colour poles in their *initial* form, peach-blossom arises out of them in their *heightened* form.

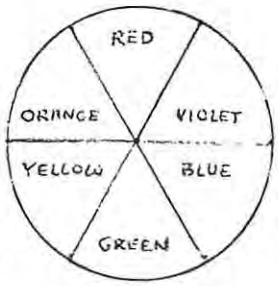
In the section where he discusses the General Characteristics of colours Goethe formulates more clearly some of the implications of the preceding observations. Generally colour can be seen to be "determined towards one of two sides".[36] He states that this contrast should be thought of as a polarity which can be spoken of by means of the terms Plus and Minus:

Plus	Minus
Yellow	Blue
Action	Negation
light	shadow
Brightness	Darkness
Force	weakness
Warmth	Coldness
Proximity	Distance
Repulsion	Attraction
Affinity with Acids	Affinity with Alkalies

He then explains that if these principles are combined so that "the union again acquires a specific character"[37] and becomes a quality in it's own right we call it *green*, in which colour a perfect balance between darkness and brightness exists. However, if we intensify these poles *yellow* darkens into *Red* while *Blue*, on the other hand, lightens into *Red*. In this *Red* the transformed poles of *yellow* and *blue* meet again in a higher ("augmented") equilibrium so that *Red* is seen as a kind of transformed green.



PATTERN OF TRANSFORMATIVE RELATIONSHIPS



PATTERN OF COMPLEMENTARY HARMONIES (COLOUR WHEEL)

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36 Ibid., p.276

37 Ibid., p.227

CHAPTER THREE

GOETHE'S METHOD OF STUDYING NATURE

Goethe's manner of studying nature differs greatly from that of other scientists. Implicit in his method is the view that man is bound up with Nature in an *inward* as well as in an *outward* way. Just as man is aware of an inwardness to his own being which motivates his outer life, so is the great totality of Nature (of which man is a part) thought of by Goethe as having, in addition to her outer aspect, an inner being. The task of human culture, as Goethe conceives it, is to find the correct relationship between the inner and outer of man and the inner and outer of Nature, for these aspects are dynamically interdependant. Nature culminates her outward plan by unfolding her inward essence before man's thought-perception; man fulfills his task by cultivating in thought what she thus unfolds, so that his activity, fertilized by this thought becomes a higher continuation of hers.

This picture differs greatly from that held by philosophers like Hume and Kant who are responsible for establishing the view of man as a being limited in consciousness essentially to the rôle of a spectator or onlooker on the world; a conception still implicit in contemporary orthodox science.

Hume established the philosophical justification for a view of man as a being whose consciousness is fundamentally separate from the external world. Man receives from the world unrelated fragments, distinct perceptions, but nothing objectively interrelating these 'parts' can, according to Hume, ever enter his consciousness. Unifying conceptions arrived at in thought may be useful as ordering devices but they can never be thought of as anything but subjectively constructed hypotheses.

Kant set his philosophy in opposition to that of Hume because he wanted to prevent Humean shepticism from undermining the Ethical life. He did this by establishing a schism between the capacities of human Reason and the Ethical life, by claiming that there are definite boundaries to the intellect, that it is impermissable for the intellect to strive to attain insight into the Ethical in man. According to Kant man does have Ethical obligations but he only finds his proper relation to these through obedient submission. However, inasmuch as Kant places these boundaries

on the capacity of human reason his philosophy is really a further development rather than a contradiction of Humean skepticism. For, according to Kant our ideas are merely shadow pictures evoked in consciousness through sense-perception: any ability to perceive *real* connections between distinct existences is forever denied to us.

It is on the basis of assumptions, similar to this that the Inductive scientific method operates. In this method the stress is on arriving at Universals which might eventually be thought to hold good in every instance. Rudolf Steiner characterizes this method as follows:

> It observes a phenomenon which comes about in a definite manner under given conditions. Again it sees the same phenomenon occur under similar conditions. From this it concludes that there exists a general law according to which this occurrence must take place, and postulates this law as such. Such a method remains entirely external to the phenomena. It does not penetrate into the depths. It's laws are generalisations from individual facts.[38]

Goethe sets to work in a different way. He does not jump immediately from sense-impressions to abstract ideas. He does not selectively restrict sense- perception in order to make certain observations fit a preconceived intellectual abstraction. Instead of letting the intellect weave hypotheses about phenomena he gives a very special value to making full use of what the senses convey, of developing them so highly that through what they report the phenomena *can present themselves*, as it were, in essence. for, as he said, it is not the senses which deceive us, but our judgement. His method is to thoroughly aquaint himself with things, establishing precisely where particular laws apply, always working with the conviction that objective thinking is born of accurate observation:

> As our senses, if healthy, are the surest witnesses of external relations so we may be convinced that, in all instances where they appear to contradict reality, they lay the greater and

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38 Rudolf Steiner, A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception, trans. Olin D. Wannamaker (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1978), p.43.

> surer stress on true relations. Thus a distant object appears to us smaller; and precisely by this means we are aware of distance.[39]

Rudolf Steiner noted that the psychologist Heinroth called Goethe's method of thought 'objective' because Goethe "thinks about things as though he is inside things with his thinking, as though his thinking lives within the things themselves".[40] Goethe does not impose an abstract thought onto things where that thought doesn't apply. He trains his observation to absorb all the outer aspects of phenomena so that the inner necessity of the phenomena arises of itself within his thinking. His aim is to think the Idea which nature thinks, to recreate the thoughts that create the world, to behold and express in Idea the spirit which reveals itself through the phenomena of the sense-world. Goethe does not intend his ideas to be taken as working hypotheses; he intends them to be understood to be the essence of the thing which is being examined.

It may seem excessive to place so much importance on an examination of what makes Goethe's method of studying nature genuinely scientific, as many may feel that the aesthetic satisfaction to be derived from, say, the colourwheel and it's usefulness as a practical guide to colour mixing for artists are sufficient justification for taking an interest in it. But it is just this question of the truth-claims made by Goethe (and Steiner), the investigation of what these truth claims rest upon, that is here emphasised, because it is precisely this effort to place science and aesthetics on a unified epistomological foundation that should make Goethe and Steiner significant in the modern context.

Although we are not concered here with a discussion of Goethe's contribution to the Science of Organics it is important for the purpose of understanding how he thinks to note that he developed an entirely different method of thinking in order to study the life-sciences from that which he considered appropriate to the study of the inorganic.

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39 Goethe, Theory of Colours, p.75.

40 Rudolf Steiner, Practical Training in Thought, trans. Henry B Monges. (New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1977) p.14

Rudolf Steiner called Goethe the "Galileo of the organic"[41] and clarified the important difference between his thought-methods in the two spheres:

> In cognizing the inorganic, concept is linked to concept in order to survey the correlation of forces which bring about an effect in nature. In the case of the organic it is necessary so to cause one concept to grow out of another that, in the progressive living metamorphosis of concepts there come to light images of that which appears in nature as an entity that has taken form.[42]

Because thinking is required to inwardly recreate the thought-essence of the object toward which it is directed in order to reach a true conception of it, those higher forms of nature which are in constant metamorphosis need to be studied with a kind of enlivened thinking. Through this enlivened thinking Goethe found it possible to arrive at the dynamic archetype which in the life-realm always underlies the specific fixed forms of the organism. For example, in studying the plant Goethe first strives to form a conception of the Type and then goes on to apprehend all the potential modifications of the Type. Lastly he traces the connection between the actual living form and one of the potential modifications. In practise he would proceed as follows: Firstly, exact sense impressions are formed of all the particular examples of plants. Secondly, powers of *memory* are awoken in order to fix in mental pictures, as precisely as possible, all the separate forms. Thirdly, the power of *mobile phantasy* is awoken through which all the single memory-pictures are imaginatively allowed to 'transform themselves' into one another. In this way a dynamic picture of the plant-archetype is built up.

This inward union of the faculties of (objective) *memory* and (subjective) *phantasy* re-establishes within the mind of the thinker the true relationship between the external visible 'shell' of nature and it's concealed 'core'. Nature's outer material aspect appears initially to our senses in the form of static disjointed impressions. Behind this external (mechanical) aspect is a dynamic component which, inasmuch as it

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41 Johan Wolfgang von Goethe and Rudolf Steiner, Readings in Goethean Science (Wyoming, Rhode Island 02898: Leo F. Manfred Associates, 1978), p.6.

42 Ibid.

dwells within the mechanical and raises it into 'life' can be called the organic realm. This vital-component lives also within the thinker in the form of *Mobile phantasy*. When this *Mobile phantasy* is combined with the (objective) *memory-pictures* reported by the senses the concealed *living-idea* behind the world phenomena is inwardly recreated by the thinker.

Through the union of these two 'poles' of mental activity an organ of cognition is formed which Goethe called *Exact-sensorial phantasy* (Exacte sinnliche Phantasie). It represented, for Goethe, the faculty of mind which Kant had claimed to be a human impossibility, that faculty which is able to pass "from the synthetic, from the universal, from the perception of a totality as such, to the particular - that is, from the whole to the parts".[43] In opposition to Kant's claim that such a faculty is a human impossibility, Goethe said:

> It is quite true, our author here seems to be pointing to an intellect not human but Divine. And yet, if in the moral sphere we are to rise by faith in God, Virtue and Immortality into an upper realm, so drawing nearer to the primal Being, why should it not be likewise in the intellectual? By Contemplation of an ever-creative Nature, may we not make ourselves worthy to be spiritual sharers in her production?[44]

The sense in which Goethe places the thinker *within* reality and not outside of it is most dramatically exemplified in relation to his method in the sphere of the organic. It was necessary therefore to consider this first. However, with respect to the Theory of Colours another form of thinking is appropriate and must be considered.

Rudolf Steiner shows that the realm of the Inorganic, in Goethe's view, is that mechanism of occurrences which is the result of cause and effect, where the occurrence depends on two factors which are external to each other, for instance a stone being set in motion by another moving stone. In this domain it is the task of cognition to establish which factors connected with an event are primary determinants, modifying influences or which have no bearing on the occurrences. An event in which the nature of what happens can transparently be seen to result inevitably and

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43 Goethe and Steiner, Readings in Goethean Science, p.24.

44 Ibid.

directly from the observed factors is called, by Goethe, a *Primal Phenomenon*.[45] This Primal phenomenon is one and the same as the objective natural law. In his research into the theory of colours Goethe uses experiments which artifially create the necessary conditions for a primal phenomenon to arise. By controlling various modifications of an event he discovers the constant that persists through the modifications. That which is essential within all the combinations is the *Idea* of the Occurrence.

Through the *Experiment* an *Objective* phenomenon is established on the basis of *Subjective* creation. Here again, though in a less dramatic way, we can see how Goethe understands the act of knowledge as a higher event of Nature herself, taking place through man who is a kind of co-creative participant with her. Man not only *discovers* Ideas within the world about him, he realises, through his participation in thinking these ideas, an inward relationship with the world. What the mind lays bare for mental 'sight' to behold Goethe calls an "open secret". The goal of knowledge is reached when such a secret is unveiled to higher perception: pragmatic common-sense and sublime reverence equally pervade his tone as he reflects on this goal:

> But when even such a Primordial phenomenon is arrived at, the evil is that we refuse to recognise it as such, that we still aim at something beyond, although it would become us to confess that we are arrived at the limits of experimental knowledge. Let the observer of nature suffer the Primordial phenomenon to remain undisturbed in its beauty; let the philosopher admit it into his department, and he will find that important elementary facts are a worthier basis for further operations than insulated cases, opinions, and hypotheses.[46]

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45 Goethe's method as described here should be carefully compared with the orthodox Inductive method presented at the beginning of this chapter, with which it is in direct contrast.

46 Goethe, Theory of Colours, p.73.

CHAPTER FOUR

GOETHE'S VIEW OF CREATIVE MAN

In his essay on Goethe as the Founder of a New Science of Aesthetics Rudolf Steiner discusses the differences between the Greek spirit and the spirit of modern times and gives reasons why, for the Greeks, a science of aesthetics was unnecessary. He says that "the desire for Art is as old as man himself, but the desire to grasp the nature of it's task only came into evidence much later".[47] The Greeks, he says, found spiritual satisfaction in reality as it immediately surrounded them, in Nature. Art, for them:

> was only a continuation of what lives and surges within Nature; it grew directly out of Nature.... Aristotle knew no higher principle of Art than the imitation of Nature.... The mere imitation of Nature, which, to us, would appear empty and insignificant, was, in this case, fully sufficient. We have forgotten how to see in mere Nature the highest that our Spirit craves for; for this reason mere realism, which offers us reality devoid of that highest, could never satisfy us.[48]

Steiner argues that this change in consciousness was a necessary one, that the loss of this immediate relation to Spirit in Nature had to occur so that the human being could become aware "of a Kingdom within his inner self, which was of at least equal standing with that outer world - in that instant he had to break away from the shackles of nature".[49] Following the Greek epoch, therefore, we find the art of the Christian Middle Ages which is an expression of the "estrangement from everything which is Nature - a flight from direct reality".[50] In this period Spirit and Nature are no longer joined but face each in "unreconciled opposition". Steiner goes on to say that "for the genesis of aesthetics a time was necessary when man, in freedom and independance from the

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47 Rudolf Steiner, Goethe as the Founder of a New Science of Aesthetics (Edinburgh: Neil and Co Ltd) p.8

48 Ibid., p.9.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., p.10

shackles of nature, perceived the Spirit in it's undimmed purity, but a time, also, when a reunion with nature is again possible".[51] It is Goethe whom Steiner says stands as the herald of this time, when "a return to nature, but with the rich abundance of a developed spirit, with the level of culture of modern times"[52] will be possible. Goethe is the first to come to the realisation that modern man finds himself polarised between two spheres: on the one hand that which is the external shell of nature, which is presented to him through sense observation and on the other hand that which is presented to him through thought as Idea.

As we have seen, for Goethe, the aim of Science is the unveiling of this Idea from behind the non-essential aspect of Nature. But he also saw that every Individual stands between the world of Idea and the world of sense-observation in a way that is unique, and that the manner in which the Individual reconciles what is given to him as Idea and what is given to him as sense-impressions determines the content of Art. Steiner expresses it as follows:

> While mere observation cannot reconcile the opposing extremes, if it has reality but has not yet the Idea, so also is Science unable to effect this reconciliation, if it has the Idea but no longer the reality. Between both, man needs a new Kingdom; a kingdom in which the Idea is represented by the Individual and not only by the whole; a kingdom in which the particular appears gifted with the character of the universal and necessary.[53]

This is the world of Art; it is not a world that is *given* to man, it has to be created by him between the kingdoms of the senses and of reason. Steiner points out that in our day, a clear comprehension of the nature and importance of this third kingdom is the task of the Science of Aesthetics. He often describes how the basis for Aesthetic Science was most clearly formulated by Friedrich Schiller, "inspired in the contemplation of Goethe's genius",[54] in his Letters on the Aesthetical Education of man. In these letters Schiller describes the two opposing

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51 Ibid., p.11

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p.14.

54 Ibid., p.16.

human instincts between which the creative impulse of Art weaves itself. On one hand there is the so-called *material impulse*, the human need to open the senses to incoming impressions from the world. What we thus apprehend is determined by natural-physical necessity and inasmuch as we are passive recipients of this content we are 'unfree'. On the other hand there is the *Formative impulse*, that of reason, which introduces order and law into the random maze of external impressions. Here too we are subjected to Laws, the laws of logic or reason, and before their iron necessity are 'unfree'.

Schiller argues that Freedom seeks refuge from both these necessities, that of matter and that of Form and that it is in the domain of *Play* or of *Art* that man realizes this Freedom. As man 'plays' between these two necessities he effects a union between his subjectivity and what is objective. As he plays in this way man's physical nature acts spiritually while his Spiritual Nature acts physically. Matter is thus transformed and ennobled by the Spirit, while the Spirit is made visible to the senses. What is realised in art is still physical, but the "manner of it's appearance is Ideal".[55]

The artist thus endows the particular or Individual with the properties which, in Nature, are only expressed through her as a totality. As Steiner says, the artist "directs his efforts so as to excel Nature in her own tendency, and to achieve to a still higher degree than she is capable of, the results possible within her laws and means".[56]

Steiner characterises Goethe's view of creative man as follows: the particular, material, perceptible element of reality streams toward man through his senses, while the universal, formal, conceptual element is awoken through the act of thinking. The mutual interchange between these elements occurs in the arena of human consciousness. In the act of creation he rhythmically gives himself now to the form which is realising, now to the substance in which he is immersed. Inasmuch as man participates spiritually in reality he unites the two streams of perception and conception. Inasmuch as he participates physically in reality he tears them asunder. The manner and context in which we engage in this creative process is different for each individual, depending on the particular quality of his development, but, as Herbert Witzenmann says:

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55 Ibid., p.26.

56 Ibid., p.23.

However much the representation is a manifestation of our subjectivity, nevertheless it cannot arise without the interaction of two objectivities. This twofold objectivity is evident just from the point of view of the representation. The formation of a representation is the pivotal act which fits together again the two parts of a broken whole. The act is subjective, the parts are objective, the whole is an objectivity which appears under the subjective conditions and aspects of positional and qualitative interdependancies.[57]

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57 Herbert Witzenman, Beppe Assenza (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1979), p.121.

CHAPTER FIVE

COLOUR AS A COSMIC-HUMAN DYNAMIC

Goethe's observations reveal that light, darkness and colour are a domain of objective creative powers which are operative in nature. They also reveal, however, that the human being does not only observe these powers from without but that he also experiences an inward relationship with them. There are, in other words specific psychological experiences which arise in relation to certain combinations of colours, suggesting that the objective laws of colour are interdependantly related to soul-laws. It is fundamentally the relationships between light, darkness and colour which are the concern of the painter, so that it can be said that the medium of the painter is really a dynamic field of impulses even before the painter applies his creativity to it. His medium is a part of nature that is not static but dynamic. Rudolf Steiner showed how painting might be the continuation of a process already existing in nature, a process that is comprehended and individualized by the artist as he brings it to expression on a painterly surface.

Once while giving a lecture on Dürer Rudolf Steiner was asked whether the engraving "melancholia" could be understood in a symbolic sense. He is said to have replied: "why look for a deeper meaning? If only you will study the magical and mysterious qualities of light in space, you will find in these a far deeper meaning than if you set to work with symbols and mysterious interpretations. Such interpretations lead us away from the true domain of art".[58]

Also in his lectures on Rembrandt Steiner spoke of this painter as the first who is truly *modern*. This modernity, Steiner said, does not lie in the content or the subject matter of his works but in his attitude toward his work. Unlike the painters of the Italian Renaissance who raise everything to the sublime, idealising the forms which they observe, Rembrandt observes immediate reality faithfully, as an outsider. And yet he brings an inwardness to outer objects because he is "able to live with

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58 Alec and Gladys Morison, "The activity of colour in the Art of Painting", in The Faithful Thinker: Centenary Essays on the work and Thought of Rudolf Steiner 1861-1925 ed. A. C. Harwood (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1961), p.156.

all that works and weaves in space". Steiner says that "In the end Rembrandt's figures provide him with nothing more than the occasion, as it were, to reveal the working of the pure distribution of light and darkness in the realm of space.... The figures give him the opportunity to seize the light. The essential is the play of light and darkness which the figures enable him to grasp".[59]

In the same way it can be said that Turner is a *modern* painter. Progressively through his career, as has often been noted, he became less interested in the landscape scenery which comprised the content of his works and more interested in grasping the dynamic laws, harmonies and contrasts of light, darkness and colour. Though he studied Goethe's Theory of Colours in the later part of life only, Turner had come through his own artistic effort to comprehend many of the laws of colour which Goethe scientifically explicated. For example this experience which Alec and Gladys Morison describe:

> Where the colours blue and yellow enhance and lighten each other, as can be seen in a clear sunset sky, a range of peach-blossom colours will arise. This was something which was observed by Turner and used with a feeling for the beautiful mood of unearthly splendour which such a colour relationship gives.[60]

This feeling of creative soul-empathy with a world of colour laws has been expressed by many modern artists. Cézanne made the following remark: "The planes in the colour, the planes! The world of colour where the soul of the planes melt into one, the warmth of the prisms which can be achieved, the meeting of the planes in the sun".[61]

Van Gogh, the father of modern expressionism said the following: "The laws of nature are unutterably beautiful just because they are not accidental", and he meant this particularly in relation to colour, for he speaks of the "marriage of complimentary colours" and "the mysterious vibration of kindred tones".[62]

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59 Ibid., 155.

60 Ibid., 157.

61 Witzenman, Beppe Assenza, p.129.

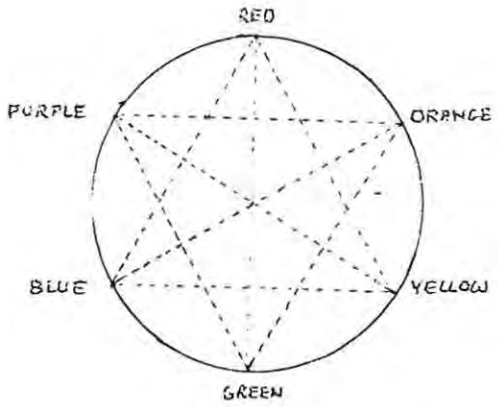
62 Alec and Gladys Morison, Centenary Essays, p.159

The section of Goethe's theory which deals with the *Physiological colours* forms a foundation to the study of *Chromatic harmony, complementarity* and *contrast*.

Goethe discovered that an objective basis for reciprocal complementarity between different colours could be found in the fact that the organ of sight has the capacity to generate physiological after-images in a way that is wholly predictable. He observed that "If we look at a dazzling altogether colourless object, it makes a strong lasting impression and it's after-vision is accompanied by an appearance of colour".[63]

In a series of experiments he explored this principle in order to establish the manner in which a given colour will call up a corresponding one: If one takes a small piece of bright-coloured paper, holds it before a moderately lighted white surface and then directs one's gaze steadily upon this coloured object for a few moments, one will find, when one removes the coloured object, while keeping the eyes in the same position that the spectrum of another colour will become visible on the white surface. Even if the eye is directed to another part of the white plane the same spectrum will be visible there also, because, Goethe says "it arises from an image which now belongs to the eye."[64]

Goethe explains that the particular colour which can be expected to arise as an after-image can be predicted by reference to the chromatic circle. In this circle the colours are "arranged in a general way according to the natural order" so that the colours diametrically opposite to one another on this circle are those which "reciprocally evoke each other in the eye".[65]



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63 Goethe, Theory of Colours, p.16

64 Ibid., p.21.

65 Ibid.

Red, Blue and Yellow form a triad of simple or primary colours. The compound colours arise from the pairing of elements in this triad. The simpler colour always demands the compound and vice-versa: Yellow demands Purple; Orange, Blue and Red, Green.

This principle extends also to instances where the whole retina is impressed with a single colour. If we look at a landscape through a pane of blue glass, "everything will afterwards appear in sunshine to the naked eye, even if the sky is grey and the scene colourless".[66]

The term *complementary colours*, often used by painters, is applied to the above relationships. Here the experience of the connection between the colour-pairs takes place through time with the after-colour following the stimulis-colour, but Goethe goes on to experimentally demonstrate the principle of *simultaneous contrast* where the after-colour arises in immediate and simultaneous juxtaposition with the stimulis-colour. If a square of white paper is held up against a yellow surface and gazed upon it will be noticed that the white becomes tinged with a purplish hue. Goethe cites as another example of this simultaneous contrast the way in which, "if a green paper is seen through striped or flowered muslin the stripes or flowers will appear reddish".[67] Goethe remarks that: "These appearances will present themselves to the attentive observer on all occasions, even to an unpleasant degree".

He summarises these reflections with the observation that "the eye especially demands completeness, and seeks to eke out the colourific circle in itself".[68]

This suggests that colour contrasts are related in such a way that whatever colour the eye is exposed to, an opposite-colour will be produced by it so that the eye can have present within itself the sum-total of all three primary colours. It is on this basis that an understanding of harmony becomes possible. Goethe writes:

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66 Ibid., p.25

67 Ibid., p.26

68 Ibid., p.28.

> When in this completeness the elements of which it is composed are still appreciable by the eye, the result is justly called harmony. We shall subsequently endeavour to show how the theory of the harmony of colours may be deduced from these phenomena, and how, simply through these qualities, colours may be capable of being applied to aesthetic purposes.[69]

After discussing after images Goethe goes on to the subject of coloured shadows a phenomenon which beautifully demonstrates how the principle of *simultaneous contrast* works. He describes an experiment which can be done to observe coloured shadow: One places a lighted candle on a white surface near a window in the late afternoon, when daylight is weak. The daylight must be of such strength as to lighten the shadow cast by the candle-flame without overpowering it. He observes that this shadow will then appear "of the most beautiful blue" and explains that the reason for this is the fact that the light from the candle has transformed the white surface into a yellow one which causes the complemental blue to be excited in the eye: "In all coloured shadows, therefore, we must presuppose a colour excited or suggested by the hue of the surface on which the shadow is thrown".[70]

Goethe describes how once, while travelling over the Harz in winter, he happened to descend from the Brocken towards evening: "owing to the yellowish hue of the snow" shadows changed from violet into blue, and later as the sun was about to set and the surface of the snow deepened toward red "the shadow colour changed to a green, in lightness to be compared to a sea-green, in beauty to the green of the emerald".[71]

An interest in coloured shadows was one of the basic preoccupations of the French Impressionist and Post Impressionist painters, like Monet and Bonnard. It has also been noted that the work of Seurat and Signac owes much to the study of Chevreul's colour theory, a text which was preceded historically by Goethe's and which is in many senses made redundant by Goethe.

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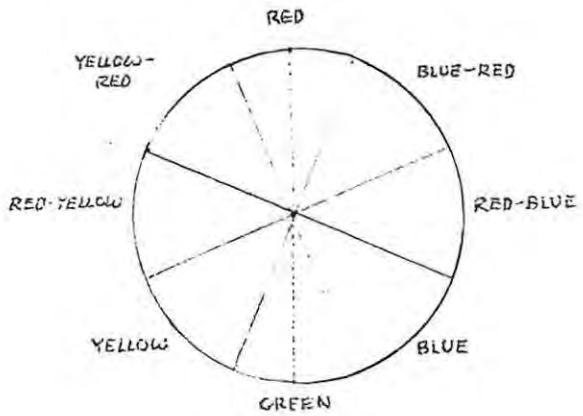
69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., p.30.

71 Ibid., p.34.

Goethe precedes his discussion of Completeness and Harmony with the observation that colours are "immediately associated with the emotions of the mind". In order to experience these relationships, Goethe tells us, the eye should be completely surrounded by a single colour. By looking through a coloured glass, for example, one can attain to a total identification with the hue.



He then extends his colourwheel to one of eight divisions and discusses it in terms of a plus (warm) side and a minus (cold) side.

Beginning with Green, at the base, we move on the left through Yellow, Red-yellow, Yellow-red into Red. These plus-colours he describes as exciting "quick, lively, aspiring" emotions. Beginning once more at Green and moving to the right we reach Blue, Red-blue, Blue-red and finally Red again. These minus-colours, we are told, produce a restless, susceptible, anxious impression. Here follows a synopsis of some of the properties which he attributes to each colour.

Yellow: It is the colour nearest to light: "In it's highest purity it always carries with it the nature of brightness, and has a serene, gay, softly exciting character".

In a strong form it has "a magnificient and noble effect.... warm and agreeable".

It is, however, "extremely liable to contamination, and produces a very disagreeable effect if it is sullied, or in some degree tends to the minus side". In this way the effect of nobleness is easily changed into one of "ignominy, cuckoldry and cowardliness".

Red-Yellow: (orange) As Yellow increases in energy it becomes Red-yellow. This is Yellow when it is augmented, condensed or darkened. Warmth and gladness are still more intensely present.

Yellow-Red: (Vermillion) "The agreeable, cheerful sensation which Red-yellow excites increases to an intolerably powerful impression in bright Yellow-red". The active side is here most highly energetic. It is a colour favoured by children and primitive tribes.

Blue: "As Yellow is always accompanied with light, so it may be said that Blue still brings a principle of darkness with it". It stimulates, but in a calm but negative way, we feel an inclination to follow it as it draws us after it, but it is evasive and retreating.

It has a tendency to coldness which we associate with melancholy.

When it partakes a little of the plus side the sea-green effect is pleasing.

Red-blue: Blue when intensified to this degree disturbs rather than enlivens. As we move deeper into it we feel activated in a way that makes us seek rest.

Blue-red: "This unquiet feeling increases as the hue progresses... a carpet of a perfectly pure deep Blue-red would be intolerable".

Red: "Whoever is acquainted with the prismatic origin of Red will not think it paradoxical if we assert that this colour, partly *actu*, partly *potentiâ*, includes all the other colours".

"This highest of all appearances of colour arises from the junction of two contrasted extremes which have gradually prepared themselves for a union".

The effect of Red is peculiar in that it combines the "grace and charm of youth" with "the gravity and dignity of old age".

Green: The union of Yellow and Blue in their fundamental and simple forms creates a simple mixture which one desires neither to advance toward nor retreat from. One's eye finds this a restful colour.[72]

From here Goethe goes on to discuss various pairs of colour-combination which he distinguishes as *Harmonious*, *Characteristic* and *non-characterisitic*.

The *Harmonious* combinations are those which were discussed in relation to after images and coloured shadows. These are the combinations which the eye spontaneously creates in relation to a given colour and for which it seeks "a colourless space next every hue in order to produce the complemental hue upon it".[73] When the eye is presented externally with these combinations "the impression is gladdening since the result of it's own operation is presented to it is reality".[74] These relationships can be reduced to the three contrasts diametrically placed on Goethe's six-hued colour-wheel:

Yellow ⟷ Red-blue
Blue ⟷ Red-yellow
Red ⟷ Green

The *characteristic* combinations are those which, unlike the harmonious ones "always carry the conditions of completeness with them "which are "arbitrarily produced" and may be "most easily described by observing that they are to be found in the colourific circle, not by diameters, but by chords, in such a manner that an intermediate colour is passed over".[75] Goethe calls these *characteristic* because they "excite a definite impression" but one which nevertheless does not wholly satisfy

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72 All quotations in this section from Theory of Colours pp.307-13.

73 Ibid., p.317.

74 Ibid., p.74.

75 Ibid., p.321.

the viewer. He claims that the reason for this partial dissatisfaction is that these combinations only present us with a part of the whole from which they are derived. Blue and Yellow, for example, as a combinations, contain no Red and therefore are "defective as compared with the whole scale". However this combination is partially satisfying because it contains "the ingredients of an ultimate state": from their mixture green can arise.

Maria Schindler has pointed, in this connection, to Rudolf Steiner's conception of the three-fold Psyche. Following Steiner she writes that the primary colour triad Yellow, Blue and Red is related to the three fundamental soul-capacities, *Thinking, Feeling* and *Willing*: "Man seeks for an equalised development of this triad (of the primal colours) upon which his whole psychology is really based - and experiences inner conflict in endeavouring to achieve it".[76]

Those colour ombinations which Goethe designates as *non-characteristic* are comprised of the still shorter chords on the circle; those which lie in immediate juxtaposition. The colours in these combinations, he tells us, are too nearly alike "for their impression to be significant". Yet they are again partially satisfying inasmuch as they "indicate a progressive state".[77]

On the basis of these ideas Rudolf Steiner developed many exercises for inwardly experiencing the nature of colour which he taught to the painters with whom he worked at Dornach. In the first of a series of lectures given in 1921, he said:

> You know that physics has long had the habit (we might say bad habit) of maintaining that the coloured world we see around us is present only for our senses and that, if we are to speak objectively, colour is no more than certain vibrations of the finest form of matter....[78]

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76 Hilde Boos-Hamburger, The Creative Power of Colour (London: The Michael Press, 1976), p.d.

77 Goethe, Theory of Colours, p.324.

78 Rudolf Steiner, Colour : Three lectures given in Dornach, 6th to 8th May, 1921 with extracts from his note-books, trans. - John Salter (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1971), p.12.

But those who arrive at such abstractions do not connect them with the manner in which colour is actually experienced: "In order to grasp colour objectively we must try to keep within the world of colour itself and not leave it; then we may hope to penetrate it's real nature".[79]

This is the key utterance with respect to the way in which Steiner's exercises are intended to be studied. In working with colours he encourages the painters not merely to apply them outwardly but to live within the vitality of the colour as he applies it. For the purposes of the exercises Steiner advised painters to work with water-colour because of its free-flowing nature: Colours must not be studied as if they are static but always with a consciousness of how they quicken or approach a state of rest, advance or recede, expand or contract, radiate or condense. The artist who comes to use them must take his queue as to how he may direct his form-construction from the inner 'tendency' of the colour itself.

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79 Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

STEINER : FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AND EXERCISES FOR PAINTERS

In order to come to an understanding of colours Steiner tells us we should first try to feel what is in the colour and then question our feelings about what lives in it. He asks us to compare the effect of three different coloured figures in relation to a green background: Red on Green, Peach-Blossom on Green, and Blue on Green. In the case of the Red figures, one feels that they come alive against the Green, one feels as if the figures must be painted in an attitude of lightening movement. The peach-blossom figures, on the other hand, "can stay there forever". They "have no espeical relationship with the meadow and do not affect it by making it seem greener; they are quite neutral". The Blue figures have a different effect. They make the Green meadow seen Blue: one finds oneself feeling that "the Blue figures are trying to carry off the meadow and dispose of it in some deep abyss".[80]

It will be recalled that Goethe's method in organic science was first to crystallise, as static memory-pictures, the single sensory observations and then afterwards to 'set these in motion' through *mobile phantasy*, by which means the objective living metamorphosis is recreated as *Living Idea*. Similarly, by painting these figures in the above way and trying to live into the corresponding experiences one can become aware that the Imagination need not remain a merely personal impulse but can become a sharpened instrument for the perception of higher laws. The only difference in the method applied here is in the order in which the static (thought-form) is related to the dynamic (mobile phantasy). Here the *Idea* of the colour must be gradually discerned through mobile immersion of the feelings in the colour field.

Rudolf Steiner extended Goethe's research into colour, adding to it his own descriptions of what he called the *Image* and *Lustre* nature of colours. The content of Steiner's colour-theory is dispersed through lectures, notebooks and colour-exercises, and is for this reason still more difficult to do justice to in a summary way than Goethe's, quite apart from the fact that a real understanding of it would require a knowledge of the fundamentals of Anthroposophy. However, as we will here

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[80] Ibid., p.14.

proceed to examine colour-exercises which are developed from the combined researches of Goethe and Steiner, a general picture of the *Image* and *Lustre* colours must be sketched.

To begin with we must recall that picture of the great 'dialogue' between Cosmos (Nature) and Man which Steiner presented as the implicit foundation of Goethe's Work: The Spirit in Nature builds up successsive kingdoms from the lifeless minerals, through the living plants, to the sentient and higher animals. The spirit-powers of Nature Work on these Kingdoms from without, progressively endowing passive substance with greater degrees of Form-Vitality until, finally, in Man, the very Spirit-essence of Nature descends to live self-consciously within the sheathes that the nature-powers have previously evolved. Thus, for Goethe, Man is the "pinnacle" of Nature's achievement and a "higher nature within nature". After Spirit has become fully incarnate as man, man works outwardly once more, raying-out what previously had streamed inwards. At this stage Art becomes the higher continuation of Nature, working in the same way, but in the polar-opposite direction. Nature's transformations of Spirit into matter are polarically complemented, in Art, with transformtions of matter back into Spirit. This happens progressively, hence Schiller's concept of Art as a domain of 'play' between the *material-impulse* and the *Impulse to Form*.

According to Steiner's further development of the Goethe-Schiller conception certain colours appear to Man as the after-expressions or shadow-images of the concealed processes of nature, whereas other colours are the outer expression of the processes which man directs back towards the Cosmos out of his own Spiritual strivings. The former he calls the *Image*-colours, the latter he calls *Lustre* colours. In Steiner's view colours are presented, one might say, as material glimpses of non-material (spiritual) processes.

The Lustre-colours are Yellow, Blue and Red. These Steiner refers to as "active colour natures". Summarising Steiner Herbert Witzenmann defines them as "the outer aspect of an essential nature within them that shines through".[81] Steiner's descriptions of these colours should be studied in relation to the colour exercises referred to.

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81 Witzenman, Begge Assenza, p.138.

It is in the nature of Yellow, the colour "closest to the light", not to "wish" to be laid on with boundaries. It has an inner tendency to "wish" to radiate out into space, diminishing in intensity toward the edges. It 'wants' to ray outwardly from a centre of concentration. Steiner calls it the *lustre of the Spirit*.

Blue has the opposite tendency, its gesture being an inclination to become lighter toward the centre and denser toward the periphery. It concentrates itself in an inward direction. It is the *lustre of the soul*. To really comprehend this polarity one must go to work with the brush and try to live into these tendencies [Exercise No. 1].

In exercise No. 2 one practises bringing Yellow and Blue into conflict. As Blue encloses Yellow and works in opposition to it one feels that Yellow as the *lustre of the Spirit* can no longer ray out.

While it is the inner nature of Yellow to expand, to move outwards in such a way as to dissolve surrounding forms; if it is made to condense by a surrounding power it transforms into Orange and then into Red: the deeper the Yellow becomes "the more decidedly it tends toward form"[82] [Exercise No. 3].

In the raying-out of Yellow there is a 'longing' to disperse form. In the condensing inward of Blue there is a 'longing' to build form. Recalling Goethe's colour-wheel in which Red arose out of the combined augmentations of Yellow and Blue, we can practise an exercise where starting with the polarity of Yellow and Blue and gradually intensifying the poles in the direction of Red we can experience how the two opposing tendencies evolve toward a position of stasis [Exercise No. 4].

The paradoxical nature of Red is then experienced, for it is a colour which is both active and restful. A Red surface wants "to be treated quietly and evenly and assert itself in this manner".[83] It is the tendency of Red to oscillate between an inclination to Blue and an inclination to Red, but at the same time to seek a stability between these inclinations. Steiner calls Red the *lustre of life*. To further deepen our experience of Red Hilde Boos-Hamburger recommends an exercise [No. 5] which she describes as follows:

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82 Boss-Hamburger, Creative Power of Colour, p.15

83 Ibid., p.17.

> Paint the active and passive series of the colour-circle as far as the two intensified ends. But then, instead of letting them culminate in pure Red, cross the two ends, at the same time intensifying them. In the same way Red-yellow and Red-blue are crossed but without deepening them much. Let Yellow and Blue, however, play into one another sufficiently to enable them to blend into a real Green, in such a way that in the Blue a Yellow-green appears, whilst in the Yellow appears a Blue-green, which takes on leaf-like forms. The two intensified ends should result in a vivid Red which can be strengthened here and there by a pure Magenta. Thus in a picture we imitate the process of Nature and through our feelings approach the experience of the transformation of the green sap into the Rose-red.[84]

Those colours which Rudolf Steiner calls Image-colours are *White*, *Black*, *Green* and *Peach-blossom*.

He talks about White and Black as Image-colours, distinguishing them from light and darkness in that they are really only abstracted *'shadows'* of principles which are not in themselves physically perceptible. In colours we see moving physical expressions of the concealed powers of Light and Dark, , but we do not, with physical eyes, see Light and Dark as such for, according to Steiner, Light is essentially Spirit and is as such not visible to physical sight. Similarly one might see Black as a mere "shadow" of Darkness, but the Nature of Darkness itself can only be conceived as being of the essence of lifelessness and death.

Steiner describes how the colour Green can be seen to arise when the two lustre-colours Yellow and Blue are mixed on a white surface. In contrast to the active natures of Yellow and Blue, Green has about it a *passive* quality, the quality of being a *shadow* of something else rather than the expression of a self-contained will or lustre.

Steiner describes how the fourth of the Image-colours must be understood: one must imagine Black and White (two Image-colours) weaving into one another, and then into this interweaving movement one must

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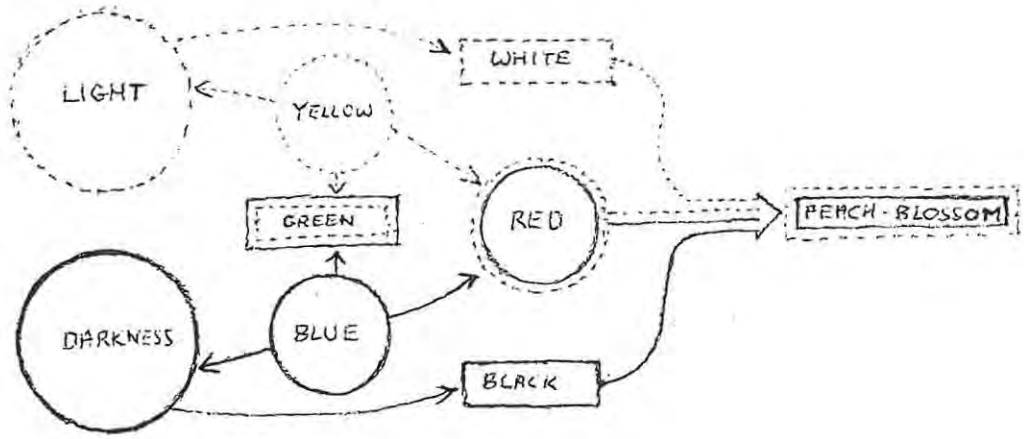
84 Ibid., p.28.

imagine Red shining in: "Through this interplay of Black and White into which I let Red shine, I would get Peach-blossom".[85]

There are thus two points of balance in the colour-circle. Light and Dark reach a static or lifeless balance (via the mixing of Yellow and Blue) in *Green* and a living, dynamic balance in *Peach-blossom* which arises when Red (itself an evolvement out of Yellow and Blue) comes into relation with the dynamic interplay of White and Black.



In study-courses given at the Goetheanum it has always been stressed very firmly that the student of painting can only properly begin to practise the harmonies and chords which Goethe described once he has fully come to know the nature of the individual colours. Another basic exercise for experiencing the fundamental polarity of Yellow and Blue and it's relation to the full scale of transformations on the colour circle is based on the way in which the "evening and morning moods" of the sky express a dynamic.

To practise this the student begins by painting a colour-circle [Exercise No. 6] using the watercolour very lightly. When this is dry

> the passive side of the circle is once again painted over with Blue right up into the pure-red; close beside it the Red-blue penetrates into the Yellow-red and the Blue-red into the Orange. Red, Yellow-red and Orange are now brought right down and leave only a little room for the Yellow. From the other side the Blue penetrates the Green and this, forming a trough

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85 Steiner, Colour, p.25.

seeks once again to enclose the Yellow. As a result it appears as if the Yellow must sink to the depths.[86]

In the complementary exercise [No. 7] the warm colours are made to play the active rôle and the opposite effect is created. In the similar so-called 'colour-whorl' exercise the full range of transitions can be practised [Exercise No.8]. Again the effort must be to live into the movement of the colours as they transform into one another.

Examples of Exercises with Harmonious colour combinations[87]

Blue - Red-yellow (orange)

One begins by juxtaposing a Red-yellow and a Blue surface, the Blue below and the Red-yellow above so that they lie in calm proximity. One then attempts to allow a vertical extension from the Blue to penetrate upward into the Red-yellow. It will be felt that such a projection violates the nature of the Blue - Red-yellow juxtaposition. The Blue that penetrates the Red-yellow is not intense enough to balance it although in their quiet states the two colour-masses had seemed perfectly compatible. Only if the Blue extension is deepened to a Red-blue can it withstand the intensity of the Red-yellow [Exercise No. 9]

Yellow - Red-blue

One begins by painting a Yellow spot which is then allowed to radiate out against a Red-blue surround. A blank zone is left between the colours, initially, so that one can then more carefully watch the colours 'breathe' or 'feel' their way to one another [Exercise No. 10]. One can allow the Red-blue to play between the extremes of Red and Blue proper, between assertiveness and passive receptivity. In certain areas the Yellow can be allowed to shine into the Red-blue dispersing its tones and weaving a kind of Greenish-yellow with pearly variations of rose and lilac.

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86 Boos-Hamburger, Creative Power of colour, p.9.

87 These exercises are described by Hilde Boos-Hamburger in The Creative Power of colour. My descriptions are a free precis based on her text, including occasional quotations, all of which may be found between pages 24 and 31 of the cited edition.

Red-Green

Unlike the colours constituting other harmonious combinations it is not possible ever to correlate Red or Green with light or darkness. As we have seen, in their ideal full strength they each represent a balance of the properties of light and darkness. One comes to a clearer understanding of their harmonious relationship by working with these colours side by side. The exercise of relating them should be controlled by the effort to make "the upper tones sound downwards" and to make "the lower ones mingle upwards, dissolving the strongest force into a delicate shimmer".

Examples of exercises with Characteristic colour-combinations

Goethe explains that the Characteristic colour-combination are so-called because "the character of each combination must be related to the individual colours of which it is composed".

Yellow-blue

In practising this chord the interaction of the lustre natures of Blue and Yellow is explored in terms of the qualities that have been discussed as typical of the individual colours. Yellow is layed on and made to radiate toward Blue which in turn reaches out to it from the periphery [Exercise No. 12].

Yellow-red

In this combination the relationship between the qualities of expansive gayety and of rich solemnity are explored. Yellow can be made to move freely between tendencies to Red-yellow and to Green, while the Red can be made to merge into the Red-yellow on the hand and on the other to intensify to a Red-blue [Exercise No. 13].

Blue-red

Red, solid, noble and calm is layed on and then surrounded by Blue with it's yearning soul-qualities. The Red can be made more active, more crimson in parts, as if charged with passion, while the intensity of longing in the Blue can be made to 'reach out' for the Red by warming into Red-blue [Exercise No. 14].

These are only a few possibilities for exercises with the lustre combinations. Many variations can be similarly developed involving the (intermediate) characteristic chords: *Green - Red-yellow; Green - Red-blue* and *Red-blue - Red-yellow* and the so-called *non-characteristic combinations*.

Hilde Boos-Hamburger offers further exercises which are developed out of the ideas layed out by Goethe in his discussion of the relation of the colour-combinations to Light and Darkness (chiaroscuro). Goethe pointed out that the effects of the colour-combinations could be widely diversified by making "both colours light or both dark, or one light and the other dark". He also observes that "the colours of the active side placed next to Black gain in energy, those of the passive side lose. The active conjoined with White and brightness lose in strength, the passive gain in cheerfulness".

Hilde Boos-Hamburger's exercises present a systematic path whereby these effects can be experienced. She set out the following as possibilities:

1. Active side with Black.
2. Passive side with Black.
3. Red and Green with Black.
4. Active side with White.
5. Passive side with White.
6. Red and Green with White.

CONCLUSION

On first becoming aware of the Goethe-Steiner impulse there are several problems that assert themselves for the artist. One of these is that healthy resistance of theoretical constructs that are felt by the artist to be inhibiting to his freedom. On hearing about colour-*laws* which he somehow has to follow in order to make art "spiritual" again, he becomes instantly wary. For, after all, Art is *not* Science, and why should the aspect of colour in painting have the monopoly on spirituality: What about modelling or chiaroscuro?

Careful consideration of Goethe's idea of *Exact sensorial phantasy* or Schiller's idea of art as a domain of interaction between subjective 'play' and objective constraint yield insights (necessarily paradoxical ones) into the problem of Freedom. Real Freedom is not to be found in doing whatever one wishes to do without consideration of law (truth); nor is it found in forcing oneself to slavishly follow the law, it is found rather in desiring the law, in educating one's own feelings to love the law. This, after all, is the secret of beauty: it is truth made visible to our feeling senses. As Goethe writes in his poem Nature and Art:

> And it is thus with all culture:
> Unfettered spirits will aspire in vain
> To the pure heights of perfection.
>
> He who wills great things must gird up his loins;
> only in limitation is mastery revealed,
> and law alone can give us freedom.[88]

The point is that in pursuing art we cannot remain "unfettered spirits", we are in pursuit of a secret, just as we are in Science or religion. The difference lies only in approach. In Science our perception comes by way of intellect, but in art it must come through feeling. Steiner writes: "In discussing any art we must not theorize but... abide, feelingly, within it's own particular medium.".[89]

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88 David Luke, ed., Goethe, The Penguin Poets series, trans. D. Luke (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), p.197.

89 Rudolf Steiner, The Art and their Mission, trans, Lisa D. Monges and Virginia Moore, Ph.D. (New York: ANthroposophic Press, 1964), p.104.

The method of awakening the knowledge of colour-laws, as has been shown, is not through wrestling with a theoretical model, as such, but through experiencing the harmonies, chords etc. The laws disclose themselves to the mind via the aesthetic emotions and not through an isolated intellectual act. Schiller once wrote: "There is no other way to make a rational being out of sensuous man but by making him aesthetic first".[90]

What of the second question: What makes colour more centrally the concern of painting than drawing or modelling (chiaroscuro)?

In discussing Art, Steiner always stressed the fact that the issue of crucial importance in any art is how the material, the medium or substance is used. The material is not something in which an idea (spirit) is contained, the idea (spirit) must radiate from the material itself. Steiner showed that, in sculpture, the expression of three dimentional space could come to its truest fulfilment: the sculptural medium lends itself to a disclosing of the spiritual through the tangible and substantial. In painting, on the other hand, the paint is applied to a two-dimensional surface and colour is truer to this two- dimentional surface than is spacial perspective. As Steiner writes:

> The painter feels the plane surface only if the third spacial dimension has been extinguished; and it is extinguished if he feels the qualitative character of colour as contributing another kind of third dimension, blue retreating, red approaching. Then matter is abolished instead of - as in spatial perspective- imitated. Certainly I do not speak against the latter. In the age which started the fifteenth century it was natural and self-evident, and added an important element to the ancient art of painting. But today it is essential to realize that, having passed through materialism, it is time for painting to return to a more spiritual conception, to return to colour-perspective.[91]

On this problem of Steiner's apparently privileging colour over drawing he writes elsewhere:

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90 Alfred Cobban, ed., The Eighteenth Century : Europe in the age of enlightenment, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p.218.

91 Steiner, Arts and their Mission, p.104.

> If somebody goes wild and just lays on colours side by side in the belief that this is what I call "overcoming drawing", he is mistaken. By "overcoming drawing" I do not mean to do away with drawing, but to let it rise out of the colours, be born from the colours. Colours will yield the drawing; one simply has to know how to live in colours. Living so, an artist develops an ability - while disregarding the rest of the world - to bring forth works of art out of colour itself.[92]

Another problem that may be confronted is one posed more generally by the Nature of Steiner's work. One may well ask:

How is it that Steiner is here spoken of as making a world-historic contribution to the development of painting and culture generally when there is so little evidence of this externally in the world. So often those painters who claim to be working with the Anthroposophical impulse in mind have a too intellectual approach, their work seems to hearken back too strongly to the colour-exercises, or else it seems insipid, Kitsch, mere Christmas-card art.

All these are far-reaching and important questions, and answers given from within Anthroposophical circles might do just as little to convince the person troubled by them as the content of Anthroposophy itself. However, it is only this content that can be involved by one seeking to meet these questions. Steiner repeatedly emphasised that the knowledge given through Anthroposophy is not of a kind that will immediately revolutionise the world: Modern Art and intellectualised culture generally is characterised by rapid changes in fashion that sweep the world for a few short years before being replaced by others. This is part of a materialistic trend that Steiner says is likely to continue to get worse for a long time yet before the seeds being sewn for a different future start to bear fruit.

The content of Anthroposophy is open to abuse and dilletantish misrepresentation like anything else that is as yet new and improperly understood. What is important in this connection is that one struggles for a true conception of the impulse given by Goethe and Steiner and that the work of those artists who identify with it is seen as necessarily

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92 Ibid., p.74.

immature, as the first humble but sincere efforts in a new direction. We may recall the words of Paul Klee who wrote that he was concerned only to do some small honest thing, to lay the first brick: "I am obliged to do things which a clever fellow could easily fake.... I am much more handicapped by the sincerity of my intentions than by any lack of talent or ability".[93] Concluding his essay on Modern Art he wrote:

> Sometimes I dream of a work of really great breadth,
> ranging through the whole region of element, object, meaning
> and style...
> Nothing can be rushed. It must grow, it should grow
> of itself, and if the time ever comes for that work -
> then so much the better![94]

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93 Herbert Read, The Philosophy of Modern Art (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1964), p.168.

94 Paul Klee, On Modern Art, p.54.

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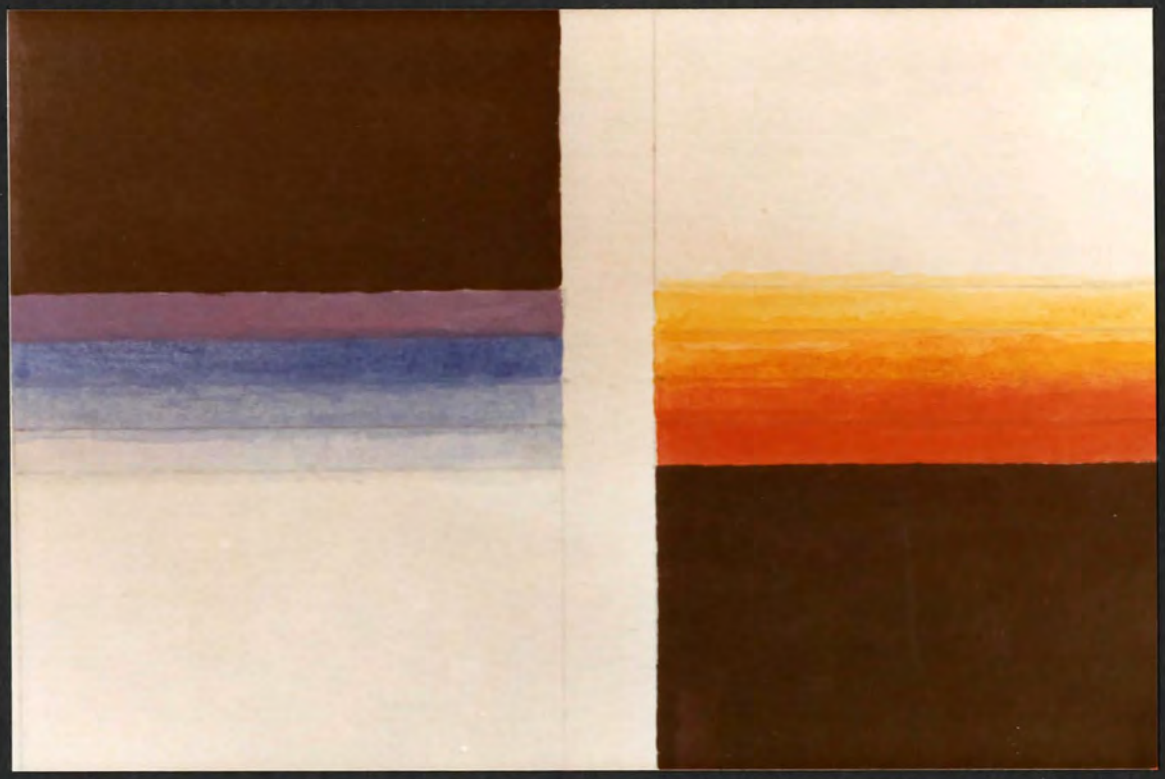

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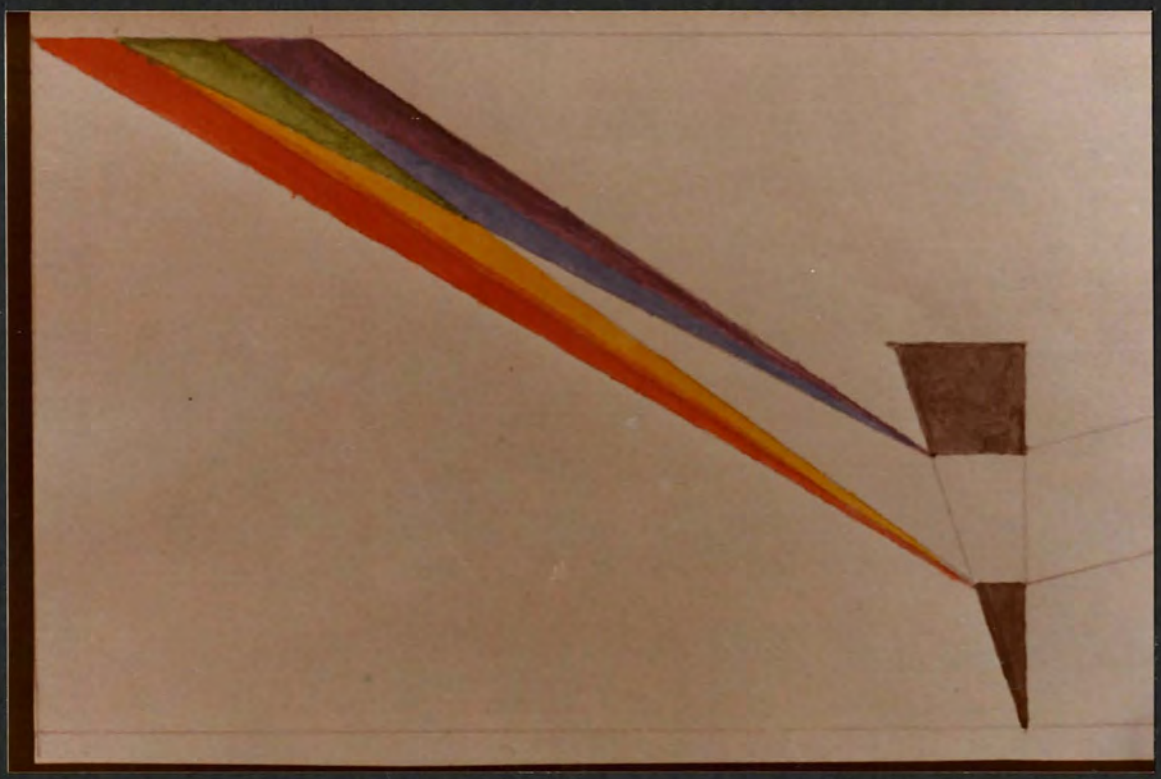

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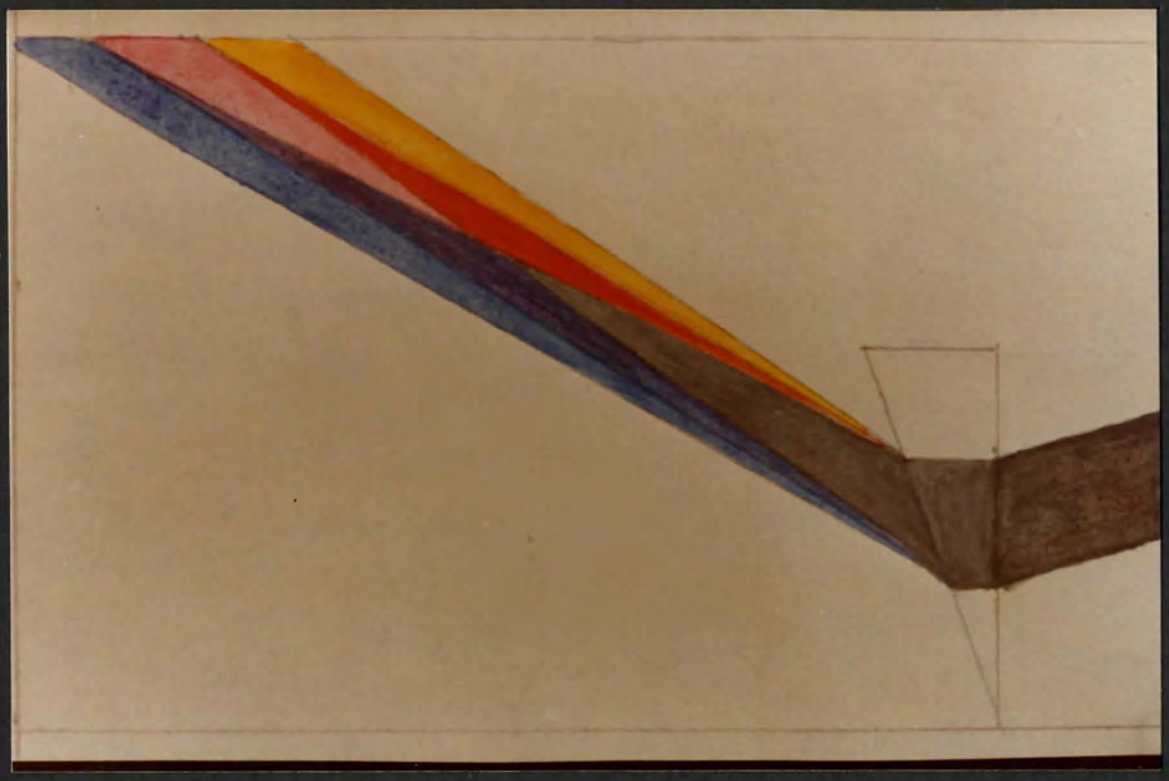

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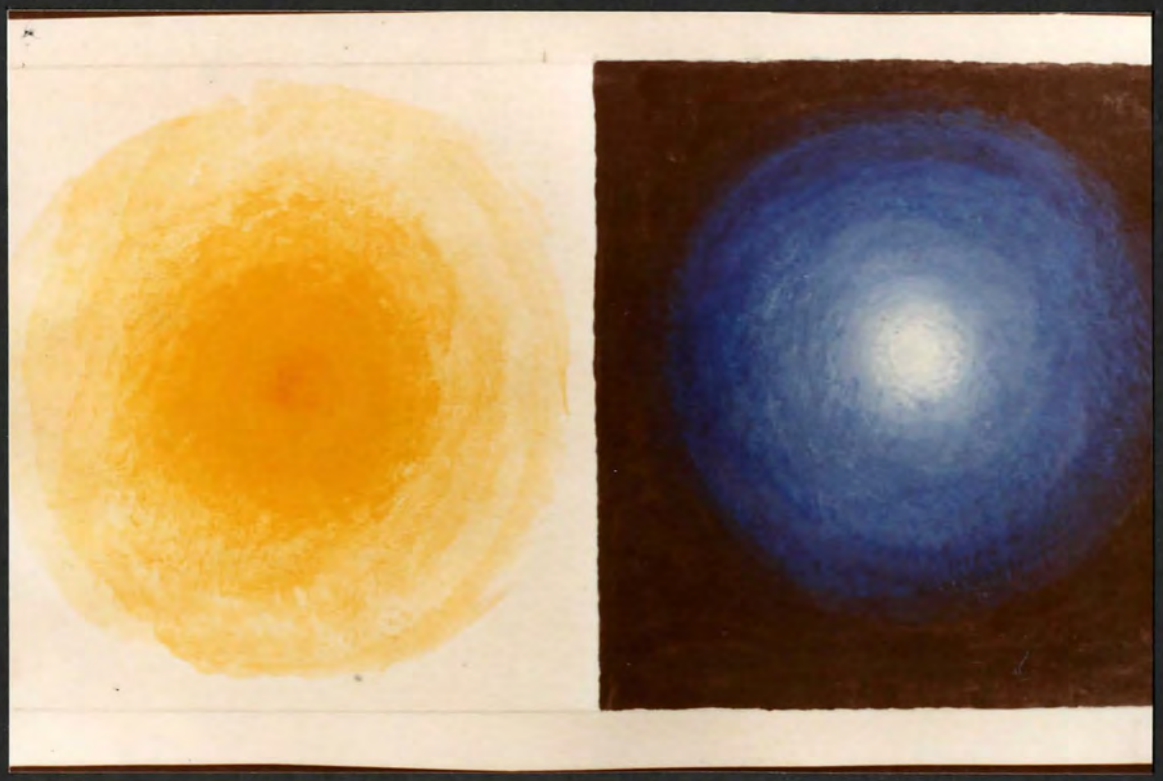

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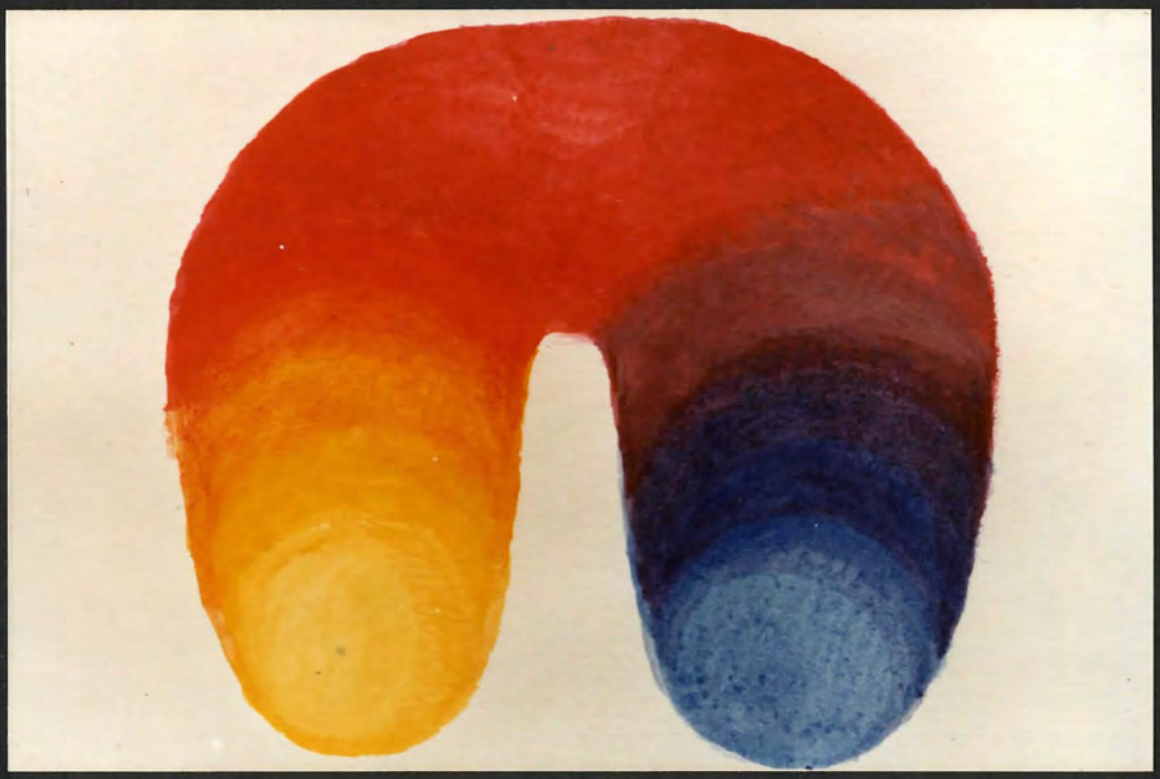

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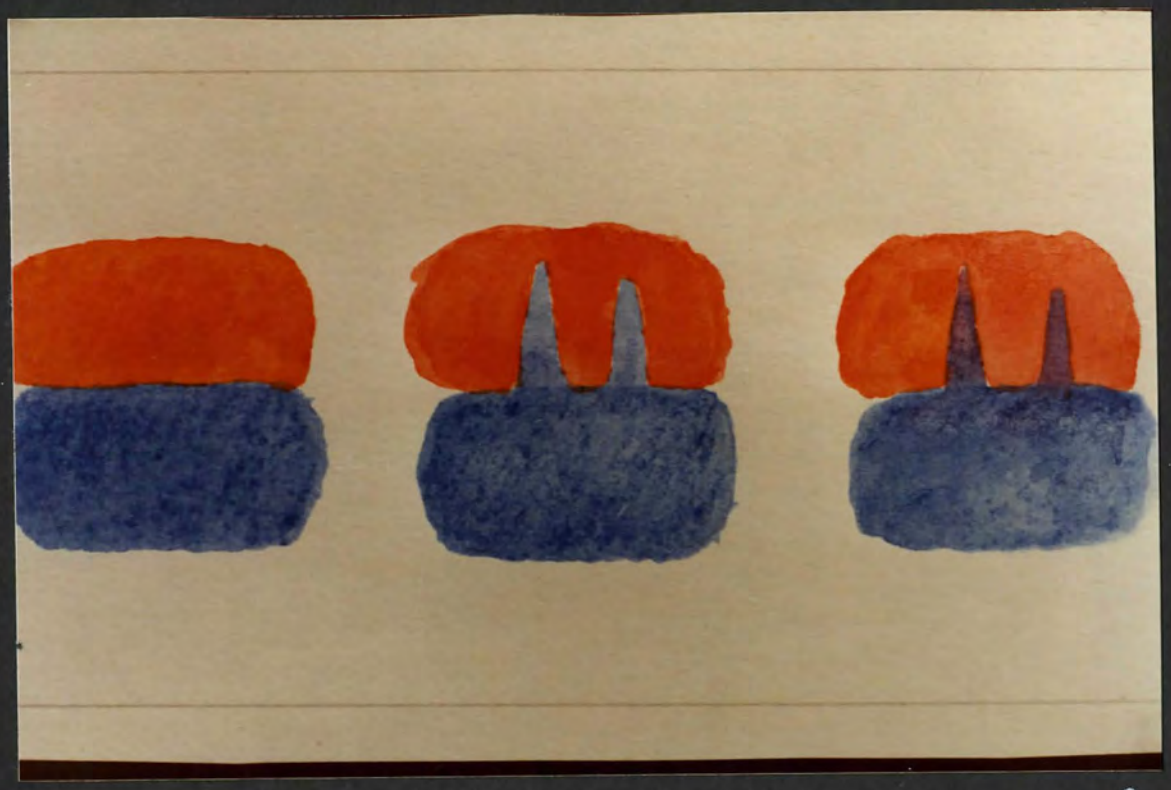

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