

B. PAINTING



V.

EFFECTS OF COLOR

Letting one's eyes wander over a palette laid out with colors has two main results:

(1) There occurs a purely physical effect, i.e., the eye itself is charmed by the beauty and other qualities of the color. The spectator experiences a feeling of satisfaction, of pleasure, like a gourmet who has a tasty morsel in his mouth. Or the eye is titillated, as is one's palate by a highly spiced dish. It can also be calmed or cooled again, as one's finger can when it touches ice. These are all physical sensations and as such can only be of short duration. They are also superficial, leaving behind no lasting impression if the soul remains closed. Just as one can only experience a physical feeling of cold on touching ice (which one forgets after having warmed one's fingers again), so too the physical effect of color is forgotten when one's eyes are turned away. And as the physical sensation of the coldness of the ice, penetrating deeper, can give rise to other, deeper sensations and set off a whole chain of psychic experi-

ences, so the superficial effect of color can also develop into a [deeper] form of experience.

Only familiar objects will have a wholly superficial effect upon a moderately sensitive person. Those, however, that we encounter for the first time immediately have a spiritual effect upon us. A child, for whom every object is new, experiences the world in this way: it sees light, is attracted by it, wants to grasp it, burns its finger in the process, and thus learns fear and respect for the flame. And then it learns that light has not only an unfriendly, but also a friendly side: banishing darkness and prolonging the day, warming and cooking, delighting the eye. One becomes familiar with light by collecting these experiences and storing away this knowledge in the brain. The powerful, intense interest in light vanishes, and its attribute of delighting the eye is met with indifference. Gradually, in this way, the world loses its magic. One knows that trees provide shade, that horses gallop quickly, and that cars go even faster, that dogs bite, that the moon is far away, and that the man one sees in the mirror is not real.

The constantly growing awareness of the qualities of different objects and beings is only possible given a high level of development in the individual. With further development, these objects and beings take on an inner value, eventually an inner sound. So it is with color, which if one's spiritual sensitivity is at a low stage of development, can only create a superficial effect, an effect that soon disappears once the stimulus has ceased. Yet, even at this stage, this extremely simple effect can vary. The eye is more strongly attracted by the brighter colors, and still more by the brighter and warmer: vermilion attracts and pleases the eye as does flame, which men always regard covetously. Bright lemon yellow hurts the eye after a short time, as a high note on the trumpet hurts the ear. The eye becomes disturbed, cannot bear it any longer, and seeks depth and repose in blue or green.

At a higher level of development, however, there arises from this elementary impression a more profound effect, which occasions a deep emotional response. In this case we have:

(2) The second main consequence of the contemplation of color, i.e., the psychological effect of color. The psychological power of color becomes apparent, calling forth a vibration from the soul. Its primary, elementary physical power becomes simply the path by which color reaches the soul.

Whether this second consequence is in fact a direct one, as might be

supposed from these last few lines, or whether it is achieved by means of association, remains perhaps questionable. Since in general the soul is closely connected to the body, it is possible that one emotional response may conjure up another, corresponding form of emotion by means of association. For example, the color red may cause a spiritual vibration like flame, since red is the color of flame. A warm red has a stimulating effect and can increase in intensity until it induces a painful sensation, perhaps also because of its resemblance to flowing blood. This color can thus conjure up the memory of another physical agent, which necessarily exerts a painful effect upon the soul.

If this were the case, it would be easy to find an associative explanation for the other physical effects of color,³⁶ i.e., its effects not only upon our sight, but also upon our other senses. One might assume that, e.g., bright yellow produces a sour effect by analogy with lemons.

It is, however, hardly possible to maintain this kind of explanation. As far as tasting colors is concerned, many examples are known where this explanation does not apply. A Dresden doctor tells how one of his patients, whom he describes as "spiritually, unusually highly developed," invariably found that a certain sauce had a "blue" taste, i.e., it affected him like the color blue.* One might perhaps assume another similar, and yet different, explanation; that in the case of such highly developed people the paths leading to the soul are so direct, and the impressions it receives are so quickly produced, that an effect immediately communicated to the soul via the medium of taste sets up vibrations along the corresponding paths leading away from the soul to the other sensory organs (in this case, the eye). This effect would seem to be a sort of echo or resonance, as in the case of musical instruments, which without themselves being touched, vibrate in sympathy with another instrument being played. Such highly sensitive people are like good, much-played violins, which vibrate in all their parts and fibers at every touch of the bow.

If one accepts this explanation, then admittedly, sight must be related not only to taste, but also to all the other senses. Which is indeed the

case. Many colors have an uneven, prickly appearance, while others feel smooth, like velvet, so that one wants to stroke them (dark ultramarine, chrome-oxide green, madder). Even the distinction between cold and warm tones depends upon this sensation. There are also colors that appear soft (madder), others that always strike one as hard (cobalt green, green-blue oxide), so that one might mistake them for already dry when freshly squeezed from the tube.

The expression "the scent of colors" is common usage.

Finally, our hearing of colors is so precise that it would perhaps be impossible to find anyone who would try to represent his impression of bright yellow by means of the bottom register of the piano, or describe dark madder as being like a soprano voice.*³⁷

This explanation (that is, in terms of association) is, however, insufficient in many instances that are for us of particular importance. Anyone who has heard of color therapy knows that colored light can have a particular effect upon the entire body. Various attempts to exploit this power of color and apply it to different nervous disorders have again noted that red light has an enlivening and stimulating effect upon the heart, while blue, on the other hand, can lead to temporary paralysis. If this sort of effect can also be observed in the case of animals, and even plants, then any explanation in terms of association completely falls down. These facts in any case prove that color contains within itself a little-studied but enormous power, which can influence the entire human body as a physical organism.

If association does not seem a sufficient explanation in this case, then it cannot satisfy us as regards the effect of color upon the psyche. In

*Much theoretical and also practical work has already been done on this subject. People are concerned with the possibility of constructing a system of counterpoint for painting also, in terms of these many-sided similarities (e.g., the physical vibrations of air and light). On the other hand, there have been in practice successful attempts to impress a tune upon unmusical children with the help of color (e.g., by means of flowers). Mrs. A. Zakharin-Unkovsky has been working on this subject for many years, and has constructed a special, precise method of "translating the colors of nature into music, of painting the sounds of nature, of seeing sounds in color and hearing colors musically."³⁸ This method has been used for many years in the school run by its inventor, and has been recognized as useful by the St. Petersburg Conservatory. On the other hand, Skriabin has constructed empirically a parallel table of equivalent tones in color and music, which very closely resembles the more physical table of Mrs. Unkovsky. Skriabin has made convincing use of his method in his *Prometheus*. (See the table reproduced in the weekly *Music* [Moscow], no. 9 [1911].)

³⁶Dr. med. Freudenberg, "Spaltung der Persönlichkeit," *Uebersinnliche Welt*, no. 2 (1908): 64-65. Here, too, hearing colors is discussed (p. 65), in which connection the author notes that tables of comparison do not constitute laws of general application. Cf. L. Sabaneev in the weekly *Music* [Moscow], no. 9 (1911); here, the author points to the definite possibility of soon formulating such laws.

general, therefore, color is a means of exerting a direct influence upon the soul. Color is the keyboard. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano, with its many strings.

The artist is the hand that purposefully sets the soul vibrating by means of this or that key.

Thus it is clear that the harmony of colors can only be based upon the principle of purposefully touching the human soul.

This basic tenet we shall call the principle of internal necessity.



VI.

THE LANGUAGE OF FORMS AND COLORS

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils,
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted. — Mark the music.

—Shakespeare

Musical sound has direct access to the soul. It finds there an echo, for man "hath music in himself."

"Everybody knows that yellow, orange, and red induce and represent ideas of joy and of riches" (Delacroix).*

*P. Signac, op. cit. See also the interesting article by K. Scheffler, "Notizen über die Farbe," *Dekorative Kunst* (Feb. 1901).

These two quotations demonstrate the profound relationship between the arts in general, and between music and painting in particular.³⁹ It was surely this striking relationship that inspired Goethe's thought to the effect that there must be a thorough-bass of painting.⁴⁰ This prophetic utterance of Goethe anticipates the situation in which painting finds itself today. This situation is the point of departure from which painting, with the help of the means at its disposal, will become art in the abstract sense, and will eventually achieve purely pictorial composition.

The means at its disposal to achieve this form of composition are as follows:

1. Color.
2. Form.

Form alone, as the representation of an object (whether real or unreal), or as the purely abstract dividing up of a space, of a surface, can exist *per se*.

Not so color. Color cannot extend without limits. One can only imagine an infinite red, can only see it in one's mind's eye. When one hears the word red, this red in our imagination has no boundaries. One must, if necessary, force oneself to envisage them. This red, which one does not see materially, but imagines in the abstract, awakens on the other hand a certain precise, and yet imprecise, representation [*Vorstellung*] having a purely internal, psychological sound.*⁴¹ This red, echoing from the word ["red"], has of itself no particularly pronounced tendency toward warm or cold. This must also be imagined, as fine gradations of the shade of red. For this reason, I have described this way of seeing as mentally imprecise. It is, however, at the same time precise, since the inner sound is left bare, without particularities arising from an accidental tendency toward warm or cold, etc. This inner sound resembles the sound of a trumpet, or of the instrument one pictures in one's mind when one hears the word trumpet, etc., where all particularities are excluded. In fact, one imagines the sound without even taking account of the changes it undergoes, depending on whether it is heard in the open air or in an enclosed space, alone or with other instruments,

whether played by a postilion, a huntsman, a soldier, or a virtuoso.

If, however, this red has to be rendered in material form (as in painting), then it must (1) have a particular shade chosen from the infinite range of different possible shades of red, being thus, so to speak, subjectively characterized; and (2) be limited in its extension upon the surface of the canvas, limited by other colors that are there of necessity and can in no case be avoided, and by means of which (by limitation and proximity) the subjective character is changed (given a veneer of objectivity): the objective element here raises its voice.

This inevitable relationship between color and form brings us to a consideration of the effects of form upon color. Form itself, even if completely abstract, resembling geometrical form, has its own inner sound, is a spiritual being possessing qualities that are identical with that form. A triangle (without more detailed description as to whether it is acute, or obtuse, or equilateral) is one such being, with its own particular spiritual perfume. In conjunction with other forms, this perfume becomes differentiated, receiving additional nuances, but remaining in essence unchangeable, like the scent of a rose, which can never be confused with that of a violet. Likewise the circle, the square, and all other possible forms.* And, therefore, the same situation as we found previously with red: subjective substance encased in an objective shell.

Here, the interaction of form and color becomes clear. A triangle filled with yellow, a circle with blue, a square with green, then again a triangle with green, a circle with yellow, a square with blue, etc. These are all completely different entities, having completely different effects.

Here, it may easily be remarked that the value of many colors is reinforced by certain forms and weakened by others. At all events, sharp colors have a stronger sound in sharp forms (e.g., yellow in a triangle). The effect of deeper colors is emphasized by rounded forms (e.g., blue in a circle). Of course, it is clear on the one hand that the incompatibility of certain forms and certain colors should be regarded not as something "disharmonious," but conversely, as offering new possibilities—i.e., also [a form of] harmony.

Since the number of forms and colors is infinite, the number of possible combinations is likewise infinite as well as their effects. This material is inexhaustible.

*A very similar result is produced in the following example by tree, in which, however, the material element of the representation occupies more space.

*The direction in which, e.g., a triangle is pointing, viz., movement, also plays a significant role. This is of great importance for painting.



Raphael, *Holy Family*.

Form in the narrower sense is nothing more than the delimitation of one surface from another. This is its external description. Since, however, everything external necessarily conceals within itself the internal (which appears more or less strongly upon the surface), every form has inner content.* Form is, therefore, the expression of inner content. This is its internal description. Here, we must think of the example used a few moments ago—that of the piano, and for “color” substitute “form”: the artist is the hand that purposefully sets the human soul vibrating by pressing this or that key (= form). Thus it is clear that the harmony of forms can only be based upon the purposeful touching of the human soul.

This is the principle we have called the principle of internal necessity.

The two aspects of form previously mentioned are at the same time its two aims. And thus its external delimitation is wholly purposeful when it most expressively reveals the inner content belonging to the form.† The external element of form, i.e., its delimitation, where in this case form serves as a means, can assume many different aspects.

And yet, in spite of all the differences form may display, it will never exceed two external limits, which are as follows:

1. Either the form, as contour, serves the purpose of representing the three dimensions of a material object upon a flat surface, i.e., of delineating this material object upon the surface plane. Or else:
2. The form remains abstract, i.e., it does not describe any real object, but is rather a totally abstract entity. Such pure abstract entities, which as such have their own existence, their own influence and

*If a form produces an indifferent effect and, so to speak, “says nothing,” then this should not be understood literally. There is no form, any more than anything else in this world, that says nothing. Still, what it has to say often fails to reach our souls, and this is what happens when what is said is itself indifferent or—more correctly—has not been used in the right place.

†This description of something as “expressive” should be correctly understood: sometimes form can be expressive when muted. Form may sometimes reveal the necessary most expressively by not going to the very limit, but by a gesture, merely showing the path that leads to external expression.

effect, are the square, the circle, the triangle, the rhombus, the trapezoid, and all the other innumerable forms, becoming ever more complicated, having no description in mathematical terms. All these forms are citizens of equal status in the realm of abstraction.

Between these two boundaries lie the infinite number of forms in which both elements are present, and where either the material or the abstract [element] predominates.

These forms are at present that store from which the artist borrows all the individual elements of his creations.

Today, the artist cannot manage exclusively with purely abstract forms. These forms are too imprecise for him. To limit oneself exclusively to the imprecise is to deprive oneself of possibilities, to exclude the purely human and thus impoverish one's means of expression.⁴²

On the other hand, there are no purely material forms in art. It is not possible to represent a material form exactly. For good or evil, the artist is dependent upon his eye, his hand, which in this case are more artistic than his soul, which has no desire to exceed purely photographic aims. The conscious artist, however, who cannot be satisfied with minutely recording the material object, necessarily strives to give expression to the object being represented. This in earlier times was known as idealization, more recently stylization, and tomorrow will be called something else again.*

The impossibility and pointlessness (in art) of aimlessly copying the object, the effort to give to the object an expressive element, these are the points of departure from which the artist sets out on the long path that leads from the "literary" coloration of the object toward purely artistic (or pictorial) aims. This is the path that leads to composition.

With reference to form, purely pictorial composition has two tasks

*The essential element of "idealization" lay in the attempt to beautify organic form, to make it ideal, often resulting in the schematic, whereby the personal, inner sound became muted. "Stylization," arising more out of Impressionism, had as its principal aim not the "beautification" of organic form, but its powerful characterization by the omission of external details. Thus, the sound that arose in this case was of a highly personal nature, but giving undue emphasis to the external. The future handling and transformation of organic form has as its aim the laying bare of the inner sound. The organic form no longer serves in this case as the direct object, but is merely one element in that divine language which is couched in human terms, because it is addressed by man to man.

before it:

1. The composition of the whole picture.
2. The creation of the individual forms that are related to each other in various combinations, while remaining subordinate to the whole composition.* Thus, many objects (real, or possibly abstract)⁴³ are subordinated within the picture to a single overall form and altered to make them compatible with this form, which they comprise. In this case, the individual form, which mainly serves the overall form of the composition, can retain little of its own personal sound and should be regarded principally as an element of that form. The individual form is shaped in this particular way not because its own inner sound (regarded as separate from the overall composition) necessarily requires it, but mainly because it is called upon to serve as a building block for this composition. Here, the first task—the composition of the whole picture—is pursued as a definite goal.†

In this way, the abstract element in art gradually has come increas-

*The overall composition can of course consist of smaller, closed compositions, which externally may even stand in a hostile relationship one to another, yet still serve the purpose of the overall composition (and in this example, specifically by means of this hostile relationship). These smaller compositions also consist of individual forms with their own different inner coloration.

†A cogent example of this: the bathing women by Cézanne, composition in triangular form. (The mystical triangle!) This construction by geometrical form is an old principle, which has of late been rejected because it had degenerated into a rigid academic formula no longer possessing any inner meaning, any soul. Cézanne's application of this principle gave it a new soul, with a strong emphasis upon the purely pictorial-compositional. In this important instance, the triangle is not an auxiliary means employed to bring about the harmonization of the group, but is itself the clearly expressed artistic aim. Here, geometrical form becomes at the same time a means of composition in painting: the emphasis lies upon the purely artistic aim, with a strong concordance of the abstract element. For this reason, Cézanne quite rightly alters the proportions of the human body: not only must the whole figure strive toward the point of the triangle, but even the individual parts of the body are themselves driven more and more strongly upward from below, as if by an inner storm, they become lighter and lighter and expand visibly.

ingly to the fore, [that same element] which only yesterday concealed itself shyly, hardly visible behind purely materialistic strivings.

And this growth and eventual predominance of the abstract is a natural process.

Natural, because the more organic form is pushed into the background, the more this abstract element comes to the fore of its own accord, with increasing stridency.

The remaining organic element has, however, as already noted, its own inner sound, which may either be identical with the inner sound of the second constituent element (the abstract) within the same form (a simple combination of the two elements), or which may be of a different nature (a complicated, and possibly necessarily disharmonious combination). In any case, the sound of the organic element, even when pushed right into the background, is able to make itself heard within the chosen form. For this reason, the choice of real objects is of some importance. As regards the two notes (a spiritual chord)⁴⁴ sounded by the two constituent elements of the form, the organic may either reinforce the abstract (by means of consonance or dissonance) or disturb it. The object itself may constitute only a contingent sound that, when replaced by another, causes no essential change in the basic sound.

A composition in the form of a rhombus can, for example, be constructed so as to include a number of human figures. After examining them in the light of one's sensibility [*Gefühl*], one asks oneself the question: Are the human figures essential to the composition, or could they be replaced by other organic forms that would avoid disturbing the basic inner sound of the composition? And if so, then we are faced with an example in which the sound of the object not only does not help the sound of the abstract element, but is directly inimical to it: an indifferent sound on the part of the object weakens the abstract. In fact, this is not only logically, but also artistically the case. In this instance, therefore, one should either find another object more compatible with the inner sound of the abstract element (compatible either as consonance or dissonance), or else choose to let the whole form remain purely abstract.⁴⁵ Here let us once again remember the example of the piano. Instead of [the words] color and form, substitute object. Every object (regardless of whether it was created directly by "nature" or by human hand) is a being with its own life and, inevitably, with its own effect flowing from it. Man is constantly subject to this psychological effect. Many of the results will remain in the "subconscious" (where they exert

just as lively and creative an effect). Many rise to the level of the "conscious." One can free oneself from many of them simply by closing one's soul to them. "Nature," i.e., the ever-changing external environment of man, continually sets the strings of the piano (the soul) in vibration, by means of the keys (objects). These effects, which often seem chaotic to us, consist of three elements: the effect of the color of the object, the effect of its form, and the effect—independent of color and form—of the object itself.

Now, however, in the place of nature we have the artist, who has the same three elements at his disposal. And without further ado, we arrive at our conclusion: Here too it is the element of purpose that is the deciding factor. So it is clear that the choice of object (= a contributory element in the harmony of form) must be based only upon the principle of the purposeful touching of the human soul.

Therefore, the choice of object also arises from the principle of internal necessity.

The more freely abstract the form becomes, the purer, and also the more primitive it sounds. Therefore, in a composition in which corporeal elements are more or less superfluous, they can be more or less omitted and replaced by purely abstract forms, or by corporeal forms that have been completely abstracted. In every instance of this kind of transposition, or composition using purely abstract forms, the only judge, guide, and arbitrator should be one's feelings. Moreover, the more the artist utilizes these abstracted or abstract forms, the more at home he becomes in this sphere, and the deeper he is able to penetrate it. The spectator too, guided by the artist, likewise increases his knowledge of this abstract language and finally masters it.

Here, we are confronted by the question: Must we not then renounce the object altogether, throw it to the winds and instead lay bare the purely abstract? This is a question that naturally arises, the answer to which is at once indicated by an analysis of the concordance of the two elements of form (the objective and the abstract). Just as every word spoken (tree, sky, man) awakens an inner vibration, so too does every pictorially represented object.⁴⁶ To deprive oneself of the possibility of thus calling up vibrations would be to narrow one's arsenal of expressive means. At least, that is how it is today. But apart from today's answer, the above question receives the eternal answer to every question in art that begins with "must." There is no "must" in art, which is forever

free. Art flees before the word "must," as day flees from night.

Regarding the second task of composition, the creation of individual forms as building blocks for the whole composition, it should also be remarked that the same form always produces the same sound under the same conditions. Only the conditions always differ, which permits us to draw two conclusions:

1. The ideal sound changes when combined with other forms.
2. It changes, even in the same context (inasmuch as it is possible for the context to remain the same), if the direction of the form changes.* From these two conclusions arises automatically another.

Nothing is absolute. And formal composition, which is based upon this relativity, is dependent upon (1) the variability of the combinations of forms, and (2) upon the variability, down to the tiniest detail, of every individual form. Every form is as fragile as a puff of smoke: the tiniest, barely perceptible alteration of any of its parts changes it essentially. And this goes so far that it is perhaps easier to achieve the expression of the same sound by the use of different forms than by the repetition of the same form: a really exact repetition lies beyond the bounds of possibility. As long as we remain particularly sensitive only to the overall effect of the composition, then this fact is more of theoretical importance. But as people develop greater and more refined sensitivity through the use of more and more abstract forms (which will receive no interpretation in physical terms), then this fact will have ever-increasing practical importance. Thus, on the one hand, the difficulty of art will increase, but on the other, the wealth of forms available as means of expression will qualitatively and quantitatively increase with it. The question of "distortion" will, of its own accord, disappear in the process, to be replaced by another, far more artistic one: To what extent is the inner sound of the given form concealed or laid bare? This change of viewpoint will once again lead to still further enrichment of the available means of expression, since concealment wields an enormous power in art. The combination of the revealed and the hidden will constitute a further possibility of creating new motifs for formal composition.

*What one calls motion, e.g., a triangle that is simply standing upright has a more peaceful, motionless, stable sound than if the same triangle is placed obliquely upon the surface.

Without such developments in this field, formal composition would remain impossible. This will, as a way of composing a picture, always seem mere unfounded willfulness to those who remain deaf to the inner sound of form (corporeal and especially, abstract form). The dislocation of individual forms upon the picture surface appears merely inconsequential, a meaningless formal game. Here, we find the same criterion and the same principle we have found up to now, in every case, to be the only purely artistic one, free from the accidental: the principle of internal necessity.

If, e.g., facial features or different parts of the body have been dislocated or "distorted" for artistic reasons, one comes up against not only purely pictorial problems, but also anatomical ones, which confine the scope of the artistic intention, forcing irrelevant considerations upon it. In our case, however, everything irrelevant disappears of its own accord, and only the essential remains—the artistic aim. And it is this apparently willful, but in fact strictly determinable, possibility of distorting forms which is one of the sources of an infinite series of purely artistic creations.

Thus, on the one hand, the flexibility of the individual forms, the so-to-speak internal-organic changes they undergo, their direction within the picture (movement), and the emphasis upon the corporeal or the abstract element of these individual forms; on the other hand, the juxtaposition of forms that together constitute the larger formal patterns, built up out of groups of forms; the juxtaposition of individual forms with these larger groups of forms, which makes up the overall composition of the whole picture; further, the principles of consonance or dissonance of all those parts mentioned, i.e., the meeting of individual forms, the limitation of one form by another, likewise the jostling, the confluence or dismemberment [*Mit- und Zerreißen*] of the individual forms; similar treatment of different groups of forms, the combination of the hidden and the revealed, of the rhythmic and the arrhythmic upon the same surface, of abstract forms—on the one hand purely geometrical (simple or more complex), on the other, indescribable in geometrical terms; combinations of delimitations of forms one from another (more/less strongly), etc., etc.—all these are the elements that constitute the possibility of a purely graphic "counterpoint" and will give rise to it. And all this is only the counterpoint of an art of black and white, as long as we exclude color.

Color, which itself affords material for counterpoint, and which con-



Cézanne, *Bathers*

ceals endless possibilities within itself, will give rise, in combination with drawing, to that great pictorial counterpoint, by means of which painting also will attain the level of composition and thus place itself in the service of the divine, as a totally pure art. And it is always the same infallible guide that leads us on toward these dizzy heights: the principle of internal necessity!⁴⁷

* * *

Internal necessity arises from three mystical sources. It is composed of three mystical necessities:

1. Every artist, as creator, must express what is peculiar to himself (element of personality).
2. Every artist, as child of his time, must express what is peculiar to his own time (element of style, in its inner value, compounded of the language of the time and the language of the race, as long as the race exists as such).
3. Every artist, as servant of art, must express what is peculiar to art in general (element of the pure and eternally artistic, which pervades every individual, every people, every age, and which is to be seen in the works of every artist, of every nation, and of every period, and which, being the principal element of art, knows neither time nor space).

One must simply penetrate these first two elements with one's spiritual eye to reveal the third element. And then one sees that a "crudely" carved column from an Indian temple is just as much animated by the same soul as any living, "modern" work.

There has been, and still is today, much talk of the personal element in art; now and again, and today with increasing frequency, one hears talk of the style to come. Even if these questions are of great importance, they will gradually lose their urgency and their significance when viewed from across centuries and finally across millenia, eventually becoming indifferent and dead.

Only the third element, that of the pure, the eternally artistic, remains immortal. It does not lose its strength with time; on the contrary, it gains in strength continually. Egyptian sculpture certainly moves us more today than it was able to move its contemporaries: it was muted by

being far too closely bound to its contemporaries by then still-living characteristics of time and personality. Today, we are able to hear revealed in it the sound of an eternal art. On the other hand, the more a "present-day" work possesses of the first two elements, the more easily it will, of course, be able to find access to the souls of its contemporaries. And further: the more strongly the third element is present in this modern work, the more the first two elements are overshadowed, and the more difficult becomes this access to the souls of its contemporaries. For this reason, centuries must sometimes elapse before the sound of the third element can reach the souls of men.

Thus, the predominance of this third element in a work of art is the sign of its greatness and of the greatness of the artist.⁴⁸

These three mystical necessities are the three necessary elements of the work of art, which are closely bound up with one another, i.e., they interact upon each other, a phenomenon that in every age expresses the unity of the work of art. The first two elements, however, embrace the temporal and the spatial, constituting in relation to the element of the pure and eternally artistic, which is beyond time and space, a kind of relatively opaque outer skin. The process of the development of art consists to a certain extent in the ability of the pure and eternally artistic to free itself from the elements of personality and temporal style. Therefore, these two forces act not only in conjunction, but also as brakes.

Personal and temporal style give rise in every epoch to many precisely determined forms, which, despite their considerable apparent dissimilarity, are so organically related that they can be described as one single form: their inner sound is ultimately one overall sound.

These two elements are of a subjective nature. The whole period wants to reflect itself, to express its own life in artistic form. Likewise, the artist wants to express his own self, and selects only those forms that are emotionally appropriate to him.

Slowly but surely, the style of the period becomes formed, i.e., a certain external and subjective form. The element of the pure and eternally artistic is, as opposed to this, the objective element, which becomes comprehensible with the help of the subjective.

This ineluctable will for expression of the objective is the force described here as internal necessity, which requires from the subjective today one general form, tomorrow another. It is the constant tireless impulse, the spring that drives [us] continually "forward." The

spirit progresses, and hence today's inner laws of harmony are tomorrow's external laws, which in their further application continue to have life only by virtue of this same necessity, which has become externalized. It is clear that the spiritual, inner power of art merely uses contemporary forms as a stepping stone to further progress.

In short, then, the effect of inner necessity, and thus the development of art, is the advancing expression of the external-objective in terms of the temporal-subjective. Thus, again, the struggle of the objective against the subjective.

For example, today's accepted form is the triumph of yesterday's inner necessity, which has attained a certain external level of emancipation, of freedom. This present-day freedom was secured by means of a struggle, and appears to many, as always, to be the "last word." One of the canons of this limited freedom is that the artist may utilize every form as a means of expression, as long as he bases his art upon forms borrowed from nature. This demand is, however, like all previous demands, merely temporal. It is the external expression of today, i.e., today's external necessity. Seen from the standpoint of inner necessity, such a limitation cannot be imposed, and the artist today is free to base his art entirely upon that inner principle from which today's external limitation is derived, and which may thus be defined as follows: the artist may utilize every form as a means of expression.

So we see, finally (and this is of immeasurable importance for all periods, and especially "today"!), that the search for the personal, for style (and thus, incidentally, for the national) not only cannot be arrived at intentionally, but also is not of such importance as we think today. And we see that the common relationship between works of art, which is not weakened by the passage of millenia, but is increasingly strengthened, does not lie in the exterior, in the external, but in the root of roots—in the mystical content of art. We see that the dependence upon "schools," the search for "direction," the demand for "principles" in a work of art and for definite means of expression appropriate to the age, can only lead us astray, bringing in their train misunderstanding, obscurity, and unintelligibility.

The artist should be blind to "accepted" or "unaccepted" form, deaf to the precepts and demands of his time.

His eyes should be always directed toward his own inner life, and his ears turned to the voice of internal necessity.

Then he will seize upon all permitted means, and just as easily upon

all forbidden means.

This is the only way of giving expression to mystical necessity.

All means are moral if they are internally necessary.

All means are sinful if they did not spring from the source of internal necessity.

On the other hand, even if one can today speculate *ad infinitum* along these lines, it is nonetheless premature to theorize about the further details. Theory is never in advance of practice in art, never drags practice in its train, but vice versa. Everything depends on feeling, especially at first. What is right artistically can only be attained through feeling, particularly at the outset. Even if overall construction can be arrived at purely by theory, nevertheless there remains something extra, which is the true spirit of creation (and thus, to a certain extent, its very essence as well), which can never be created or discovered through theory, but only suddenly inspired by feeling. Since art affects the emotions, it can only exert its effect by means of the emotions. The right result, even given the most careful proportions, the finest weights and scales, can never be the result of mental calculation of deductive reasoning. These proportions cannot be calculated, nor these scales be found ready-made.*⁴⁹ Proportions and scales are to be found not outside, but within the artist; they are what one might call a feeling for artistic limits, a sense of tact—qualities the artist is born with, which are heightened by enthusiasm so as to reveal genius. It is in this sense that Goethe's prophecy of the possibility of a thorough-bass of painting is to be understood. This kind of grammar of painting can at the moment only be guessed at, and if it eventually comes about, it will be constructed not so much on the basis of physical laws (as has already been attempted, and is being attempted again today: Cubism), but rather upon the laws of internal necessity, which may quite correctly be described as spiritual.

*That great and versatile master, Leonardo da Vinci, devised a system or scale of little spoons for measuring out the various colors. One was supposed to be able to achieve an automatic harmony by this method. One of his pupils went to a lot of trouble to learn how to apply this method and, disheartened by his lack of success, asked another colleague how the master managed with these measuring spoons. "The master never uses them," replied his colleague. (Merezhkovsky, *Leonardo da Vinci*, German translation by A. Eliasberg, published by R. Piper and Co., Munich.)⁵⁰

* * *

Thus we see that the internal lies at the heart of the very tiniest problem, and also at the heart of the greatest problems in painting. The path upon which we find ourselves today, and which is the greatest good fortune of our time, leads us to rid ourselves of the external,* to replace this basis by another diametrically opposed to it: the basis of internal necessity. But just as the body is strengthened and developed through exercise, so too is the spirit. Just as the body, if neglected, becomes weak and incapable, so too does the spirit. The sense of feeling with which the artist is born resembles the talent of which the Bible speaks, which is not to be buried. The artist who does not use his gifts is a lazy servant.

For this reason, it is not only not harmful, but positively necessary for the artist to be acquainted with the starting point of these exercises.

This starting point consists in the weighing-up of the inner value of one's materials, on an objective scale, i.e., the examination—in our case—of color, which by and large must affect every man.

Thus we need not become involved here with the deep and subtle complexities of color, but shall content ourselves with the elementary representation of the simple colors.

One concentrates first upon color in isolation, letting oneself be affected by single colors. In this way we are confronted with the simplest possible schema. The whole question can be couched in the simplest possible terms.

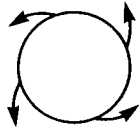
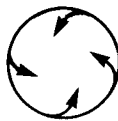
The two great divisions, which at once become obvious, are:

1. warmth or coldness of a color
2. lightness or darkness of a color

*The concept "external" should not here be confused with the concept "material." I employ the former concept simply as a substitute for "external necessity," which can never lead us beyond the bounds of accepted and hence mere traditional "beauty." "Internal necessity" recognizes no such boundaries, and thus often creates things we are accustomed to describe as "ugly." "Ugly" is hence merely a conventional concept, dragging out a semblance of continued existence as the external result of an inner necessity that has already produced its effect and has long since been made incarnate. In earlier times everything unrelated to internal necessity was stamped with the term ugly. The beautiful, on the other hand, was defined as that which was related to it. And rightly—everything that arises from internal necessity is beautiful in consequence. And is sooner or later recognized as such.

In this way, for every color there are four main sounds [*vier Hauptklänge*]: (I) warm, and either (1) light, or (2) dark; or (II) cold, and either (1) light, or (2) dark.

TABLE I.

	first pair of opposites: I and II /	(of an inner character, as emotional effect)
I	Warm Yellow	Cold Blue = I contrast
	2 movements:	
	1. horizontal	
	toward spec- tator (physical) ←	→ away from spec- tator (spiritual)
	Yellow	Blue
	2. eccentric	and concentric
		
II	Light White	Dark Black = II contrast
	2 movements:	
	1. The movement of resistance	
	Eternal resistance and yet possibili- ty (birth)	complete lack of resistance and no possibility (death)
	White	Black
	2. Eccentric and concentric, as in the case of yellow and blue, but in petrified form.	

In the most general terms, the warmth or coldness of a color is due to its inclination toward yellow or toward blue. This is a distinction that occurs, so to speak, within the same plane, whereby the color retains its basic tonality, but this tonality becomes more material or more immaterial. It is a horizontal movement, the warm colors moving in this horizontal plane in the direction of the spectator, striving toward him; the cold, away from him.

The colors that cause the horizontal movement of another color are themselves characterized by this same movement; they have, however, another very different movement that distinguishes them sharply one from another as regards their inner effect. They constitute thereby the first great contrast in terms of inner values. The inclination of a color toward cold or warm is thus of incalculable internal importance and significance.

The second great contrast is the difference between white and black, i.e., those colors that produce the other opposing pair, which together make up the four main possibilities of tone: the inclination of the color toward light or dark. These also have the same movement toward or away from the spectator, although not in dynamic, but in static, rigid form (see Table I).

The second movement that concerns yellow and blue, and contributes to the first great contrast, is their eccentric or concentric motion.* If one makes two circles of the same size and fills one with yellow and the other with blue, one notices after only a short period of concentrating upon these circles that the yellow streams outward, moves away from the center, and approaches almost visibly toward the spectator. The blue, however, develops a centripetal movement (like a snail disappearing into its shell), and withdraws from the spectator. The eye is stung by the first circle, while it immerses itself in the second.

This effect is heightened if one adds the contrast between light and dark: the effect of yellow is increased by lightening the tone (or, put simply, by adding white), while the effect of blue is intensified by increased darkness of tone (admixture of black). This fact assumes even greater significance when one notices that yellow tends toward light (i.e., white) to such an extent that no very dark yellow can exist. There is, therefore, a profound relationship in physical terms between yellow

*All these assertions are the results of empirical-spiritual experience and are not based upon any positive science.

and white, just as between blue and black, for blue can assume so deep a tone that it verges on black. In addition to this physical resemblance, there is also a moral similarity that sharply distinguishes the two pairs (yellow and white on the one hand, blue and black on the other) in their inner values, while closely relating the two constituents of each pair (of which more later, when discussing white and black).

If one tries to make yellow (this typically warm color) colder, it takes on a greenish hue, and at once loses much of both its movements (horizontal and centrifugal). It assumes a somewhat sickly and supernatural character, like someone full of drive and energy prevented by external circumstances from using them. Blue, having the completely opposite motion, affects yellow like a brake; eventually, upon further addition of blue, both directionally opposed motions cancel each other out, resulting in motionlessness and tranquillity. The result is green.

The same occurs when white is darkened by adding black. It loses its constancy, and the eventual result is gray, which is very close to green in its moral value.

The only difference is that within green are hidden the paralyzed forces of yellow and blue, which may yet become active again. A living possibility exists in green that is totally lacking in gray. It is lacking because gray consists of colors that possess no purely active power (of movement), but consist on the one hand of motionless resistance, and on the other of immobility incapable of resistance (like an infinitely strong wall stretching off into infinity and an endless, bottomless pit).

Since both the colors that make up green are active and have movement within themselves, one can in fact establish their spiritual effect purely theoretically, on the basis of the character of the movement. Likewise, if one proceeds in a purely experimental fashion, letting the colors affect oneself, one comes to the same conclusion. In fact, both the primary movement of yellow, that of striving toward the spectator, which can be raised to the level of importunity (by increasing the intensity of the yellow), and its secondary movement, which causes it to leap over its boundaries, dissipating its strength upon its surroundings—both resemble the properties of any material force that exerts itself unthinkingly upon the object and pours forth aimlessly in every direction. On the other hand, yellow, when directly observed (in some kind of geometrical form), is disquieting to the spectator, pricking him, stimulating him, revealing the nature of the power expressed in this color, which has an effect upon our sensibilities at once impudent

and importunate.* This property of yellow, a color that inclines considerably toward the brighter tones, can be raised to a pitch of intensity unbearable to the eye and to the spirit. Upon such intensification, it affects us like the shrill sound of a trumpet being played louder and louder, or the sound of a high-pitched fanfare.†

Yellow is the typical earthly color. Yellow cannot be pushed very far into the depths. When made colder with blue it takes on, as mentioned above, a sickly hue. If one compares it to human states of mind, it could have the effect of representing madness—not melancholy or hypochondria, but rather mania, blind madness, or frenzy—like the lunatic who attacks people, destroying everything, dissipating his physical strength in every direction, expending it without plan and without limit until utterly exhausted. It is also like the reckless pouring out of the last forces of summer in the brilliant foliage of autumn, which is deprived of peaceful blue, rising to heaven. There arise colors full of a wild power, which, however, lack any gift for depth.

We find this gift for depth in blue, and likewise, first of all theoretically, in its physical movement (1) away from the spectator, and (2) toward its own center. And this is the result produced by letting blue (in no matter what geometrical form) affect our senses. The inclination of blue toward depth is so great that it becomes more intense the darker the tone, and has a more characteristic inner effect. The deeper the blue becomes, the more strongly it calls man toward the infinite, awakening in him a desire for the pure and, finally, for the supernatural. It is the color of the heavens, the same color we picture to ourselves when we hear the sound of the word "heaven."

*This is, e.g., the effect produced by the yellow Bavarian mailboxes, assuming that they have not lost their original color. It is interesting to notice that lemons are yellow (acid taste), and that canaries are also yellow (shrill sound of their singing). These are examples of a particular intensity of the color-tone.

†The correspondence between color and musical tones is of course only relative. Just as a violin can produce very different tones, so, e.g., can yellow in its various shades be expressed by the sounds of different instruments. In the case of such parallels, one should think of the pure mid-tone in color, and in music the middle tone produced when not varied by use of vibrato, mute, etc.

Blue is the typically heavenly color.* Blue unfolds in its lowest depths the element of tranquility.† As it deepens toward black, it assumes overtones of a superhuman sorrow.‡ It becomes like an infinite self-absorption into that profound state of seriousness which has, and can have, no end. As it tends toward the bright [tones], to which blue is, however, less suited, it takes on a more indifferent character and appears to the spectator remote and impersonal, like the high, pale-blue sky. The brighter it becomes, the more it loses in sound, until it turns into silent stillness and becomes white. Represented in musical terms, light blue resembles the flute, dark blue the 'cello, darker still the wonderful sounds of the double bass; while in a deep, solemn form the sound of blue can be compared to that of the deep notes of the organ.

Yellow easily becomes acute and cannot sink to great depths. Blue becomes acute only with difficulty and cannot rise to great heights.

The ideal balance of these two colors—diametrically opposed in every respect—when they are mixed, produces green. The horizontal movement of one color cancels out that of the other. The movement toward and away from the center cancels itself out in the same way. Tranquility results. This logical conclusion can easily be arrived at theoretically. And the direct effect upon the eye and, finally, through the eye upon the

*“... les nymbes . . . sont dorés pour l'empereur et les prophètes (i.e., for human beings) et bleu de ciel pour les personnages symboliques (i.e., for those beings which have only spiritual existence). N. Kondakov, *Histoire de l'art byzantin consid. princip. dans les miniatures*, vol. 2, p. 38, 2 (Paris: 1886–1891).

† Unlike green—which, as we shall see later, conveys earthly, self-satisfied repose—but rather solemn, superterrestrial absorption. This should be understood literally: The “earthly” lies on the path which leads to the “super[terrestrial],” and cannot be avoided. All the torments and questionings and contradictions of earthly life must be experienced. No man has succeeded in escaping them. Here too is internal necessity, concealed under the cover of the external. The recognition of this necessity is the source of “peace.” Since, however, it is this very peace which is most distant from us, it is only with difficulty, even in the realms of color, that we are able to approach inwardly the state of this predominance of blue.

‡ Different again from violet, as described below.

soul, gives rise to the same result. This fact has been known not only to doctors (and in particular to oculists), but to everyone for some time. Absolute green is the most peaceful color there is: it does not move in any direction, has no overtones of joy or sorrow or passion, demands nothing, calls out to no one. This continual absence of movement is a property that has a beneficial effect upon tired people and tired souls, but which after a certain period of repose can easily become tedious. Paintings composed as harmonies in green confirm this assertion. Just as a picture painted in yellow gives out a spiritual warmth, while a blue one will appear too chill (i.e., an active effect, for man, as an element of the cosmos, is created for continual, perhaps eternal activity), so does green appear merely tedious (passive effect). Passivity is the most characteristic quality of absolute green, a quality tainted by a suggestion of obese self-satisfaction. Thus, pure green is to the realm of color what the so-called bourgeoisie is to human society: it is an immobile, complacent element, limited in every respect. This green is like a fat, extremely healthy cow, lying motionless, fit only for chewing the cud, regarding the world with stupid, lackluster eyes.* Green is the principal color of summer, when nature has outlived the year's time of storm and stress, the spring, and has sunk into self-contented repose (see Table II).

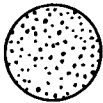
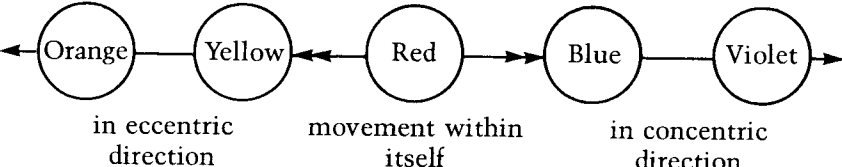
If we disturb the balance of pure green, making it tend toward yellow, it comes alive, full of joy and youth. By the admixture of yellow, an active force is brought into play again. If, however, blue predominates, the green becomes deeper, taking on a quite different sound: it becomes serious and, so to speak, pensive. In this case, therefore, another active element has come to the fore, but one of a totally different character than in the case of the warmer green.

When tending toward light or dark, green still retains its original character of equanimity and peace, in the case of light green the former characteristic predominating, of dark green the latter. Which is natural enough, since these changes are brought about by the addition of white or black. In musical terms, I would think the best way of characterizing absolute green would be the quiet, expansive middle register of the violin.

These two last-named colors—white and black—have already been defined in general terms. As a closer definition, white, which is often

* This is the effect of this ideal, much-vaunted “balance.” As Christ put it, “You are neither cold nor warm. . . .”

TABLE II.

Second Pair of Opposites: III and IV		(of a physical character, as complementary colors)
III	Red	Green = III Contrast
I	Movement	spiritual resolution of the I. Contrast
	Movement within itself	= potential mobility = immobility
		
	Eccentric and concentric movement disappear completely When mixed optically = Gray as with mechanical mixture of white and black = Gray	
IV	Orange	Violet = IV Contrast
	arising out of the I contrast thus	
	1. effect of active element yellow on red = Orange	
	2. effect of passive element blue on red = Violet	
		

regarded as a non color (due in particular to the Impressionists, who see "no white in nature"),* is like the symbol of a world where all colors, as material qualities and substances, have disappeared. This world is so far above us that no sound from it can reach our ears. We hear only a great silence that, represented in material terms, appears to us like an insurmountable, cold indestructible wall, stretching away to infinity. For this reason, white also affects our psyche like a great silence, which for us is absolute. Its inner sound is like the absence of sound, corresponding in many cases to pauses in music, which constitute only a momentary interruption of the development of a movement or of the [musical] content, as opposed to the definite conclusion of that development. It is a silence that is not dead, but full of possibilities. White has the sound as of a silence that suddenly becomes comprehensible. It is a nothingness having the character of youth or, more exactly, the nothingness that exists before the beginning, before birth. Perhaps the earth sounded thus in the white period of the ice age.

Black has an inner sound of nothingness bereft of possibilities, a dead nothingness as if the sun had become extinct, an eternal silence without future, without hope. Musically, it is represented by a general pause, after which any continuation seems like the beginning of another world, for that part which was brought to a close by this pause remains finished, complete for all time: the wheel has come full circle. Black is something extinguished, like a spent funeral-pyre, something motionless, like a corpse, which is dead to all sensations, which lets everything simply pass it by. It is like the silence of the body after death, the close of life. Black is externally the most toneless color, against which all other colors, even the weakest, sound stronger and more precise. Not so with white, compared with which the sound of nearly all other colors be-

*Van Gogh in his letters asks the question whether he should not depict a white wall simply as white. This question, which can present no difficulties to the nonnaturalistic painter, who uses colors according to their inner sound, appears to an impressionistic-naturalistic painter as a dangerous attack upon nature. The question must appear just as revolutionary and insane to such an artist as the substitution of blue shadows for brown appeared in his own times (the favorite example of "green sky and blue grass"). Just as in the latter case it is possible to recognize the transition from academicism and realism to Impressionism and Naturalism, so in Van Gogh's question we see the seeds of the "interpretation of nature"—i.e., the tendency to represent nature not in terms of external appearances, but rather to emphasize the element of inner impression, which recently has become known as expression.

comes dulled, while many dissolve completely, leaving nothing but a weak, paralyzed echo behind them.*

It was not for nothing that white was chosen as the vestment of pure joy and immaculate purity. And black as the vestment of the greatest, most profound mourning and as the symbol of death. The balance between these two colors that is achieved by mechanically mixing them together forms gray. Naturally enough, a color that has come into being in this way can have no external sound, nor display any movement. Gray is toneless and immobile. This immobility, however, is of a different character from the tranquillity of green, which is the product of two active colors and lies midway between them. Gray is therefore the disconsolate lack of motion. The deeper this gray becomes, the more the disconsolate element is emphasized, until it becomes suffocating. As the color becomes lighter, we feel a breath of air, the possibility of respiring, for it contains a certain element of concealed hope. A similar gray is formed by the optical mixture of green and red, arising out of a mixture, in spiritual terms, of self-complacent passivity, and a powerful, active, inner glow.†

Red, as one imagines it, is a limitless, characteristically warm color, with the inner effect of a highly lively, living, turbulent color, yet which lacks the rather light-minded character of yellow, dissipating itself in every direction, but rather reveals, for all its energy and intensity, a powerful note of immense, almost purposeful strength. In this burning, glowing character, which is principally within itself and very little directed toward the external, we find, so to speak, a kind of masculine maturity (see Table II).

This ideal red, however, can in reality undergo any number of changes, permutations, and variations. Red is very rich and various in its material form. One need only think of red lead, vermilion, English red, madder, from the lightest to the darkest tones! This color displays the possibility

*Vermilion, e.g., appears dull and dirty next to white, whereas next to black it assumes a bright, pure, striking power. Bright yellow becomes weak and runny next to white; next to black, its effect is so strong that it tears itself free from the background, hovers in the air, and leaps into one's eye.

†Gray—immobility and peace. Delacroix sensed this when he sought to achieve the effect of peace by the mixture of green and red (Signac, op. cit.).

of maintaining more or less the same basic tone, while appearing at the same time characteristically warm or cold.*

Bright, warm red (minimum) has a certain affinity with mid-yellow (it also contains quite a large amount of yellow as a pigment), and evokes feelings of power, energy, striving, determination, joy, triumph (pure), etc. In musical terms, it reminds one again of the sound of a fanfare, in which the tuba can also be heard—a determined, insistent, powerful sound.

In its middle tones, such as vermilion, red has more of the constancy of powerful emotion: it is like a steadily burning passion, a self-confident power that cannot easily be subdued, but can be extinguished by blue, as a red-hot iron by water. This red cannot bear anything cold, and in combination with it loses its sound and meaning. Or, to put it better: This violent, tragic cooling produces a tone that is avoided and decried by artists, particularly today, as "muddy." Now this is wrong. Mud, in its material form, as a material representation, a material being possesses, like all other material beings, its own inner sound. For this reason, avoiding mud in painting today is just as unfair and biased as yesterday's fear of "pure" colors. It should never be forgotten that all means are pure that arise from internal necessity. Here, the externally "dirty" is internally pure. Or else, the externally pure is internally dirty. By comparison with yellow, red lead and vermilion are of similar character, but their movement toward the spectator is considerably less: these reds glow, but more within themselves, lacking entirely the rather maniacal character of yellow. For this reason, perhaps, they are more popular than yellow: one often finds a predilection for red in primitive peasant ornamentation, and also in folk costumes where, in the open air, as the complementary of green it has a particularly "beautiful" effect. This red is of a principally material and very active character (in isolation) and has no tendency toward the deeper tones, any more than yellow. Only when it penetrates a higher milieu does this red take on a deeper tone. Darkening it with black is dangerous, for dead black extinguishes the glow or reduces it to a minimum. There results then brown: blunt, hard, capable of little movement, and in which red sounds as a scarcely audible murmur. Yet

*Admittedly, every color can be either warm or cold, but nowhere does one find so great a contrast as in the case of red. A whole fund of internal possibilities!

from this externally weak tone arises an internally strong and powerful one. From the necessary application of brown springs an indescribable inner beauty—that of restraint. Vermilion has a sound like a tuba, and a parallel can be drawn with the sound of a loud drum beat.

Like every fundamentally cold color, cold red (such as madder) can be considerably darkened (especially by the addition of ultramarine). It also changes considerably in character: the impression of a deep glow increases, but the active element gradually disappears completely. This active element is, however, not so totally absent in, as e.g., dark green, but rather gives an intimation of its presence, the expectation of a new energetic upsurge, like some animal that has retreated into its lair and is lying hidden but nevertheless on the watch, ready to make a wild spring. Herein lies the great difference between red and the deepening tones of blue, for red, even in this state, still produces an impression of the corporeal. It reminds one of the passion-laden middle and lower registers of the 'cello. Cold red, when bright, gains more of the corporeal element, but of the purely corporeal, giving the impression of pure youthful joy, like the fresh, pure figure of a young girl. This same image can easily be expressed in musical terms by the high, clear, singing tones of the violin.* This color, which can only be intensified by the admixture of white, is popular among young girls as a color for dresses.

Warm red, when lightened by the use of related yellow, becomes orange. By this addition, the inward movement of red is transformed into the beginning stages of outward-streaming movement, flowing out into its surroundings. Red, however, which plays a considerable part in [the constitution of] orange, also preserves in this color an undertone of seriousness. It resembles a man sure of his powers, and for this reason evokes a particularly healthy feeling. This color is like a medium-toned church bell ringing the Angelus, or a powerful contralto voice, or a viola playing a largo.

While the approach of red toward the spectator brings about orange, the [effect of] withdrawal that blue exerts upon red constitutes violet, which has a tendency to move away from the spectator. Here, however, the basic red must be cold, for warm red cannot be mixed with cold blue (not by any means), which is also true in spiritual terms.

*The pure, joyful, often consecutive tones of little bells (and of sleigh-bells) are described in Russian as a "raspberry-colored sound." The color of raspberry juice is close to that of the bright, cold red just described.

Violet is thus a cooled-down red, in both a physical and a psychological sense. It therefore has something sad, an air of something sickly, something extinguished about it (like a slag heap!). It is not for nothing that this color is considered suitable for the clothes of old women. The Chinese in fact use it as the color of mourning. It is like the sound of the *cor-anglais*, of the shawm, and in its deeper tones resembles those of the lower woodwind (e.g., the bassoon).*

The last two colors, which arise from a modification of red by yellow or blue, are made up of an unstable balance of forces.⁵¹ In the mixing of colors one notices their tendency to lose this equilibrium. One has the feeling as of watching a tightrope walker, who has to take care to maintain his balance on both sides continually. Where does orange begin, and red and yellow stop? Where is the borderline that divides violet strictly from red or blue?†

These two last-defined colors (orange and violet) constitute the fourth and last pair of opposites in the realm of the simple, primitive colors, which means that in a physical sense they stand in the same relationship to one another as do those of the third pair (red and green), i.e., as complementary colors (see Table II).

The six colors that constitute the three great pairs of opposites confront us like a great circle, like a snake biting its own tail (the symbol of infinity and of eternity). And to right and left, the two great possibilities of silence: the silence of birth and the silence of death (see Table III).

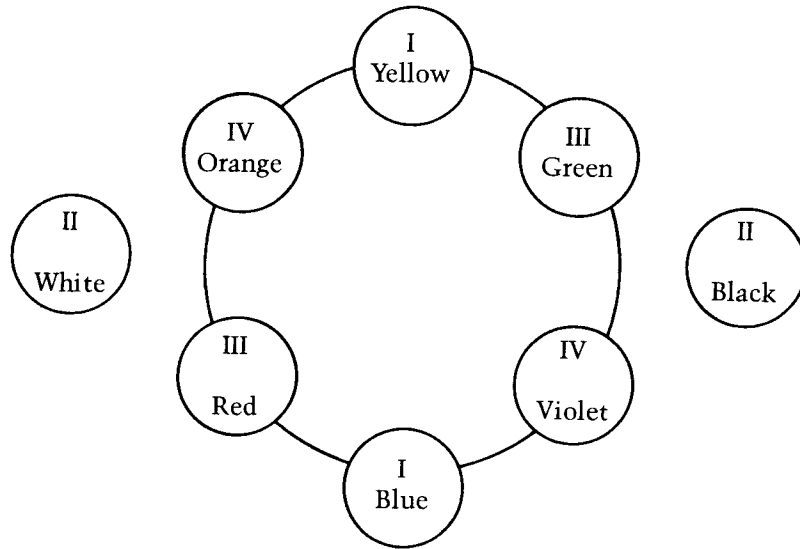
* *
*

It is clear that all the descriptions employed for these quite simple colors are extremely provisional and clumsy. So too are the emotions we have used to characterize these colors (joy, sorrow, etc.). These emotions are no more than material states of the soul. The different tones of the colors, like those of music, are of a much subtler nature and awaken far

*Artists sometimes reply jokingly to the question "How are you?" with the words "All violet," which signifies far from happy.

†Violet also has the tendency to turn into lilac. And when does the one end and the other begin?

Table III



The pairs of opposites represented as a ring between two poles = the life of the simple colors between birth and death.

(The Roman numerals indicate the pairs of opposites.)

subtler vibrations in the soul than can be described in words. With time, every tone can very probably find its own material expression even in words, but there will always remain something extra that cannot be exhausted by words, and yet is not merely an elaborate accident of the particular tone, but its very essential. For this reason, words are and remain mere indications, somewhat external labels for colors. In the impossibility of replacing the essential element of color by words or other means lies the possibility of a monumental art. Here, amidst extremely rich and different combinations, there remains to be discovered one that is based upon the principle just established. I.e., the same inner sound can be rendered at the same moment by different arts. But apart from this general sound, each art will display that extra element which is essential and peculiar to itself, thereby adding to that inner sound which they have in common a richness and power that cannot be attained by one art alone.

And, in addition to this [kind of] harmony, everyone will be able to see what equally powerful and profound disharmonies and what infinite combinations are possible on the basis of the preponderance of one art, or the preponderance of the contrast between various arts, set against the tranquil concordance of yet others, etc., etc.

One often hears the opinion that the possibility of substituting one art for another (e.g., by the [written] word in the case of literature) would refute the necessity of differentiating between the arts. This, however, is not the case. As has been said, the exact repetition of the same sound by different arts is not possible. Yet even were it possible, the repetition of the same sound would at least have a different external coloration. Even if this were not the case—if the repetition of the same sound by the means of the different arts were in every case exactly the same (both externally and internally)—even so, this kind of repetition would not be superfluous, because different people have a leaning towards different arts (either active or passive, i.e., as transmitter or receiver of the sound). Even if this were not the case, this repetition would still not be completely meaningless. Repetition, the piling-up of the same sounds, enriches the spiritual atmosphere necessary to the maturing of one's emotions (even of the finest substance), just as the richer air of the greenhouse is a necessary condition for the ripening of various fruits. A simple example of this is the way in which the repetition of actions and thoughts and feelings can eventually make a powerful impression upon the individual, even if he is not particularly adept at taking in the single

actions, etc., by themselves, as a rather thick material [at first fails to absorb] drops of rain.*

One must conceive the spiritual atmosphere, however, not only in the form of such tangible examples. This, like the air, can either be pure or filled with foreign bodies. Not only actions that can be observed, thoughts and feelings that can find external expression, but also perfectly secret actions that "no-one knows about," unuttered thoughts, and unexpressed feelings (i.e., the actions that take place within people) are the elements that constitute the spiritual atmosphere. Suicide, murder, violence, unworthy and base thoughts, hatred, enmity, egotism, envy, "patriotism," prejudice are all spiritual forms, spiritual entities that go to create the [spiritual] atmosphere† And on the contrary, self-sacrifice, help, pure, high-minded thoughts, love, altruism, delight in the happiness of others, humanity, and justice are also such entities, which can kill the others as the sun kills microbes, and can reconstitute the pure atmosphere.‡

The other (and more complex) form of repetition is that in which different elements participate in different forms. In our case, these different elements are the different arts (i.e., realized and synthesized—monumental art). This form of repetition is all the more powerful in that people of different natures react differently to the individual means. For one, the most direct medium is that of musical form (which in general has an effect upon everyone—the exceptions are too rare); for another, the pictorial; for a third, the literary, etc. Apart from this, however, the forces that are hidden within the various arts are

*The effects of advertising are externally based upon this form of repetition.

†There exist periods of suicide, of warlike feelings, etc. Wars and revolutions (the latter in smaller doses than the former) are the products of this sort of atmosphere, which is further infected by them. By the measure by which thou judgest shalt thou also be judged!

‡History knows such periods also. Did there ever exist a greater one than that of Christianity, which swept the weakest along with it in the spiritual struggle? Even amidst war and revolution, there are forces of this kind at work, which cleanse the plague-laden air.

themselves fundamentally different, so that the result to be achieved (even in the case of the same person) will be more intense than if each of the different arts were to work independently, in isolation.

* * *

This difficult-to-define effect produced by the simple, isolated colors is the basis upon which the harmonization of different values can be achieved. There are pictures (in the realm of the applied arts: whole interiors) that are executed throughout in a particular local color, chosen according to artistic feeling. The permeation of a particular tone-color, the joining together of two contiguous colors by means of a mixture of one with the other, is the basis upon which the harmony of colors is often constructed. From what has just been said about the effects of color, and from the fact that we live in a time full of questions and premonitions and omens—hence full of contradictions (consider too the divisions of the triangle)—we can easily conclude that harmonization on the basis of simple colors is precisely the least suitable for our own time. It is perhaps with envy, or with a sad feeling of sympathy, that we listen to the works of Mozart. They create a welcome pause amidst the storms of our inner life, a vision of consolation and hope, but we hear them like the sounds of another, vanished, and essentially unfamiliar age. Clashing discords, loss of equilibrium, "principles" overthrown, unexpected drumbeats, great questionings, apparently purposeless strivings, stress and longing (apparently torn apart), chains and fetters broken (which had united many), opposites and contradictions—this is our harmony. Composition on the basis of this harmony is the juxtaposition of coloristic and linear forms that have an independent existence as such, derived from internal necessity, which create within the common life arising from this source a whole that is called a picture.

Only these individual constituents are essential. All the rest (i.e., including the objective element) are incidental. The rest merely provide overtones.

From this proceeds logically the juxtaposition of two color-tones one with another. On the same principle of antilogic, colors long considered disharmonious are now placed next to each other. For example, the juxtaposition of red and blue, these physically unrelated colors, is today chosen as one of the most strongly effective and most suitably harmoni-

ous because of the great spiritual contrast between them. Our harmony is based mainly upon the principle of contrast, the most important principle in art at all times. Our contrast, however, is one of internal opposition, which stands alone and excludes the possibility of all help (which would today be disturbance and superfluity) from any other harmonizing principles!

It is remarkable that this very juxtaposition of red and blue was so popular with the primitives (the ancient Germans and Italians, etc.) that it has been preserved until the present day in the remaining fragments of this period (e.g., in religious folk-carvings).⁵² One very often sees in such paintings and painted sculptures the Mother of God portrayed in a red dress with a blue mantle thrown over it; it seems as if the artists wanted to portray heavenly grace bestowed upon earthly man, and hence covered the human with the divine.⁵² From the description of our harmony it is logical to conclude that even "today," inner necessity demands an infinitely great arsenal of expressive possibilities.

"Permitted" and "forbidden" combinations, the clash of different colors, the overriding of one color by another, or of many colors by a single color, the emergence of one color from the depths of another, the precise delimitation of an area of color, the dissolution of simple or complex colors,⁵³ the retention of the flowing color area by linear boundaries, the bubbling over of the color beyond these boundaries, the intermingling [of colors] or [their] sharp division, etc., etc.—all this opens up purely pictorial (= painterly) possibilities in an infinite series stretching into the unattainable distance.

As far as drawing and painting are concerned, the turn away from the representational—and one of the first steps into the realm of the abstract—was the exclusion of the third dimension, i.e., the attempt to keep the "picture" as painting upon a flat surface. Modeling was abandoned. In this way, the real object was moved nearer to the abstract, a move that indicated a certain progress. As an immediate consequence, however, one's possibilities became pinned down to the real surface of the canvas, so that painting took on new, purely material overtones. This pinning down was at the same time a limitation of possibilities.

⁵²Probably one of the first artists of "yesterday" to introduce this juxtaposition into his early paintings, accompanied by a great number of coloristic excuses, was Frank Brangwyn.

The attempt to free oneself from this material [element], from this limitation, combined with the effort toward the compositional, naturally necessitated the abandonment of any one picture plane. An attempt was made to constitute the picture upon an ideal plane, which thus had to be in front of the material surface of the canvas.* In this way, composition with flat triangles became composition with triangles that had turned plastic, three-dimensional, i.e., pyramids (so-called "Cubism"). Here also, however, inertia very quickly set in. Attention was concentrated especially upon this one particular form, hence leading once again to an impoverishment of resources. This is the inevitable result of the external application of a principle arising from internal necessity.

Particularly in this case, which is of very great importance, one should not forget that there are other means of both retaining the material surface and constituting an ideal surface, not only of fixing the latter as a flat plane, but also of exploiting it as a three-dimensional space. The very thinness or thickness of a line, the positioning of the form upon the surface, and the superimposition of one form upon another provide sufficient examples of the linear extension of space. Similar possibilities are offered by the correct use of color, which can recede or advance, strive forward or backward, and turn the picture into a being hovering in mid-air, which signifies the same as the pictorial extension of space.

The unification of these two kinds of extension in harmonious or disharmonious combinations is one of the richest and most powerful elements of linear-pictorial composition.

*See, e.g., Le Fauconnier's article in the catalogue of the second exhibition of the Neue Künstler-Vereinigung München (1910–1911).⁵⁴



VII. THEORY

The characteristics of our harmony today make it self-evident that in our own time it is less possible than ever to establish a ready-made theory,* to construct set procedures of pictorial harmonization [*einen konstruierten malerischen Generalbaß*]. Any such attempts would in practice lead to the same result as that achieved by, e.g., the little spoons of Leonardo da Vinci already mentioned. It would, however, be over-

*Such attempts have been made, to which much has been contributed by the parallelism with music, e.g., *Tendances Nouvelles*, no. 35: Henri Rovel, *Les lois d'harmonie de la peinture et de la musique sont les mêmes* (p. 721).

hasty to maintain that in painting there can never be any hard and fast rules, principles resembling those of harmonization in music—or that such principles would always lead only to academicism. Music too has its own grammar, which, like all living things, changes during great periods, yet has always found successful application as an auxiliary means, as a kind of dictionary.

Our painting today is, however, in a different state: its emancipation from direct dependence upon “nature” is in its very earliest stages. If, up until now, color and form have been used as inner forces, this use has been largely unconscious. The subjugation of composition to geometrical form had been used already in ancient art (e.g., in the art of the Persians). Construction upon a purely spiritual basis, however, is a lengthy process, which begins relatively blindly and at random. Thus it is essential that the painter should develop not only his eyes, but also his soul, so that it too may be capable of weighing colors in the balance, and active not only in receiving external impressions (also, admittedly, sometimes internal ones), but also as a determining force in the creation of works of art.

If, even today, we were to begin to dissolve completely the tie that binds us to nature, to direct our energies toward forcible emancipation and content ourselves exclusively with the combination of pure color and independent form, we would create works having the appearance of geometrical ornament, which would—to put it crudely—be like a tie or a carpet. Beauty of color and form (despite the assertions of pure aesthetes or naturalists, whose principal aim is “beauty”) is not a sufficient aim of art. Precisely because of the elementary state of our painting today, we are as yet scarcely able to derive inner experience from composition with wholly emancipated forms and colors. The nervous vibrations will, admittedly, be there (rather as in the case of the applied arts), but they will be largely confined to the area of the nerves, because the vibrations of our spirit, the movement of our soul that they conjure up, are too weak. If, however, we consider that the spiritual revolution has taken on a new, fiery tempo, that even the most “established” basis of man’s intellectual life, i.e., positivistic science, is being dragged along with it and stands on the threshold of the dissolution of matter, then we can maintain that only a few “hours” separate us from this pure composition.⁵⁵

Even ornamentation is not, admittedly, an entirely lifeless being. It has its own inner life, which is either no longer comprehensible to us



Kandinsky, *Impression No. 4*

(ancient ornament) or else is only an illogical confusion, a world in which, so to speak, grown men and embryos are treated in the same way and play the same role in society, where dismembered beings are placed side by side with independently living noses and toes and navels. It is like the confusion of a kaleidoscope,* in which material accident rather than the spirit has the upper hand. And yet, despite this incomprehensibility or inability ever to be understood, ornament has an effect upon us, albeit at random.† Internally, Oriental ornament is altogether different from Swedish or Negro or ancient Greek ornament, etc. It is, e.g., not without reason that we generally describe pieces of patterned material as gay or serious, sad, lively, etc.—i.e., employing the same adjectives as are always used by musicians (*allegro*, *serioso*, *grave*, *vivace*, etc.) to determine how a piece is to be performed. It is quite possible that ornamentation originally derived from nature (even modern designers seek their motifs in fields and woods). And yet, even if we were to assume no other source besides external nature, in good ornamentation the forms and colors of nature were treated not in a purely external way, but as symbols, and finally, almost as hieroglyphs. Precisely for this reason, these symbols have gradually become incomprehensible, and we are no longer able to decipher their inner value. For example, a Chinese dragon, which has, even in its ornamental form retained much of its precise physical appearance, has so little effect upon us that we can quite happily tolerate its presence in our dining rooms or bedrooms, and it makes no more impression upon us than a tablecloth embroidered with daisies.

Perhaps at the close of our now-dawning period a new style of ornamentation will arise, but it is hardly likely to consist of geometrical forms. At the juncture we have reached today, any attempt to create such a style of ornamentation by force would be like trying to open a scarcely formed bud into a full-blown flower with one's fingers.

Today we are still firmly bound to the outward appearance of nature and must draw our forms from it.⁵⁶ The question is, how are we to do

*This confusion is of course also a precise [form of] life, but belongs to another sphere.

†The world here described is nevertheless one that has its own, wholly individual inner sound, is fundamentally and in principle necessary, and itself presents possibilities.

it?—i.e., how far does our freedom extend to alter these forms, and with which colors should they be connected?

This freedom extends as far as the sensibility of the artist can reach. Seen from this point of view, it can be at once understood just how infinitely important it is to cultivate this sensibility.

A few examples will suffice to answer the second part of this question.

The color red, which, regarded in isolation, is always warm and exciting, will undergo a fundamental change in inner value when no longer isolated or regarded as an abstract sound, but used as an element of another entity when associated with a natural form. This association of red⁵⁷ with different natural forms will also produce different internal effects, which will still appear related, owing to the permanent effect of red when regarded in isolation. Let us, for instance, associate red with sky, flower, dress, face, horse, tree. A red sky conjures up associations of sunset, fire, and so forth. It is therefore a "natural" (in this case, solemn or threatening) effect that is thereby produced. Now admittedly, much depends upon how the other objects juxtaposed with the red sky are treated. If they are placed in a causal relationship and combined with colors that are in turn possible for such objects, then the natural aspect of the sky sounds even stronger. If, however, these other objects are far removed from nature, they may thus weaken the "natural" impression of the sky and possibly even eliminate it. Much the same thing occurs when the color red is combined with a face, where red can have the effect of conveying the emotions of the figure portrayed, or can be explained by a special effect of lighting. Such effects could only be annulled by the predominant abstraction of the other parts of the painting.

A red dress, on the other hand, is quite a different case, since a dress can be any color one likes. Under these circumstances, red will perhaps have the best chance of producing its effect as "painterly" necessity, since red can here be treated by itself, without being directly associated with material purposes. The effect produced, however, is reciprocal, since the red of the dress acts upon the figure clothed in this same red, and vice versa. If, for example, the overall tone of the picture is sad, and this tone is particularly concentrated upon the red-clothed figure (by the positioning of the figure within the whole composition and by its own movement, facial features, carriage of the head, color of the face, etc.), then this red of the dress will, as an emotional dissonance, particularly emphasize the sadness of the picture, and especially of the principal figure. Another color that itself produced a sad effect would certainly, by

lessening the dramatic element, weaken the impression produced.* Thus, [we find] once again the principle of contrast. Here, the element of drama arises only because of the inclusion of the color red in the overall sad composition, for red, when completely isolated (i.e., when it is mirrored in the calm surface of the soul) cannot under normal conditions have an effect of sadness.†

The effect produced will be different again if this same red is used for a tree. The basic tone of the red remains the same as in all the previously-mentioned cases. But with it will be associated the spiritual values of autumn (for the word "autumn" is itself a spiritual unity, like every other real or abstract, incorporeal or corporeal concept). The color combines completely with the object to form an isolated element, which creates its effect without the dramatic overtones of the red dress I have just described.

Finally, a red horse is a completely different case. The very sound of the words creates an altogether different atmosphere. The natural impossibility of a red horse necessarily demands a likewise unnatural milieu in which this horse is placed. Otherwise, the overall effect is either that of a curiosity (i.e., a purely superficial and inartistic effect), or else a clumsily conceived fairy tale ‡ (i.e., a well-founded curiosity having an inartistic effect). A normal, naturalistically painted landscape with modeled, anatomically precise figures would produce such a discord when placed together with this horse that no feeling would follow from it, and it would prove impossible to fuse these elements into a single unity. What is to be understood by this "unity," and what it might

*Here, it must once again be expressly emphasized that all such cases, examples, etc., are to be regarded purely in terms of schematic values. All this is conventional, and can be altered by the overall effect of the composition—or just as simply by a single brushstroke. The series of possibilities is infinite.

†It must be continually emphasized that expressions such as "sad," "happy," etc., are extremely clumsy and can only serve as pointers to the delicate, incorporeal vibrations of the spirit.

‡If the fable is not "transposed" in its entirety, then the result resembles the effect produced by cinematographic fairy-tale pictures.

be, is shown by the definition of our modern-day harmony. From which we may conclude that it is possible to split up the entire picture, to indulge in contradictions, to lead [the spectator] through and to build upon any and every sort of external plane, while the inner plane remains the same. The elements of construction of the picture are no longer to be sought in terms of external, but rather of internal necessity.

Also, the spectator in such cases is all too often accustomed to seek a "meaning," i.e., an external connection between the parts of the picture. Once again, this same materialistic period has, in life in general and therefore also in art, produced the kind of a spectator who is unable simply to relate to the picture (especially true of "connoisseurs"), and who looks for everything possible in the painting (imitation of nature, nature seen through the temperament of the artist—and therefore temperament itself, the direct conjuring-up of mood, "*peinture*," anatomy, perspective, external mood, etc., etc.); what he does not attempt is to experience for himself the inner life of the picture, to let the picture affect him directly. Dazzled by external devices, his spiritual eye is unable to seek out what it is that lives by these means. If we carry on an interesting conversation with someone, we attempt to penetrate the depths of his soul; we seek an inner form, his thoughts and feelings. We do not worry about the fact that he employs words, which consist of letters, which are in turn nothing more than purposeful sounds,⁵⁸ which require for their formation the drawing of breath into the lungs (anatomical aspect), and which, through the expulsion of air from the lungs, special positioning of tongue, lips, etc., cause vibrations of the air (physical aspect), which, moreover, impinge upon our consciousness through the intermediary of the eardrum (psychological aspect), producing a nervous reaction (physiological aspect), etc., *ad infinitum*. We know that all these factors are merely incidental to our conversation, purely contingent, but must be utilized as momentarily necessary external means, and that the essential aspect of the conversation is the communication of ideas and feelings. It is in this way that one should approach a work of art, experiencing the direct, abstract effect. Then, with time will develop the possibility of speaking through purely artistic means, and it will become no longer necessary to borrow the forms for this inner speech from the external world, forms that today provide us with the opportunity, by the use of color and form, to increase or diminish their inner significance. Juxtaposition of opposites (such as the



Kandinsky, *Improvisation No. 18*

red dress in the sad composition) can produce an effect of unlimited power, but must still remain upon one and the same moral plane.

Even if such a plane is readily accessible, however, the problem of color in our example is not altogether solved. "Unnatural" objects and their appropriate colors can easily assume literary overtones, whereby the composition takes on the effect of a fairy-tale. The spectator readily accepts this atmosphere because it is like a fairy-tale; in it he (1) looks for the story, and (2) remains unaffected or little affected by the pure impression of color. In any case, the direct, pure, inner effect of color is now no longer possible, since the external aspect easily outweighs the internal. And man is generally not willing to plumb the depths, but prefers to remain on the surface, because this demands less effort. There is, admittedly, "nothing more profound than superficiality," but this depth is like that of a bog. On the other hand, is there any form of art more readily assimilated than the "plastic"? And yet, as soon as the spectator believes himself to be in fairyland, he is at once immune to strong spiritual vibrations. Thus, the purpose of the work of art is nullified. For this reason, a form must be found that first excludes the fairy-tale effect,* and secondly, in no way inhibits the pure effect of color. For this purpose neither form, movement, color, nor the objects borrowed from nature (real or unreal) must produce any external or externally associated narrative effect. And the less externally motivated, e.g., movement is, the purer, deeper, more inner its effect.

* * *

A very simple movement, whose purpose is unknown, produces of its own accord a significant, mysterious, and solemn effect. This, provided that one is unaware of the external, practical purpose of the movement. Then it has the effect of a pure sound. A simple, concerted action (e.g., preparing to lift a heavy weight) produces, if its purpose is unknown, an effect so significant, so mysterious and dramatic and striking, that one involuntarily stops still as if in the presence of a vision, of life upon

*This battle against the atmosphere of fairyland resembles the battle against nature. How easily, how often contrary to the will of the artist composing with color, does nature intrude into the work of its own accord. It is easier to depict nature than to fight against it!

another plane—until all of a sudden the magic vanishes, the practical explanation comes like a bolt from the blue, and the mysterious procedure and the reasons behind it are laid bare. In this simple movement, which to all external appearances is unmotivated, lies an immeasurable wealth of possibilities. Such occurrences come to pass particularly easily if one is given to wandering about plunged in abstract thoughts. Such thoughts drag one away from one's everyday, practical, purposeful actions. In this way, the observation of such simple movements becomes possible outside the sphere of practical experience. As soon as one reminds oneself, however, that nothing inexplicable is allowed to happen on our streets, then in the same instant one's interest in the movement ceases. The practical sense behind the movement extinguishes its abstract sense.⁵⁹ It is upon this principle that the "new ballet"—which is the only way of exploiting the whole significance, the entire inner meaning of movement in time and space—should be and will be built. The origin of dance is apparently of a purely sexual nature. Even today we can still see this original element revealed in folk dance. The necessity, which is later in origin, of employing dance as part of divine service (as a means of inspiration), remains, so to speak, upon the level of the applied use of movement. Gradually, over the centuries, these two practical applications assumed artistic overtones, culminating in the language of movement that is ballet. This language today is understood only by a few, and still loses in clarity. What is more, it is far too naive for the era to come: it has served only as the expression of material feelings (love, fear, etc.), and must be replaced by another capable of bringing forth subtler spiritual vibrations. For this reason, the reformers of ballet have in our own times turned their eyes toward forms from the past, whence they seek help even today. Thus originated the link forged by Isadora Duncan between Greek dance and the dance of the future. This happened for exactly the same reasons as those which prompted the painters' search for help among the primitives. Of course, in the case of dance (as in the case of painting), this is only a transitional stage. We are faced with the necessity of creating a new dance form, the dance of the future. The same law of exploiting uncompromisingly the inner sense of movement as the principal element of dance will produce its effect here, too, and lead us toward our goal. Here, too, conventional "beauty" of movement must be thrown overboard, and the "natural" progress of the action (narrative = the literary element) explained as unnecessary and ultimately distracting. Just as in music and

in painting, there exist no "ugly sounds" and no external "dissonance"; i.e., just as in both these arts every sound or concordance of sounds is beautiful (= purposeful), provided that it arises from internal necessity, so too in ballet we will soon be able to sense the inner value of every movement, and inner beauty will replace outer beauty. From these "unbeautiful" movements that now suddenly become beautiful streams forth at once an undreamed-of power and living strength. From this moment begins the dance of the future.

* * *

This dance of the future, which is thus raised to the level of the music and painting of today, will in the same instant become capable of contributing as a third element to the creation of a form of stage composition that will constitute the first work of Monumental Art.

Stage composition will consist initially of these three elements:

1. musical movement,
2. pictorial movement,
3. dance movement.

Everyone will understand from what has been said above on the subject of pure pictorial composition what I mean by the threefold effect of internal movement (= stage composition).

Just as each of the two principal elements of painting (linear and painterly form) leads an independent existence, each speaking through its own medium, through means peculiar to itself—just as composition in painting arises out of the combination of these elements and their collective characteristics and possibilities—so in the same way composition on the stage will become possible by means of the juxtaposition (= opposition) of the three already mentioned types of movement.

Skriabin's experiment referred to above (the attempt to heighten the effects of musical tones through the effects produced by the corresponding color-tones) is of course a very elementary one and represents only one possibility. Apart from the concordance of two, or eventually all three, elements of stage composition, the following can also be utilized: discordance, the alternation of the effects of individual elements, the exploitation of the complete (and of course, external) independence of each of the separate elements, etc. Arnold Schoenberg has already utilized precisely this last method in his quartets. Here, one can see just

to what extent the inner harmony gains in strength and significance if the external harmony is used in this way. Now one can imagine the brave new world of the three mighty elements in the service of one single creative aim. I am here compelled to renounce further development of this important topic. The reader should merely apply the corresponding principles laid down for painting, and of its own accord the happy dream of the theater of the future will rise up before his spiritual eyes. Upon the tortuous paths of this new kingdom—which lie through dark jungles and over immeasurable chasms, to icy heights and to the edge of the heady abyss, like an endless maze stretching out in front of the explorer—the same guide will lead him with unfailing hand: the principle of internal necessity.

* * *

From the previously examined examples of the use of color, from the necessity and significance of the use of "natural" forms in combination with color (on account of their sound), can be deduced (1) where the path that leads to painting lies, and (2) how as a general principle this path is to be followed. This path lies between two realms (which today constitute two dangers): on the right lies the completely abstract, wholly emancipated use of color in "geometrical" form (ornament); on the left, the more realistic use of color in "corporeal" form (fantasy)⁶⁰—but which is excessively impeded by external forms. And (possibly only today) we are faced with the possibility of veering too much to the right and . . . overstepping the limits, or likewise, of tending too much to the left, and experiencing the same result. Beyond these limits (here I abandon my schematic path) lie, on the right, pure abstraction (i.e., greater abstraction than that of geometrical form) and, on the left, pure realism (i.e., a higher form of fantasy—fantasy in hardest material). And between the two—unlimited freedom, depth, breadth, a wealth of possibilities, and beyond them the realms of pure abstraction and realism—e v e r y t h i n g today is, thanks to the moment at which we find ourselves, placed at the service of the artist. Today is a day of freedom only conceivable when a great epoch is in the making.* And, at the same

*On this question, see my article "Über die Formfrage" in the *Blaue Reiter* [Almanac] (R. Piper & Co., 1912). Here I take as my starting point the work of Henri Rousseau, in order to prove that the coming realism of our period is not only the equivalent of abstraction, but identical to it.⁶¹

time, this freedom constitutes one of the greatest limitations, since all these possibilities between, within, and beyond these limits stem from one and the same root: from the categorical demands of Internal Necessity.

That art is above nature is by no means a new discovery.* New principles do not, moreover, come down from heaven, but rather stand in a causal relationship to the past and the future. All we need to consider is where this principle lies today and what point we may be able to reach with its help tomorrow. Moreover, this principle, as must be emphasized again and again, must never be applied by force. If the artist, taking this for his tuning fork, attunes his soul to it, then his works will of their own accord be cast in the same key.⁶³ Most important of all, the advancing "emancipation" of today rises from the foundations of inner necessity, which, as has already been described, is the spiritual force behind the objective in art. The objective [element] in art seeks today to reveal itself with particular intensity. Temporal forms are therefore loosened so that the objective may be more clearly expressed. Natural forms impose limitations that in many cases hinder this expression. They are therefore pushed aside to make room for the "objective [element of] form"—construction as the aim of composition. Thus can be explained the pressure already evident today to uncover the constructive forms of our age. Cubism, for example, as a transitional form reveals how often natural forms must be forcibly subordinated to constructive ends, and the unnecessary hindrances these forms constitute in such cases.

At all events, a clearly visible kind of construction is in general used today, which appears to be the only possible way of giving expression to the objective element of form. But if we think of the definition of

*Literature in particular has long since expressed this principle. E.g., Goethe says: "The artist with his free spirit takes precedence over nature, and can adapt her according to his higher aims. . . . He is at once her master and her slave. He is her slave inasmuch as he must work with earthly means in order to be understood (NB!), and yet her master inasmuch as he submits these earthly means to his higher intentions, the former in the service of the latter. The artist desires to speak to the world by means of a whole; this whole is not, however, to be found in nature, but it is rather the fruit of his own spirit or, if you prefer, a breath of fruitful divinity." (Karl Heinemann, *Goethe*, 1899, p. 684.) In our own time, O. Wilde: "Art only begins where imitation ends" (*De Profundis*).⁶² In painting, too, we often find similar ideas. Delacroix, e.g., said that for artists, nature was no more than a dictionary. And elsewhere: "One should define realism as the antithesis of art" (*Mein Tagebuch*, p. 246, published by Bruno Cassirer, Berlin 1903).

modern day harmony given in this book, then even in the realm of construction we are able to recognize the spirit of the times. Not the immediately obvious, eye-catching type of ("geometrical") construction, not the richest in possibilities, nor the most expressive, but rather the hidden type that emerges unnoticed from the picture and thus is less suited to the eye than to the soul.

This hidden construction can consist of forms apparently scattered at random upon the canvas, which—again, apparently—have no relationship one to another: the external absence of any such relationship here constitutes its internal presence. What externally has been loosened has internally been fused into a single unity. And this remains for both elements—i.e., for both linear and painterly form.

Precisely here lies the future theory of harmony for painting [*Harmonielehre der Malerei*].⁶⁴ These "somehow" related forms have a fundamental and precise relationship to one another. Ultimately, this relationship may be expressed in mathematical form, except that here one will perhaps operate more with irregular than with regular numbers.

In every art, number remains the ultimate form of abstract expression.

It goes without saying that this objective element must, on the other hand, require the use of reason, the conscious, as a collaborating force (objective knowledge—the thorough-bass of painting). And this objective element will enable the works of today to say, even in the future, not "I was," but "I am."



VIII.

ART AND ARTIST

In a mysterious, puzzling, and mystical way, the true work of art arises "from out of the artist." Once released from him, it assumes its own independent life, takes on a personality, and becomes a self-sufficient, spiritually breathing subject that also leads a real material life: it is a being. It is not, therefore, an indifferent phenomenon arising from chance, living out an indifferent spiritual life, but rather possesses—like every living being—further creative, active forces. It lives and acts and plays a part in the creation of the spiritual atmosphere that we have discussed. It is also exclusively from this inner standpoint that one must answer the question whether the work is good or bad. If it is "bad" formally, or too weak, then this form is unsuitable or too weak to

produce any kind of pure, spiritual vibration within the soul.* Thus, a "well-painted" picture is in reality not one that is correct in values (the inevitable *valeurs* of the French) or divided up almost scientifically into cold and warm, but rather one that leads a full inner life. Likewise, "good draftsmanship" is where nothing can be altered without destroying this inner life, regardless of whether this draftsmanship contradicts anatomy or botany or any other science. It is not here a question of whether an external (hence always merely incidental) form has been distorted, but simply of whether the artist needs to use this form as it is in its externals. Colors, too, must be used in the same way, not dependent upon the existence of this particular sound [*Klang*] in nature, but upon the necessity of this particular sound within the picture. In short, the artist is not only entitled, but obliged to treat his forms in whatever way is necessary for his purpose. There is no necessity for anatomy and so forth on the one hand, nor, on the other, for overthrowing these sciences as a matter of principle, but what is necessary is the complete, unlimited freedom of the artist in his choice of means.† This necessity is the right to unlimited freedom, which becomes an abuse as soon as it ceases to rest upon that same necessity. Artistically speaking, this right constitutes the moral plane already discussed. In one's entire life (hence in art too) one's aims must be pure.

In particular: purposeless adherence to scientific facts is never so harmful as their purposeless rejection. In the former case, a (material) imitation of nature results, which may well be employed for various

*Those works that are called, e.g., "immoral" are either altogether incapable of producing a vibration of the soul (in which case they are, according to our definition, inartistic), or else they produce a different vibration of the soul, inasmuch as they possess a form that is correct in some respect. Then they are "good." If, however, apart from this spiritual vibration, they also produce purely carnal vibrations of a lower order (as they are called today), then one should not conclude that it is the work that is to be despised, rather than the person reacting to it by baser vibrations.

†This unlimited freedom must be founded upon the basis of internal necessity (which one calls probity). And this principle is one that belongs not only to art, but also to life. This principle is the mightiest sword of the true superman against philistinism.

special purposes.* In the latter, artistic deceit, a sin that gives rise to a long chain of evil consequences. In the first instance, the moral atmosphere is left empty, petrified. In the second, it becomes poisoned and plague-ridden.

Painting is an art, and art in general is not a mere purposeless creating of things that dissipate themselves in a void, but a power that has a purpose and must serve the development and refinement of the human soul—the movement of the triangle. It is a language that speaks in its own unique way to the soul about things that are for the soul its daily bread, which it can only obtain in this form.

If art renounces this task, then this gap must remain unfilled, for there is no other power that can replace art.† Always at those times when the human soul leads a stronger life, art too becomes more alive, for soul and art complement and interact upon each other. While in those periods in which the soul is neglected and deadened by materialistic views, by disbelief, and their resultant, purely practical strivings, the opinion arises that “pure” art is not given to man for a special reason, but is purposeless; that art exists only for art’s sake (*l’art pour l’art*).‡ Here, the bond between art and soul becomes half anaesthetized. The reckoning, however, soon follows; since the artist and the spectator (who communicate by means of this language of the soul) can no longer understand each other, the latter turns his back on the former, or gazes at him as he would at a conjuror, whose outward skill and powers of invention command one’s admiration.

*It is clear that this imitation of nature, if it derives from the hand of an artist who is spiritually alive, never remains merely a lifeless repetition of nature. In this form, too, the soul may speak and be heard. Take as an example the landscapes of Canaletto, as opposed to, e.g., the alas all-too-famous heads by Denner (Alte Pinakothek, Munich).

†This gap can also be easily filled by poison and pestilence.

‡This view is one of the few expressions of idealism to be found at such times. It is an unconscious protest against materialism, which would have everything practical and purposeful. It is further proof of how strong and inviolable art is, and of the power of the human soul, which is living and eternal, which can be numbed, but never killed.

First of all, then, the artist must seek to alter this state of affairs by recognizing his duty toward art and toward himself, regarding himself not as master of the situation, but as the servant of higher ends, whose duty is precise and great and holy. He must educate himself, immerse himself in his own soul, and above all, cultivate and develop this soul of his so that his external talents have something they can clothe, not like a lost glove from an unknown hand, which is an empty, purposeless semblance of a hand.

The artist must have something to say, for his task is not the mastery of form, but the suitability of that form to its content.*

The artist is no Sunday’s Child of life: he has no right to a life without responsibility. He has a difficult task to fulfill, which often becomes a cross to bear. He must know that every one of his actions and thoughts and feelings constitutes the subtle, intangible, and yet firm material out of which his works are created, and that hence he cannot be free in life—only in art.

From which it is self-evident that the artist, as opposed to the nonartist, has a threefold responsibility: (1) he must render up again that talent which has been bestowed upon him; (2) his actions and thoughts and feelings, like those of every human being, constitute the spiritual atmosphere, in such a way that they purify or infect the spiritual air; and (3) these actions and thoughts and feelings are the material for his creations, which likewise play a part in constituting the spiritual atmo-

*It is, of course, clear that we are here talking about the education of the soul, not about the necessity of forcibly injecting into every work some specific content, or forcibly clothing in artistic guise this content one has thought up! In such cases, the end result would only be lifeless cerebration. As I have already stated: The true work of art comes about in a mysterious way. No, if the soul of the artist is alive, then there is no need to bolster it with cerebration and theories. It will find something to say of its own accord, something that may, at that moment, remain unclear even to the artist himself. The inner voice of his soul will also tell him which form to use, and where to find it (external or internal “nature”). Every artist who works according to so-called feeling knows just how suddenly and unexpectedly a form that he himself has conceived can appear distasteful, and how another, correct form substitutes itself “as if on its own initiative” for what has been discarded. Boecklin used to say that the true work of art must be like a great improvisation, i.e., reflection, construction, previous working out of the composition should be no more than preliminary steps in the direction of that goal, which may appear unexpected even to the artist himself. It is thus the application of our future counterpoint is to be understood.

sphere. He is a "king," as Sar Peladan calls him, not only in the sense that he has great power, but also in that he has great responsibilities.

If the artist is priest of the "beautiful," then this beauty is also to be found by means of this same principle of inner value, which we have found in every case to be present. This "beauty" can only be measured with the yardstick of inner greatness and necessity, which until now has throughout and in every case afforded us faithful service.

Whatever arises from internal, spiritual necessity is beautiful. The beautiful is that which is inwardly beautiful.*

Maeterlinck, one of the original pioneers, one of the first spiritual composers of the art of today, out of which the art of tomorrow will be born, has said:

"There is nothing on earth more desirous of beauty, and which is more easily beautified, than the soul. . . . Thus there are very few souls on earth who will resist the domination of a soul that is devoted to beauty."[†]

And this quality of the soul is that fluid which makes possible the slow, barely visible, at times outwardly stilled, and yet continuous and inexorable, progress of the spiritual triangle onward and upward.⁶⁵

*By this beauty we are, of course, to understand not external, nor even internal morality (such as is generally accepted), but everything that, even in a wholly intangible form, refines and enriches the soul. Thus, e.g., in painting, every color is inwardly beautiful, since every color causes a vibration of the soul and every vibration enriches the soul. Hence everything can, in the end, be inwardly beautiful, even if it is outwardly "ugly." As it is in art, so it is in life. And thus there is nothing that is "ugly" in its inner result, i.e., its effect upon the souls of others.

[†] *Von der inneren Schönheit* (K. Robert Langewiesche Verlag, Düsseldorf and Leipzig, p. 187).



CONCLUSION

The accompanying six reproductions⁶⁶ are examples of tendencies towards construction in painting.

The forms that these attempts take may be divided into two main groups:

1. Simple composition, which is subordinated to a clearly apparent, simple form. I call this type of composition melodic.
2. Complex composition, consisting of several forms, again subordinated to an obvious or concealed principal form. This principal form may externally be very hard to find, whereby the inner basis assumes a particularly powerful tone. This complex type of composition I call symphonic.

Between these two main groups there lie various transitional forms, in which the melodic principle is always necessarily present.

The whole process of development is strikingly similar to that in music. Deviations in both these processes result when some other law comes into play that has until now always been ultimately subordinated to the primary law of development. Thus, these deviations are not significant here.

If one removes the objective element from a melodic composition, thus revealing the basic pictorial form, then one finds primitive geometrical forms or a structure of simple lines serving the general movement. This general movement is repeated in the individual parts



Kandinsky, *Composition No. 2*

[of the picture], and sometimes varied by means of individual lines or forms. These individual lines or forms can in this latter case serve various purposes. They can, e.g., create a kind of closing to which I give the musical name *fermata*.* All these constructional forms have a simple inner sound, as all melodies do. It is for this reason that I call them melodic. Revitalized by Cézanne and later by Hodler, these melodic compositions acquired in our own time the description rhythmic. These were the seeds of the rebirth of compositional aims. It is, however, obvious at first sight that the exclusive limitation of the concept rhythmic to these particular instances is too narrow. Just as in music, every structure possesses its own rhythm, just as in the completely "random" distribution of objects in nature, a rhythm is always present, so too in painting. It is merely that in nature, this rhythm is sometimes not apparent to us because its purposes (in many of the most important instances) are not clear. This unclear juxtaposition is thus called arrhythmic. This distinction between rhythmic and arrhythmic is, therefore, wholly relative and conventional (like the distinction between consonance and dissonance, which at bottom does not exist).†

Many pictures, woodcuts, miniatures, etc., from earlier periods of art are examples of complex, 'rhythmic' composition with a strong intimation of the symphonic principle. One need only think of the old German masters, of the Persians, the Japanese, of Russian icons and especially folk prints, etc., etc.‡

In nearly all these works, symphonic composition is still bound very closely to the melodic. That is to say, if one takes away the objective element so as to reveal the compositional, a composition comes to light that is built out of feelings of repose, of tranquil repetition, of a fairly

*See, e.g., the Ravenna mosaic, where the principal group is in the form of a triangle, toward which the other figures are ever more imperceptibly oriented. The outstretched arm and the curtain in front of the door create the *fermata*.

†Cézanne's *Bathers* is reproduced in this book as an example of this clearly laid out, melodic composition with open rhythms.

‡Many of Hodler's pictures are melodic compositions with symphonic undertones.

balanced division of parts.* Early choral music, Mozart, and finally, Beethoven spring involuntarily to mind. These are all works having more or less of a kinship with the elevated, tranquil, and dignified style of architecture of a Gothic cathedral: balance and the equal distribution of individual parts are the keynote and spiritual basis of this type of construction. Such works belong to transitional form.

I have included reproductions of three of my own paintings as examples of the new symphonic type of construction, in which the melodic element is used only occasionally, as one of the subordinate parts—thus taking on a new form.

These reproductions are examples of three different sources:

1. The direct impression of "external nature," expressed in linear-painterly form. I call these pictures "Impressions."
2. Chiefly unconscious, for the most part suddenly arising expressions of events of an inner character, hence impressions of "internal nature." I call this type "Improvisations."
3. The expressions of feelings that have been forming within me in a similar way (but over a very long period of time), which, after the first preliminary sketches, I have slowly and almost pedantically examined and worked out. This kind of picture I call a "Composition." Here, reason, the conscious, the deliberate, and the purposeful play a preponderant role. Except that I always decide in favor of feeling rather than calculation.

It will, presumably, be clear to the long-suffering reader of this book what conscious or unconscious [principle of] construction lies at the root of all three categories of my painting.

In conclusion, I would remark that in my opinion we are approaching the time when a conscious, reasoned system of composition will be

possible, when the painter will be proud to be able to explain his works in constructional terms (as opposed to the Impressionists, who were proud of the fact that they were unable to explain anything). We see already before us an age of purposeful creation, and this spirit in painting stands in a direct, organic relationship to the creation of a new spiritual realm that is already beginning, for this spirit is the soul of the epoch of the great spiritual.

*Here, tradition plays a great part, particularly in art that has become part of popular lore. Such works occur mainly during the flowering of a particular period of artistic culture (or else encroach upon the period following). The fully formed, open flower spreads an atmosphere of inner peace. During periods of gestation, too many warring, conflicting, obstructing elements exist for this peace to achieve obvious prominence. In the last analysis, of course, every serious work of art is peaceful. This ultimate peace (exaltation), however, is not easy for contemporary man to find. Every serious work of art has an inner sound like the peaceful and exalted words "I am here." Love or hatred of the work of art are dissolved and dissipated. The sound of these words is eternal.