

COLOUR AND LIGHT

(See: Michael Chekhov's criticism of March 8th Performance.)

We must know something about colours and their movements although it is not possible for us to study the theme in its complete form. Goethe created a theory of colour and light. Rudolf Steiner also developed theories to which Albert Steffen has added. We can take something from each one of these theories which will help us to understand the significance of colours - what gestures are in the various colours and the impression a human being gets from them. We will accept the theories quite freely and make some definitions. It will be necessary to imagine some of the colours as it has not been possible for us to get all of the examples.

RED: Try to imagine which kind of RED we are speaking about. There are many shades of this colour. Imagine that we have a YELLOW and a BLUE on either side of the RED, and we will see that the RED endeavours to balance the two. In spite of its tremendous activity RED, when combined with YELLOW and BLUE, tries to fight the BLUE. Try to imagine this and do not be disturbed if you do not experience this reaction at once. It will come with time and in the meantime we must study the experience of others. If we think of the combination of colours as the conversation of colours then we will recognize that the speech of RED, when placed between BLUE and YELLOW, is to balance.

HOW DO WE THINK OF THE COLOUR OF THE HUMAN SKIN - FLESH.
If we compare RED with the flesh colour we will see that the gesture of the flesh colour is to disappear and it is more pleasant for the eye if it does disappear. Its tendency is to become thinner and finer and finally to disappear. The movement of the RED on the contrary says "I want to be here;" while the flesh continues to say "I do not want to be here." We must imagine the audience's reaction to these two colours. The audience will be attracted to the RED as to a person who asserts himself. When visitors come into our Studio rooms for the first time they pause because, unconsciously perhaps, they experience a reaction as if "flowing away," because of the flesh colour of the rooms. Now imagine that a visitor enters the same rooms but that we have placed a RED spot some place in the room. The visitor will be instantly attracted to the RED spot.

FLESH Flesh is a very strange colour and if we observe it for a long time we will feel that we are penetrating into another world - a spiritual world. Another definition of this colour is that it is like the petal of the peach blossom.

and LILAC

Like YELLOW this colour does not wish to be limited or unequally distributed. If it is unequally distributed it gives the impression of something unhealthy and more or less ugly - especially if in such a form as knots.

Colour is very important to us because by means of it we can catch and hold the interest of our audience. If we understand this principle we will realise the importance of the impression which the setting makes upon the audience the moment the curtain goes up. At this moment the audience is really like a lot of little children.

If you will gaze at a RED surface you will begin to see yourself moving around in it as if you were seeking something, exploring something.

It creates a restlessness and a desire to move in this RED world and instinctively you wish the whole scene to be RED. The gesture of RED is activity and movement.

Another gesture of RED is that it radiates, and sends its rays equally from each point - the whole RED spot comes toward you from each point with the same power. It wishes to be distributed equally while BLUE always wants to be stronger on the edge and weaker in the centre. RED is quite happy if it is distributed equally, while BLUE is more happy if the edges are more powerful. RED also wishes to be enlarged and enlarged. Imagine that you are painting something BLUE and that you paint the edges a darker BLUE than the centre, it will give you more feeling of harmony than if you painted the BLUE equally. The gesture of YELLOW is the opposite of BLUE. It wishes to be powerful in the middle. The gesture of BLUE is to concentrate on the edges while the gesture of YELLOW is to radiate from the centre out. They have an entirely different gesture.

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Gradually try to apply these ideas to your sketches - it may take time for you to feel their application but it will come - just as we must learn our A.B.C.'s before we can compose words and sentences. We are living in such a colourless world that we are dead towards such things but we must awaken our natural re-actions to colours.

One definition will not be clear because it is closely connected with Dr. Steiner's other theories, but perhaps some of you will be able to feel it instinctively. RED is the shine of something which is living ... the shining of something living.

Another gesture of RED is will and power. Different nuances of RED express different qualities of will and power. Imagine this quite freely.

Another definition of RED is dignity ... some kinds of RED. CARMINE is closely connected with seriousness and dignity. The seriousness in RED depends upon its density. The more BLUE is mixed with red the colder it gets although the quality of RED is warm. Therefore if you will imagine passing from RED to BLUE you will go from warmth to coldness.

RED makes an attack on us - it comes nearer to us but in the form of an attack. It is too aggressive to come coldly towards us. Animals are sensitive to colours and the bull expresses a psychological gesture when he sees RED.

If from time to time you will go through the gestures of the colours you will gradually get a feeling for such things which will lead us in one direction and enable us to make our performances harmonious. We will be able to give our audience many suggestions through our use of colours in costumes, settings, lighting etc. This knowledge can be one of the most important instruments in our hands.

RED speaks to us as "God's wrath." After we have experienced this we will feel an answer to this colour which is "I want to learn how to pray." This is the whole composition of feelings which speak to us through RED.

SCARLET can give us a feeling of love. The quality of the love depends on the nuances of the colour and the conditions around it, but love lies in RED.

Excitement and joy are in RED.

Also horror. One of the authors we have mentioned suggests that we look through red glass on the landscape, on nature, and then this feeling of horror will be more easily understood.

RED also suggests to us "laughter of the soul."

YELLOW RED: Now imagine that we have added a little YELLOW to RED - making it almost ORANGE. One of the qualities of this colour is very high activity - aggressiveness. Goethe called it YELLOW-RED - it is not quite ORANGE.

If we look on this colour for some time, and allow ourselves to be influenced by it, the result will be a breathless feeling - a feeling of thrill - at the end of the experiment.

ORANGE: This colour makes our personal feelings stronger - it makes us conscious of self.

It also awakens a desire to know more and more.

By letting ORANGE influence us we can know more about the good and bad sides of our natures - self knowledge.

Each time of the day has a special nuance, a special significance and so has each colour. ORANGE suggests the quality of evening, and the influence of this colour is very near to the influence of evening time.

We also have some traces of the "God's wrath" quality in ORANGE.

RED-YELLOW: YELLOW is powerful but if we add a little bit of RED it increases all its qualities. It must be RED-YELLOW, however, and not YELLOW-RED, or ORANGE.

In this RED-YELLOW is the tendency to high glow. It has some of the qualities of the sunset - warmth and bliss - beatitude.

Another interesting quality of this colour is that we want to go forward with it.

All these things, of course, are psychological gestures and we must try to transform them into such.

YELLOW: There are two different tendencies in GREEN and YELLOW. GREEN wants to be framed, while YELLOW cannot bear any limitations. It wants to radiate from the centre into unlimited space. If we try to frame YELLOW we will get the feeling that we want to laugh at it - almost offensively. The activity of this YELLOW colour continues to be with us after we have stopped looking at it - it remains with us longer than other colours.

If we open ourselves to this YELLOW it will increase in us the feeling of spirituality, the feeling of self in the spiritual realm.

Joy and pleasure are other qualities of this colour. Like ORANGE it calls up the feeling of evening. It is nearest to the light. Soft charm is in it.

If we look at nature on a very gloomy day through a YELLOW glass it is able to change the day to a happy one.

GREEN-YELLOW: If you will add a little GREEN to the YELLOW you can get at once the most dreadful feeling. A feeling of inner and physical dirt.

When YELLOW begins to shine as for instance in silk and satin it is the most magnificent feeling a human being can experience. But do not confuse YELLOW with GOLD.

GREEN: This colour gives us the feeling of being very healthy and egotistical. Whereas YELLOW leads us to spiritual self-realization, GREEN leads us nearer to the earth in our experience. It reminds us of the quality of the day.

GREEN is very conducive to thought, and this invitation to think brings us to the next definition.

Through GREEN we come to a certain feeling of astonishment before everything, and being at the same time astonished and thoughtful we begin to develop some feelings of sympathy or antipathy to things around us.

GREEN also balances BLUE and YELLOW but with the feeling of pleasure. It is happy when it is balancing these two colours.

BLUE: Unlike RED which wants to spread over the space, BLUE wishes to be more dense on the edges. It leads us somewhere far away. It moves from us while RED moves towards us. Therefore, if we watch BLUE and RED at the same time we get the feeling that RED is nearer than BLUE. We can call this the "perspective of colours."

BLUE is conducive to concentration.

One of its most important qualities is its softness and delicacy. It recedes from us and with this receding movement we experience the feeling of sorrow and sadness.

While ORANGE and GREEN tend to make us feel egotistical, BLUE gives us the opposite feeling.

BLUE gives us the quality of "God's mercy" in comparison with the "God's wrath" which RED gives us. It has the quality of morning. Peace.

BLUE brings the feeling of darkness while YELLOW brings the feeling of light - they speak about these two things.

Goethe says about BLUE that "It is enchanting nothing." He also says that if we paint a room BLUE we will feel that the room is bigger but colder and empty.

RED-BLUE: The addition of a little RED to the BLUE awakens the activity in the colour. But it is activity with unrest and creates the desire to find a point in it where we can find rest.

It is full of life and joy.

LILAC: This is RED-BLUE in a very weak saturation. It calls up mystical feelings - which can be either good or bad.

LILAC and PLESH have one quality in common - they want to disappear into space. LILAC cannot be defined in a certain space as GREEN can. It wants to be created and re-created - to be continuously re-born - and to disappear into infinite space.

BLUE-VIOLET: Like BLUE this colour leads us somewhere far away - LILAC also does this. We want to follow deeper and deeper where it leads us. It gives us courage. We are made brave by following it.

VIOLET: This colour creates in us a desire to pray.

WHITE: This gives us first a feeling of light, great quietness and peacefulness, and a certain kind of activity.

The feeling of "I" in a good high sense can be found from WHITE. Each colour is a picture of something, and WHITE is the "soul picture of the spirit." In the sense we use the term "spirit" here we mean the highest part of the human being. The soul is something in connection with the experience of every-day life. It is placed as it were between body and spirit. Spirit is something like an angel which lives in another world. Therefore WHITE is the soul picture of the spirit.

BLACK: Weakness. The spirit picture of death.

BLACK, GREY and BROWN are the three colours which represent evil powers and evil influences.

COMPOSITIONS: RED and GREEN are complimentary - the RED intensifies the GREEN. A spot of GREEN on a RED field makes the GREEN more intense, while on the other hand RED on a GREEN field begins to move. The connection between these two colours is a passionate one.

In contrast to this we have the combination of GREEN and PLESH. These colours have no influence over each other.

When GREEN and BLUE are combined the inclination of GREEN is to take some of the quality of BLUE and become a little bluish. BLUE dominates and has the tendency to push GREEN away.

GOLD is YELLOW but with some other qualities. In spite of its shining quality it is heavy and does not radiate. Unlike YELLOW GOLD loses its own will.

Another difference between YELLOW and GOLD is that GOLD wishes to distribute itself while YELLOW wants to be dense in the centre and disappear on the edges.

GOLD has a metal feeling in its colour and so has SILVER.

The combination of YELLOW and BLUE is poor and common but through the association of GREEN which is very near to this composition, it can have a slight trace of satisfaction.

YELLOW and RED is a one-sided composition but gay and active. Magnificent.

BLUE and RED give almost the same impression as BLUE-RED. YELLOW-RED and BLUE-RED excite and heighten the mood.

The following combinations give the impression that "it is very pleasant."

1. YELLOW and YELLOW-RED.
2. YELLOW-RED and PURPLE.
3. BLUE and BLUE-RED.
4. BLUE-RED and PURPLE.

YELLOW and GREEN are common and flat but gay.

BLUE and GREEN are common, flat and repulsive. In German this composition is known as "the colour of fools."

PURPLE or GREEN, side by side with BLACK become more dark and gloomy, while PURPLE and GREEN, side by side with WHITE, become more joyful.

The stronger the saturation of each colour the more serious and beautiful qualities they possess.

Dr. Steiner has given a very interesting piece of advice to Directors. There are three important things on the stage - the colour of the settings in general, colour of lighting and colour of costumes. The colours of each have an entirely different function. The colour of the settings must express the general atmosphere and character of the whole scene, act or play. The lighting makes it possible for us to change the atmospheres throughout the play, and the colour of the costumes must express the qualities and moods of the characters. Through these three mediums we can express the performance from every point of view, and we will find our work richer and more flexible if we will try to express the idea of the performance through these three means.

The following is some general advice given us by the three authorities we referred to at the beginning:-

Imagine the colours without any connection to real things. Imagine them flowing into unlimited space - pure type of imagination. Get accustomed to imagining the colours as living flowing substances, and to asking what speaks to us out of each colour. Imagine the colours as living organs of the spiritual organism. Try to be the colour.

In designing costumes the following suggestion will be helpful-

Find the colours the character radiates and fix these colours in the costume.