The Poetics of Colour in Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, Wassily Kandinsky and Else Lasker-Schüler

Grace Beatrice Rey Lawson Conquer
Somerville College, University of Oxford
Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Michaelmas 2016

Short Abstract

This thesis looks at the poetics of colour in Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, Wassily Kandinsky and Else Lasker-Schüler. It argues that focusing on colour words allows us to think more carefully about the sort of making that poetry, around the turn of the twentieth century, was seen to be, its purpose and effects. In doing so it thinks also about this making—about the ways that words can be seen as the material of poetry, the ways poems relate to objects, and are objects, the ways poets negotiate semantic space and communicability.

While other accounts argue for the specificity of a particular period, author, or hue, I argue for the specificity of the medium, a conclusion which seems necessary when considering how these particular poets thought about and through colour. While the poets' projects differ, colour can be used in each case like a prism, to separate out their attitudes and commitments towards their medium and its place in the world.

The combination of these four poets, which is, to the best of my knowledge, unique, also allows new connections to be seen, whether, facing inward, in terms of colour itself, or outward towards the commitments regarding the poem that an approach via colour exposes. The four poets share an interest in the involvement, and in some cases, aesthetic education, of readers, and in how and what we can learn through reading, and particularly reading colour. What we learn has less to do with colours and how they are experienced than to do with the constructed world of the poem and its mechanisms, and of the role we have to play in animating this world.

Long Abstract

This thesis looks at the poetics of colour in Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, Wassily Kandinsky and Else Lasker-Schüler, four poets central to innovation in, and the rejuvenation of, German-language poetry around the turn of the twentieth century. Examining the ways in which the four poets used colour to develop, and reflect on, their practices, I allow new or overlooked similarities and lineages to emerge, while putting forward a method of reading colour which, unlike many previous accounts, refuses to lump together distinct projects.

This is not, of course, the case with all colour criticism; however, approaches have tended to fall into a number of camps, with attendant limitations. Surveys—whether book length, such as Jacques Le Rider's *Les couleurs et les mots*, or essay length, such as Jacob Steiner's 'Die Farben in der Lyrik von George bis Trakl', can do much to show the diversity within the colour use of a particular period, and also suggest a sense of development across it, but are of course constrained as to how much space they can give over to an individual writer; studies of individual writers, such as Davide Vago's *Proust en couleur* or Toni Bernhart's *"Adfection ihrer Cörper": Empirische Studie zu den Farben in der Prosa von Hans Henny Jahnn*, can pay the necessary attention but have concomitantly less scope for attesting to currents surrounding their chosen authors (although both books do indeed do this very well). Studies of single colours can fall short because they beg the question of what a colour is, and whether it can be considered a meaningful unit, and block off for their enquiry larger questions of what a colour word can do in a text at all, as well as discussions of relations between colours. The best of these, such as Angelika Overath's *Das andere Blau*, make a good case for the uniqueness of their hue while exploring its use as an example of colour in text, thus leaving space for the possibility that hues not tracked in the account might nonetheless function similarly. My approach, in which close attention is paid

to a small number of poets, all contemporaries, and for the most part a particular period in each poet's career, allows, I hope, the best of all worlds. On the one hand, for all the claims that each poet might have made on behalf of their newness and originality, there are obvious overlaps, in part due to a shared inheritance of French symbolism as well as interconnected social and artistic circles. But these overlaps also help us narrow down the particularity of their projects and of their 'handling' of colour, and the flexibility of colour language even within a specific period.

The period in which these poets were working was one in which the borders between different art forms were often crossed: in terms of poetry, this sometimes involved returning to the idea of the poem itself as a piece of visual art, or integrating it into sound performances—we might think here in particular of Dada or Futurist poetry, although this is also the case with less explicitly avant-garde work—or combining poetry and illustration or elaborate typography, or else studying the methods of making proper to visual art and transposing them to a different medium. All four of the writers I look at here took seriously the importance of visual art for poetry, and thought about the relation between the two—which means, in practice, the distinctiveness of each form. In each case these writers dismissed simple analogies between the arts in favour of more nuanced—or at least deeper-seated—accounts of their overlaps.

Writing on colour around this period often takes this coming together of art forms—considered by its practitioners as novel, even revolutionary—as its starting place, and thinks about colour language as if it were an analogue to coloured paint. Thus, it is suggested that poets' use of colour around the beginning of the twentieth century is 'abstract'. This is an idea that I look at particularly in my first three chapters, and do not dispute so much as diversify. It is not obvious what abstraction looks like in language, and such brief analogies pay too little attention to the distinct relations colour words and coloured pigments have to a visual experience of the world. It is in part to explore such questions that I discuss Kandinsky, not usually thought of, if indeed known, as a poet. If we consider his poetry as essentially—but not superficially—linked to his painting then we can move on from accounts that reduce

colour words in poetry to shorthand for visual experience, both within Kandinsky's work but also in other poetry of the time, very little of which considers reflecting reality as it is experienced as its first aim (even Rilke at his most impressionist is moulding and making this material into new and autonomous things).

Kandinsky can also help us think about the effects individual named hues might have, effects such as connotation, but also physical, and famously with regard to Kandinsky, psychic or spiritual effects. Kandinsky has become known for his 'colour theory', which was enthusiastically received by his peers and which he himself inherited, via theosophy, from Goethe, as well as from popularisations of nineteenth-century science. It is not my project to dispute his claims nor adjudicate between those arguing for the greater or lesser influence of certain forerunners, although it is of course useful to remember that Kandinsky did not intuit these effects from pure experience. Rather, it is interesting to discuss the possibilities that open out were it to be the case that colours had certain effects, and the implications for works of art, which would act as a kind of spiritual telephone—and the implications for those same works if it is not at all the case. It is in his use of colour words that Kandinsky's 'theory' is at its least stable. If readers are not just receivers of a transmitted message but participants in its making, our understanding of the effects of colour must change—and I argue that one of the effects of colour in language is to bring about that participation.

My introduction discusses these questions at further length. It gives a picture of the ways colour words are already a kind of high artifice, with close historical links to chemical dyes and abstracted ways of thinking about colour in nature, such as Newton's spectrum, and of the ways that colour words have been used to signal or symbolise attitudes to making as opposed to things or affects (a word I use to cover the range of emotional and spiritual states that come into causal contact with colour). It looks also at the way that colour accrues connotation, which I return to in thinking, in particular, about Lasker-Schüler. These discussions take place through readings of poetry, narrative prose and essays from around the turn of the twentieth century (albeit the 'long' turn of the twentieth century). I also consider previous

approaches to colour in literature and in other fields to suggest that what we learn from looking at colour has very little to do with colour and much to do with the field or question at hand.

That colour words point to the idea of their own materiality can be seen in particular in the early work of Stefan George, the focus of my first chapter. Here colour seems to adhere to materials and is a property of the surfaces of things, especially in the poems of *Hymnen* and *Algabal*, which can be seen more broadly in attitudes to the word as the poet's material, and indeed to the 'material' on which the poems are based, whether paintings, historical figures, other poems: in each case the transmission of 'content' is second to an interest in the surface characteristics of texture and shape. This has what we can think of as an ethical dimension, in that it is also at the surface that we as readers come into contact with these works, and they are works whose surfaces are carefully considered to give the reader the appropriate aesthetic training. We might think the paraphrasable content of the poems dislocated from everyday life to the point of offering no interpretative access, and the colour choice an act of deliberate mystification, seemingly meaningful but with no key to its meaning; but it is in fact in the self-justification of, say, colour words, especially when associated with gemstones, silks and cultivated flowers, that we are returned to the purity of non-teleological, non-interpretative pleasure in form, where our training begins.

While discussions of Rilke's colour use have particularly circled around his own poems about cultivated flowers ('Blaue/Rosa Hortensie') as well as his writing on Cézanne, in my second chapter I look a little more broadly. Turning also to poems and prose pieces written in Worpswede, Sweden and Capri I suggest that his use of colour words is indexed to his ideas around the notion of balance between the depicted thing and the mode of its depiction, the fact, that is, that one must do justice to one's subject while doing justice to the work of art as itself a kind of thing with demands and affordances. Much of Rilke's work of this period, as many previous critics have observed, focuses on acts of looking, a process which both takes in the object of the gaze but also remakes it as a differentiated thing, and this can be

seen to apply in particular to colours, which nonetheless cannot be truly differentiated without doing violence to the formal integrity of the object to which they are attached. Through the use of colour words, Rilke models in language a kind of impartial looking, like that of an animal, which sees colour and form holistically, but before function. Balance is essential to the process of making, and also a feature of the made thing, and the idea of the elements of a work of art being in balance is central to his writing on Cézanne, where instances of colours seem active in maintaining the aesthetic forcefield of the painting through their relations with other instances or instances of other colours. Formal elements, prototypically colours, according to Rilke, *do* things, including listening, conversing, and knowing—a model which can help us think, too, about criticism and its relation to the poem.

As this first half progresses, the centre of gravity shifts from material and maker to work to beholder or reader, and where the first half paid attention to the poets' attitudes to the process of making, the second half changes tack to think about how readers encounter colour words and how they might approach them. In my third chapter I look at Kandinsky, whose colours seem to continue the trend of abstraction seen in these previous poets. (Kandinsky has, of course, been seen—not least by Kandinsky—as the figurehead of abstract painting.) He, too, is interested in the relationship between the work and the viewer, and while his own writing on how this might function is less developed in terms of poetry than painting, many of the claims made for one medium are said to apply to any other, given that all have the same metaphysical origin. My readings of the poems, which are framed also by examples from subsequent avant-garde movements, suggest that they are far more self-reflexive than has previously been suggested, and encourage the reader's involvement in deciding between interpretations, or between sense and nonsense. I look to Kandinsky's reception among Dada poets to flesh out a theory of reading in which physiological, aesthetic and spiritual experiences of the poem are united, in which 'wandering' is put before interpretation, and sense is epiphenomenal.

In my fourth chapter I think further about colour and interpretation, and look at

previous accounts of Lasker-Schüler's colour use which treat colour language as code for conceptual entities such as desire, inspiration, motherhood, God. While this approach seems to me wrong-headed, the fact of wanting to know, or pin down, the colours Lasker-Schüler uses seems to mirror the ways the speakers of the poems themselves seek to know, to uncover what lies behind the surfaces of other people. Colour is related to affect not by one-to-one correspondence of distinct kinds; rather, it is closer to something like a litmus paper, an index of valence or intensity. Colours do not do things as they might in Rilke or Kandinsky, but they do things in the way that poems do things: they are a record of the event that they themselves constitute. This happens in particular with regard to symbolic meanings, particularly of colours, which cannot be decided in advance but, I argue alongside examples of Lasker-Schüler's prose and poetry, have to be experienced and constructed by the reader.

The thesis concludes by looking at the ways that colour has been used as an analogy for reading, where the interactive nature of colour vision as it is currently understood, and has been understood in the past, in which seeing is not passive but actively involves a kind of remaking, functions as does readerly attention to texts. While the ways colour words work in the four poets I have chosen differ, they share two characteristics, one particular to their context in literary history and the other, I suggest, likely to be true of other periods. The first is that they reflect on their own making and the problems and questions that the practice of writing poetry entails. The second is that they crystallise the problems of reading (of which criticism, or literary analysis, is a kind), and, while seeming to ask to be taken at face value, and not have some sort of meaning or content or knowledge extracted from or imposed on them, they know themselves to be brought about by an interaction with a reader, who is rarely impartial or objective, and who has their own desires, knowledge, ways of seeing.

Contents

Short Abstract ..... **ii**

Long Abstract ..... **iii**

Acknowledgements ..... **xi**

Abbreviations ..... **xii**

Introduction **1**

'Absolutely proper and endlessly displaced': what do we mean by 'colour'? . 4
'A dictionary of tints': the creation of colour words 11
'Blau ist die Farbe deines gelben Haares': colour in poetry around 1900 16
'Precise notations of what has been seen': the ethics of accuracy 26
'The way lint collects': how do colours come to mean? 29

1. George and surfaces **37**

I: Word as material (1) 45
II: Surfaces, edges, borders 53
III: Colour and value 60
IV: Colour and interpretation 71

2. Rilke and balance **76**

I: Looking at the thing itself 81
II: Colour, object and mode of depiction 89
III: Figure and ground 98
IV: 'Der große Farbenzusammenhang' 102
V: Object, maker, viewer 109

3. Kandinsky's red corners: wandering in the poem 116
I: The status of the theoretical work..... 125
II: Colour universals 127
III: Word as material (2) 136
IV: 'Spazieren' 139

4. Lasker-Schüler's blue rooms: an experiment in reading 153
I: Das blaue Gemach..... 157
II: Reading colour across the poems 165
III: Mein blaues Klavier 179

Conclusion 188

Bibliography..... 196
Primary 196
Other primary 198
Secondary..... 200

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the AHRC; the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, Somerville College and the Queen's College, Oxford; the Friedrich-Schlegel-Graduiertenschule at the Freie Universität, Berlin; those at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach and at the Stefan George Archiv in the Württembergische Landesbibliothek; to MT, TW, BM, AP and RR; BM, PD, MM, HF, WG, KG, NT, TW and CK; and to CL.

Abbreviations

SW Stefan George, *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden* ed. by Georg Peter Landmann and Ute Oelmann, 18 vols (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982-2013)

BfdK *Blätter für die Kunst* ed. by Carl August Klein and Stefan George, 1892-1919

KA Rainer Maria Rilke, *Werke: Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden* ed. by Manfred Engel, Ulrich Fülleborn, Horst Nalewski and August Stahl, 4 vols (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel, 1996)

SWR Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Ernst Zinn and Ruth Sieber-Rilke, 7 vols (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1959)

WB Else Lasker-Schüler, *Werke und Briefe: kritische Ausgabe* ed. by Norbert Oellers, Heinz Rölleke and Itta Shedletzky, 11 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag at Suhrkamp, 1996-)

GW Else Lasker-Schüler, *Gesammelte Werke in drei Bänden* ed. by Friedhelm Kemp, Werner Kraft and Margarete Kupper, 3 vols (Munich: Kösel, 1959-1962)

Introduction

The central, and most obvious, problem that colour poses for literature—whether for those writing it or those reading—is that it is not there. While the importance of colour as opposed to line or form in art has a history of ideological debate, painted or drawn marks always have a colour; poetry, certainly when read aloud, doesn't. In discussing the opening lines of Hans Henny Jahnn's *Das Holzschiff*, Toni Bernhart makes the following observation, or, as he calls it, 'banalisierende Gedankengang': 'Bilder und Farben werden sichtbar. Gleichzeitig aber sind überhaupt keine Farben und Bilder sichtbar, sondern schlicht und einfach schwarze Buchstaben auf weißem Papier.'[1] The invisibility of textual colour is precisely why it is worth studying: the work of the historian Michel Pastoureau on the history of colour, and colours, takes as its starting point the fact that '[t]oute description, toute notation de couleur est culturelle et idéologique […]. Le fait même de mentionner ou de ne pas mentionner la couleur d'un objet est un choix fortement signifiant, reflétant des enjeux économiques, politiques, sociaux ou symboliques s'inscrivant dans un contexte précis.'[2] It is not only what colour a thing, in a written text, is given that is significant; it is that its colour is given at all.

Why do poets use colour? In this thesis I argue that it is here, in negotiating this absence, feeling around the edges of what cannot be put on the page, that they

---

[1] *Das Holzschiff* begins, 'Wie wenn es aus dem Nebel gekommen wäre, so wurde das schöne Schiff plötzlich sichtbar. Mit dem breiten gelbbraunen, durch schwarze Pechfugen gegliederten Bug und der starren Ordnung der drei Masten, den ausladenden Rahen und dem Strichwerk der Wanten und Takelage.' Toni Bernhart, *"Adfection derer Cörper": Empirische Studie zu den Farben in der Prosa von Hans Henny Jahnn* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 2003), p. 37.

[2] Michel Pastoureau, *Noir: Histoire d'une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 15.

allow us to see most clearly what *can* be. Colour points to the gaps between different kinds of making, between different ways of mediating or manufacturing experience. It is for this reason that poetry is often opposed to the visual arts, both by its makers and by critics such as Jacques Le Rider, who writes, 'face à la couleur, la parole fait l'expérience de son impuissance. Les poètes peuvent rêver d'égaler le musicien. Mais ils ne peuvent peindre et le triomphe du coloris proclame la défaite des mots. [...] Se mesurer aux arts plastiques est pour un écrivain l'épreuve suprême des limites du langage.'[3] It is certainly the case in the poets I look at, and many of their contemporaries, that poetry was seen to have much to learn from painting.[4] Even, however, in the absence of more explicit engagement with visual art, colour tests poets and writers who attempt to depict visual experience in words. We could—following Pastoureau ('le fait de mentionner...')—describe the role of colour words in poetry, as opposed to painting, or film, architecture, theatre, illustration, as a form of 'mention' as opposed to 'use': a quotation from a sort of experience not to be found on the page. This is not to say that colour words do not *do* things, rather, that if they have significance or effects they are of a different sort to what coloured paints or lights or textiles might do. In the usual application of the use-mention distinction ('Berlin is a beautiful city' as opposed to ''Berlin' has six letters')—which, I should add, is hardly uncontested—it is words that are 'mentioned' and not 'used' that are more materially present, referring not to concepts or things but 'typographical or phonetic shapes' to which they are identical.[5] We might then initially think

---

[3] 'Rilke et Cézanne: La poésie à l'école de la couleur', *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft,* 19 (1992), 109–17 (p. 109). See also his chapter, 'Du musée des images à la couleur pure', in *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: historicisme et modernité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), pp. 155–79.

[4] Not, of course, for the first time in the history of the 'sororal' relationship between literature and visual art; but that this relationship becomes particularly close around the turn of the twentieth century is an, I hope, uncontroversial claim, whether that relationship be, as in the case of Blaise Cendrars' and Sonia Delaunay's *La prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (1913), a bringing together of art forms, or, as in Ezra Pound's essay on Vorticism, a bringing together of processes. I return to Pound in my first chapter; for a useful discussion of Pound's interactions with the art world, see Rebecca Beasley, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[5] Donald Davidson, 'Quotation', in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 79–94 (p. 79). The use-mention distinction is formulated by W. V. O. Quine in *Mathematical Logic* (New York: Norton, 1940), pp. 23–33. For a discussion of the distinction, and of Davidson's paper, see A. W. Moore, 'How Significant Is the Use/Mention Distinction?', *Analysis*, 46.4 (1986), 173–179.

that here the opposite is the case, that colour words are pure semantic value, with no connection to visible or tangible things, whereas coloured paint or dye is a kind of stuff. However, as I will argue, by referring to an absent kind of material, colour words point to *the idea of* materiality, the idea that art is corporeal, sensual. Even in cases where colour words in poetry seem most innocuous, and simply descriptive, the fact that they are intended to evoke a visual experience gestures back to the material condition of literature as a particularly abstracted form of visual experience, forming an unspoken lament for the unfortunate rift between the page and the world. It is for this reason that all colour words (and not just certain individual hues, as has sometimes been claimed) can be seen as 'poetological'; reflecting, that is, on the art of making that is poetry.[6]

Colour poses a problem for language, it would seem, and also, therefore, a challenge for those for whom words are their medium. The artist David Batchelor puts it well: 'colour can become something of an embarrassment, and an embarrassment to language in particular. The difficulty we encounter when putting colour experiences into words is a constant reminder of the limits of language and, as such, colour is an awkward presence that can make me inarticulate or render me mute.'[7] But when making, rather than describing, colour experiences, we find new problems. What colour language and coloured stuff seem to share is a certain elusiveness with respect to *meaning*; both colour words and the colours of lights, pigments, cloth and so on seem to oscillate between semantic richness and emptiness or indifference. We regularly exploit the fact that colours have no fixed meanings or hierarchy when, for instance, we colour code our notes; colour categories seem like empty vessels waiting for us to fill them with provisional, but discrete, meanings or associations. But this is dependent on viewing the colours of things as themselves provisional or arbitrary: if I have one notebook that is blue, I write everything in it; if I have two

[6] I nonetheless take Angelika Overath's point, following Gottfried Benn, that blue, in the context of German poetry after Romanticism, can be seen as 'eine[ ] ausgezeichnete Farbe, die in die Problematik des schöpferischen Prozesses selbst führt'. Angelika Overath, *Das andere Blau: Zur Poetik einer Farbe im modernen Gedicht* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987), p. 1.

[7] David Batchelor, *The Luminous and the Grey* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), p. 14.

notebooks, one which is blue and one which is red, it seems appropriate to categorise my writing (by subject, or by mode or form). But if I have a blue and a red pen, the question of which to write in is suddenly fraught with the prior and wider cultural significance of blue pens and red ink and of the colours blue and red, and even of certain seemingly objective facts about these colours and, say, their legibility. (Similarly, if I were colouring in a picture the question of which colour I choose for the sea would not purely be answered by reference to the hope of distinguishing one form from another; and if one of my subjects was 'Marxism' it would seem slightly perverse to use the blue notebook).[8] This banal example shows, I hope, the sorts of problems we might have when thinking of more rarefied forms of deliberate colour choice, such as painting; literature is not unique in having to negotiate colour's semantic porousness, or leakiness, although it can, unlike painting, choose to avoid it altogether.

'ABSOLUTELY PROPER AND ENDLESSLY DISPLACED': WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'COLOUR'?

What, then, is colour? And how, if we want to answer this question, do we get a handle on the subject, which has seemed disciplinarily, if not also ontologically, slippery? According to James Gibson, '[t]he meaning of the term *color* is one of the worst muddles in the history of science', and Larry Hardin points out the 'brute factuality' and 'paradigmatic [...] unanalyzability' of colour as it has seemed to the history of philosophy.[9] Literary studies, too, 'hat es nicht leicht mit den

[8] And in fact much colour-coding is based around a sense of natural rightness, even if seemingly spurious or post-hoc. V. S. Naipaul makes this point when discussing Flaubert: 'One of the more arresting things that Flaubert said [...] was that he mentally gave a different colour to each of his books. *Bovary* was grey, *Salammbô* purple. He didn't care about narrative and character; he just did the colour. This is nonsense, but the idea of colour is interesting and must have come to Flaubert out of the labour and strain of the second book. It must have seemed to him that during the greyness of the work on *Bovary* he had been solacing himself with the thought of the purple book about Carthage to come, when he would let himself go. It gave a logic to the work he was doing'. V. S. Naipaul, *A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling* (London: Picador, 2007), p. 137. Here post-hoc rationalisation is itself imposed on the process of colour-coding.

[9] James J. Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), p. 183; C. L. Hardin, *Color for Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), p. xx.

Farben', as Jutta Müller-Tamm has suggested.[10] Colour, according to the art historian Stephen Melville, is 'subjective and objective, physically fixed and culturally constructed, absolutely proper and endlessly displaced'; it 'can appear as an unthinkable scandal.'[11] This scandalous behaviour—'neither fish nor fowl, color is anarchic, spreading across categories and disrupting them,'[12]—might seem to make of colour an unpromising area of study, but the opposite has seemed true, not least to deconstruction, as Melville's essay shows.

One way to narrow down our subject might be to follow Michael Sheringham in making a distinction between writers whose interest is in individual colours and those whose interest is in colour as part of a relational system; writers, that is, who 'valorise[ ]' 'the pure experience of a single colour, a unified experience of one colour at a time, or, on the other hand, the contrastive nature of colour, the harmonies and resonances which colours can achieve in combination.'[13] Yet this presupposes that colours are already treated as plural; we might also think of those—for instance Walter Benjamin in his early notes on colour experience and perception, or, later, Barthes writing on Cy Twombly—whose interest is in colour per se, not yet broken down into separate hues.[14] While there have been

---

[10] Jutta Müller-Tamm, 'Goethe und Schiller ausgezählt: Farbstatistik in der Philologie um 1900', in *Die Farben der Klassik: Wissenschaft - Ästhetik - Literatur,* ed. by Martin Dönike, Jutta Müller-Tamm, and Friedrich Steinle (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), pp. 313–24 (p. 319).

[11] Stephen Melville, 'Colour Has Not yet Been Named: Objectivity in Deconstruction', in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture,* ed. by Peter Brunette, David Wills, and Stephen Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 33–48 (p. 45).

[12] Michael Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 244.

[13] Michael Sheringham, 'Language, Color, and the Enigma of Everydayness', in *Sensual Reading: New Approaches to Reading in Its Relations to the Senses,* ed. by Michael Syrotinski and Ian Maclachlan (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), pp. 127–52 (p. 130). His examples include Ernst Jünger's sketches on the colour red in *Das abenteuerliche Herz,* and the work of Kandinsky on the one hand, and Baudelaire's art theory on the other. This distinction can also be seen in my thesis, with George and Rilke mostly interested in colour interactions and Kandinsky and Lasker-Schüler more interested in the intensity and particularity of individual hues, although I will argue that even in this case colour functions in a covertly relational way.

[14] 'Farbe muß gesehen werden.' Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften: VI,* ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), p. 109; 'Mais qu'est-ce que la couleur? Une jouissance.' Roland Barthes, 'Cy Twombly, ou Non multa sed multum', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993), III, 1033–47 (p. 1039). Baudelaire seems to straddle these two camps: 'La mélodie est l'unité dans la couleur, ou la couleur générale.' Charles Baudelaire, 'Salon de 1846', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), II, 415–96 (p. 425).

useful monographs on individual colours—in answer, as it were, to Rilke's suggestion that someone write a 'Monographie des Blaus'—by considering hues singly and ignoring writing on colours as part of a system, or colour as a whole, the authors of these studies have often risked undermining their own conclusions.[15] As Pastoureau points out, 'une couleur ne vient jamais seule; elle ne prend son sens, elle ne «fonctionne» pleinement du point de vue social, artistique et symbolique que pour autant qu'elle est associée ou opposée à une ou plusieurs autres couleurs. Par là même, il est impossible de la considérer isolément. Parler du noir, [...] c'est aussi—nécessairement—parler du blanc, du rouge, du brun, du violet, et même du bleu.'[16] To talk sensibly about colours, we must bear in mind not only what they are or seem to be, but also what they are not, or could not be.[17]

While we might follow Melville in suggesting that *colour* has often 'seem[ed] bottomlessly resistant to nomination', *colours* can properly only be thought of as a product of that nomination.[18] Pastoureau is insistent on the inseparability of the

---

[15] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Schriften zu Literatur und Kunst*, ed. by Horst Nalewski, *Werke: Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden*, 4 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1996), IV, p. 607. Future references will be given in the form KA vol:page.

[16] Pastoureau, *Noir*, p. 12. In part because of the necessity, when talking of black, to talk 'even of blue' (etc.) there is a certain degree of overlap between Pastoureau's three books on single colours; I have, for simplicity's sake, quoted only from the second. See also Michel Pastoureau, *Bleu: Histoire d'une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2000); Michel Pastoureau, *Vert: Histoire d'une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2013).

[17] A number of studies of single hues make the claim (or indeed base their arguments on the claim) that their particular hue is 'polar' or 'paradoxical': for instance, in her examination of the colour yellow in the early twentieth century, Sabine Doran writes that it 'contains opposition within itself' and emphasises its 'polarity', Sabine Doran, *The Culture of Yellow, Or, The Visual Politics of Late Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 6, passim.; and in another recent book on a single hue, Carol Mavor makes rather a meal of blue's 'paradoxical' nature, Carol Mavor, *Blue Mythologies: Reflections on a Colour* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), pp. 9–14. This claim is much weaker when we consider that this can be said to be the case of most hues at most points in history: 'So,' says Ernst Jünger, 'ist das Rot die Farbe der Herrschaft und des Aufruhrs, das Gelb die Farbe der höchsten Vornehmheit und des Pöbels, das Blau die Farbe des Nichts und des Wunderbaren zugleich.' Ernst Jünger, 'Lob der Vokale', in *Blätter und Steine* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1934), pp. 47–85 (pp. 72–73). This fact is reiterated in Bernd Hamacher's study of grey and brown in Goethe, in order to suggest that these 'uncolourful' colours do not contain such polarities. Bernd Hamacher, 'Grau und Braun—"Vorgefühl der Gegensätze des Kalten und Warmen": Zur Rehabilitierung der 'farblosen', 'schmutzigen' Farben bei Goethe', in *Die Farben der Romantik: Physik und Physiologie, Kunst und Literatur*, ed. by Walter Pape (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 73–80 (p. 73).

[18] Melville, p. 45.

naming of colours and the colours themselves: 'Le nom de la couleur c'est aussi de la couleur. C'est peut-être même l'élément qui conditionne avec le plus de force nos goûts et nos choix chromatiques. Dès qu'il s'agit de couleurs, nous sommes prisonniers du langage et des faits de lexique.'[19] What we believe about a colour, how we feel when we look at it, what we think about its ontological make-up, is dependent on how we have named it, and we might go so far as to say, as Richard Cronin has put it in his study of colour in nineteenth-century poetry, that '[c]olours, as opposed to colour, exist only in the process of being named.'[20]

In an earlier study of colour in Symbolist poetry, Françoise Meltzer looks to this aspect of colour to suggest that an approach via art history is misguided: 'The consistent comparison of color on the page with that on the canvas is ultimately ineffectual in the elucidation of textual color semiology. Thus the attempt to use art history as a method of literary research in this field has failed as much as the purely scientific methods of the previous century.'[21] For this reason, others studying colour in literature have often looked rather to linguistics to understand the field within which they are working. Cronin is one of these, calling on Brent Berlin and Paul Kay's idea of 'basic colour terms' to remind readers that recourse to complex models of colour perception is inappropriate when looking at literature, which deals with words, their availability and how they are used—rather than consult colour charts, '[w]e can find out how many colours there are by counting the words we have to describe them.'[22] Toni Bernhart's study of

---

[19] Michel Pastoureau, *Dictionnaire des couleurs de notre temps: symbolique et société* (Paris: Bonneton, 1992), pp. 132–33.

[20] Richard Cronin, *Colour and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 12. See also John Lyons ('I am assuming, then, that colour is real. I am not assuming, however, that colours are real. On the contrary, the main burden of my argument is that they are not'), John Lyons, 'Colour in Language', in *Colour: Art & Science*, ed. by Trevor Lamb and Janine Bourriau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 194–224 (p. 197).

[21] Françoise Meltzer, 'Color as Cognition in Symbolist Verse', *Critical Inquiry,* 5.2 (1978), 253–273 (p. 270). The article is a summary of her PhD thesis, 'The Painted Veil: Color and Cognition in Symbolist Verse.' (University of California, Berkeley, 1975).

[22] Cronin, p. 11. Berlin and Kay's hugely influential book of 1969, *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*, posited that, statistically speaking, all natural languages have between two and eleven 'basic' colour terms, corresponding to the English black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and grey, and if they do not have the full complement of

colour in the work of Hans Henny Jahnn, starting from the principle that 'die Setzung der Farbwörter in der schönen Literatur eine Konstruktion der Kunst [ist]', also takes from Berlin and Kay the idea of 'basic colour terms' but modifies these with the help of German linguists for the context of Jahnn, as the starting point for a quantitative approach in which thirteen 'Farbetyma' are counted and their frequency, combinations and modifications analysed.[23] Bernhart insists on the linguistic nature of the body of work to be studied, regardless of the topic: 'die Farben müssten—schwarz auf weiß—unter den Wörtern zu finden sein.'[24] It is for this reason that he sees it only proper to separate out textual scholarship from other forms of colour research, whether psychological, cognitive or cultural and historical.

Using Berlin and Kay as a guide can help someone, who is, as Bernhart, in the business of giving a large-scale statistical picture of a set of works by settling in advance the decision of what 'counts' as a colour, and by suggesting dimensions

---

eleven, the terms they do have will follow that order (if a language only has two terms, they will be black and white; if three, black, white and red, and so on, although it gets a little more complicated). 'Basicness' involves a number of criteria, many of which have been contested, but of which the most important are that a basic colour term must be a hyperonym (top-level category, so, as 'scarlet' can be seen as a kind of 'red' it is not basic) and that it is not contextually constrained (anything can be 'red' but not everything can be 'auburn'). The most important discussion and redefinition of basicness is T. D. Crawford, 'Defining "Basic Color Term"', *Anthropological Linguistics,* 24.3 (1982), 338–343; for a summary and discussion of the work and context of Berlin and Kay, see Lyons; for an excellent overview, including developments in ideas of 'basicness', see C. P. Biggam, *The Semantics of Colour: A Historical Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). The work of Berlin and Kay has also found its way into poetry itself, such as that of Jacques Roubaud, who mentions the sequence in an interview about his book *La Dissolution* (2008). See Susan Harrow, 'Colorsteps in Modern and Contemporary French Poetry', *French Forum*, 37.1 (2012), 35–52 (pp. 43–44).

[23] Bernhart, *"Adfection derer Cörper",* p. 29. He summarises his approach on p. 103:

> Die Farben bilden im Allgemeinen ein relativ feststehendes und geordnetes System in der Sprache. Ihr Auftreten und ihre Verteilung folgen einer Struktur, die nicht nur autorspezifisch, sondern in hohem Maße sprachspezifisch und auch universalsprachlich ist. Dies zeigen der Vergleich der Farbverteilung in den einzelnen Texten von Hans Henny Jahnn, der Vergleich mit anderen Autoren und Texten sowie der Vergleich mit dem Modell von Brent Berlin und Paul Kay. Die literaturwissenschaftliche Farbforschung muss diesen Hintergrund im Auge behalten, um das Auffallende (das Abweichende) erkennen zu können.

For a more in-depth summary and defence of this method, see Toni Bernhart, 'Die Vermessung der Farben in der Sprache: zur Berlin-Kay-Hypothese in der Literaturwissenschaft', *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik: Lili,* 38.150 (2008), 56–78; and Toni Bernhart, 'Quantitative Literaturwissenschaft am Beispiel der Farbensemantik', in *Literatur und Kognition: Bestandsaufnahmen und Perspektiven eines Arbeitsfeldes,* ed. by Martin Huber and Simone Winko (Paderborn: Mentis, 2009), pp. 217–34.

[24] Bernhart, *"Adfection derer Cörper",* p. 37.

of colour the researcher can safely ignore by limiting their definition of 'colour' to 'hue'. This, however, has been an important starting point of criticism of Berlin and Kay: hue is not the dimension of colour of primary salience in all cultures, at all points in history[25] (and even in contemporary Western usage, it seems clear that 'gold' and 'silver' have some claims to basicness, as any child will tell you).[26] We might also think of the achromatic colours—black, white, grey—which have not always been considered 'colours'.[27] This is of obvious importance when discussing writing on art—see, for instance, Rilke on Cézanne's black;[28] but our reading of, say, Théophile Gautier's 'Symphonie en blanc majeur' or George's 'Daneben war der raum der blassen helle' might vary radically if we insist on, or if we see these writers as insisting on, chromaticity over cultural salience—is this white an absence or a presence? Is the 'raum der blassen helle' in opposition to the 'saal des gelben gleisses' and the other coloured spaces of Algabal's 'unterreich' or is it another example of them? A degree of responsiveness both to the cultural context and to the habits of an individual writer can help settle or illuminate questions of what might 'count', and it is interesting in the case of comparative colour counts to see quite how varied this can be even within a particular period.

---

[25] Old English, famously, is more interested in brightness than hue. For a critical overview of this topic, see C. P. Biggam, 'The Ambiguity of "Brightness" (with Special Reference to Old English) and a New Model for Color Description in Semantics', in *Anthropology of Color: Interdisciplinary Multilevel Modeling,* ed. by Robert E. MacLaury, Galina V. Paramei, and Don Dedrick (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), pp. 171–88. A term very close to home which a speaker of German or English would find baffling is the Welsh *glas,* defined as '1. blue; 2. pale; 3. grey; 4. green; 5. young, raw; silver (coins).' See Biggam, *The Semantics of Colour,* pp. 10–11.

[26] Cronin does, in fact, ask a child. Cronin, p. 11. The question of gold's status is explored by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Remarks on Colour*, who points out, in response to Goethe's categorising gold under yellow: 'Man redet von der 'Farbe des Goldes' und meint nicht Gelb. "Goldfarben" ist die Eigenschaft einer Oberfläche, welche glänzt, oder schimmert.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour,* ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. by Linda L. McAlister and Margarete Schättle (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977) I.33; see also I.54. The current issue of *Polysèmes* (15 (2016)), 'Gold in/and art', makes a clear case for the usefulness of studying gold as a colour in literature (the focus in this instance is British literature). Catherine Delyfer, 'Foreword', *Polysèmes. Revue d'études intertextuelles et intermédiales,* 15 (2016).

[27] See the introductions to Pastoureau, *Noir;* and John Harvey, *The Story of Black* (London: Reaktion, 2013).

[28] 'Das Gebrauch von Weiß als Farbe war ihm von Anfang an selbstverständlich: es bildete mit dem Schwarz die beiden Enden seiner weit offenen Palette, und in dem sehr schönen Ensemble einer steinernen, schwarzen Kaminplatte mit dazugehöriger Pendüle benehmen sich Schwarz und Weiß (letzteres an einem Tuch, das einen Teil der Platte bedeckt, herabhängend) ganz farbig neben den anderen Farben, gleichberechtigt und wie seit lange akklimatisiert. (Anders als bei Manet, wo das Schwarz wie eine Stromunterbrechung wirkt und den Farben doch noch, wie von anderswoher kommend, entgegensteht.)' KA IV:634.

In his essay on colour in German poetry between 1890 and 1914, Jacob Steiner also uses colour counts, but includes 'gold', 'silbern' and 'elfenbeinern' as separate categories, and the differing frequencies of these 'material' colours helpfully illuminates distinctions between, for instance, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Else Lasker-Schüler.[29]

Such differences in the cultural salience of hue lay at the centre of one of the more famous episodes in the history of the study of colour in literature. Research by William Gladstone taking classical Greek colour words as its starting point noticed that these colour categories seemed not to map onto contemporary colour terminology, with the most notorious being the term 'chloros', which 'indicates', according to Gladstone, 'rather the absence than the presence of a definite colour.'[30] The conclusion drawn at the time was that this was a function, not of culturally distinct naming practices, but of physiology, and by turning to anthropological linguistics to investigate the evolution of colour vision a tradition was born, stretching, via Berlin and Kay, to the present day. This research was taken up by Nietzsche, who summarises, in the aphorism 'Die Farbenblindheit der Denker' in *Morgenröte*, the sorts of claims made by Gladstone and Magnus, and then makes the following 'Vermutung':

> Jeder Denker malt seine Welt und jedes Ding mit weniger Farben, als es giebt, und ist gegen einzelne Farben blind. Diess ist nicht nur ein Mangel. Er sieht vermöge dieser Annäherung und Vereinfachung Harmonien der Farben in die Dinge hinein, welche einen grossen Reiz haben und eine Bereicherung der Natur ausmachen können. [...] Und noch jetzt arbeitet sich mancher Einzelne aus einer theilweisen Farbenblindheit in ein reicheres Sehen und

---

[29] I discuss this further in my first chapter. Jacob Steiner, 'Die Farben in der Lyrik von George bis Trakl', in *Rilke: Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Karlsruhe: Von Loeper, 1986), pp. 86–104. For the history of quantitative analyses of colour in literature, see Bernhart, *"Adfection derer Cörper",* pp. 44–49. For a critical take on such analyses, see Müller-Tamm.

[30] William Gladstone, *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age,* 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1858), III, p. 468. Gladstone's work was taken up in particular in Germany, primarily by the ophthalmologist Hugo Magnus, to whom Gladstone later responded; the linguist Barbara Saunders has translated and edited a useful volume on the discussion surrounding Magnus's work (there is no equivalent anthology in German, as far as I know). Barbara Saunders, *The Debate about Colour Naming in 19th Century German Philology: Selected Translations* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007). For the reception of Gladstone's work among British writers of the late nineteenth century, see Charlotte Ribeyrol, *Etrangeté, passion, couleur: l'hellénisme de Swinburne, Pater et Symonds: 1865-1880* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2013), pp. 153–66.

> Unterscheiden hinaus: wobei er aber nicht nur neue Genüsse findet, sondern immer auch einige der früheren aufgeben und verlieren muss.[31]

For Nietzsche, as for later anthropologists, the number of colour terms is not epistemologically hierarchical; rather, a way of thinking of colour has attendant pleasures and forms of knowledge which are not transferable.[32]

'A DICTIONARY OF TINTS': THE CREATION OF COLOUR WORDS

These studies, whatever conclusions may have been drawn from them at the time, remind us that to read colour in literature of a different language, period or culture we must not go in with preconceived ideas of which colours we expect to find. Poets innovate; but they innovate with the materials they have to hand, and if we do not know what their 'palettes' looked like we might make mistakes.[33] This is a point made by George Stewart, who, while arguing that only with the development of aniline dyes did English develop a concomitant richness of colour terminology, points out that Chaucer, '[l]ike many another medieval man of genius [...] was cabined close by lack of tools. He was an Abelard studying philosophy without Aristotle, a Roger Bacon scanning the heavens without a telescope. [...] Those words which give the glow of multicolored light to the

---

[31] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröte. Idyllen aus Messina. Die fröhliche Wissenschaft,* ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: dtv, 1988), p. 262. Andrea Orsucci has suggested that the most plausible source for Nietzsche's interest in Greek colour terms is the debate in the journal *Kosmos* between Ernst Krause and Magnus (i.e. that translated by Saunders, see n.30); see Andrea Orsucci, *Orient—Okzident: Nietzsches Versuch einer Lösung vom europäischen Weltbild* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), pp. 238–47.

[32] This is somewhat reminiscent of the history of 'ecological' approaches to colour, beginning at least under that name with James Gibson and represented more recently by Evan Thompson, which bridge the otherwise entrenched subjective-objective divide and which are essentially comparative, but not between human cultures, rather, between humans and other animals. See James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979); Evan Thompson, *Colour Vision: A Study in Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1995). For an excellent overview of previous accounts of colour (and a helpful new 'adverbial' account of what colour perception might be), see Mazviita Chirimuuta, *Outside Color: Perceptual Science and the Puzzle of Color in Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2015).

[33] Such anachronism is found even in studies of colour as material; in his history of pigment, Philip Ball gives the example of Faber Birren who 'assign[ed] cobalt to the palette of Rubens and his contemporaries, almost two centuries before its invention.' Philip Ball, *Bright Earth: The Invention of Colour* (London: Viking, 2001), p. 4.

pages of a modern poet were in the fourteenth century either not yet invented or not yet metaphorically employed.'[34]

Another of Stewart's examples is the naturalist John Latham, whose work on Australasian birds required a great deal of dexterity in describing colours: 'he enlisted the suffix *–ish*; he made use of the homely garden compound of pea-green; he borrowed from the Latin luteous, rufous and fulvous; he ransacked all nature for lilac, brimstone, vermilion, chestnut, ash, cinerous, peach-blossom—any stick to beat a dog, and any word to describe a parrot'[35]—and whose innovation far outstripped that of the poets of his day. (It wasn't, for example, until the Romantics that compound colour adjectives, either using substances like 'pea green' or modifying adjectives like 'dark' and 'light', made their way into poetry). Necessity is, in the case of colour terms, the mother of invention; and it is in fact not in particular poets who need to use colours, as Chaucer, Virgil, Homer and their peers have shown. Instead, it is those engaged in the natural sciences, and particularly, as Stewart points out, those in the business of making new colours, such as mauve and magenta. (Stewart also uses the famous story of Isaac Newton dividing up the spectrum into seven not just to make clear to what degree such categories are not natural but to point out that the order in which the colours are named— 'red, yellow, green, blue, and a violet purple, together with orange and indico'—is not that of the spectrum, rather of the cultural salience—essentially the 'basicness'—of the colour terms.)[36]

---

[34] George R. Stewart, 'Color in Science and Poetry', *The Scientific Monthly*, 30.1 (1930), 71–78 (pp. 71–72). I am grateful to Nick Gaskill for bringing this essay to my attention. Histories of dyes and pigment include Philip Ball's *Bright Earth*; for aniline dyes in particular see A. S. Travis, *The Rainbow Makers: The Origins of the Synthetic Dyestuffs Industry in Western Europe* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1993). For a more German-specific account, see Esther Leslie's wide-ranging history of a 'poetics of carbon', *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (London: Reaktion, 2005).

[35] George R. Stewart, p. 74.

[36] Carole Biggam, in her introduction to the historical semantics of colour (see n. 22), describes a study from 1977 in which men and women were asked to assign, first, their own colour terms to colour swatches, then colour terms they were provided with; not only did men use less 'fancy' terms and stick to more 'basic' ones, they did so even when these were provided, suggesting that they were actively avoiding 'fancy' terms (and were less accurate when they did use them). One group of women, however, had a significantly lower score for 'fancy' usage: habited nuns. Biggam, *The Semantics of Colour*, pp. 65–66.

Stewart's argument is that by abstracting colours from the objects that they had, previously, been attached to, the availability of dyes in many colours showed up the deficiencies of language, and opened up gaps into which all manner of colour names rushed, including those chosen for historically contingent reasons (for example, 'magenta', after the battle of the same name), but also those taken from the objects that the colour was prototypically associated with (for example, 'apricot'). This particular strategy, however, in the field of nature writing, becomes tautologous, and thereby inefficient and insufficient, as Richard Jefferies points out: 'Would it be possible to build up a fresh system of colour language by means of natural objects? [...] [T]his plan is interfered with by two things: first, that almost every single item of nature, however minute, has got a distinctly different colour, so that the dictionary of tints would be immense; and next, so very few would know the object itself that the colour attached to it would have no meaning.'[37] Calling on the richness of English at that point, enlarged by science, Jefferies suggests that in the future the means of expression will be unimaginably larger; yet even with the wealth of books on the science of colour, and sets of technical colour names such as artists' pigment, Jefferies finds no colour vocabulary up to the task of matching the specificity of colours as they appear in nature. (He also makes clear that any human use of colour, not just in terms of words, will be constrained by the covert or overt influence of language and culture: 'in so far as I have looked at pictures, it seems as if the artists had met with the same obstacle in paints as I have in words—that is to say, a deficiency. Either painting is incompetent to express the extreme beauty of nature, or in some way the canons of art forbid the attempt.'[38])

Other writers, too, saw the inadequacy of everyday colour names to describe the natural world, and made of this—as had, out of necessity, the naturalists of the previous century—the occasion for linguistic innovation. In his early diaries,

---

[37] Richard Jefferies, 'Nature and Books', in *Field and Hedgerow: Being the Last Essays of Richard Jefferies* (London: Longmans, Green, 1889), pp. 19–36 (p. 23).

[38] Jefferies, p. 22.

Gerard Manley Hopkins is fascinated, on the one hand, by unusual words—from English dialect, historical, minor and exotic languages—and on the other, by nature and the minutiae of its appearance, and particularly its colour, as part of an attentiveness to a natural, that is, created world. In 1864 he writes the following 'note on green wheat':

> The difference between this green and that of long grass is that the first suggests silver, latter azure. Former more opacity, body, smoothness. It is the exact complement of carnation. Nearest to emerald of any green I know, the real emerald *stone*. It is lucent. Perhaps it has a chrysoprase bloom. Both blue greens.[39]

A dedication to learning, and particularly to language (unlike Jefferies' pointedly anti-intellectual approach in the essay mentioned) is what makes art of accuracy: 'No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion | Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear, | Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.' In the newness of the language, the balance between what Eric Griffiths calls 'the world's separateness from the figuring mind and [...] its susceptibility to that mind' is held, and, as Griffiths observes, 'empirical noticing develops into religious apprehension.'[40]

The marriage of accuracy and innovation reaches a different sort of peak in German literature, in the poetry of Arno Holz, as in this passage from 'Morgendlicher Rosenstrauss':

Aus
tiefsattem, köstlichstem,
noch
taublätterigem, noch taulauchttropfigem, noch tauglitzerigem
Dunkelglanzgrün,
flimmernd, schimmernd, glimmernd,
mitten
im
schattenkühlen, ebenerdigen, weinrebenumkletterhangenen

---

[39] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Vol 3: Diaries, Journals and Notebooks,* ed. by Lesley Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 149. The word 'chrysoprase' is defined in a footnote as 'ancient name of a golden-green precious stone'.

[40] Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 276. For a detailed discussion of Hopkins' attitude to language and philology, see James Milroy, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Deutsch, 1977); for colour words see in particular pp. 169-174.

Gartenhausraum,
Rosen![41]

Holz reaches for several strategies in describing colour in his *Phantasus* poems (and in particular the later versions, that is, 1916-1929, from which this is taken), all of which can be seen here: the first is to use compound colour words ('Dunkelglanzgrün'); the second is to modify colour words with compound adjectives ('tiefsattem' and so on); and the third is to make colours into nouns, that is, to separate the things described from the colour that describes them. This is a strategy we will see put to use in George and Rilke, but for different reasons and to differing effect. In Holz it forms part of the radical 'impressionism' of his method, in which sense impressions seem to oscillate between a cumulative picture and an ever-changing sensory present (later in the same poem the following lines describe, without even mentioning the roses, their colours: 'Weiße, gelbe, lichtnußbraune, | rote, |[...] | schwarzblau, samtschwer |schillernde'). Clive Scott makes the distinction between Rilke, in which what we might call impressionism is 'already a step away from the raw sensory shock of sensation, is either a single sensation generalized or a group or series of sensations reconciled and appeased by a synthesizing structure' and Holz's 'sensation-Impressionism' which is 'a group or series of sensations untranscended, intractable, erratic, and hostile.'[42] It is in this latter case that the line between Naturalism and Expressionism, Futurism and so on can be drawn, and in which earlier techniques, born of necessity, become self-justifying in the name of literary and linguistic experimentation. It is here that my thesis takes its starting point: 'jedem Leser,' writes Jacob Steiner, 'fällt auf, daß in der Lyrik vom Fin de siècle bis zum ersten Weltkrieg die Farben eine besondere Rolle spielen. Sie treten zahlreicher auf als in irgendeiner früheren Epoche der deutschen Literatur und

[41] Arno Holz, *Werke,* ed. by Wilhelm Emrich, 7 vols (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1961), I, p. 279.

[42] Clive Scott, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism', in *Modernism, 1890-1930,* ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James Walter McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 206–27 (p. 224). Scott dedicates a good few pages of the essay to colour, and how distinctions in how it is used map onto smaller currents within these larger literary styles or movements (pp. 218-222).

haben eine bis dahin nicht gekannte Qualität.'[43] Colours in poetry of this period are up to something—but what, and why?

'BLAU IST DIE FARBE DEINES GELBEN HAARES': COLOUR IN POETRY AROUND 1900

This thesis looks at the poetry of four figures central to German literature between the fin de siècle and the First World War—Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, Wassily Kandinsky and Else Lasker-Schüler—and asks what use colour, and colours, have been put to, and why. Their new qualities and the new roles they are given—for, *pace* Steiner, these are plural, and usefully distinguished—require us to ask further questions of literature, and particularly poetry, itself: its role, its make-up, its materials. For what unites the four poets in this study is the fact that they see in colour a way of developing their poetic practice, of thinking critically about literary history, of creating new means of expression. Colour itself is fascinating only for what it has to offer: in the case of George and Rilke, a way of rethinking the attitude of the writer to his material, i.e. language, and for Kandinsky and Lasker-Schüler, a way of rethinking communication and communicability in written art. The conjunction of the four suggests a distinct picture of the challenges facing poets ambitious for their art at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This period is one, as Jacob Steiner points out, in which colour first seems to play a new role in poetry, and is a period marked also by connections between literature and the visual arts and ideas of visuality per se, and of scepticism around language, and of interest in surfaces and appearances, colour being the obvious meeting point of these.[44] There are other periods, however, in which social and

[43] Jacob Steiner, p. 86.

[44] In her essay on qualia in Woolf, Dora Zhang summarises the problem that colour (among other sensations) posed for writers of this period: 'At the same time that literary modernism evinced an intense interest in representing first-person experience, it also continually encountered the difficulty of describing such feelings and sensations in language.' Dora Zhang, 'Naming the Indescribable: Woolf, Russell, James, and the Limits of Description', *New Literary History,* 45.1 (2014), 51–70 (p. 52). Carsten Strathausen's book on vision in George, Rilke and Hofmannsthal

philosophical questions might best be answered through colour, and in which colour takes on new significance across arts and literature. An obvious example is around the turn of the nineteenth century, as recent collections of essays on colour in German Classicism and Romanticism have shown, and it is in part because of the wealth of previous material on, say, Goethe's *Zur Farbenlehre* that this period plays little part in the following study.[45] Another example might be the middle of the twentieth century, a point at which developments in film technology and plastics made colour much more central to everyday experience, while those reading Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la perception* or Wittgenstein's late works were beginning to think differently, again via colour, about perception and language respectively.[46] At this point the tradition of experimental poetry, which can be traced back to the poets I discuss here, plays with the incorporation of literal colour in visual or concrete poetry (an example of which begins my chapter on Kandinsky). Thus, there is something particular about the period I focus on within literary, art and intellectual history, but it is not particular to it that colour is its measure.

---

makes the case for this visuality very persuasively; Carsten Strathausen, *The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision around 1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[45] See *Die Farben der Klassik: Wissenschaft - Ästhetik - Literatur,* ed. by Martin Dönike, Jutta Müller-Tamm, and Friedrich Steinle (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016); *Die Farben der Romantik: Physik und Physiologie, Kunst und Literatur,* ed. by Walter Pape (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014). For recent work on *Zur Farbenlehre* see Friedrich Steinle's chapter, 'Goethe und die Farbforschung seiner Zeit', in Dönike, Müller-Tamm and Steinle, pp. 255-289; Joel B. Lande, 'Acquaintance with Color: Prolegomena to a Study of Goethe's Zur Farbenlehre', *Goethe Yearbook,* 23.1 (2016), 143–169; Olaf Müller, *Mehr Licht: Goethe mit Newton im Streit um die Farben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2015); Olaf Müller, 'Goethes philosophisches Unbehagen beim Blick durchs Prisma', in *Farben: Betrachtungen aus Philosophie und Naturwissenschaften*, ed. by Jakob Steinbrenner and Stefan Glasauer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), pp. 64–102. See also Frederick Burwick, *The Damnation of Newton: Goethe's Color Theory and Romantic Perception* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986).

[46] Michael Sheringham draws together Merleau-Ponty and psychoanalytical writing on colour in thinking of its role with regard to the everyday in the writing of Yves Bonnefoy and Philippe Jaccottet: 'Colors address us through our senses, through our bodily presence in the world (Merleau-Ponty), but at the same time they involve us in a mental process of discrimination and deciphering which both resists and solicits language.' Sheringham, p. 151. For a discussion of colour in Merleau-Ponty, see Véronique M. Fóti, 'The Dimension of Color', in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. by Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 293–308. For a recent discussion of Wittgenstein and colour, see *Wittgenstein on Colour,* ed. by Frederik Gierlinger and Štefan Joško Riegelnik (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Oscar Hanfling, '"Ich weiß schon, was ich damit meine": Wittgenstein und das Wort "rot"', in Steinbrenner and Glasauer, pp. 182–97; see also Jacques Le Rider, *Les couleurs et les mots* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), pp. 388–402 for a summary and the application of Wittgenstein's *Remarks* to painting and literature.

★

An Anna Blume
Merzgedicht 1

Oh du, Geliebte meiner siebenundzwanzig Sinne, ich liebe Dir! — Du, deiner, dich dir, ich dir, du mir. — Wir?
Das gehört (beiläufig) nicht hierher.
Wer bist du, ungezähltes Frauenzimmer? Du bist — — bist du? — Die Leute sagen, du wärest, — laß sie sagen, sie wissen nicht, wie der Kirchturm steht.
Du trägst den Hut auf deinen Füßen und wanderst auf die Hände, auf den Händen wanderst du.
Hallo, deine roten Kleider, in weiße Falten zersägt.
Rot liebe ich Anna Blume, rot liebe ich dir! — Du, deiner, dich dir, ich dir, du mir. — Wir?
Das gehört (beiläufig) in die kalte Glut.
Rote Blume, rote Anna Blume, wie sagen die Leute?
Preisfrage: 1. Anna Blume hat ein Vogel,
2. Anna Blume ist rot.
3. Welche Farbe hat der Vogel?
Blau ist die Farbe deines gelben Haares.
Rot ist das Girren deines grünen Vogels.
Du schlichtes Mädchen im Alltagskleid, du liebes grünes Tier, ich liebe dir! — Du deiner dich dir, ich dir, du mir. — Wir?
Das gehört (beiläufig) in die Glutenkiste.
Anna Blume! Anna, a – n – n – a, ich träufle deinen Namen. Dein Name tropft wie weiches Rindertalg.
Weißt du es Anna, weißt du es schon?
Man kann Dich auch von hinten lesen, und du, du Herrlichste von allen, du bist von hinten wie von vorne:
„a – n – n – a".
Rindertalg träufelt streicheln über meinen Rücken.
Anna Blume, du tropfes Tier, ich liebe dir![47]

Let us start, however, at the end: with a poem that, centring on the palindromic Anna, imagines an upturned literary history of colour. The disruptive, parodic 'An Anna Blume', first printed in *Der Sturm* in 1919, may seem to have little to do with the poetry of my first two chapters; yet the questions it poses, and the assumptions that are forcefully overturned, must be kept in mind. For while such extravagant and nonsensical colour use seems far from Rilke's careful impressionism or George's controlled aestheticism, they are of a piece, and

[47] Kurt Schwitters, *Anna Blume: Dichtungen* (Hannover: Steegemann, 1919), pp. 5–6.

looking forward helps us see the continuities across early twentieth-century movements, and helps us clarify what it is colour is up to around 1900.

Whatever our take on the poem as a whole, it is clear that the colours in Schwitters' poem do not refer to a world external to the poem: this is not, and cannot be, a case of naturalistic description. While it could be true that there was an Anna Blume to which the poem was addressed, it cannot be true that her yellow hair is blue, or (for slightly different reasons) the cooing of her green bird red. It is also unclear what it might mean to love someone red(ly), or in what sense Anna is red, or green (is she the elusive 'reddish-green' thing from Wittgenstein's *Bemerkungen über die Farben*?). Her name can be read from both directions, and is thus multiplied, but the opposite goes for these colours which, by being more than one thing at once, become nothing at all. The poem celebrates the productivity of rule-breaking: for instance, 'ich liebe dir' is, I would argue, more eloquent, or at least more suggestive, than 'ich liebe dich', and similarly the faulty syllogistic 'Preisfrage' opens up space for imaginative possibilities; however, the central couplet with its opposing colours presents a logical impasse.[48] A poem in which language is joyfully distended to allow for new modes of expression breaks down at this point (notably the point at which it most resembles a traditional poem or song); the brute reality of colour turns a poem which could, otherwise, have maintained ties with the natural world into a kind of game, a fiction, a piece of verbal nonsense that *does* nothing, and goes nowhere.

But it is also the case—again, thinking forward to Wittgenstein—that while it may be impossible to imagine a blueish yellow, or a thing that is both all-over red and all-over green, to attempt to do so involves either a cleansing or an expansion; that through the paradox of impossible colours—or through the task

[48] Opposing, at least in the tradition of the opponent-process theory proposed by Ewald Hering, rather than Goethe's colour wheel (in which blue is opposed to orange), as John Gage points out; 'but', he suggests, and rightly, 'it seems clear that [Schwitters'] oxymoronic play with colours was simply a play with opposites: we need look no further than the words on the page.' John Gage, *Colour and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), p. 185.

of juggling two, irreconcilable, facts—we arrive at a newer, and purer, poetic repertoire or outlook. Colour's semantic unresolvedness makes it the ideal candidate for the poet who is looking to 'break down the walls of the present and wake us to the hope and exaltation of the untried, unsuspected possibilities of human thought and art,' as Edmund Wilson puts it;[49] and one of the most famous examples of this is Rimbaud's 'Voyelles', written around 1871 and published in 1883:

> A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles,
> Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes.
> A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
> Qui bombillent autour des puanteurs cruelles,
>
> Golfe d'ombre ; E, candeur des vapeurs et des tentes,
> Lance des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles
> I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres belles
> Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes ;
>
> U, cycles, vibrements divins des mers virides,
> Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides
> Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux ;
>
> O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs étranges,
> Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges :
> — O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux ![50]

Rimbaud sees in colour the possibility of creating a 'langage universel'—a language bypassing the world and the intellect, speaking to the soul via the senses.[51] This is not, as has sometimes been claimed, an attempt to harness natural vowel-colour associations—either seen to be universal or generated by the idiosyncrasies of neurological synaesthesia—but instead an exploitation—'purement apocryphe d'intention et de sens'[52]—of the semantic emptiness of pure sound (vowels) and pure colour, in which both become a vessel for rich, and

---

[49] Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York: Scribner, 1931), p. 298.

[50] Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes,* ed. by André Guyaux and Aurélia Cervoni (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), pp. 168–69.

[51] Letter to Paul Demeny, 15.5.1871, Rimbaud, p. 346.

[52] Victor Segalen, *Les Synesthésies et l'école symboliste* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902), p. 27.

potentially arbitrary, images.[53] In Rimbaud's poem, we notice, the tenuousness lies not in the relationship between colour and thing—in fact the flies, the vapours, the lips, the seas and pastures are all of quite unsurprising hue—but between the two systems, of vowels and colours. Novelty is not necessarily born from going against nature, as in Schwitters, but can also germinate in the suggestion that language itself is conventional and meaning or reference only flimsily tethered to individual words and sounds. A poem whose internal logic was infallible, in which no thing possessed a quality it could not possess in the wild, could still, by suggesting an absence of motivation, by suggesting that there was in fact no external cause, itself be radical.

It is against the backdrop of Symbolism that the four writers I focus on were working: George, who in fact translated this sonnet for his *Zeitgenössische Dichter* (1905), attended as a young man Mallarmé's Tuesday salons, and Rilke and Kandinsky both made explicit their debts to the Belgian symbolist poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. We might well then answer the question of *how it is* that German poetry of this period is so interested in colour by pointing back to Rimbaud, Verlaine and their contemporaries; but the questions of how and why—in the sense of, 'for what purpose'—cannot be answered solely through reference to their precursors. Rimbaud's seeming commentary on the poem teasingly alludes to its own hermeticism:

> J'inventai la couleur des voyelles ! - A noir, E blanc, I rouge, O bleu, U vert. - Je réglai la forme et le mouvement de chaque consonne, et, avec des rythmes instinctifs, je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens. Je réservais la traduction.[54]

---

[53] These are not, then Baudelaire's 'Correspondances'; and if I underplay the link between colour and music, this is in part because it suggests too much this particular side of the history of cross-sensory imagery. We can perhaps take our cue from Verlaine, for whom music was, famously, not colour, but 'la nuance'; or from Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who has his 'Zurückgekehrter' say, 'Mir ist Musik neben [der Sprache der Farben] wie das liebliche Leben des Mondes neben dem fruchtbaren Leben der Sonne.' Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, in *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden, vol. 7: Erzählungen; Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe; Reisen,* ed. by Rudolf Hirsch and Bernd Schoeller (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979), pp. 544–71 (p. 570). (See pp. 25-6, below.)

[54] 'Une saison en enfer', Rimbaud, p. 263.

We might think here of the story told by members of George's 'Kreis' of the translation he made of the Odyssey into an unnamed invented language, seen in the final couplet of the poem 'Ursprünge' (1907), a translation that was (perhaps apocryphally) discovered and burnt by members of the circle on his death, to ensure the uninterpretability of this language.[55] A translation would allow us to see the workings of a given system, and this is not the point; its work lies in what is presented to a reader. By destroying the translation, the 'accessibilité' of the final lines of 'Ursprünge' is shored up; there is nothing, similarly, 'inaccessible' about the colours of 'Voyelles', for all that it may be in other ways unfriendly to a reader. The colours are in fact that which is most accessible, in that their conjunctions are not alien to reason (similarly, in 'An Anna Blume' the colours are never employed ungrammatically; sense is undermined only through an appeal to facts about colours in the world and the laws that govern their appearance).[56] While the colours themselves are not literally present, our imagination is not taxed: we have plenty of examples to help us summon up sensory experiences. Yet as readers we want more than just pleasurable sounds (George) or imaginary sense-experiences (Rimbaud); we almost certainly can't help letting our intellects meddle, and it is here that colour begins to worry us. The new quality that Steiner refers to in the poetry of this period is then this: for the first time, we find ourselves wondering *why this colour, and not another.* It is not that this question was not pertinent before, but the answer was to be found either in the cultural cache of symbolic associations, or in the claims to naturalism made especially by nineteenth-century literature, or else through fairly stable systems of metonymy and synecdoche. Here, however, these cannot be relied on to bring us

[55] Ernst Morwitz, *Kommentar zu dem Werk Stefan Georges* (Munich: Küpper, 1960), p. 290; Robert Boehringer, *Mein Bild von Stefan George*, 2 vols (Munich: Küpper, 1951), I, p. 17. Boehringer regretted the decision, made by the two others who were with him at the time; but, as Friedrich Kittler observes, it was 'konsequent und nicht nur pietätvoll' in that it preserved this hermeticism. Friedrich Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900,* 2nd edition (Munich: Fink, 1987), p. 339.

[56] For all that it is famously unclear whether the sentence 'Nothing can be red and green all over' does appeal to facts about the world or is purely a matter of language. A canonical discussion of this is D. F. Pears' *'Incompatibilities of Colours', in Logic and Language (Second Series),* ed. by Antony Flew (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), pp. 112–22. (In his Foreword to Hardin's *Color for philosophers,* Arthur Danto sees the very fact that analytic philosophy sees this to be a problem as indicative of its having lost its way when it comes to colour, Hardin, pp. x–xi.)

reassurance. The poetic innovation of my poets is visible precisely through the alarming absence of such reassurance: it resides in colour, but colour does not reside in text.

Marjorie Perloff uses colour to show up the divide she argues for in twentieth century Anglo-American poetry between symbolists, on the one hand, and on the other the inheritors of Rimbaud, proponents of a 'poetics of indeterminacy'. The distinction is exemplified by a comparison between Wallace Stevens' use of white in 'Auroras of Autumn' ('the images of whiteness and bareness [...] become the symbolic embodiments of Stevens' emotional state') and Beckett's in 'Ping'. '[H]ere words like "white" and "bare," which have specific connotations in Stevens' text, have no definable meaning. Their value is compositional rather than referential, and the focus shifts from signification to the play of signifiers.'[57] The point, in the writing that I look at in this thesis, is that colour is, in fact, both compositional and referential, although the patterns of reference are not, as with Stevens, always so transparent. The balance or tension between the two is where, often, the poetry lies.

It would seem, then, almost improper to ask the question of why the room in 'Ping' ('Bing' in the first, French, version) is white, or, from the opposite direction, of why it has the title 'Ping'/'Bing'. In an essay in *Encounter*, David Lodge notes the 'ingenious suggestion' that this 'alludes to the parlour game "Ping Pong" which assumes that all words and concepts can be placed in one of two great categories, "Ping" and "Pong." Thus, for example, *white* is Ping and *black* is Pong; and Beckett's piece is the account of a man inhabiting a Ping world, struggling feebly to reach out to or recover a Pong world.'[58] This is framed here as a joke; yet the 'ping/pong' game and its relatives have been used to explain avant-garde colour use from Rimbaud on, in the desire or hope that some truth external to the poem is being presented or uncovered.

---

[57] Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 22–23.

[58] David Lodge, 'Some Ping Understood', *Encounter,* February 1968, 85–89 (p. 89).

In the case of 'Voyelles', the search for reasons as to why the vowels were given those particular colours yielded various proposed sources: reading primers were hunted down, to see if this was a matter of memory, conscious or otherwise, for instance.[59] However, other lines of inquiry did not look to biography, or assume—like ping and pong—that it was a matter of universal associations; rather, the colours were attributed to private, pathologised sensations. This—the 1890s until the 1920s—was the heyday of psychological research into synaesthesia,[60] and the interpenetration of literature and science was such that Rimbaud's poem was in fact taken as a case study of 'audition colorée' by a psychologist looking for examples, while another, reading it as artifice not document, nonetheless noted that it had at least drawn his subjects' attention to their own, genuine, coloured hearing.[61] (Synaesthesia, whether neurological or creative, was also seen as a symptom of 'degeneration' by, among others, Max Nordau.)[62] I return to this research in my chapter on Kandinsky, another artist whose imagination has been taken for a medical condition.[63] While much of the research concluded that these 'genuine' synaesthetes rarely shared colour-vowel associations, it had often hoped to find an objective and universal set of correspondences, either shared only by those with the condition, or one present, if dormant, in every human.[64] The

---

[59] For the 'querelle des abécédaires' see Étiemble, *Le Sonnet des voyelles: de l'audition colorée à la vision érotique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 150–53.

[60] For a history of research into synaesthesia, see Lawrence E. Marks, 'On Colored-Hearing Synesthesia: Cross-Modal Translations of Sensory Dimensions', *Psychological Bulletin,* 82.3 (1975), 303–31. For a graph showing the waxing and waning of scientific interest in synaesthesia, see John Harrison's popular introduction, *Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 27. Harrison suggests that the 1990s heralded a new 'wave' of synaesthesia research, a wave which seems, fifteen years later, yet to peak, and this interest is not limited to science but has also spread to literary studies (as it did at the beginning of the twentieth century); see, for example, the volumes *Habitus in Habitat III: Synaesthesia and Kinaesthetics*, ed. by Jörg Fingerhut, Sabine Flach, and Jan Söffner (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011); Hans Adler and Ulrike Zeuch, *Synästhesie: Interferenz, Transfer, Synthese der Sinne* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002).

[61] Albert de Rochas, 'L'audition colorée', *La Nature,* 644 (1885), 274–75 (p. 275). Théodore Flournoy, *Des Phénomènes de Synopsie* (Paris: Alcan, 1893), p. 241.

[62] Max Nordau, *Entartung* (Berlin: Duncker, 1892), pp. 254–55.

[63] The reduction of a writer's colour-use to physiological facts can be seen also in the reception of Lafcadio Hearn, discussed by Stefano Evangelista in 'Symphonies in Haze and Blue: Lafcadio Hearn and the Colours of Japan', in *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 71–94 (pp. 76–77).

[64] Such 'objective' experiments into universal colour-associations include Edward Bullough, 'On the Apparent Heaviness of Colours', *British Journal of Psychology,* 2.2 (1907), 111–152; G. J. von

presence of such a system would speak to deeper structures of experience—and allow for their excavation.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who was also interested, at least according to Adorno, in Rimbaud's 'Farbenlehre der Worte',[65] refers to this tendency to explain away irreducible experiences of colour in his *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*. Through colours 'das innerste Leben der Gegenstände' can issue forth—'nicht die Wollust und Harmonie ihres schönen stummen Lebens [...]; nein, nur die Wucht ihres Daseins, das wütende, von Unglaublichkeit umstarrte Wunder ihres Daseins'.[66] The letter-writer describes the moment of enlightenment of a figure called Rama Krishna, brought about by the sight of a flight of white herons against the blue sky: 'nichts als diese zwei Farben gegeneinander, dies ewig Unnennbare, drang in diesem Augenblick in seine Seele und löste, was verbunden war, und verband, was gelöst war'.[67] The letter-writer then frames this experience of transcendence with a portrayal, and dismissal, of reductive and pathologising physicalism:

> Es war ein englischer Geistlicher von der gewöhnlicheren Sorte, der mir davon erzählte. »Ein heftiger optischer Eindruck ohne allen höheren Inhalt«, sagte er mir. »Sie sehen, es handelt sich um ein anomales Nervensystem.« Ohne allen höheren Inhalt! Wäre ich einer eurer gebildeten Menschen, wären mir eure Wissenschaften, die nichts sein können als wunderbare, alles sagende Sprachen, nicht eine verschlossene Welt, wäre ich nicht ein geistiger Krüppel, besäße ich

---

Allesch, 'Die ästhetische Erscheinungsweise der Farben', *Psychologische Forschung,* 6.1 (1925), 1–91; Roman Jakobson, *Kindersprache, Aphasie und allgemeine Lautgesetze* (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell, 1941). Two useful discussions of this are Gérard Genette, *Mimologiques: voyage en Cratylie* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), pp. 395–428; and E. H. Gombrich, 'Art and the Language of the Emotions', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 36.1 (1962), 215–234. Most research suggests that shared associations are mostly limited to pairs of oppositions (such as ping/pong-white/black above). With reference to the empirical research into colour-vowel associations, Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that in Rimbaud's sonnet such oppositional relations should be seen not as sensory correspondences, rather analogical: 'a' is as far from 'e' as black is from white. Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Des sons et des couleurs', in *Regarder, écouter, lire* (Paris: Plon, 1993), pp. 127–46 (p. 135).

[65] Hofmannsthal to Carl August Klein, 8.7.1892, in Stefan George and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Briefwechsel zwischen George und Hofmannsthal,* 2nd ed (Munich: Küpper, 1953), pp. 24–25. Adorno makes the connection to Rimbaud, but emphasises less the possibility of universality and more the way that 'Voyelles' allows for the emancipation of poem from concept, becoming pure technique. Theodor W. Adorno, 'George und Hofmannsthal: Zum Briefwechsel 1891-1906', in *Gesammelte Schriften 10.1: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I: Prismen; Ohne Leitbild,* ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 195–237 (pp. 191–92).

[66] Hofmannsthal, *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, p. 565. Parts of the complete *Briefe* were published in the *Prosaische Schriften* of 1907 under the title 'Die Farben'. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Die prosaischen Schriften gesammelt* (Berlin: Fischer, 1907), pp. 121–45.

[67] Hofmannsthal, *Die Briefe des Zurückgekehrten*, p. 568.

> eine Sprache, in die innerliche wortlose Gewißheiten hinüberzufließen vermöchten! Aber so!

A mute eloquence, proper to colour with its closeness to the transcendental, is ironically attributed to science—while the explanatory apparatuses of the sciences may, too, be a 'verschlossene Welt', it is more accurately the case that the mystical connection that colours have, in these letters, to the innermost feelings of the letter-writer is closed, to the flatfooted reasoning of the educated, who are, in another sense, 'geistige Krüppel'.[68] The story of the 'englischer Geistlicher von der gewöhnlicheren Sorte' should come as a warning: if our approach relies too much on external bodies of knowledge then we are apt to lose sight of the particularity, the 'höherer Inhalt', of the aesthetic object or experience in question.

'PRECISE NOTATIONS OF WHAT HAS BEEN SEEN': THE ETHICS OF ACCURACY

This appeal to a kind of objectivity can be seen in the question, which I pick up in my third and fourth chapters, of whether or not a certain colour in a poem is to be trusted, and of what sort of claim to truth a given colour mention is making. The accuracy of a depicted colour, or a depicted colour-perception, sometimes attracts a kind of reductive praise, as if the goal of all art were simply to demonstrate certain psychological processes. As with Hopkins above, attentiveness is not a one-way process, but itself a form of creation; the details of

---

[68] The idea of the 'alles sagende Sprache' can be related to the philosophical thought experiment proposed by Frank Jackson as a refutation of physicalism: 'Mary is a brilliant scientist who is, for whatever reason, forced to investigate the world from a black and white room *via* a black and white television monitor. She specializes in the neurophysiology of vision and acquires, let us suppose, all the physical information there is to obtain about what goes on when we see ripe tomatoes, or the sky, and use terms like 'red', 'blue', and so on. [...] What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a color television monitor? Will she *learn* anything or not?' Frank Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', *The Philosophical Quarterly,* 32 (1982), 127–136 (p. 130). While the experience of red, and a religious experience in the face of colour are of different spiritual magnitudes, Hofmannsthal is using the example of Rama Krishna to think about his own experience of colour which seems to come from the very nature of colour itself, that is, that a deeply spiritual experience is proper to the nature of colour and moreover irreducible.

the record of attentiveness are less important than the implications of that attentiveness, as Paul Celan points out:

> Die Aufmerksamkeit, die das Gedicht allem ihm Begegnenden zu widmen versucht, sein schärferer Sinn für das Detail, für Umriß, für Struktur, für Farbe, [...] das alles ist, glaube ich, keine Errungenschaft des mit den täglich perfekteren Apparaten wetteifernden (oder miteifernden) Auges, es ist vielmehr eine aller unserer Daten eingedenk bleibende Konzentration.[69]

This is where attempts to locate propositional knowledge in poetry fall down, according to Raymond Geuss, who uses an example from Sappho, in which the jealous poet turns 'greener than grass', to suggest that it would be foolish to think that accuracy might be the sole arbiter of aesthetic value in poetry, a form of skilled making. He quotes Longinus who 'praises it for its accuracy of observation', and while suggesting that it might not be 'strictly irrelevant to an appreciation or evaluation of the poem' to know that the skin did in fact turn a certain hue—which might be thought 'to accord well with the emotional intensity of the situation being presented: jealousy does perhaps focus the attention and sharpen certain kinds of perception'—this is subordinate to the skill with which, as Longinus goes on to say, Sappho 'selects the most striking effects of passion and combines them'.[70] That colour use might be the marker of skill above all seems also the case in someone like Holz: for all that colour impressions are part of an experiment in writing a certain kind of subjectivity, the emphasis on form, on morphological consistency and sound patterning makes these impressions seem often gratuitous, or incorporated for effects of technique rather than truth.

That colour might be skill abstracted, the relationship between words and world fading in relevance, can be seen also in narrative prose, and in particular the realist novel, in which unmotivated 'accuracy' of description is a generic marker.

> 'The parasol, made of iridescent silk, with the sun shining through it, lighted with shifting colors the white surface of her face. She smiled in the moist

---

[69] Paul Celan, 'Der Meridian', in *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*, ed. by Beda Allemann, Stefan Reichert, and Rolf Bücher, 5 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), III, 187–202 (p. 198).

[70] Raymond Geuss, 'Poetry and Knowledge', in *Outside Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 184–205 (pp. 202–3).

> warmth of its shade; and you could hear the drops of water, one by one, falling on the taut silk' (65) [13]. In retrospect, you can say that these glimpses of Emma all suggest her sensuous nature—the extent to which she will live, and die, by her senses. But as we read them they are details that we have yet to recover for meaning—to recuperate, as the French would say. They are simply there, as precise notations of what has been seen.[71]

Peter Brooks is keen to separate out Flaubert's fetishization of colours and textures from Balzac's indexical things, which suggest character and plot. In the above passage it is not, then, that these details are to be interpreted; they simply are, they record. Yet because these are fictional colours, and their function is primarily one of 'reality effect', colour is not itself trustworthy, or accurate; rather, colour is *accuracy*, *trustworthiness*, the diligence with which these uninterpretable details fill the pages a display of skill, and a gesture of reassurance to a reader of the richness of the given world.[72]

In his study of Victorian poetry, Richard Cronin makes of specificity in colour descriptions an ethical point: by describing the breast of a man who has cut his throat as 'dull red, like a robin's', Kipling attends to the suicide rather than merely seeing it: 'Kipling observes the man's death, and in doing so he presents himself, so quietly that one would rather say he was recognised, as a human witness in an inhuman world.'[73] In the passage of Kipling's, as in the poetry of Hopkins, Clare, Keats and others, sincerity in colour description must be assumed; these are attempts to 'escape from a shadowy phantasmal world of private imaginings into a public world of shared reality' (p. 8), for colour, acting as an interface as it does between indescribable, private sensation and language, is by necessity sociable. 'Les couleurs ne parlent pas un idiome singulier, ni une *Privatsprache*, mais le

---

[71] Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 55.

[72] Compare, in the early twentieth century, the beginning of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften,* where it is implied that the communicability of colour might lie not in language, which is in any case hugely imprecise, rather, in objective measurement.

> Es wäre wichtig, zu wissen, warum man sich bei einer roten Nase ganz ungenau damit begnügt, sie sei rot, und nie danach fragt, welches besondere Rot sie habe, obgleich sich das durch die Wellenlänge auf Mikromillimeter genau ausdrücken ließe; wogegen man bei etwas so viel Verwickelterem, wie es eine Stadt ist, in der man sich aufhält, immer durchaus genau wissen möchte, welche besondere Stadt das sei. Es lenkt von Wichtigerem ab.

Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften: Roman,* ed. by Adolf Frisé (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1952), pp. 9–10.

[73] Cronin, p. 7.

langage le plus universel qui se puisse concevoir. Elles échappent mieux que les mots à la menace de l'hermetisme.'[74] By reaching for colour, Cronin and Le Rider claim, the writers imply that they are trying to break the bubble of solipsism.

'THE WAY LINT COLLECTS': HOW DO COLOURS COME TO MEAN?

But what, exactly, is shared when writers or artists reach for colour? Above, it was assumed that colour words directed readers to the (presumedly) universal experience of pure colour sensations; yet the content of colour experience—especially an experience of the deliberate colours of a work of art—is rarely so pure. In discussing the use of colour in film, Sergei Eisenstein takes issue with Kandinsky's play *Der gelbe Klang* for misunderstanding how colour associations work. Kandinsky had attempted to liberate the natural effects of colour from figurative content; yet such effects, Eisenstein maintains, do not exist.

> The method employed here [i.e. in the Yellow Sound] is clear—to extract 'inner tonalities' of all 'external' matter. Such a method *consciously attempts to divorce all formal elements from all content elements;* everything touching theme or subject is dismissed, leaving only those extreme formal elements that in *normal creative work* play only a partial rôle. […] We cannot deny that compositions of this kind evoke *obscurely disturbing* sensations—but no more than this. But to this day attempts continue to be made to arrange these subjective and largely personal sensations into meaningful relationships, that are, frankly, just as vague and remote.

And, in a footnote:

> Both Remy de Gourmont and Humpty-Dumpty adopted this course. The one claims, 'To erect into laws one's personal impressions, this is the greatest effort of a man if he is sincere.' The other: 'When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.'[75]

---

[74] Le Rider, *Les couleurs et les mots,* pp. 261–62.

[75] Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (1943; San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1975), p. 117. This is reminiscent of William Empson's comments on synaesthesia:

> '[Synaesthesia] throws back the reader upon the undifferentiated affective states which are all that such sensations have in common; perhaps recalls him to an infantile state before they had been distinguished from one another; and may actually induce a sort of rudimentary disorder into his modes of sensation (so that the 'images' of the visualiser are transformed sounds) like those due to migraine or epilepsy or drugs like mescal. Mescal-eaters have just that impression common among readers of 'pure' poetry, that they are seeing very delightful but quite new colours, or knowing something which would be very important and interesting if they could make out just what it was.

'In art', he writes, 'it is not the *absolute* relationships that are decisive, but those *arbitrary* relationships within a system of images dictated by the particular work of art. The problem is not, nor will ever be, solved by a fixed catalog of color-symbols'—rather, the emotional and semantic value of a colour arises through deliberate repetition and juxtaposition. 'This means that *we do not obey some "all-pervading law" of absolute "meanings" and correspondences between colors and sounds—and absolute relations between these and specific emotions,* but it does mean that *we ourselves decide which colors and sounds will best serve the given assignment or emotion as we need them*.' (pp. 150-3)

Eisenstein's example shows this method in work:

> If we have even a *sequence* of montage pieces:
>
> A gray old man,
> A gray old woman,
> A white horse,
> A snow-covered roof,
>
> we are still far from certain whether this sequence is working towards 'old age' or towards 'whiteness.' (p. 152)[76]

We have to be given a key, or otherwise reach a point in the sequence at which it is certain that an association is heading in one direction or another. Eisenstein may be talking about film, but I will argue that this approach can help us read poetry; that, in the absence of stable codes, and at a point in literary history at which the sorts of assumptions of sincerity made above are inapposite, it is by reference to these work-internal chains of association that we can find out what a given colour is up to.

For it is this mechanism by which colour's 'meaning' in a given culture is, in any case, made, although in this larger sense there is no film-maker or poet standing at the side arranging the items; instead, as William Gass has written of 'blue', 'a

---

> But how such a disturbance can be of serious importance to a reader of poetry it is not easy to see; or how one is to be sure when it is occurring.'

William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity,* 2nd ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), p. 13.

[76] A sequence which bears some resemblence to Ezra Pound's imagined ideogram; see my first chapter.

random set of meanings softly gather[s] around the word the way lint collects'.[77] On the back cover of Sabine Doran's *The Culture of Yellow*, W. J. T. Mitchell commends it for being 'not just a compendium' of instances of yellow in art and literature; yet there is an argument for the compendium as the most appropriate form for the subject, showing how the roles and attachments a hue takes on accumulate and silently fall away.[78] In the Museum of Modern Literature in Marbach one of the exhibits is Friedrich Kittler's collection of index cards cataloguing the colours of the moon, the sea, the sky, and so on, as they appear in German literature. The accompanying text suggests, 'Kittlers Zettelkasten ist weniger ein Textgenerator als ein Modell der Welt in ihrer Pluralität':[79] whether the colour a poet gives the moon reflects a desire to capture some aspect of objective reality or to communicate subjective experience, it is in each case a remaking of the world.

⋆

This thesis is structured in two halves. The first deals with Rilke and George, the most canonical poets of German modernism, or indeed aestheticism.[80] These are, I think, terms useful only insofar as it helps us see the internationalism of their concerns, and in these chapters I bring them, accordingly, in conversation with their predecessors, contemporaries and counterparts working in, inter alia, England, France and Italy. In some cases these are writers to whom they are

---

[77] William Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Boston: Godine, 1975) p. 7.

[78] For better or worse a list- or catalogue-like approach has been favoured among those writing on colour, such as Charles A. Riley's *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music and Psychology* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995). This goes especially for more popular books, such as Alexander Theroux's *The Primary Colours: Three Essays* (London: Picador, 1995).

[79] Heike Gfrereis, *Die Seele: die Dauerausstellung im Literaturmuseum der Moderne* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2015), p. 346.

[80] It is not coincidental that the periods in which George and Rilke seem most interested in colour—the 1890s and the 1900s respectively—are the periods in which they are most engaged with questions of the autonomy of the work of art, of formal harmony and sensual impression, which are seen as prototypically 'aestheticist'. In his book on 'the religion of art' in Aestheticism, however (in which there is an extended discussion of colour), Leon Chai explicitly excludes German aestheticism (Hofmannsthal, but also George and Rilke) for its extrapolation from the moment to larger questions about human existence. Leon Chai, *Aestheticism: The Religion of Art in Post-Romantic Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. xiii.

explicitly indebted—such as Ruskin or Huysmans in the case of George—and in others they are the fellow inheritors of a particular aesthetic tradition—Woolf in the case of Rilke—and in each case the aim is to open out the discussion, to tie the accounts I am giving to those others might give or have given, while simultaneously narrowing down what exactly can and ought to be said of the poets in question—demystifying poets who are treated as sui generis without, I hope, reducing them to period-based generalisations. Both chapters think—if at times obliquely—about translation; colour words, for both poets, involve a translation from the visual arts, or visual experience more broadly, and colour is often, but not exclusively, used in a way we might think of as ekphrastic, or as a metonym for ekphrasis. Both George and Rilke approached the visual arts as writers—as poets, but also as critics (Rilke having considered a more formal training in art history under Richard Muther)—and their concerns are correspondingly about writing as a sort of art, or craft, and words, whether spoken or written, as its material. For George the question that colour words are used to answer is of how to acquire for oneself a material good enough to write poetry in (and on), and what that poetry will then look like (both in formal and material terms). Colour words in early George refer to their own materiality, and as such are used to think about surfaces: the sufficiency of the surface as justification for the work of art, the importance of the surface in determining aesthetic value (and of value in determining aesthetic surfaces). Rilke, on the other hand, is satisfied with his materials, but is worried about what to do with them, and colour is used to reflect on skill, on the ability to match, to fit, to keep in check or in balance. George's colours are for the most part static, Rilke's dynamic, but both are more interested in making than meaning.

The second half looks, then, at colour and meaning, through the work of two highly original artists who used poetry as one among multiple media—performance, painting, drawing, costume—in the name of expression. Colour is not the thing to be translated or transposed from painting or the world to the page; rather, colour is a vector and aids in the transmission of certain sorts of spiritual or emotional states or effects. Here I ask how we might approach such

work—work which has willingly given up literal colour to be text on a page (and not, for instance, a painting). Thus, where in the first half I look at poets who used colour to think about making, in the second half I use colour to think about reading. The first part, my third chapter, is more theoretical; reading Kandinsky's writings on art I discuss questions of media and universalism, and try to clear the ground of slightly shaky metaphysics and pseudoscience for a theory of reading colour that is not unnecessarily beholden to external material—a theory that comes, if somewhat askance, from Kandinsky's own writings. Where previous accounts mostly take his assertions about colour effects as part of a stable system, I argue that it is their instability and dynamism that we should foreground, the way that Kandinsky shows colours to be contingent—as Rilke also emphasised—on their relations and interactions, and furthermore the interaction between work and viewer. Taking my cue from Kandinsky's image of 'spazieren', I turn to his poetry in the light of this new emphasis on relations, looking also at one of the most enthusiastic readers of this poetry, Hugo Ball, and beginning to address ideas of colour abstraction in terms of pure sense coming up against nonsense. The second part, my chapter on Else Lasker-Schüler, continues this process of de-systematised reading to demonstrate how colour associations function from the ground up, bringing Lasker-Schüler's love of polarities and paradoxes back to the idea of the pleasure, seen in George, of the non-interpretable. A colour word, in Lasker-Schüler, is not there to be unpacked, but rather to be experienced—even enjoyed. This, I argue, is the way to read colours: as they encourage us to read them (and not as others tell us to read them).

Interest in colour—in philosophy, in art history, and especially in literature—is currently flourishing. Since proposing this project four years ago there have been in the UK alone several exhibitions dedicated to colour: 'Making Colour' at the National Gallery (2014), 'Colour and vision' at the Natural History Museum (2016), 'COLOUR: The Art and Science of Illuminated Manuscripts' at the Fitzwilliam Museum (2016-17) as well as further exhibitions dedicated to specific colours; there have been conferences on 'Colour Thinking' (Trinity College, Oxford, 2016), 'Progress in Colour Studies' (UCL, 2016) and 'The Power of

Colour' (Berlin, 2013), as well as 'Gold in/and British Art and Literature' (Toulouse, 2014).[81] Thinking only of the topic of colour in literature, which had previously been neglected in the wider colour studies field, PhDs have been completed, such as that of Élodie Ripoll at FU Berlin/EHESS on the French novel of the long eighteenth century (2015), and monographs published, such as Charlotte Ribeyrol's *Etrangeté, passion, couleur: l'hellénisme de Swinburne, Pater et Symonds: 1865-1880* (2013), or Davide Vago's *Proust en couleur* (2012), as well as several edited volumes, including Ribeyrol's on the Victorian 'colours of the past' (2016), and, in the German context, on colour and romanticism (2014) and colour and classicism (2016).[82] Nicholas Gaskill's extremely promising project has yet to be completed but involves reading the literature of American Modernism in the light of contemporary ideas about perception and against the backdrop of the infusion of colour into social spaces through the development of aniline dyes.[83] There have also been less scholarly works: David Batchelor's *The Luminous and the Grey* (2014), which attends to literature as well as the visual arts, and then, if we include writing on individual colours, Carol Mavor's *Blue Mythologies* (2013), as well as the reissue of William Gass's *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (1975).[84] The field is, however, far from saturated; taken as a whole, these new works show the heterogeneity of approach that colour, as a starting point, offers, and we might think that the idea of 'colour in literature' as a kind of sub-field seems misguided. Rather, there are explorations and histories of the cross-fertilisation of literature and science, or literature and painting, or literature and philosophy, there are examples of quantitative analyses—and this is not at all exhaustive—all of which happen to use one particular set of words—colour

[81] The proceedings of the last were published as a special issue of *Polysèmes*.

[82] Élodie Ripoll, 'De l'unique au multiple. Emplois et fonctions de la couleur dans le roman français (1720-1839)' (FU/EHESS, 2015); Ribeyrol, *Etrangeté, passion, couleur;* Davide Vago, *Proust en couleur* (Paris: Champion, 2012); *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol; Pape, *Die Farben der Romantik*; Dönike, Müller-Tamm and Steinle, *Die Farben der Klassik*.

[83] Nicholas Gaskill, 'Red Cars with Red Lights and Red Drivers: Color, Crane, and Qualia', *American Literature*, 81.4 (2009), 719.

[84] Batchelor, *The Luminous and the Grey*; Mavor (see n. 17); William H. Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2014).

words—as a 'key' to unlocking the field under study, shedding light both on the object of study and on this field of activity.[85]

The study of colour is, as many have noted, disciplinarily homeless (or promiscuous): 'Colour', the art historian John Gage writes, 'is everybody's business', and elsewhere its interdisciplinarity is stressed, for instance by Jacques Le Rider ('[p]eu de thèmes réclament autant d'interdisciplinarité'), Charles Riley ('[t]he multidisciplinary approach to the role of color in Modern aesthetics [...] is an imperative') and Michel Pastoureau ('la couleur est par essence un terrain transdocumentaire et transdisciplinaire').[86] The literature on colour spans philosophy, art history, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, empirical aesthetics, psychoanalytic theory, and many more fields and sub-fields; and of these areas some have seemed more promising (or perhaps forgiving) than others. Sigmund Skard, in an exhaustive survey on research on colour in literature, makes the chastening claim that 'color history has always been the hunting ground of dilettantes';[87] I have tried to bear this in mind. While, then, finding the engagement with this certainly diverse set of approaches exciting, I have tried not to allow this to steer the course of my thesis. Pastoureau follows his comment on colour's 'transdisciplinarité' with a qualification: '[m]ais certains terrains se révèlent à l'usage plus fructueux que d'autres.'[88] My choice of 'terrain' follows my material, that is, poetry. As David Batchelor points out, much of the interesting writing on colour is 'made in and through practice': 'That is to say, the discourse on colour is not largely an academic discipline; rather it is generated in the course of making things—paintings, sculptures, photographs, installations,

---

[85] For instance, the everyday in the case of Michael Sheringham: 'Can colour lead us to the heart of our sense of the quotidian?' Sheringham, p. 128. This is not just the case in literary studies: colour 'provides a microcosm of research in cognitive science,' Evan Thompson, Adrian Palacios and Francisco J. Varela, 'Ways of Coloring: Comparative Color Vision as a Case Study for Cognitive Science', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences,* 15.1 (1992), 1–74 (p. 1); for colour and anthropology, and particularly the method of participant observation, see Taussig, pp. 116–17.

[86] John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 7; Le Rider, *Les couleurs et les mots,* p. 4; Riley, p. 1; Pastoureau, *Noir,* p. 17.

[87] Sigmund Skard, 'The Use of Color in Literature: A Survey of Research', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 90.3 (1946), 163–249 (p. 163).

[88] Pastoureau, *Noir,* p. 17.

films, buildings, novels, songs and poems.'[89] It is this writing that I focus on here; my interlocutors, and interlocutors of my chosen poets, tend to be other writers—literary or art critics, novelists, poets. This thesis is, then, not interdisciplinary, and if I draw on anything other than poetry this is only in the name of disciplinary or generic 'simultaneous contrast', that is, to bring out the specifics of colour as it is used in poetry as opposed to anywhere else. Colour is, in these poets, a 'remarkably telling index' or 'litmus paper' of their commitments;[90] through colour, we can see where they stand on questions of materials and media, of semantics, of poetic skill and making; of what, that is, poetry is, and is for.

[89] *Colour,* ed. by David Batchelor (London: Whitechapel, 2008), p. 15.

[90] Stephen Bann, 'The Colour in the Text: Ruskin's Basket of Strawberries', in *The Ruskin Polygon: Essays on the Imagination of John Ruskin,* ed. by John Dixon Hunt and Faith M. Holland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 122–36 (p. 122). Bann is making this claim of colour in Ruskin.

1. George and surfaces

> Words are solid, they are not ghosts or pointers. The poet connects, arranges, defines, things: pearls and eyes; garlic, sapphires, and mud.[1]

> Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel! One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or of lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words?[2]

The poet as a connecter, an arranger, a definer of words: it is Ezra Pound that Kenner is describing, yet in the solidity and thinglikeness of his words, and particularly in the pearls and sapphires, we might recognise, too, the early Stefan George in this description.[3] In the introduction we saw how Eisenstein described the task of the director as the conscious arranging of coloured images, ordered in such a way that a cumulative sense of a colour's meaning could be communicated to a viewer. Only through careful juxtaposition could colour successfully carry a unitary semantic charge. And only through careful juxtaposition of coloured things—claims Ezra Pound, in his explication of the Chinese ideogram—can we communicate the concept of colour:

---

[1] Hugh Kenner, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 77.

[2] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* ed. by Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 19–20.

[3] George has been presented to English-speaking audiences as a German counterpart to Pound; see, for instance J. P. Stern, *The Dear Purchase: A Theme in German Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 237–38. Pound, for his part, is unappreciative: 'Germans claim that German poetry has developed since the middle ages. My own belief is that Goethe and Stefan George at their lyric best are doing nothing that hadn't already been done better or as well.' Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London: Routledge, 1934), p. 55.

> But when the Chinaman wanted to make a picture of something more complicated, or of a general idea, how did he go about it?
>
> He is to define red. How can he do it in a picture that isn't painted in red paint?
>
> He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures of
>
> ROSE CHERRY
> IRON RUST FLAMINGO
>
> That, you see, is very much the kind of thing a biologist does (in a very much more complicated way) when he gets together a few hundred or thousand slides, and picks out what is necessary for his general statement. Something that fits the case, that applies in all of the cases.
>
> The Chinese 'word' or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS.[4]

Colour, it would seem, is resistant to paraphrase or definition, and can only be arrived at through ostension, whether by using red paint, or by pointing at a selection of objects said to be red. Colour (and, the implication is, poetry) can only come about if we pay attention to the concrete; colour, and poetry, lies in the tension between images placed side by side. The whole cannot be reduced to its parts, the meaning, that is, the colour, or the poem, consists only in the gesture of pointing, in the putting together. After all, 'Pound at his best is not, by any standards, getting together hundreds of slides and waiting for some general statement to emerge. […] Pound shapes his material.[…] It is Pound the poet who sees the similarities in dissimilarities and brings to his material a very individual, and some would say cranky, "interest, point of view, problem".'[5] Like Rimbaud, the Poundian poet is creating from nothing a language based on spurious or tenuous similarity, making rather than unveiling.

In his earliest work Stefan George is interested in this 'putting together': an attitude to making in which stuff and substance are as important as symbol and meaning. This physicalised conception of poetic technique he shares with Rilke in his 'middle' period,

---

[4] Pound, pp. 21–22.
[5] Christine Brooke-Rose, *A ZBC of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 115.

the subject of my next chapter, and together the two chapters think about colour as a tool to prise open a poem in order to look at its inner workings or processes, something like the x-raying of a painting; this is of particular interest when thinking about the work of someone who, like George, exercised strict control over both the availability of drafts (and dissemination in general) but also access of interpretation, and where the question of what the poem is *made of* as opposed to what it *means*—information it is unclear that we might ever get hold of—seems a more fruitful approach. That poems might be about the process of making, or that an awareness of their made-ness might animate them is hardly unusual; what is particular about these early poems is the way in which colour, and colour understood in a particular way, that is, as a property of surfaces, is the vehicle of this poetic self-consciousness. In the Introduction I argued that colour words are 'poetological' in that they point to enforced absence of colour from text, such that a reference to a colour shows all the more how fragile the act of communicating and making art from words is. With George, however, this is not the case: for one, colour was never 'absent' from his poems, and in later collections the particular colours in which they were printed and with which they were decorated were meaningfully part of the work.[6] While the collections I focus on were deliberately non-ornate, the interplay of black ink and textured paper (and the exclusion of colour) was intended to be anything but a transparent, regrettable interface between the disembodied 'text' and the reader; moreover, the colour words, in always being attached to objects or materials, are not related to questions of the ineffable, but are instead set like jewels, staunch and unarguable, brilliant, but dumb. It is in this respect that they reflect on the process of making: colours are metonyms of materials; they are, or stand in for the bits of stuff from which art objects are assembled, and so are analogous to words, at least as George understood them. 'Words', Kenner writes, 'are solid, they are not ghosts or pointers'; as Dorian Gray puts it, there is nothing 'so real as words'.[7]

---

[6] Mallarmé '[hat] den Wechsel von Rot und Blau [in dem *Jahr der Seele*] gelobt und eine tiefere Bedeutung darin gesehen.' Edith Landmann, *Gespräche mit Stefan George* (Düsseldorf: Küpper, 1963), p. 37.

[7] Despite extensive translation from English, as well as personal connections to England and English writers, such as Wilde's friend Ernest Dowson, George has only infrequently been placed in the context of English-language writing around 1900. Where he has, it has, at least in one case, been at the cost of a correct evaluation of his very great debt to French Symbolism. H. R. Klieneberger, *George, Rilke, Hofmannsthal and the Romantic Tradition* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1991), pp. 5–34. Klieneberger uncritically repeats the claim made by George's editorial mouthpiece, Carl August Klein, in 'Über Stefan George, eine neue Kunst' (*Blätter für die Kunst* [henceforth BfdK] 1.1 (1892) 45-50), that he is in fact doing

⋆

In the section 'Im Unterreich'—'wo ausser dem seinen kein wille schaltet | und wo er dem licht und dem wetter gebeut'—of *Algabal* (1892) something like the circular magic of Pound's ideogrammic method is given a particularly concrete twist:

> Der saal des gelben gleisses und der sonne.
> Sie herrscht auf flacher kuppel unter sternen
> In blitzen schnellen aus dem feuerbronne
> Topase untermengt mit bernstein-kernen.
>
> An allen seiten aufgereiht als spiegel
> —Gesamter städte ganzer staaten beute —
> Die ungeschmückten platten goldnen ziegel
> Und an der erde breiten löwenhäute.
>
> Nur nicht des Einen scharfen blick zu blenden
> Vermag die stechend grelle weltenkrone
> Und dreimal tausend schwere urnen spenden
> Den geist von amber weihrauch und zitrone.[8]

The idea of yellow itself is abstracted: as Jacob Steiner points out, there is a reversal of the usual attribution of colour. It is not 'Das gelbe Gleißen des Saales', but 'Der saal des gelben gleisses' (as in the poem which directly follows, where we find 'der raum der blassen helle'): 'Es ist, als ob Saal und Raum der emanzipierten Kunstfarbe dienten und nicht mehr die Farben der Charakteristik der Räume. […] Die Farbe hat sich verselbstständigt.'[9] The hall serves as a vessel for this emancipated colour. Yet colour, while emancipated, is never far from things, the golden tiles, topazes, amber and lion-skins (and ambergris, frankincense, lemon). What is first presented as an abstracted colour, a general idea of yellow, is thereafter instantiated, or realised, through a set of objects. The making of the effect is unveiled; the effect *is* its production. But how, then

---

something very different from the Symbolists, a claim which can hardly be taken at face value (Klieneberger, p. 1). For a recent, and much more sceptical, take on George's French inheritance and self-branding in the 1890s, see Maik Bozza, *Genealogie des Anfangs: Stefan Georges poetologischer Selbstentwurf um 1890* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016). For a discussion of George's translations from English, see Olga Marx, *Stefan George in seinen Übertragungen englischer Dichtung* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1967).

[8] Stefan George, *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden, Vol II: Hymnen; Pilgerfahrten; Algabal*, ed. by Ute Oelmann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), p. 61. Henceforth SW.

[9] Jacob Steiner, pp. 92–93.

to account for the fact that these are objects which, being ornamental, are only present in order to carry or convey this colour? In George—and implicitly in Pound—for all that colours are attached to things, those things are specifically chosen for their colour, brought into the room, or the poem, as a kind of interior decoration. Objects are pretexts for colour, the concrete is an excuse for the abstract.[10] And the poet, in both cases, is not a mere passive observer, but an organiser of the world around him, and indeed a creator of that world.[11]

My focus in this chapter will be primarily on George's early work, work with which 'die Moderne beginnt':[12]—*Hymnen* (1890), *Pilgerfahrten* (1891) *Algabal* (1892) (united in 1898/9 in one volume), as well as the poems from 1887-1890 published in 1901 as *Die Fibel. Auswahl erster Verse*, and the slightly later *Buch der hängenden Gärten* (1895), a collection in which 'sich der farbige klang und die klingende farbe zu erstaunlicher modernität [steigert].'[13] While overly strict delineations of period in George's work can gloss over important continuities, there is a case to be made for the works published before 1897 possessing 'eine ästhetische Radikalität' that is not, or rarely, to be found in the middle and later work.[14] For my purposes the distinction is based on what George has called 'das doch nicht äusserliche': the fact that the publication of *Das Jahr der Seele* marked the beginning of George's collaboration with Melchior Lechter on typography

---

[10] Another literary historical position shared by Pound and George is their influence on the mid-twentieth century concrete poetry movement. Recent studies to flesh out George's influence on the movement include Joachim Jacob's *Die Schönheit der Literatur: zur Geschichte eines Problems von Gorgias bis Max Bense* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007); and Jürgen Brokoff's *Geschichte der reinen Poesie: von der Weimarer Klassik bis zur historischen Avantgarde* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010); for the influence of George on Gomringer and Heissenbüttel in particular, see Günter Heintz, *Stefan George: Studien zu seiner künstlerischen Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Hauswedell, 1986), pp. 346–67. Short statements by a number of poets, including Gomringer and Heissenbüttel, are included in *Kein ding sei wo das wort gebricht. Stefan George zum Gedenken: Darstellung, Werkauswahl, Dichterstimmen*, ed. by Manfred Schlösser, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Agora, 1961).

[11] In this chapter I will use the pronoun 'he', reluctantly, to refer to the figure of the poet or speaker.

[12] Dieter Lamping, *Das lyrische Gedicht: Definitionen zu Theorie und Geschichte der Gattung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), p. 148.

[13] Lechter to George, 24.1.1896. Melchior Lechter and Stefan George, *Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe,* ed. by Günter Heintz (Stuttgart: Hauswedell, 1991), p. 13.

[14] Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie,* p. 482; see also Lamping, p. 154. George himself, however, rejected the notion that the early books contained only 'Künstlerisches', and the political work starting later—'Ganz falsch! *Algabal* ist ein revolutionäres Buch.' Ernst Robert Curtius, 'Stefan George im Gespräch', in *Kritische Essays zur europäischen Literatur* (Bern: Francke, 1950), pp. 138–57 (p. 153).

and book design, and thus a wholly different attitude to 'putting together'.[15] The most important studies of the early work, Hubert Arbogast's *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges* and Manfred Durzak's *Der junge Stefan George* were published half a century ago.[16] More recent work has tended towards the thematic, and concentrated more on the later work as well as that of the 'Kreis'.[17] A very recent exception to this is Maik Bozza's *Genealogie des Anfangs*, which also makes available many of the early drafts as legible wholes (the details had previously been published in the *Sämtliche Werke* but only in the appendices); and the two chapters Jürgen Brokoff dedicates to George in *Geschichte der reinen Poesie* also turn to the early work to suggest that it is here that he is at his most radical—or at least, that this was how his poetry, and processes of poetic making, were presented.[18]

A letter to his classmate Arthur Stahl suggests the degree to which newness was central to his own self-conception:

> Du erlässest mir weite erklärungen denn sie würden mich gleich hineinreissen in vielleicht unverständliche erörterungen über die bedeutung des WORTES
>
> Du redest so verächtlich über lyrik als von dem einzigen wozu Du Dich bis jetzt aufgeschwungen hättest. Geht doch von hier aus in erster linie das NEUE aus. Aber

---

[15] 'Das doch nicht äusserliche' is the title of a piece in the *Blätter* (written in fact 'unter der Tarnkappe' of Carl August Klein; the phrase is Bozza's (p. 22)); 'Unterhaltungen im grünen salon III: Das doch nicht äusserliche', BfdK 1.5 (1893), 145–46 (p. 145). That colour was central to George's stylistic innovation is clear from contemporary parodies, such as those of Wilamowitz ('O, stilvoll Mausegrau der Deckelhülle'), in particular 'Stefan', in which George's favourite colour, blue, is used in the sense of 'hungover'. See Ulrich K. Goldsmith, 'Wilamowitz as Parodist of Stefan George', *Monatshefte,* 77 (1985), 79–87.

[16] Hubert Arbogast, *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges: Eine stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1967); Manfred Durzak, *Der junge Stefan George: Kunsttheorie und Dichtung* (Munich: Fink, 1968).

[17] Recent studies have focused on theosophy: Jan Stottmeister, *Der George-Kreis und die Theosophie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014); parody: Gunilla Eschenbach, *Imitatio im George-Kreis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); the last collection, *Das neue Reich*: Ernst Osterkamp, *Poesie der leeren Mitte: Stefan Georges Neues Reich* (München: Hanser, 2010); economics and politics: Korinna Schönhärl, *Wissen und Visionen: Theorie und Politik der Ökonomen im Stefan-George-Kreis* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009); Roman Köster, *Das Ideal des schönen Lebens und die Wirklichkeit der Weimarer Republik: Vorstellungen von Staat und Gemeinschaft im George-Kreis* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009), many looking in particular at the 'Kreis'. Recent edited collections have focused on religion: *Stefan George und die Religion*, ed. by Wolfgang Braungart (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); politics: *A Poet's Reich: Politics and Culture in the George Circle*, ed. by Melissa. S. Lane and Martin A. Ruehl (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2011); *Stefan George: Dichtung, Ethos, Staat : Denkbilder für ein geheimes europäisches Deutschland*, ed. by Bruno Pieger and Bertram Schefold (Berlin: VBB Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010); and the later works: *Stefan George, Werk und Wirkung seit dem 'Siebenten Ring'*, ed. by Wolfgang Braungart, Ute Maria Oelmann, and Bernhard Böschenstein (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001).

[18] Bozza; Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie*, pp. 445–506.

> mein buch das Du nächstens haben wirst soll für mich sprechen wenn die umstände eine unterredung zu lange hinausschieben sollten[19]

The newness consists precisely in the attitude to the word outlined above: George's aim was to rejuvenate poetic language, and an emphasis on the material qualities of language put it in a better position for this process, often described in the language of scientific experiment (Jürgen Brokoff describes it as a 'Reinigung', Beda Allemann evokes a 'Sprachlaboratorium' in which '[d]as Lyrische sich aus den Lösungen des bloß Stimmungshaften zur poésie pure nieder[schlägt]').[20] This process is, famously, laid out in the poem 'Ein Angelico', a reading of which lies in the centre of my first section, in which I concentrate on how this new and markedly visual approach to language relied on analogies to the visual arts via the comparison of words to pigment. The paradoxical relationship implicit in the idea of separation between art and everyday (in that shutting one out of the other requires the acknowledgement of what is to be shut out) leads to my second section, which pays particular attention to edges—the paratextual material and the poems that bookend the collections, but also the edges of the spaces (gardens, parks, tents) in the poems, where coloured things stand, metonymically, guard. That objects could act as a mediator (or frustrator) between inside and outside in a larger sense is the subject of my third section, which focuses on the relationship between colour and value. Colours—apt to gain or lose semantic charge willy nilly—muddy a programme of pure fungibility, and George's exploitation of this forms the backbone of *Algabal*'s moral project.

The 'roter Faden' of these three sections ties colour, in the early George, to surface. If we think of Algabal's hall, above, it is the properties of the surfaces of the objects that define the space; this model applies to much of the early work in which it is not only the case that the book is to be judged by its cover, it is all 'cover'—inner and outer typography to be considered equally. This is not to deny that these books (and Algabal's lion-skins and jars) are defiantly three-dimensional, and Ute Oelmann, in an essay for an exhibition of George's book design, insists on an approach that takes this solidity into account:

---

[19] From 22.11.1890; reprinted in Robert Boehringer, *Mein Bild von Stefan George*, II, p. 29.

[20] Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie*, p. 452; Beda Allemann, 'Gibt es abstrakte Dichtung?', in *Definitionen,* ed. by Adolf Frisé (Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann: 1963), pp. 156–84 (p. 162).

> Zurückblickend begründete Stefan George 1898 seine Publikationspolitik der Jahre 1890 bis 1898 [...] mit der Unfähigkeit der 'lesende[n] menge' ein 'dichtwerk als gebilde zu begrüssen und zu geniessen.' [...] Das 'dichtwerk' als 'gebilde', das bedeutet das Gedicht nicht als Textur, als Bild und Fläche, sondern plastisch. Jedes Element ein Ding, jedes Körper: der Buchstabe, die Silbe, das Wort, der Vers, die Strophe. Das Gedicht als Schriftkörper, kompakt auf der Seite stehend, Marmor oder Eisen![21]

This picture of the poems as hard, stone-like things was for some the main appeal: 'I put [George's] poems, considered as hard clear objects chiselled out of words, far above those of Rilke,' Stephen Spender wrote in 1958; 'I like to think of George as hewing poems out of words as Henry Moore hews sculpture out of stone.'[22] Ernst Morwitz makes a similar point in his introduction to the first extended translation of George's poetry into English: 'His language is so plastic, so three-dimensional, that even when he dares to interpolate abstract reflections without transition, he does not break the spell of the whole.'[23] That George is a 'plastic' poet has become a commonplace in criticism;[24] while I don't disagree with this picture, it only becomes interesting at the point where we begin to see its implications. Oelmann, for instance, links the three-dimensional feel of the poems and collections to their purpose as a kind of cultural antidote, an aesthetic education for the public which 'musste herangebildet, ästhetisch erzogen werden'.[25] And if we are to be educated by them then it is precisely at the surface that we come into contact with these very material objects, and it is at the surface that George's colours do their work. Oelmann quotes from the piece 'Vers als Kunstmittel' from the *Blätter*, a translation from D'Annunzio's *Il piacere*: words as medium are 'dichter als marmor, geschmiediger als wachs.'[26] The solidity and pliability of words is made concrete in colours.

---

[21] Ute Oelmann, *'Das doch nicht äusserliche': die Schrift- und Buchkunst Stefan Georges* (Stuttgart: Verband deutscher Antiquare, 2009), p. 10.

[22] Schlösser, p. 135.

[23] *Poems,* trans. by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz (New York: Pantheon, 1943), p. 16. Compare also Edith Landmann, p. 42.

[24] A point made by Wolfgang Braungart, 'Hymne, Ode, Elegie, Oder: Von den Schwierigkeiten mit antiken Formen der Lyrik (Mörike, George, George-Kreis)', in *'Mehr Dionysos als Apoll': antiklassizistische Antike-Rezeption um 1900*, ed. by Achim Aurnhammer and Thomas Pittrof (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002), pp. 245–71 (p. 260).

[25] Oelmann, *'Das doch nicht äusserliche'*, p. 10.

[26] BfdK 7, p. 7.

I: WORD AS MATERIAL (1)

Ein Angelico

Auf zierliche kapitel der legende
– Den erdenstreit bewacht von ewigem rat ·
Des strengen ahnen wirkungsvolle sende –
Errichtet er die glorreich grosse tat:

Er nahm das gold von heiligen pokalen ·
Zu hellem haar das reife weizenstroh ·
Das rosa kindern die mit schiefer malen ·
Der wäscherin am bach den indigo.

Der herr im glanze reinen königtumes
Zur seite sanfte sänger seines ruhmes
Und sieger der Chariten und Medusen.

Die braut mit immerstillem kindesbusen
Voll demut aber froh mit ihrem lohne
Empfängt aus seiner hand die erste krone.
(SW II:27)

The poem, which acts as 'eine ästhetische Standortsbestimmung' comes from the section 'Bilder' of *Hymnen*:[27] these poems are to be taken not only as poems of ekphrasis, poems *about* paintings, but also as drawings or paintings in themselves—by analogy, but also quite literally. This is a response to Fra Angelico's *The Coronation of the Virgin* (c.1434-35) which George would have seen in the Louvre during his trip to Paris in 1889.[28] The title, however, suggests that this one could stand in for all or any of Fra Angelico's paintings, a tension between general and specific which further encourages a poetological reading: firstly extending the general to painting, and then to any form of artistic creation, including poetry. This kind of suggested extension of reference can also be seen in the ambiguity of pronouns in which 'er', initially the artist, is elided with the figure of God in the final line: by whose hand exactly is Mary crowned? The deification of the 'Künstler' is of a piece with George's own ambitions, as Armin Schäfer describes: 'Er wollte dezidiert Künstler sein und immer schon ins Museum oder, noch

[27] Rainer Nägele, 'Jenseits der Mimesis: Stefan George, "Ein Angelico" und Günter Eich, "Verlassene Staffelei"', *Neophilologus*, 59 (1975), 98–108 (p. 100).

[28] See SW II:108.

besser, ins Pantheon, und er wollte zudem bestimmen, wie er dort ausgestellt werden sollte.'[29] (In an essay on the poet from 1898, Georg Simmel suggests that George's significance could be said to be as an artist rather than specifically a poet.)[30]

Critical attention has been frequently paid to the second quatrain, which Jacques Le Rider sees as a decisive moment for colour in German poetry: 'Un ton nouveau du chromatisme poétique se fait entendre dans ces vers: d'adjectifs, les noms de couleurs sont devenus substantifs.'[31] The process described in the stanza is one, as Jürgen Brokoff observes, of abstraction: 'Die Farben werden weggenommen, entwendet, geraubt.[…] Die künstlerische Wahl der Farben ist im buchstäblichen Sinne Abstraktion.'[32] (The 'literal' meaning being the etymological, from the Latin *abstrahere*, to draw or pull away.) This abstraction works on two levels: one is, as Le Rider points out, syntactic; in taking the colours away from the objects of which they were previously the properties, adjectives become nouns (this is a step further than that which we saw in the later poem from *Algabal*, where the 'gelb' is attached to the—unusual—noun 'gleiss'). This syntactic move is one that will be shown to play a more central role in the work of Rilke, on the one hand, and Kandinsky, on the other.[33] For George it is not in the hope, as it might be for my other poets, of repurposing the techniques of the visual art

---

[29] Armin Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form: Stefan Georges Lyrik* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), p. 25. For a detailed discussion of this tendency, see Hansjürgen Linke's study on the 'cultic' in George. Hansjürgen Linke, *Das Kultische in der Dichtung Stefan Georges und seiner Schule* (Munich: Küpper, 1960), especially 38-53.

[30] Georg Simmel, 'Stefan George: eine kunstphilosophische Betrachtung', in *Gesamtausgabe V: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1894-1900*, ed. by Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and David P Frisby (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 287–300 (p. 300). Clement Greenberg makes the same distinction, 'if [it] may be made,' in his review of the 'extremely bad' translations by Carol North Valhope and Ernst Morwitz published in 1943 (see n. 23). 'Review of "Poems" by Stefan George', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944,* ed. by John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 144–48 (pp. 146, 147). For the relationship between Simmel and George, see Michael Landmann, 'Georg Simmel und Stefan George', in *Georg Simmel und die Moderne: neue Interpretationen und Materialien*, ed. by Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 147–73.

[31] Le Rider, *Les couleurs et les mots*, pp. 250–51.

[32] Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie,* p. 481.

[33] For the relationship between George and Rilke, see Ute Oelmann, '„Und gute Gespräche vereinten mich mit seinem Wesen". Stefan George und Rainer Maria Rilke', *George-Jahrbuch,* 11 (2016), 231–52; Eudo C. Mason, 'Rilke und Stefan George', in *Exzentrische Bahnen: Studien zum Dichterbewusstsein der Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 208–47; for the relationship between George and Kandinsky, including a formal comparison of their work, see Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 81–91.

of the period: the colours are taken away not from the objects they depict in order to take on a life of their own, outside of pictorial representation, as is the case in Rilke's account of Cézanne. Instead, they are taken from objects which give the colour a history, and from this second level of abstraction we can draw out two claims about artistic creation.

This process of abstraction is solely concerned with the preparation, stripping down, purifying of one's materials—in the case of poetry, language—and implied in this process is the claim that art should be autonomous from, but in a position of drawing from, 'life', as in the 'strengste Lebensausschliessung' that Wilhelm Worringer aligns with abstraction.[34] Georg Simmel sees this separation as central to George's craft: 'Aus den einzelnen Worten sind durch Zusammenhang und Klang alle assoziativen Mitschwebungen ausgeschieden, die ihnen einen dem Kunstwerk des Gedichts fremden Werth zufügen könnten.'[35] We notice a kind of abstraction in the exaggerated assonance and alliteration, the 'kalkulierte klangliche Einheit' in which the sounds themselves become detached from words or sense that is characteristic of George's poetry. In this particular strophe, the vowels 'a' and 'o' alternate, forming, according to Hubert Arbogast, a poetic equivalent of a musical chord.[36] This play of vowels permeates the strophe and gives it a particular timbre, or 'Tonfarbe', a word whose multi-sensory associations lead us back to the double layer of abstraction that is always present in a focus on language, especially for George: where Arbogast sees these as patterns of sound, we could, especially given the encouragement of George's emphasis on the typography and orthography of his poems, see this as, at the same time, a visual harmony. In both cases, the medium, and its material incarnation, work alongside, and often against, but never fully foil the act of depiction. Abstraction foregrounds the medium and by extension the effect it might have aside from its content, or context: the pleasures and frustrations of the surface.

---

[34] Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie*, p. 17.

[35] Simmel, 'Stefan George: eine kunstphilosophische Betrachtung', p. 298.

[36] Arbogast, p. 107.

The relationship between art and life is not, however, unambiguous. It is unclear, here, to what degree we are to understand this as a separation at all, and on another reading it could easily be claimed that George wishes to situate rarefied art practice precisely in the context of the everyday.[37] Taken as part of the *Hymnen* as a whole I find this reading less plausible, but it is nonetheless true that the relationship between colour and its stuff is deliberately mystified: it is not clear, for example, where the colours 'rosa' and 'indigo' originate. Morwitz states that the 'rosa' is a reference to the red slate that is found near Bingen, where George grew up, yet it would seem from the syntax that the pink is being taken from the children themselves, not the 'schiefer' with which they are painting.[38] The indigo could come from the washerwoman, from the clothes she is washing or dying, or, as Rainer Nägele suggests, the sky reflected in the stream.[39] An element of mystery or opacity thus diverts—and abstracts—the images from a task of straightforward narration, with the result that the children and the washerwomen, already treated as equivalents to the 'heilige pokale' of line 5, seem also elevated from their otherwise lowly status (the everyday dragged upwards, rather than art downwards). This seems to form a parallel to the doctrine of transubstantiation alluded to in the 'pokale' and the 'weizenstroh': the everyday figures retain their outward appearance but have in essence become metaphysically differentiated from the everyday world as we understand it.[40] We can also apply this to the colours themselves, which could be taken as a reduced form of the 'accidents' of the objects they are taken from; here the colours stay the same, but their aesthetic status, being selected by the artist, is upgraded.

If Fra Angelico takes from life to make art (whatever that process involves), George takes both from life and from art: 'George selbst war es, der Natur und Kunst als ein

---

[37] 'Fra Angelicos Bild, so weltfremd es in seinem Sujet und in der Herbheit seiner byzantinischen Formen erscheinen mag, wirkt durch seine Farben lebensnah, sogar alltäglich.' Ray Ockenden, 'Mensch und Natur in der Dichtung Stefan Georges', in Stefan George: *Dichtung, Ethos, Staat: Denkbilder für ein geheimes europäisches Deutschland*, ed. by Bruno Pieger and Bertram Schefold (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010), pp. 353–96 (p. 365).

[38] Morwitz, p. 22. This is repeated in Nägele's analysis, see Nägele, p. 102.

[39] Nägele, p. 103.

[40] See Braungart's chapter, 'Poetische Eucharistie' in *Ästhetischer Katholizismus: Stefan Georges Rituale der Literatur* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), pp. 223–53, esp. pp. 230-35. For the relationship between colour and Catholicism in the late nineteenth century, see Claire Masurel-Murray, '"White Alb and Scarlet Camail": The Colours of Catholicism in Fin-de-Siècle Literature'', in *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England,* pp. 235–56.

einziges Arsenal betrachtete, aus dessen reichen Vorräten er *das* auswählte, was er seinen eigenen Absichten dienstbar machen konnte.'[41] The integration of the two worlds is thus also a flattening of the distinction or hierarchy: all becomes material. This is the process, too, that is being described by Brokoff above, in which the messy worldly reality of language is smoothed out in its transformation to becoming the minimal bits of the work of art; in this new state it becomes wholly unfamiliar, or as Norbert von Hellingrath wrote, 'geschraubt und undeutsch'.[42] We can see this in particular in the translations, and I have argued for a reading of George's 'reworking' of Shakespeare's sonnets (1909) that sees the flattening out of Shakespeare's rich and allusive language, intertwined syntax and polysemy, the uncanny 'Wörtlichkeit' and unit-by-unit approach, and the stretching of the possibilities of German syntax and morphology not as a sacrilege ('Frevel'), as Karl Kraus described it, but as a remarkably rich statement of poetic practice.[43] Even in the 1890s, however, George experimented with translation as a way of filtering his materials, as in the following passage, part of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and first published in the *Blätter für die Kunst*, :

> Ein schwerer purpurner giftiger dunst dehnt sich flach über die wüste hin, verhüllt ihre geisterhaften wracke massiger trümmer in deren risse das rote licht bleibt wie sterbendes feuer auf entweihten altären und der blaue rücken des Albanerberges hebt sich in den feierlichen raum eines grünen klaren stillen himmels. Wachttürme dunkler wolken stehen unverrückt an den vorgebirgen der Apenninen. Von der ebene zu den bergen hin zerschmelzen die eingerissenen wasserbauten, pfeiler nach pfeiler, in der finsternis wie verhüllte zahllose schaaren von leidtragenden die vom grab eines volkes daherkommen.[44]
>
> (A dull purple poisonous haze stretches level along the desert, veiling its spectral wrecks of massy ruins, on whose rents the red light rests, like a dying fire on defiled altars. The blue ridge of the Alban Mount lifts itself against a solemn space of green, clear, quiet sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds stand steadfastly along the promontories of the Apennines. From the plain to the mountains, the shattered aqueducts, pier beyond pier, melt into the darkness, like shadowy and countless troops of funeral mourners, passing from a nation's grave.)[45]

---

[41] Arbogast, p. 88.

[42] Norbert von Hellingrath, *Pindarübertragungen von Hölderlin: Prolegomena zu einer Erstausgabe* (Jena: Diederich, 1911), p. 8.

[43] Karl Kraus, 'Sakrileg an George oder Sühne an Shakespeare?', *Die Fackel,* 34.885–887 (1932), 45–64 (p. 47); Rey Conquer, 'A Poetics of Parataxis: Stefan George's Umdichtung of Shakespeare's Sonnets', *Oxford German Studies,* 44 (2015), 365–382.

[44] 'Nachbildungen aus Swinburne [und] J. Ruskin', BfdK, 3.4 (1896) 126-128 (pp. 127-28).

[45] John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 3: Modern Painters I*, ed. by Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: Allen, 1903), p. 43.

What is at first glance remarkable about this translation is how similar the word order is across the German and the English. The effect is not that Ruskin's style is maintained but that the list form, the lining up of description, is pushed to an extreme (thanks, also, to the very infrequent punctuation) and the intoxicating richness of Ruskin's prose becomes dizzying through the sheer volume of seemingly abstracted colours and shapes (that were there in Ruskin all along), giving the effect both of the process of taking on board the Italian countryside but also making of this something quite odd and alien. Forms and relations of forms are more important than an interpreted impression (in the preface to his translation of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* George makes clear they were begotten not out of the desire to introduce a foreign poet 'sondern der ursprunglichen reinen freude am formen'): 'durch genau erwogene wahl und anhäufung von konsonanten und vokalen bekommen wir einen eindruck ohne zuthat des sinnes.' This description of George's work from the first issue of the *Blätter* sets out his practice in which foreignness forms part of its appeal:

> jubel und trauer glätte und härte nacht und licht fühlen wir ohne dass wir die begriffe dastehn haben. ganze verse dünken uns aus einer anderen sprache und versetzen uns in seltsame unruhe. alles läuft auf eins hinaus: den grossen zusammenklang wobei wir durch die worte erregt werden wie durch rauschmittel.[46]

In discussing the history of the phrase 'art for art's sake' Angela Leighton notes that art *about* art forms a particular kind of subcategory of this, which 'erect[s] a self-protective barrier against literal decoding', the subject as shield.[47] By taking over the sense or content of another's work, whether through ekphrasis (as in 'Ein Angelico') or translation, form and material come to the fore, and an extra of mediation between life and artwork is added: the source is 'pre-flattened', the material has already been prepared. In this early period, translation was, for George, a process of learning as much as its own goal: learning from the poets he translated (not only did George translate, he also copied out whole collections during his time in France) but also from language itself.[48] Translation is not, in this early work, a vertical practice, that is, an act of service, but instead a horizontal method of processing and purifying language. This can be seen

---

[46] 'Über Stefan George, eine neue Kunst', p. 48.

[47] Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 30.

[48] Kurt Breysig, 'Begegnungen mit Stefan George', *Castrum Peregrini,* 42 (1960), 9–32 (p. 14).

in, among other things, the fact that the poems that make up the collection 'Zeichnungen in grau', published as part of 'Die Fibel', were written first in 'lingua romana', an invented language (one of George's 'merkwürdige[ ] vorstudien und sprachexperimenten'), and then translated into German.[49] George's later claim, reported by Kurt Breysig, 'er habe eigentlich nie neue Worte geprägt, sondern alte wieder herausgeholt' can usefully remind us of the flexibility of his medium, with its archaic and dialect words, but glosses over the fact that new—that is, invented—words are the starting point of the early work, words that might be, in George Steiner's phrase, 'innocent of literature'.[50] 'Worte', Breysig reports, 'müssten eine Patina haben'; yet so many of George's words—whether German or in other languages—have less a patina than protective coating between work and world, a layer repelling, rather than recalling, social history or the weathering of literature.[51]

The resistance of George's language lies not just in the choice of words or the revival of previous orthographical and typographical customs (lower case, roman rather than blackletter type, more efficient spelling) but also, and particularly, in the ways of putting those words together. Hubert Arbogast compares George's use of language in the early works to Hellingrath's concept of 'harte Fügung', which Hellingrath defines in his introduction to Hölderlin's Pindar translations as 'erstaunlichere satzgefüge: anakoluthe/ bald prädicatlos hingestellte worte/ in deren kürze ein satz zusammengedrängt ist',[52] and later makes more clear the physicalising of language that

---

[49] 'Über Stefan George, eine neue Kunst', p. 48. As an example, the first lines of 'Rosa Galba'/'Gelbe Rose':

> En la atmosfera calida tremulante de odores
> En la luz argenta de un de fallaz
> Ella respira circunfundida de un galba fulgor
> Evelota toto en una seta galba (SW I:127)
>
> Im warmen von gerüchen zitternden luftkreis
> Im silbernen licht eines falschen tages
> Hauchte sie von gelbem glanz umgossen
> Ganz gehüllt in gelbe seide. (SW I:72)

[50] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 191. Steiner is referring here to the unnamed language into which George is said to have translated the first book of the Odyssey, and of which only two lines remain, the final couplet of the poem 'Ursprünge' in *Der siebente Ring*.

[51] Breysig, p. 14. The subject of discussion is the period up to 1891.

[52] Arbogast, pp. 105–27; Hellingrath, p. 5.

this entails: 'die worte gleich greifbaren wesen sich nebeneinander ordnen'.[53] Words become something like tesserae, the poem a mosaic, an image that has been used against George as criticism: 'Manches [bei *Algabal*] wirkt dabei so gesucht, daß das gesamte Versgefüge zu sprachlichen Einlege- oder Mosaikarbeiten erstarrt.'[54] We could substitute George's name into Wilde's criticism of Pater—'the most perfect master of English prose now creating amongst us'—whose work 'is often far more like a piece of mosaic than a passage in music, and seems, here and there, to lack the true rhythmical life of words and the fine freedom and richness of effect that such rhythmical life produces.'[55] Adorno takes this further: 'Er würgt die Worte, bis sie ihm nicht mehr enteilen können: der toten meint er sich sicher'.[56] Words, or elements, are captured and pinned down, and through use are exhausted—almost as if a sacrifice to newness.[57] George's picture of rhyme is telling: 'REIM ist ein teuer erkauftes spiel. hat ein künstler einmal zwei worte miteinander gereimt so ist eigentlich das spiel für ihn verbraucht und er soll es nie oder selten wiederholen.'[58] This is 'ein seltener reichtum', and all the rarer for the fact that, once put in place to be admired it is already used up.[59] In the preterite 'nahm' of the second stanza of 'Ein Angelico' the process of preparation becomes a fait accompli—or, seen from the side of the finished poem, a kind of injunction: this process has to have already taken place before the 'grosse tat' of the poem itself, in the same way that the translator has his material already prepared for him, sitting in rows waiting to become 'a poem made out of words from another poem'.[60]

---

[53] Hellingrath, pp. 35–36. For a further discussion of 'harte Fügung' in George, see Jacob, pp. 402–5.

[54] Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Stilkunst um 1900* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967), p. 234.

[55] Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Complete Works, Vol 4: Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, The Soul of Man,* ed. by Josephine M. Guy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 123–206 (p. 137).

[56] Adorno, 'George und Hofmannsthal', p. 215.

[57] Kenner describes Pound's translations—in which syntax is not 'a one-way street [...] guiding us with sometimes misleading ease through a sentence or poem'—using a similar image: 'lay out [...] the elements all on one plane, each sharp, each bright, each of comparable importance; disregard their syntactic liaisons; make a selection, and arrange them anew'. Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London: Faber, 1972), p. 140.

[58] Introduction to BfdK, 2.2 (1894) 33-35 (p. 35).

[59] 'Über Stefan George, eine neue Kunst', p. 48.

[60] Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 141.

II: SURFACES, EDGES, BORDERS

I have been treating colour as an analogy for words: colour, thought of as pigment, has stood in for words, considered as material. Colours touch the surface of the text only through this analogy: it is the ink and the paper that forms the barrier, or interface, between the work and the world. But what of the surfaces that the colour words themselves conjure up—the topazes and lionskins of 'der saal des gelben gleisses', the gold of 'Ein Angelico', the silk and wax of the yellow rose? Objects get lost into, or subsumed by properties that describe more how their surfaces interact with the world around them: and these surfaces are captured by words that refer, also, to colour. The liturgical sensuality of the second poem from the sequence 'Neuländische Liebesmahle'—from *Hymnen,* but preempting the world of Algabal's 'Unterreich'—begins with the extravagance of its textured colours:

> Den blauen atlas in dem lagerzelt
> Bedecken goldne mond- und sternenzüge ·
> Auf einen sockel sind am saum gestellt
> Die malachit- und alabasterkrüge.
>
> Drei ketten eine kupferampel halten
> Die unsrer stirnen falben schein verhehlt ·
> Uns hüllen eines weiten burnus falten
> Und – dass uns nicht ein myrtenbüschel fehlt!
>
> Bald hören wir des tranks orakellaut
> Auf teppichen aus weichem haar gesponnen.
> Der knabe wohl mit jedem wink vertraut
>
> Verbeugt sich würdig vor dem hospodar ..
> Mir dämmert wie in einem zauberbronnen
> Die frühe zeit wo ich noch könig war.
> (SW II:17)

Here the imaginary space of the 'lagerzelt' is bordered by coloured surfaces: the blue atlas silk canopy, the malachite and alabaster jugs set around the edge ('saum', thus linking the textile and the spatial in the implied rhyme 'raum'). The following lines underline this attention to texture, first with the 'kupferampel', which is coloured by its material, and second with the adjective 'falb', which is most commonly an animal colouring (see also the 'teppiche[ ] aus weichem haar gesponnen'). We might think that

attention to texture is a kind of perceptual diligence, an attention to detail (as we will see in the grey leaves of 'Die Gärten schliessen')—but it is not description but deflection: the overemphasis on surface qualities is itself a fortification against those who would intrude on the poem. In this aesthetics of the surface, in, that is, the respectively reflective ('blauen atlas', 'golden', the polished stone of the jars, 'kupfer'), brilliant ('mond', 'sternen', 'ampel', 'schein') and sensuously animal ('atlas', again; 'falb', 'weichem haar') textures of the tent, in the hard ('krüge', 'ketten', 'kupfer') and soft ('teppichen aus weichem haar') textures of the language, a fortification is built up, an attention to the edges of things and how they can be patrolled.

Reading, for a moment, distantly, we see that these 'surface colours' are present throughout the early work. By counting colour words we can sketch out a picture of colour language within the early work that can serve as a fairly blunt indication that the impression given by, for instance, 'Neuländische Liebesmahle' is representative. In *Hymnen Pilgerfahrten Algabal* there are, in total, 150 words to do with colour, of which 125 relate to hue (including 'gold(en)', 'silbern', 'kupfern' and 'stählern', as well as those which mean or imply 'multicoloured', such as 'bunt' but also 'farbenstrahlen'). Of these 125 words, 48 are unmodified (i.e. named, mostly 'basic' hues and nothing more: 'rot', 'blau', 'grau' etc.); the majority, then, are compound adjectives like 'mattblau', 'perlgrau', 'rotgelb', 'seidengrün', compound nouns like 'silberstaub', 'purpurschleppe', adjectives from substances, of which 'milchig' is the only example, or names of substances chosen for their colour: 'demant', 'koralle', 'perle', 'türkis'. The remaining 25 refer only to saturation, brightness, tone, brilliance, or reflectance ('blitzend', 'hell', 'schimmernd', 'grell'). In the *Stern des Bundes* (1914), a collection of comparable length (although with a significantly larger total word count) there are by contrast 53 instances of colour, including qualities of light and shade, of which only half (27) are related to hue; these significant differences can be seen to underscore the thematic move away from the concrete and textural, as well as the play of binaries, indexed by darkness and light, that characterise the later collection.

Jacob Steiner includes in his essay on colour in George to Trakl, quoted above, a count of colour words across George's entire œuvre.[61] While Steiner does not give quite enough detail regarding his parameters to compare this broader picture with my narrower one, what both share is a particular openmindedness towards a definition of colour in George.[62] Even on Steiner's more conservative count, there are far more 'material' colours—'Elfenbeinen', 'Alabastern' etc.—than in his counts from Rilke, Hofmannsthal and Lasker-Schüler, who stick in the most part to 'basic' colour terms and their derivatives ('blau' and 'bläulich' for instance). The 'abstracted' colours of 'Ein Angelico' are exemplary: of four colour words ('gold', 'hell', 'rosa', 'indigo') one does not name a hue, one names a material and a colour that is equally a property of surface. Of the two hues proper, neither is a basic colour term; 'rosa' was at that point a hyponym (subcategory) of 'rot', and indigo, for all that it is a spectral colour, continues to be a hyponym of 'blau'.[63] In the case of 'indigo' it seems all the more clear that this was a word chosen for its association with dyeing—the blues of Fra Angelico were painted in ultramarine, that is, using lapis lazuli, and not indigo at all. The predominant move in the early work is to foreground the artificiality of colour through a process of concretion, in which no colour is allowed to seem natural or ethereally detached from things.[64]

A property that many of these colour words share is that of describing reflectance: in Algabal's yellow hall it is particularly the reflective qualities of the colours that is isolated ('gleiss' denoting a specifically metallic, reflective sort of shine)—to the point where the stolen riches in fact function as mirrors, pointing inwards:

> An allen seiten aufgereiht als spiegel
> —Gesamter städte ganzer staaten beute —
> Die ungeschmückten platten goldnen ziegel

---

[61] Jacob Steiner, p. 230. He encourages future work showing the development in colour use across George's career—to which I hope I have contributed!

[62] As William Gladstone knew only too well, it is difficult to know when certain words, even when morphologically unambiguous, refer predominantly to colour or to material. Gladstone, III, p. 464.

[63] See Claudia Frenzel-Biamonti, 'Rosa Schätze—Pink zum kaufen: Stylistic confusion, subjective perception and semantic uncertainty of a loaned colour term', in *New Directions in Colour Studies*, ed. by C. P. Biggam, 2 vols (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), I, 91–104.

[64] We might compare here the slightly later, and very well known 'Komm in den totgesagten park und schau' in which the creative act involves separating and preserving abstracted 'basic' colours from the flowers and foliage of the park.

The argument could be made that this is exclusionary: in this entirely self-sufficient space, with its own, manufactured sun, the hard, metallic edges let nothing of the outside world in.[65] But what is more clearly the case is that this is a space—and all of the poems of 'Im Unterreich' are spaces—of critical self-reflexivity and self-reflection (what is being reflected back in this instance is precisely the fact that these are looted treasures). The equivalent in these collections—each for the most part self-sufficient, for all that they were later split up and selections published in the *Blätter*—is the deliberate ordering of poems, with each having explicitly programmatic introductory poems, and a final poem which seems to point onwards towards the next book. Additionally, each has a dedication and an inscription which serve as intermediaries between the otherwise self-contained world of the poems and the reader. At these points of inward reflection, in which the poet's task or intention is scrutinised, the border becomes porous.

In *Hymnen* the programmatic and paratextual material is particularly interested in colour:

> KURZ EH ES FRÜHLING WARD BEGANN DIES LIED
> BEI WEISSEN MAUERN UND IM UFERRIED
> ALL UNSRES VOLKES NEUEN SÖHNEN HOLD
> SPIELT DURCH EIN JAHR DER TRAUM IN BLAU UND GOLD
> (SW II:8)

The world of the poems is defined by colours ('ein traum in blau und gold') and the white walls and reeds imply a separation, for all that it is not clear what lies on which side. The colours set the scene through their impenetrability: the white walls literally, the blue and gold, in describing a dream, in terms of interpretation. These are not

---

[65] Algabal's 'Unterreich' could be compared to Nietzsche's 'Werkstätte der Moral' with its 'falsche[s] schillernde[s] Licht'; in *Algabal*, however, that light is fabricated out of darkness belongs to the book's discussion of the aestheticisation of cruelty (or rather, the cruelty inherent in aestheticisation). Algabal certainly looks a lot like the 'Herr' of the second part of *Zur Genealogie der Moral*: 'Ihr Werk ist ein instinktives Formen-schaffen, Formen-aufdrücken, es sind die unfreiwilligsten, unbewusstesten Künstler, die es giebt: — in Kürze steht etwas Neues da, wo sie erscheinen, ein Herrschafts-Gebilde, das l e b t, in dem Theile und Funktionen abgegrenzt und bezüglich gemacht sind, in dem Nichts überhaupt Platz findet, dem nicht erst ein "Sinn" in Hinsicht auf das Ganze eingelegt ist. Sie wissen nicht, was Schuld, was Verantwortlichkeit, was Rücksicht ist, diese geborenen Organisatoren; in ihnen waltet jener furchtbare Künstler-Egoismus, der wie Erz blickt und sich im "Werke", wie die Mutter in ihrem Kinde, in alle Ewigkeit voraus gerechtfertigt weiss.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse; Zur Genealogie der Moral*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: dtv, 1988), p. 281; 325.

colours, necessarily, as the object of perception: these are colours as ideas, and this becomes all the more clear when we see that the first and last poems are in fact achromatic:

Weihe

Hinaus zum strom! wo stolz die hohen rohre
Im linden winde ihre fahnen schwingen
Und wehren junger wellen schmeichelchore
Zum ufermoose kosend vorzudringen.

Im rasen rastend sollst du dich betäuben
An starkem urduft · ohne denkerstörung ·
So dass die fremden hauche all zerstäuben.
Das auge schauend harre der erhörung.

Siehst du im takt des strauches laub schon zittern
Und auf der glatten fluten dunkelglanz
Die dünne nebelmauer sich zersplittern?
Hörst du das elfenlied zum elfentanz?

Schon scheinen durch der zweige zackenrahmen
Mit sternenstädten selige gefilde ·
Der zeiten flug verliert die alten namen
Und raum und dasein bleiben nur im bilde.

Nun bist du reif · nun schwebt die herrin nieder ·
Mondfarbne gazeschleier sie umschlingen ·
Halboffen ihre traumesschweren lider
Zu dir geneigt die segnung zu vollbringen:

Indem ihr mund auf deinem antlitz bebte
Und sie dich rein und so geheiligt sah
Dass sie im kuss nicht auszuweichen strebte
Dem finger stützend deiner lippe nah.
(SW II:10)

Die Gärten schliessen

Frühe nacht verwirrt die ebnen bahnen ·
Kalte traufe trübt die weiher ·
Glückliche Apolle und Dianen
Hüllen sich in nebelschleier.

Graue blätter wirbeln nach den gruften.
Dahlien levkojen rosen
In erzwungenem orchester duften ·
Wollen schlaf bei weichen moosen.

> Heisse monde flohen aus der pforte.
> Ward dein hoffen deine habe?
> Baust du immer noch auf ihre worte
> Pilger mit der hand am stabe?
> (SW II:28)

The only named colour is 'grau', and the other colour words, 'mondfarbne', 'dunkelglanz' describe achromatic effects of light, or else visibility ('nebelmauer', 'gazeschleier', 'nebelschleier'). Both poems are remarkable in their degree of perceptual naturalism (the fact that at dusk, for example, everything appears grey, and other sensory perceptions are heightened, as in 'Die Gärten schliessen'),[66] a naturalism that penetrates even to the level of the syntax, with the parenthetical 'ohne denkerstörung' in 'Weihe' mimetically describing exactly that which it suggests avoiding. Schäfer likens the collection, and these poems in particular, to a series of 'Wahrnehmungsexperimenten und Bewegungsstudien', seeing in them something of the techniques of impressionist or neoimpressionist painting; '[d]as Bild bleibt [aber] nicht auf der Ebene des Geschauten, sondern inauguriert einen Neuen Illusionismus, der nichts abbildet und keinen Gegenstand representiert, sondern den Gegenstand selbst in einder Vision schafft.'[67] The ironic integration of syntax into this experiment—such that the poem forces its own thought processes on the reader—gestures towards a prosody of literalness, in which sound and metre echo mental life (we might compare Arthur Symons' listless 'grey hours')[68] but this is not their aim; rather, the 'initiation' of the poet is one of skill in creating (as opposed to describing).

Claude David has described 'Weihe' as a covertly 'Jugendstil' poem, and we might then see the emphatic desaturation as an attempted turn from the lush verse of his

---

[66] See Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form*, p. 187.

[67] Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form*, p. 174; 177.

[68]

> There are some hours when I seem so indifferent; all things fade
> To an indifferent greyness, like that grey of the sky;
> Always at evening-ends, on grey days; and I know not why,
> But life, and art, and love, and death, are the shade of a shade. ('Grey Hours: Naples')

Arthur Symons, *Knave of Hearts: 1894-1908* (London: Heinemann, 1913), p. 33.

contemporaries, despite the features they have in common.[69] The compound nouns on the one hand, the foliage and elves on the other are not to be seen as gratuitous ornamentation, line for the sake of line, but part of the poet's journey to mastery (the line 'Nun bist du reif', for instance, would not be out of place in George's much later work; 'Zum ufermoose kosend vorzudringen', on the other hand seems almost parodically over-patterned). David makes the important point that vowel patterning is to 'Weihe' what colour is to *Algabal*: what we have here is not harmony for harmony's sake—and not just harmony for the sake of representing the 'elfenlied' that is the poem. Instead, this is harmony for the sake of making.

The poet is called on in his 'initiation' to see and hear, yet the primary senses here, as in 'Die Gärten schliessen' are smell and touch—in the latter case, for the superficially convincing reason of the poem's seeming commitment to impressionism. There is a reorganising of the hierarchy of senses, as Schäfer points out, forming part of an aesthetic orientation for the pilgrim or implied addressee.[70] This reevaluation in which sight, the noblest sense, finds itself at the bottom is not to suggest that this is in fact the case, a truth to be taken away from the poem—or indeed that to enter the collection we might want to leave sight behind, for all that the colours and objects we might see there are certainly distinctive in texture as well as appearance. Instead the oppositions are invoked to highlight the rarity of the sensations—rather than simply lifting smell and touch up to the level of sight, they are prized precisely because they are being called on in an absence. This model—a flattened, or realigned, hierarchy suspended between form and oppositional aesthetics can be seen in the famous, and famously poetological poem 'Die Spange', which I discuss later in this chapter; I turn first to the coloured rooms of *Algabal* in which value—in this rarefied world—becomes arbitrary and circular.

---

[69] Claude David, 'Stefan George und der Jugendstil', in *Formkräfte der deutschen Dichtung vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart: Vorträge, gehalten im Deutschen Haus, Paris, 1961/1962*, ed. by Hans Steffen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 211–28 (p. 218).

[70] Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form,* p. 176.

III: COLOUR AND VALUE

Daneben war der raum der blassen helle
Der weisses licht und weissen glanz vereint ·
Das dach ist glas · die streu gebleichter felle
Am boden schnee und oben wolke scheint.

Der wände matte täfelung aus zedern ·
Die dreissig pfauen stehen dran im kreis ·
Sie tragen daunen blank wie schwanenfedern
Und ihre schleppen schimmern wie das eis.

Für jede zier die freunden farbenstrahlen:
Aus blitzendem und blinderem metall ·
Aus elfenbein und milchigen opalen ·
Aus demant alabaster und kristall ·

Und perlen! klare gaben dumpfer stätte
Die ihr wie menschliche gebilde rollt
Und doch an einer wange warmer glätte
Das nasse kühl beharrlich wahren sollt.

Da lag die kugel auch von murra-stein
Mit der in früher jugend er gespielt ·
Des kaisers finger war am tage rein
Wo tränend er sie vor das auge hielt.
(SW II:62)

The room, as with the 'saal des gelben gleisses', is coloured both by definition ('der raum der blassen helle') and through the impression given by the white, light-coloured or shimmering objects which fill it: 'schnee', 'wolke' 'elfenbein' 'blitzende[s] metall' and so on. The objects are not chosen for their value (snow is hardly as valuable as ivory) but for their colour or effect; some have even been altered to give this effect such as the 'gebleichte[ ] felle'. The assemblage is both predetermined by colour and productive of it. This organising principle, in which an abstract formal similarity determines the choice of object, is taken a step further in the second stanza of the first poem of the section 'Tage':

Er trägt ein klein aus blauer Serer-seide
Mit sardern und saffiren übersät
In silberhülsen säumend aufgenäht ·
Doch an den armen hat er kein geschmeide.

Here the stones and fabrics seem to have been primarily chosen to contribute to the alliteration, suggesting that any colour, any stone would do.[71] (Its opposite might be found in the line 'Die leiber die hellrot wie blüten und hochrot wie blut.' ('In hohen palästen', SW III:74), in which the matching vowel transition almost too neatly maps onto naturalistic colours; the reason the sound patterning in Algabal—as indeed in the passage from Ruskin—'works' is that it revels in its self-justification.) The fact, too, of noting the bare arms points to a reversal of norms (if one wanted to wear precious stones, one would normally wear jewellery; as it is Algabal transfers the ornamental function to something usually considered necessary, his clothing).

Georg Simmel, a friend and colleague of George in the 1890s, makes the suggestive argument in 'Psychologie des Schmuckes' that the social purpose of jewellery is tied to its brilliance; the dazzle both incites envy in and offers itself up to the other. Thus, through its material, 'der Schmuck [ist] Distanzierung und Konnivenz in einem Akt.'[72] It is for this reason that the diamond is the precious stone *par excellence,* '[d]enn er ist sozusagen selbst körperlos, seine Wirkung besteht nur in den Strahlen, die er aussendet, ohne dass sie an einer an sich schon auffälligen und reizvollen farbigen Substanz hafte, wie es beim Saphir und dem Smaragd der Fall ist.' Value is thus determined by formal qualities and specifically those qualities involving an interaction with an external body. The moral problem at the centre of Algabal is then precisely this: how to spin value out of nothing?

The interaction of precious jewels and metals, colour, and value, is one that Joris-Karl Huysmans addresses in *À rebours* (1884), a novel which may have provided George with

---

[71] It has been suggested that the 'Serer-seide' was taken from a historical account of the actual Heliogabalus, see Victor A. Oswald, Jr., 'The Historical Content of Stefan George's "Algabal"', *Germanic Review*, 23 (1948), 193–205 (p. 203). If so, it is telling that what has been pillaged from the account was taken not for the sake of it semantic content but for the sake of formal consistency. The very idea of assimilating decisions of taste to non-relevant visual appearances has possible historical basis: Claude David notes that Heliogabalus was said to insist on his meals all being one colour. *Stefan George: Sein dichterisches Werk* (Munich: Hanser, 1967), p. 76.)

[72] Georg Simmel, 'Psychologie des Schmucks', in *Gesamtausgabe VIII.2: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen, 1901-1908,* ed. by Volkhard Krech and Alessandro Cavalli (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), pp. 385–93 (pp. 387–88). Walter Benjamin comments that *Die Philosophie des Geldes* 'stammt nicht umsonst aus der Zeit, in der sich Simmel sich dem Kreis um George »nahen« dürfte.' Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel, 1928-1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), pp. 405–6.

the initial encounter with the figure of Heliogabalus on whom Algabal is based.[73] In one passage, Huysmans' aesthete Des Esseintes buys a tortoise in order to enhance the colours and patterns of a carpet: at first his hope is that the dark shell moving slowly around will set off the bright carpet, but instead its colours are dulled. He realises that rather than bringing the colours out, they need to be subdued, and thus decides to encrust the tortoise's shell with precious stones—but these must be carefully chosen:

> Le choix des pierres l'arrêta; le diamant est devenu singulièrement commun depuis que tous les commerçants en portent au petit doigt ; les émeraudes et les rubis de l'Orient sont moins avilis, lancent de rutilantes flammes, mais ils rappellent par trop ces yeux verts et rouges de certains omnibus qui arborent des fanaux de ces deux couleurs, le long des tempes ; quant aux topazes, brûlées ou crues, ce sont des pierres à bon marché, chères à la petite bourgeoisie qui veut serrer des écrins dans une armoire à glace[.][74]

For Des Esseintes the value of a given stone or metal is dependent on both intrinsic and extrinsic facts: qualities such as brightness, reflectance, hue, opacity, and so on are not irrelevant; nor is its relative scarcity. However, as Simmel and Huysmans both make clear, of primary importance is the value it gains in society. Value, they suggest, can only ever be ascertained or determined through the interaction of material and society, the interaction of the wearer and the beholder, including, as with Des Esseintes, the implied beholder, shut out but nonetheless present in his reasoning. Thus Des Esseintes' tortoise cannot be encrusted with diamonds (too common) or topazes (too cheap, too popular with the bourgeoisie) or, later, amethysts (worn by butchers' wives) or 'oriental' turquoise (used in petty trinkets). He rejects stones for being 'trop civilisées et trop connues'; he needs 'des minéraux plus surprenants et plus bizarres'.[75] Similarly, the function of the gems is to subdue the almost-gaudy colours of the carpet, fighting embellishment with embellishment. At first glance this might seem in contrast to George's 'Die Spange', in which, as we will see, the move from plain to ornate is one of compromise—which suggests a hierarchy in which use value is to be placed above aesthetic or monetary value. The 'dandy' aesthetics of Huysmans would have it that scarcity, not in absolute but in social terms, is the determining factor of value, with

---

[73] Morwitz, p. 44.

[74] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À rebours*, ed. by Marc Fumaroli (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 129.

[75] Huysmans, *À rebours*, p. 130.

aesthetic specificity in second place.[76] In 'Die Spange', (surprising) scarcity is the constraint on specificity; however, in both cases value is determined in opposition to social norms and through knowledge defined as specialist and arcane.

Die Spange

Ich wollte sie aus kühlem eisen
Und wie ein glatter fester streif ·
Doch war im schacht auf allen gleisen
So kein metall zum gusse reif.

Nun aber soll sie also sein:
Wie eine grosse fremde dolde
Geformt aus feuerrotem golde
Und reichem blitzendem gestein.
(SW II:54)

The last poem of *Pilgerfahrten* and set apart from the rest of the collection, 'Die Spange' points ahead to *Algabal*. We might therefore be reminded of the 'topase' and 'goldne[ ] ziegel' of its second poem—particularly because these are 'ungeschmückt[ ]' and 'platt': even in the midst of the seemingly overembellished 'unterreich', a kind of 'glatter [...] streif' encircles the room. We might also be reminded of Walter Pater: 'Say what you have to say, what you have a will to say, in the simplest, the most direct and exact manner possible, with no surplusage:—there, is the justification of the sentence so fortunately born, "entire, smooth, and round," that it needs no punctuation, and also (that is the point!) of the most elaborate period, if it be right in its elaboration.'[77] (There are also echoes of the final stanzas of Horace's ode 3.1, which is quoted in 'Über Stefan George':

quodsi dolentem nec Phrygius lapis
nec purpurarum sidere clarior
delenit usus [...]

cur valle permutem Sabina
divitias operosiores?

[Will purple silks more lustrous than the starlight

[76] This is in keeping with the original 'dandy', George 'Beau' Brummell, who wore simple but specifically cut and arranged clothes, rather than the more elaborate styles that were popular at the time. See Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 112.

[77] Walter Pater, 'Style', in *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1889), pp. 1–36 (p. 32).

Or mottled Phrygian marble allay sorrow?
[...]
Why change my Sabine vale
For the great inconvenience of wealth?][78])

The truly discerning put simplicity first—but know when ornamentation is called for or made necessary.[79]

However, as William Waters points out, the 'resolution put forward by the second stanza is out of all possible proportion to the problem framed by the first stanza': 'surely there are materials between iron and gold? surely even with gold one could make a "glatter fester streif"?' This implausible leap of reasoning 'gives the impression that the unreadiness of ripe iron becomes a pretext, rather than an inescapable cause, for the decision announced by the second stanza.'[80] In this context this seems no different to Pater's own qualifications that allow his own stylish but rarely simple sentences not to fall foul of his own edict: an aestheticist modelling of the very thing it purports to be against. In *Algabal* however, this takes a turn for the grisly, as in the following examples:

Die tauben flattern ängstig nach dem dache
»Ich sterbe gern weil mein gebieter schrak«
Ein breiter dolch ihm schon im busen stak ·
Mit grünem flure spielt die rote lache.

Der kaiser wich mit höhnender gebärde ..
Worauf er doch am selben tag befahl
Dass in den abendlichen weinpokal
Des knechtes name eingegraben werde.
(SW II:66)

Hernieder steig ich eine marmortreppe ·
Ein leichnam ohne haupt inmitten ruht ·
Dort sickert meines teuren bruders blut ·
Ich raffe leise nur die purpurschleppe.
(SW II:68)

---

[78] The Odes of Horace, trans. by James Michie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 143.

[79] In *Il Piacere* (1889) which we saw George quote above (see n. 26), the protagonist Andrea Sperelli visits the woman he loves only for her husband to give him a tour of his collection of pornographic books. The husband's crudeness and lasciviousness is concentrated into an obsession with the books' ornate clasps (and he presses Andrea to design one for him), a scene which can help us pick out the underlying sensual menace of George's own 'foreign umbel'. Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il piacere* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1889).

[80] William Waters, 'Stefan George's Poetics', in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George,* ed. by Jens Rieckmann (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2005), pp. 25–49 (pp. 26–27).

Rosen regnen ·
Purpurne satte
Die liebkosen?
Weisse matte
Euch zu laben?
Malvenrote ·
Gelbe tote:
Manen-küsse
Euch zu segnen.
(SW II:69)

In each of these acts of cruelty, it is not that acts of violence are aestheticised; instead they seem analogous to the unfortunate substitution of gold for iron, a sacrifice made in bad faith in the name of beauty. And beauty's name, here, is colour: the red puddle against the green hall; the oppositions and symmetry of the white steps with the trails of red and purple; the couplet 'Malvenrote · | Gelbe tote:' leaving both the colour words to do the work—both of the killing and its representation—and making of those colours the point of the exercise. 'Die herabregnenden "güsse" von roten, gelben und weißen Rosen haben nicht nur eine ausgesprochen "ästhetische" Lichtwirkung, sondern sind zugleich Mittel des Todes', as Durzak points out.[81] Jürgen Brokoff suggests that this has the effect of complicating Durzak's picture of 'ästhetischer Immoralismus;'[82] alongisde the obvious tastelessness and stirring of moral outrage, there is a metapoetic level in which the power of the poet over language is absorbed into the 'Macht reiner Sprachlichkeit'. The effect of these multiple leveles of power is one, he claims, of a surprising flattening: 'Die reine Sprachlichkeit kappt jede Tiefendimension und setzt an die Stelle eines sozialen Raumes die *Oberfläche* der aus Worten bestehenden Poesie.'[83]

'Die Spange' pre-empts the excess and will to control of *Algabal*, but also gestures on a more literal level to the physical objects George himself was having made, that is, the printed books. The first editions of the books from *Hymnen* to *Die Bücher der Hirten-*

[81] Durzak, *Der junge Stefan George*, pp. 233–34.

[82] Durzak, *Der junge Stefan George*, p. 226.

[83] Jürgen Brokoff, 'Macht im Innenraum der Dichtung: Die frühen Gedichte Stefan Georges', in *Die Souveränität der Literatur: zum Totalitären der klassischen Moderne 1900-1933,* ed. by Uwe Hebekus and Ingo Stöckmann (Paderborn: Fink, 2008), pp. 415–32 (p. 429).

und Preisgedichte, der Sagen und Sänge und der hängenden Gärten are not unlike a 'glatter fester streif': the paper was thick, that is, costly, but also solid and permanent, and the poems, do not, in Ute Oelmann's phrase, 'hang on the washing line' as would normally be the case,[84] they '»stehen« wie Stelen', often beginning a half or two thirds of the way down the page as if being built up in blocks from the bottom margin, and there are pages left, suggestively, blank.[85] This simplicity—inspired by the books of Verlaine and other poets that George read during his time in France, but taken far further than these models—was radically elegant compared to German books of the time.[86] 'Die[se] Bücher', wrote a contemporary reviewer, 'haben das, was den anderen fehlt — Geschlossenheit'.[87] Typographical decisions made primarily as a form of aesthetic opposition were couched in moral terms: Lechter called *Hymnen* 'das erste wieder anständig gedruckte Buch in Deutschland', and in the *Blätter* the charge of vanity is pre-empted and refuted:[88]

> Sogar für das technische eines buches ist der verfasser mit verantwortlich, und man darf es ihm nicht als eitelkeit vorwerfen wenn er druck und papier der landläufien markterzeugnisse verschmäht und für den geschöpf eine standesgemässe kleidung beansprucht.[89]

It is in fact the duty of the writer to ensure the propriety of his own book-design.

The initial collaborations with Lechter, on the other hand, borrowed much more heavily from the English model provided by William Morris's Kelmscott Press, and the book of translations from Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, with its gold and blue lettering and stylised peacock, is nothing if not what might be termed a 'grosse fremde dolde'; yet this too was, with the care and choreography and its extremely limited run, a move

---

[84] As is in fact the case in the current Klett-Cotta edition ('in opposition,' Oelmann says, 'to any of George's principles').

[85] Oelmann, *'Das doch nicht äusserliche'*, p. 12.

[86] '[StG] hatte eine radikal moderne Lösung gewählt: die französische [...] und er hat sie radikalisiert.' Oelmann, *'Das doch nicht äusserliche'*, p. 11.

[87] Ernst Schur, 'Ziele für die innere Ausstattung des Buches', *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde,* 2 (1898), 32–34, 137–41, 227–32 (p. 231).

[88] Quoted in Friedrich Wolters, *Stefan George und die Blätter für die Kunst: deutsche Geistesgeschichte seit 1890* (Berlin: Bondi, 1930), p. 146. Wolters underlines the importance of the first seven years in George's development in terms of book art, and paints a picture of German culture as certainly not 'reif' for such radically 'schlicht' books as the first collections (which sinned not only through the ugliness of its books but also through superfluities such as the dominance of 'fraktur' script and unnecessary letters in its spelling, which George simplified (e.g. jetzt->jezt)) pp. 138-146.

[89] 'Das doch nicht äusserliche', BfdK 1.5 (1893), p. 145

deliberately in opposition to the dominant culture. The return to (mostly) monochrome simplicity in 1907 is tempered or complicated by the development of the famous 'St-G-Schrift', a typeface based on George's handwriting made in collaboration with Lechter—an implied 'de-fetishization of print culture' that was ostentatiously unornamented yet difficult to read, unique and suggestive of monastic hand-copying yet mass-reproducible.[90] Friedrich Kittler presses the point 'daß alle Details der St-G-Schrift (Schriftart, Letternform, Rechtschreibung, Interpunktion) experimentell ermittelte Standards voraussetzen, maximieren und ausnutzen'—giving the impression of clarity (similarity of lower and upper-case letters, roman as opposed to blackletter) but proving in fact resistant to quick reading (through removing ascenders and descenders).[91] Words such as 'wimmern, nennen, weinen' show '[einen] einheitlichen Gesamtcharakter'; '[l]auter *wimmern*, *nennen*, *weinen* füllt demgemäß die 18 Bände eines Werks, dessen Esoterik physiologisch verbürgt wird.'[92]

Letters, words, become visually indistinguishable; smoothness becomes a barrier to the work, the words lined up like flat, shining tiles. This visual indistinguishability leads to semantic leakage, and where phonemic distinctions begin to break down—where 'platt' suggests 'glatt', 'weisse' suggests 'weise' ('Vogelschau'), 'saum' suggests 'raum' ('Neuländische Liebesmahle')—the individual word loses its semantic singularity. It is thus unique only in its arbitrary shapes and sounds, but barely, and can be substituted by words that are formally similar (a mechanism similar to the word-for-word sonnet translations, and also in the 'Noah's ark' approach to rhyme: in both cases what is singular, and to be prioritised, is the translation or combination of sounds or shapes, rather than that of ideas). This attitude to surface appearance can be seen in 'Ein Angelico': it doesn't matter where the pink or blue come from (that is, 'mean'), what matters is their colour.

---

[90] Michael Minden, *Modern German Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 98.

[91] Kittler, p. 265. For a further discussion of 'Lesbarkeit', see Stephan Kurz, *Der Teppich der Schrift. Typographie bei Stefan George* (Basel: Stroemfeld, 2007), p. 139.

[92] Kittler, p. 267, in part quoting Oskar Messmer (a student of Rorschach's).

George's use of colour has been likened, by Jacob Steiner in the essay quoted above, to that of baroque poetry.[93] For Steiner, the similarity lies in its opulence and artificiality, and particularly in a tendency towards superficial visual metaphors, such as in 'Im Park' from *Hymnen*:

> Rubinen perlen schmücken die fontänen ·
> Zu boden streut sie fürstlich jeder strahl ·
> In eines teppichs seidengrünen strähnen
>
> Verbirgt sich ihre unbegrenzte zahl.[94]

This attitude to metaphor lies at the centre of Gérard Genette's essay on French baroque poetics, 'L'or tombe sous le fer'.[95] Here, the 'poétique structurale' (p. 37) of baroque poetry is contrasted with a sonnet by Ronsard, where 'le poème est doucement emporté vers un état de fusion qui [...] traduit [...] par le jeu des sonorités, des rimes en –eur (à *fleur*) et en –ose (à *rose*), par la fluidité du rythme, par la contagion des images, l'embaument du langage même dans l'unité substantielle.' In later poetry, however, such unity is resisted: we see a system 'de contrastes réglés et sans nuances'. It offers 'une profusion de couleurs, de substances, de qualités sensibles' but this sensuality is, it transpires, polarised 'selon les lois strictes d'une sorte de géométrie matérielle.'[96] Thus, in Saint-Amant's 'Sonnet sur la Moisson', we have the line, 'L'or tombe sous le fer', describing the wheat harvest; here, the two materials, gold and iron, are chosen 'pour leur fonction la plus superficielle et la plus abstraite': via the process of a visual metaphor on the one hand (gold wheat) and conventional metonymy on the other (iron for the sickle). That there is an inconsistency in the mechanics of comparison is of no importance: all that matters is the final impression, that of 'un conflit de métaux nobles'.[97]

In 'Im Park', however, the very first word seems to make clear the artificiality of a method of 'géométrie matérielle': while baroque poetry may have not bothered all that much with accuracy of colour, a comparison of water droplets to rubies seems to require

---

[93] Jacob Steiner, p. 92.

[94] SW II:11.

[95] Gérard Genette, 'L'or tombe sous le fer', in *Figures I* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976), pp. 29–38.

[96] Genette, 'L'or tombe sous le fer', pp. 29–31.

[97] Genette, 'L'or tombe sous le fer', pp. 32–33.

an even greater deal of imaginative shading in on the part of the reader (are they red because it is sunset?). Armin Schäfer suggests that the first metaphor (water droplets are rubies and pearls) is reified via the second line, in which the verb 'streut' fixes the jewels as jewels, which then in turn is given further reinforcement by the third line, in which the grass is a 'teppich'. The metaphor is never complete until the next line adds to it, a process he likens to the movement of the terza rima form.[98] It is noticeable that this process removes life, movement and agency from the fountain and the grass (themselves already, of course, a form of nature made artificial), and this reification takes place not merely on the level of colours within the imaginative world of the poem, but also in its language. In the first line (Rubinen perlen schmücken die fontänen ·) the orthographical and morphological idiosyncrasies (including 'Rubinen' for 'Rubine') and resultant syntactic ambiguity make almost too much of the visual and auditory qualities of language, through the insistent repetition of '-(n)en' and the uniform trochees. This seems a deliberate gesture of indifference towards language, a leveling of distinctions that puts materiality before material (one step further, as it were, from the baroque, such that a kind of Ronsardian unity or fluidity is reached from the other side—only here the 'contagion' happens not within the images, rather on their surface).

There is, then, a contradiction in this attitude. Dorian Gray marvels, in my second epigraph, at 'how terrible' 'mere words' can be, and at their 'subtle magic'; and this is echoed in Arthur Symons' essay on the French symbolist poets, in which Verlaine's poetry is 'the poetry of sensation, of evocation; poetry which paints as well as sings', which only has to think the colours onto the canvas and they appear. 'The mere magic of words—words which evoke pictures, which recall sensations': that something so flimsy and arbitrary could do so much![99] The 'bannende Kraft des Wortes' is mirrored, in Symon's account, by colour, which, too, has magical powers of evocation in the aestheticist imaginary: '[m]ere colour,' as Wilde puts it, 'unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways.'[100] The

[98] Armin Schäfer, 'Gärten in der Lyrik Stefan Georges', in *Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte des Gartens = Gardens in social history,* ed. by Walter Gebhard (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 151–65 (p. 163).

[99] Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', *Harper's Magazine,* 1893, 858–67 (p. 861).

[100] Edith Landmann, p. 42; Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 195. This can be seen earlier in the century in *Middlemarch,* where Dorothea is affected unexpectedly by the abstract beauty of coloured jewels:

pull between the seeming impotence and affective power of colour is exactly that which George is trying to rein in: by insisting on the magic, on the look, the 'Buchstabenkult', while flattening out all differences, his words, and his colours, keep a tight grip of what Leighton calls their 'dreamy implications.'[101]

Des Esseintes, when deciding on stones for his tortoise, continues by rejecting sapphires (only brilliant in natural light) and hydrophanes (only brilliant in water). His choices are thus subject to several criteria, all at odds: the stones are desirable in terms of social significance; their colours may be intrinsically desirable; the stones are also chosen for mimetic reasons (they are set in a not unnaturalistic floral design on the tortoise's shell) and this is all constrained by the formal features of the intended context (dry, artificial light) and his own formal requirements (brilliance for the pattern; for the border, stones with 'feux vagues', another form of oppositional value).[102] This can be seen, too, in *Algabal*: the stones and materials are chosen to fit the colour schemes of the various rooms and spaces described, yet those spaces are themselves defined by their predominant colour, whether blue, gold or white, which have both symbolic value and derive value from the objects that are those colours. There is a kind of circularity, then, here, which we can see in line 6 of 'Daneben war der raum der blassen helle': we may at first be surprised to find peacocks in this room of 'pale brightness' and it is not until the following line that it becomes clear that these are white peacocks. The reader begins to fear that both the objects chosen, and their colours, are entirely arbitrary: on the one hand, so long as an object is brilliant, it could be allowed in this room, whether tin can or diamond; on the other, the sheer variety of stones means that any one could be chosen to fit any colour, a bird found with whatever plumage the poet desired, and that these would, in the world of the poem, be perfectly substitutable.

'"How very beautiful these gems are!" said Dorothea, under a new current of feeling, as sudden as the gleam. "It is strange how deeply colours seem to penetrate one, like scent." [...] All the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy. [...] She thought of often having them by her, to feed her eye at these little fountains of pure colour.' George Eliot, *Middlemarch,* ed. by David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 13–14.

[101] Leighton, *On Form,* p. 30. Leighton's own susceptibility to this 'mere magic' can be seen from the fact that in *On Form* she refers twice to Théophile Gautier's *Émaux* [i.e. enamels] *et camées* as *Emeralds and Cameos:* which proves her point, saying more about the fungibility of decadent topoi and the seductive fluidity of form than it does about her proofreading.

[102] Huysmans, *À rebours,* p. 132.

IV: COLOUR AND INTERPRETATION

Dorian Gray 'procure[s] from Paris no less than nine large-paper copies of the first edition' of the book—a stand-in for *À rebours*—that holds him as a moral hostage, 'and ha[s] them bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods'.[103] It might seem particularly fitting that he coordinates his book with his boredom, especially when Robert de Montesquiou's rooms (on which Des Esseintes' were based) were decorated so that each had a particular unifying theme and was designed to conjure up a particular atmosphere—for all that for onlookers like Edmond de Goncourt the effect was of a 'méli-mélo'.[104] But Dorian's indexing his mood with colours suggests something more: that colour *deserves* to have some sort of semantic tagging. The nagging sense of colour's non-arbitrariness, its seeming stability of reference, is solid enough for Ernst Jünger to use as an analogy for translation: lyric poetry and vowel sounds are like colour or coloured stones; prose is consonantal and metallic, and consequently easier to translate, that is, substitute.

> Auch die Schwierigkeit oder vielmehr die Unmöglichket, das lyrische Gedicht zu übersetzen, dürfte vor allem bei den Vokalen zu suchen sein. Diese Aufgabe gleicht der Nachbildung eines Schmuckes mit anderen Stoffen; und es leuchtet ein, daß sich die metallische Fassung leichter ersetzen läßt als die Farbe und Anordnung der Steine, die sie umschließt.[105]

Colour seems to have on this account a certain authenticy or inherent rightness that even questions of value can't dislodge. Yet gemstones, as Des Esseintes and Algabal well know, are both more and less than their colours, and in Huysman's later novel *La cathédrale* the author-proxy Durtal suggests that the symbolic meaning of stones is 'très confuse':

> Les motifs qui ont décidé le choix de certaines pierres pour leur faire spécifier par la couleur de leur eau, par leur éclat, une vertu précise, sont amenés de si loin, sont si faiblement prouvés que l'on pourrait substituer une gemme à une autre, sans modifier pour cela la signification de l'allégorie qu'elles énoncent. Elles sont une série de synonymes pouvant se suppléer, à une nuance près en somme.[106]

---

[103] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 108.

[104] Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: mémoires de la vie littéraire,* 3 vols (Paris: Laffont, 1989), III, p. 604.

[105] Jünger, p. 55.

[106] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *La cathédrale* (Paris: Stock, 1898), p. 196.

Contra Jünger, the semantic value of stones is, according to Huysmans, *unstable*, of uncertain provenance and difficult to verify. There are too many variables, their colour or effulgence or 'water', which makes them, as a result, too flimsily attached to the 'vertu précise': they could easily be attached to any, or none. Surface—reflectance and transparency—muddies the waters of meaning. Adorno relates this to the market: 'Auf dem kunstgewerblichen Markt kann alles alles bedeuten. Je weniger vertraut die Stoffe, desto schrankenloser ihre Verfügbarkeit für Intentionen.'[107] But the binding of scarcity with simultaneous proliferation of, and obfuscation, of meaning is part of the Kreis brand. Lechter calls one of the early issues of the Blätter 'ein[ ] kostbar geschliffene[r] Edelstein: darin sich glühende Farbendämmerungen mystisch brechen'. After quoting the poem 'Ich trat vor dich mit einem segensspruche' he asks: 'wie haben S i e Das nur vollbracht?!'[108] Jewels are mute vessels of colours, and colours are mystical, slippery and vague. The stones themselves have no semantic function; instead, what they perform is meaningfulness itself, the sense that they could or should mean or refer (to what, however, we are not know), without, in fact, having any denotative or connotative value.

> Wie zeug ich dich aber im heiligtume
> – So fragt ich wenn ich es sinnend durchmass
> In kühnen gespinsten der sorge vergass –
> Dunkle grosse schwarze blume?
> (SW II:63)

In one of the most frequently quoted poems of Algabal the emperor himself speaks for the first time; where the previous three poems are poetological in their descriptions of an artificial space under the all-powerful artistic direction of 'der Eine', this, in its direct address of the 'dunkle grosse schwarze blume' places itself much more unambiguously within the literary tradition of the lyric (not least because, as Claude David points out, this is an obvious play on the blue flower of the Romantics).[109] As in 'Ein Angelico', the use of tense controls this self-reflexivity: the question, 'wie zeug ich dich', in the present, imagines a flower not yet begotten—but the parenthesis indicates that this, as

---

[107] Adorno, 'George und Hofmannsthal', p. 230.

[108] Letter of 3.12.1895. Lechter and George, p. 8.

[109] David, *Stefan George,* p. 79.

the rest of the poem, has already taken place. The answer is not for us to know, but it is for us to know that the speaker knows (if, as it seems it ought, the 'blume' refers at least in some sense to the collection itself). As Gert Mattenklott puts it, '[d]ieses Gedicht ist sein eigenes Sinnbild als eines hermetischen.'[110] Wolfgang Braungart writes of the 'gesteigerte *Bedeutsamkeit* des literarischen Textes' of Symbolism, 'in der sich die dem poetischen Text zugrunde liegende Idee äußern soll, die sich jedoch nicht auf genaue faßbare *Bedeutungen* reduzieren läßt.' 'Diese gesteigerte Bedeutsamkeit' he continues, 'radikalisiert den ästhetischen Text zum faszinierenden Geheimnis.'[111]

Not only do George's materials scramble the process of signification, they obstruct any attempt to retrace the processes by which they have come to be there. Waters finishes his account of 'Die Spange' in pointing to this 'secret history': 'The sight of the strange red-gold blossom gives no hint of the artist's desire to make a plain iron link; and yet, by the poem's own account, without that original "ich wollte" there would have been no "nun aber soll." The "grosse fremde dolde" conceals its secret history even as it conceals its own (vestigial) functionality. But this poem exists to make it clear that to know only the gem-encrusted umbel is not really to know the object at all.'[112] Whereas the 'or' and the 'fer' of Saint-Amant's 'Sonnet sur la Moisson' are unembarrassed by the straightforwardness of their moving parts, George's materials are coyly obfuscating, promising deeper layers of richness that they have no intention of giving up.[113]

It is then one of the great ironies of George's work that his followers held a 'Deutungsmonopol':[114] 'Man darf ohne Übertreibung sagen, daß niemand George so viel geschadet hat wie seine Freunde.'[115] In the fussiness of the commentaries and interpretations, colour suffers—although in this Morwitz's clearly off-topic comments

---

[110] Gert Mattenklott, *Bilderdienst: ästhetische Opposition bei Beardsley und George* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1985), p. 314.

[111] Braungart, *Ästhetischer Katholizismus,* p. 15.

[112] Waters, 'Stefan George's Poetics', p. 27.

[113] Particularly in the fact of his inventing languages can we see, claims Brokoff, 'daß der frühe George den Bedeutungsraum des ins Kunstwerk eingefügten Wortes als eine Sperrzone verstanden wissen will.' Brokoff, 'Macht im Innenraum der Dichtung', p. 416.

[114] Schäfer, *Die Intensität der Form,* p. 9.

[115] Arbogast, p. 3.

about yellow being George's second favourite colour and its significance in Buddhism seem almost preferable to Manfred Durzak's claim that yellow is a symbol for 'cosmic power'.[116] Durzak is right in making clear the mechanism by which white, in being attached to so many objects, 'widerspricht einer [...] gradlinigen Deutung'; it seems however a disappointment that he still gives a suggestion for what white could be a symbol of, if we were to want to conceive of it as such: the pleasure, surely, lies in never knowing.[117] I develop the idea of colour as pleasurable nonsense in my chapters on Kandinsky and Lasker-Schüler; with regard to George, we may think of it as a kind of pleasurable mystery, about which we might follow Wilde's Gilbert:

> ERNEST. If a man's work is easy to understand, an explanation is unnecessary. . . .
>
> GILBERT. And if his work is incomprehensible, an explanation is wicked.
>
> ERNEST. I did not say that.
>
> GILBERT. Ah! but you should have. Nowadays, we have so few mysteries left to us that we cannot afford to part with one of them.[118]

What George's colours offer us is never a straightforward 'mystery' but neither is it a code to which one answer can be given. Instead, we are invited to stay on the surface, in the same way that our reading, physiologically speaking, snags on the sheer look of the letters and gets caught in their shapes as opposed to their sense. George's colours are not, as with Pound and as, to some degree, with Rilke, about 'what everyone KNOWS'; by playing a part in the maximally 'niche' aesthetics of collecting (whether objects or archaic words) they become part of a world that nobody knows: and that is their appeal. The entirely solipsistic work of art has more to offer than that which offers partial access (Algabal's stones are more pleasurable than Des Esseintes' for having value independent of the world at large); the frustrations of the surface are also its pleasures. '[Vers] kann zu gleicher zeit unsern geist unsern verstand unsern körper besitzen'[119]—and it is this last that, in the end, characterises George's colours, for all that we cannot touch them, unlike the 'graues weiches Papier, das sich wie Sammet anfühlt' of the

---

[116] Morwitz, p. 46; Durzak, *Der junge Stefan George*, p. 218.

[117] Durzak, *Der junge Stefan George*, p. 222.

[118] Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 128.

[119] 'Vers als Kunstmittel' p. 7.

books themselves.[120] 'So also sollte das Gedicht Georges sein:' Oelmann writes, 'Ein plastisch räumliches Gebilde; als Körper sollte es auf Körper wirken.'[121] As gestures towards the textures of the necessarily physical objects that they are, these colours nonetheless evade our fingers; in insisting, like jewels or like George's words, on their surface qualities they seem all the harder to reach and read. Rather, they are like the materials that form the edges of Algabal's rooms: impenetrable and brilliant.

[120] Schur, p. 231.

[121] Oelmann, *'Das doch nicht äusserliche'*, p. 10.

2. Rilke and balance

He was describing, as all young poets are for ever describing, nature, and in order to match the shade of green precisely he looked (and here he showed more audacity than most) at the thing itself, which happened to be a laurel bush growing beneath the window. After that, of course, he could write no more. Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another. Nature and letters seem to have a natural antipathy; bring them together and they tear each other to pieces.[1]

All great writers are great colourists[2]

Il semble que cette couleur, qu'on me pardonne ces subterfuges de langage pour exprimer des idées fort délicates, pense par elle-même, indépendamment des objets qu'elle habille.[3]

If George's colour use was primarily about making, Rilke's is about looking—looking 'at the thing itself'—and saying what is there: 'Farben sehen und Farben sagen können' is his project in the first decade of the twentieth century.[4] Failure, while not as hyperbolically inevitable as Virginia Woolf would have it, haunts the poet, and particularly his alter ego Malte Laurids Brigge, who, in Rilke's only novel, famously writes that he is 'learning'—somewhat more patiently than Woolf's epicene hero—'to see'.[5] Like Woolf—'Cézanne and Picasso had shown the way'[6]—Rilke looked to the visual arts to find new ways of writing, and in the first decade of the twentieth century,

---

[1] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 13.

[2] Virginia Woolf, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1934), p. 23.

[3] Charles Baudelaire, 'Exposition Universelle 1855', in *Œuvres complètes*, II, 575–97 (p. 595).

[4] *Worspwede* KA IV:305-400 (p. 307).

[5] *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, in KA III:435-665 (p. 456).

[6] Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1940), p. 172.

that is, the period in which he was writing *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, as well as the poetry and prose on which this chapter is based, the articulation of this relationship came to a high point of clarity and fertility. Importantly, this was a relationship that took place on home ground: unlike Lasker-Schüler (and of course Kandinsky) Rilke did not draw, or paint, nor did he collaborate on book design as did George. Instead, he wrote, whether the long, self-conscious letters to Lou Salomé about Rodin or Clara Westhoff about Cézanne, the monographs on the Worpswede artists and on Rodin, the passages in *Malte*, or, of course, the poems of the *Buch der Bilder* and the *Neue Gedichte* and the requiem for Paula Becker. '[W]o,' he asks Lou Salomé in 1903, 'ist das Handwerk meiner Kunst?'[7] 'Irgendwie muß auch ich dazu kommen, Dinge zu machen; nicht plastische, geschriebene Dinge.'[8] When writing about colour, then, Rilke's words have work to do on both sides: both in describing the thing looked at (Orlando's 'Nature') and constituting the thing that is being made ('literature'). By being both 'one thing' and the other, colour allows Rilke to develop a new poetics; colour allows itself to be used as a way in to talking about the autonomy of forms, and therefore about form, or formalism per se.

'Ich fange an, Neues zu sehen', Rilke wrote to Salomé.[9] In so doing he both described and instantiated this new mode, in which the seen thing and the manner in which it is seen are elided in the abstract noun 'Neues': what is seen is made by how it is seen. And the very fact of turning a way, via grammar, into a thing, makes a 'thing' of the poet's material, not in the much more physical sense that George does (nor, as we will later see, on the physiological-spiritual model of Kandinsky); in this phrase, as in much of Rilke's work of the period, 'words' have the 'poetic tangibility of solid objects', are 'thick with [their] own shape'. This is Angela Leighton on Woolf; and she goes on: 'this intensity of language is often achieved through repetition. Certain words are reiterated, so that a rhythm or pulse starts up which interferes with the impulse of the narrative. It

[7] 8.8.1903. For ease of reference, I will use dates as opposed to page numbers for letters; the editions consulted can be found in the bibliography. The exception to this is the letters to Clara Westhoff published as *Briefe über Cézanne* which will be dated and given a page reference from the *Kommentierte Ausgabe*.

[8] 10.8.1903.

[9] 8.8.1903.

is in moments like these that she turns the primary, forward drive of the story into something else: elegiac recollection.'[10] Rilke's work of the 1900s comes across, often, as an elegy to its own possibility, both the thing and an acknowledgement that, through being realised, it is on its way to being lost. (As Tony Phelan writes of 'Der Panther', the poem 'seem[s] to suggest that the forms which make poetry possible—language and repetition—also and simultaneously keep us away from the full blaze of reality, whether of god or the world.')[11] But it is elsewhere through repetition—of words, of sounds, and particularly, of words describing colours–that what is written is allowed to become part of this reality. Colour words oscillate between visual and verbal, between thing and description and so allow Rilke to tread the line between the sterility of aestheticism or calculated formalism—pure, gratuitous form—and the instrumentalisation of form in the service of story-telling; they allow, that is, for the sense of balance, the idea of 'Gleichgewicht' which is all-important to Rilke at this point.

⋆

> Ich wollte eigentlich noch von Cézanne sagen: dass es niemals noch so aufgezeigt worden ist, wie sehr das Malen unter den Farben vor sich geht, wie man sie ganz allein lassen muss, damit sie sich gegenseitig auseinandersetzen. Ihr Verkehr untereinander: das ist die ganze Malerei. Wer dazwischenspricht, wer anordnet, wer seine menschliche Überlegung, seinen Witz, seine Anwaltschaft, seine geistige Gelenkigkeit irgend mit agieren läßt, der stört und trübt schon ihre Handlung. (27.10.1907 KA IV:627)

> *Es ist, als wüßte jede Stelle von allen*. So sehr nimmt sie teil; so sehr geht auf ihr Anpassung und Ablehnung vor sich; so sehr sorgt jede in ihrer Weise für das Gleichgewicht und stellt es her: wie das ganze Bild schließlich die Wirklichkeit im Gleichgewicht hält. (22.10.1907 KA IV:630)

Balance is to be held between the object and the mode of its depiction; between the figure and ground, the vehicle and the tenor; between elements within the same work; between work and human experience, whether that of its maker or of the viewer or reader. Rather, then, than repeat the work of Judith Ryan and others by tracing the

---

[10] Leighton, *On Form*, p. 125.

[11] Tony Phelan, *Rilke: Neue Gedichte* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1992), p. 47.

development of Rilke's work across this decade, this project of learning to see, I will draw on poems, letters, prose-poems and –sketches and criticism from this period to show how the idea of balance is central to the use of colour, and vice versa.[12] Beginning with the ideological balance of 'einfaches Schauen' in which the gaze is as 'unparteiisch', as uninfluenced by human knowledge and needs as possible, I think about the implications and prerequisites of objectivity when it comes to colour.[13] In the letters on Cézanne Rilke is particularly interested in his unliterariness, the way that his painting strips colour of 'Nebenbedeutung', that through the lack of 'Auslegung, das Urteil, die Überlegenheit' in his work, of 'wählerischen Verwöhntheiten', a 'neue Existenz' of colour is created. How this way of seeing abstractly, of formal reduction can be balanced by the desire to retain subject matter and representationalism will be explored in the second section, which looks, too, at style; where Cézanne's reluctance to write and the 'Knoten' of his style, in which the sentences 'verwickeln sich, sträuben sich',[14] are a mark of the clarity of his vision, Rilke's own consciousness and manipulation of style, and his tendency towards certain features, of euphony, repetition, syntactical idiosyncrasies can seem contradictory, perhaps even unbalanced. It is colour that manages this equilibrium, being at once literary and painterly, form and content. A further sort of balance, particularly at issue in poetry but also more literally in painting, is to be maintained between figure and ground. The democratic refusal to prioritise one over the other, for example in his description of the portrait of Mme Cézanne, has been seen as a mark of objectivity.[15] This interest in the relationship between 'subject', 'form' and 'background', however, dates back to the late 1890s and encounters with Nietzsche and Maeterlinck, and is tied up with the idea of pretext: of using a particular object or setting as the background of or excuse for a poem, a formed thing, that is '*actually* about' something else (for instance, emotional states).[16] In the following decade, however, this

---

[12] Judith Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung: poetische Struktur und Dichtungstheorie in R. M. Rilkes Lyrik der mittleren Periode (1907-1914)* (Munich: Winkler, 1972); Judith Ryan, *Rilke, Modernism and the Poetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[13] The phrase 'einfaches Schauen' is used of both Cézanne and Rodin: 12.10.1907 KA IV:614 and KA IV:430. The word 'unparteiisch' is used several times in the letters, for instance 29.10.1907 KA IV:627.

[14] 21.10.1907 KA IV:628.

[15] A particularly astute point made by Helen Bridge in 'Rilke and the Modern Portrait', *The Modern Language Review*, 99.3 (2004), 681–695 (p. 686).

[16] KA IV:5.

develops into a more critical position, in Rilke's writing on art and in his poetic practice. Not only are the *Neue Gedichte* famous for their unwillingness to sacrifice the objects or situations that are their subject matter as 'vehicles' for the sake of a higher, conceptual or affective 'tenor', the literal backgrounds of many of the poems are often dynamic, an updated dionysianism for a poetics of 'Gleichgewicht' and 'Sachlichkeit'. And this 'innere Gleichgewicht', the balance of forms within the work, is where colour comes into its own: 'es ist die Farbe, die die Malerei ausmacht'[17]—and not only in painting, but also in Rilke's poems and prose-poems, bringing along with it a subtle discussion both of what 'form' might be in the context of these visually informed works of literary art and of the role of the reader's imagination when faced with a seemingly autonomous work. I turn, finally, to the balance between the work and the beholder. In the sort of art that Rilke most praises the latter seems to be explicitly shut out of the workings of the former: 'Wer dazwischenspricht,' he wrote of Cézanne's colour, quoted above, 'wer anordnet, wer seine menschliche Überlegung, seinen Witz, seine Anwaltschaft, seine geistige Gelenkigkeit irgend mit agieren läßt, der stört und trübt schon ihre Handlung'. How then do we understand the position of the human, their knowledge, feelings, their muddled and subjective way of looking, who has been waiting not always patiently in the wings? While the idea that colour can move, paint, overhear may be 'selbstverständlich [...] metaphorisch'[18] there is an argument to be made for form 'knowing' (or even 'teaching', 'conveying') itself, having an epistemic richness and autonomy rather than being a repository of knowledge. Rilke's project of seeing and saying colour came to a new turning point, and in the poems of his 'late' period, described, in a famous poem of 1914 as 'Herz-Werk', colour never has the same agency or syntactical autonomy.[19]

It might seem then that the attitude to colour, in paint or words, up until this point is cold, objective, disengaged. Yet the idea that objected, abstracted seeing is entirely

---

[17] 24.10.1907 KA IV:633; 8.10.1907 KA IV:606.

[18] Herman Meyer, 'Rilkes Cézanne-Erlebnis', in *Zarte Empirie: Studien zur Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1963), pp. 244–86 (p. 262).

[19] In, for instance, the Fifth Elegy the tawdry artificial colours of Madame Lamort's hats suggest inauthenticity, an attention to surface over depth: 'La couleur n'est pas un attribut accidentel de la substance que serait la «figure», elle est la substance même: c'est la forme qui est accidentelle.' Karine Winkelvoss, *Rilke, la pensée des yeux* (Asnières: PIA, Institut d'allemand d'Asnières, 2004), p. 238.

without emotional content or contamination is not, in fact, true, and Rilke suggests that the very act of painting, of manipulating colour is love itself, in which the objectivity of the look only serves to sharpen the focus on the love injected into the created forms. '[Cézanne] wußte seine Liebe zu jedem Apfel zu verbeißen und in dem gemalten Apfel unterzubringen für immer.'[20] The formulation is a little syrupy, but Rilke's conclusion in the *Worpswede* monograph, I think, stands: 'Das ist alle Kunst: Liebe, die sich über Rätsel ergossen hat,—und das sind alle Kunstwerke: Rätsel, umgeben, geschmückt, überschüttet von Liebe.' (KA IV:325)

I: LOOKING AT THE THING ITSELF

> Ich bat Mathilde Vollmoeller neulich, einmal mit mir durch den Salon zu gehen, um meinen Eindruck neben einem zu sehen, den ich für ruhig und nicht literarisch abgelenkt halte. Gestern waren wir zusammen da. [...] Denk dir aber mein Erstaunen, als Fräulein V., ganz malerisch geschult und schauend, sagte: »Wie ein Hund hat er davorgesessen und einfach geschaut, ohne alle Nervosität und Nebenabsicht.« (12.10.1907 KA IV:614)

The idea of 'looking at the thing itself', or, as Herbert Read writes of Cézanne, 'seeing the world *as an object*, without any intervention either of the tidy mind or the untidy emotions' lies at the centre of Rilke's Cézanne letters.[21] This objectivity answers to different names: 'sachliches Sagen' (19.10), 'Sachlichkeit' (18.10), which reappears as 'harte Sachlichkeit' (letter to Jakob von Uexküll, 19.8.1909); 'Unbestechlichkeit' (23.10), or else 'unparteiisch [sein]' (29.10 and *passim*). What Rilke wished for was to be cleansed of literary ways of seeing, to see instead like a painter (for instance) and he looked to visual artists as guides: artists such as Cézanne, and Rodin (whom he came to see as more invested in the literary than he had previously imagined) and Van Gogh (who again, next to Cézanne, came to seem far too articulate and stylistically adept),[22] but then also his friends and peers, such as the painter Mathilde Vollmoeller, who becomes his literal guide in the above passage. He imagines the reactions of a painterly

---

[20] 13.10.1907 KA IV:617.

[21] Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959), p. 13.

[22] 'Dass man Van Goghs Briefe so gut lesen kann, dass sie so viel enthalten, spricht im Grunde gegen ihn', 21.10.1907 KA IV:627.

eye, laying bare his sense of inadequacy: when describing the Van Gogh reproductions he looked over with Vollmoeller, he writes to Westhoff, 'Wieviel würdest Du in ihr sehen, was ich noch nicht sehen kann. Du hättest wahrscheinlich gar nicht die kleine biographische Notiz von höchstens zehn Zeilen gelesen, die in dem Inhaltsverzeichnis voransteht, Dich auf Dein Schauen einfach verlassend' (3.10.1907 KA IV:601). The letters show Rilke striving to overcome his literariness: they start with him reading stories into Cézanne's objects, embedding them in a social world ('von welcher Dürftigkeit sind auch bei ihm alle Gegenstände: die Äpfel sind alle Kochäpfel und die Weinflaschen gehören in rund ausgeweitete alte Rocktaschen' (7.10.1907 KA IV:606)) and end with an exaggerated formalism ('Dass [das] Rot [von den Äpfeln] in das Blau hineinrollt erscheint als eine Aktion, die so sehr aus den farbigen Vorgängen des Bildes zu stammen scheint' (4.11.1907 KA IV:636)). The incorruptible eye is to see and says what is there, not how it could be used to furnish a story—just as Cézanne paints apples as something inconsumable, inexhaustibly present: 'Bei Cézanne hört ihre Eßbarkeit überhaupt auf, so sehr dinghaft wirklich werden sie, so einfach unvertilgbar in ihrer eigensinnigen Vorhandenheit.' (8.10.1907 KA IV:608).

What does this 'Schauen' or 'Anschauen'—'eine so wunderbare Sache, von der wir noch so wenig wissen'[23]—look like in practice?[24] This is Cézanne showing Joachim Gasquet how to look at Veronese's *The Wedding at Cana*:

> Mais voilà de la peinture, voilà de la peinture! Le morceau, l'ensemble, les volumes, les valeurs, la composition, le frisson, tout y est... Écoutez un peu, c'est épatant !... Qu'est-ce que nous sommes?... Fermez les yeux, attendez, ne pensez plus à rien. Ouvrez-les... N'est-ce pas?... on n'aperçoit qu'une grande ondulation colorée, hein? une irisation, des couleurs, une richesse de couleurs. C'est ça que doit nous donner d'abord le tableau, une chaleur harmonieuse. Un abîme où l'œil s'enfonce, une sourde germination, un état de grâce coloré. Tous ces tons vous coulent dans le sang, n'est-ce pas? On se sent ravigoté. On est au monde vrai, on devient soi-même, on devient de la peinture... Pour aimer un tableau il faut d'abord l'avoir bu, ainsi, à longs traits. Perdre conscience. Descendre avec le peintre aux racines sombres enchevêtrées des choses. En remonter avec les couleurs, s'épanouir à la lumière, avec elle. Savoir voir. Sentir...[25]

---

[23] Letter to Westhoff, 8.3.1907

[24] Käte Hamburger gives a useful summary of Rilke's use of the word 'schauen' in the early and middle work as a preliminary to her argument making the case for Rilke's parallels to Husserl. Käte Hamburger, 'Die phänomenologische Struktur der Dichtung Rilkes', in *Philosophie der Dichter: Novalis, Schiller, Rilke* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966), pp. 179–276 (pp. 181–85).

[25] Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne* (Paris: Bernheim-jeune, 1921), pp. 165–66.

Seeing objectively, in this account and increasingly in Rilke's letters, would involve seeing nothing but colour, 'une grande ondulation colorée', 'une richesse de couleurs'. Appreciation of the 'tableau' begins with this structural beauty, the 'chaleur harmonieuse' of colours and their interactions. These are colours abstracted, not in order to analyse, but as a direct object of a consciousnessless, unthinking sensing.[26] It is thus not just the literary that the viewer needs to be stripped of; human thought itself is suspect and to be abandoned. Hence Vollmoeller's comparison of Cézanne to a dog: things are to be seen, not analysed, nor interpreted; this is 'ein "bildloses" Wahrnehmen' in which 'der Hund [ist] dem Chaos seiner ungefilterten Wahrnehmungen ausgesetzt.'[27] This animal way of interacting with the world is seen also in *Worpswede*, in which Heinrich Vogeler's form-perception and ability to explore the natural world made him almost more beetle than human, experiencing forms in a depth beyond superficial seeing and hearing tell:

> Ein unermüdliches Erforschen der Formen geht nebenher, das ihn immer fähiger macht, Alles, bis in die Nuancen genau *so* zu sagen, wie er es erlebt. (KA IV:390)
>
> Er weiß in das Leben der kleinsten Blumen hineinzublicken; er kennt sie nicht von Sehen und vom Hörensagen. Er ist in ihr Vertrauen eingedrungen und wie der Käfer kennt er des Kelches Tiefe und Grund. (KA IV:392)

This allows him to paint colours not as inessential but the very substance of the surface itself, from which the static surface becomes event:

> Die Bilder, die nun folgen, sind Versuche, bewegte und lebendige Farben zu malen, Farben, die nichtmehr wie ein Überzug über den Dingen liegen, sondern sich wie fortwährende Ereignisse auf ihrer Oberfläche abspielen. (KA IV:397)

---

[26] Rilke would have read the famous letter to Emile Bernard in which Cézanne sets out a proto-cubist analytical approach: 'Traitez la nature par le cylindre, la sphère, le cône, le tout mis en perspective, soit que chaque côté d'un objet, d'un plan, se dirige vers un point central. Les lignes parallèles à l'horizon donnent l'étendue… les lignes perpendiculaires à cet horizon donnent la profondeur.' *Paul Cézanne, Correspondance*, ed. by John Rewald (Paris: Grasset, 1937), p. 259. This aspect of Cézanne's seeing is not, however, commented on, nor his interest in polyperspectivity. 'Man könnte kurz sagen:'—'kurz', but with some degree of irony—'Rilke sieht nur, was er braucht.' Meyer, 'Rilkes Cézanne-Erlebnis', p. 255.

[27] Annette Gerok-Reiter, 'Perspektivität bei Rilke und Cézanne: zur Raumerfahrung des späten Rilke', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte,* 67 (1993), 484–520 (p. 499). Rilke also uses the image of the dog—both before and after Vollmoeller—for instance, 'Und [Cézanne] sitzt im Garten wie ein alter Hund, der Hund dieser Arbeit, die ihn wieder ruft und ihn schlägt' (9.10.1907 KA IV:611); not only does the dog's way of seeing fit with Rilke's new way of seeing, it importantly links this way of seeing to the daily sacrifices of the artist, making of a work ethic a more existentially thoroughgoing affair, as Martina Kurz observes: 'Dieser Hund opfert die eigene Wirklichkeit, die eigene Existenz, dem Bild auf, und hier darf man wohl übersetzen: dem Kunstwerk.' Martina Kurz, *Bild-Verdichtungen: Cézannes Realisation als poetisches Prinzip bei Rilke und Handke* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), p. 285.

The insistence on non-human, especially dog-like seeing seems problematic: for one, if anything, animals are surely more likely to interpret, to instrumentalise—not, admittedly, for narrative gain, but certainly via the hermeneutic of edibility. If the colours of forms have salience it is surely because they are up for being consumed or played with. And secondly, colour-sight is importantly species-dependent, and our way of seeing colour—regardless of where one stands on the question of the extent to which colour-language affects it—and our prioritising colour must then count as one of the more particularly human activities. Colour in Cézanne, then, if it adheres to the kind of objectivity that Rilke claims for it, is not only non-human, it is 'machinelike', as T. J. Clark suggests: 'at an infinite remove from appetite, foodstuff, or flesh'.[28] Thus one of the paradoxes of colour which have made it so enticing for writers is underlined: colour is, as for Cézanne, something untainted by thought and language, a state of grace; yet these qualities disappear as soon as they are put into words. This irony is visible, too, in Rilke's description of Cézanne's blue, which both insists on its genealogy while suggesting that Cézanne has finally allowed it to be stripped of connotation (which surely would include this, its history):

> Und bei dem Blau fiel mir auf, daß es jenes bestimmte Blau des 18. Jahrhunderts ist [...] (Es ließe sich denken, daß jemand eine Monographie des Blaus schriebe, von dem dichten wachsigen Blau der pompejanischen Wandbilder bis zu Chardin und weiter bis zu Cézanne **:** welche Lebensgeschichte!) Denn Cézannes sehr eigenes Blau hat diese Abstammung, kommt von dem Blau des 18. Jahrhunderts her, das Chardin seiner Prätention entkleidet hat und das nun bei Cézanne keine Nebenbedeutung mehr mitbringt.

What Cézanne does with blue, Rilke claims, has to be seen against the very background it is no longer drawing on, its non-literariness only making sense when we see what it could otherwise be.

We might consider colour, for a moment, in contradistinction to form, although advisedly, remembering Adrian Stokes' contention with Roger Fry, who had said that Cézanne's 'colour is the one quality which remains supremely great under all conditions': 'As if great colour—not pleasant or lovely but great colour—could be

---

[28] T. J. Clark, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne', in *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory,* ed. by Tom Cohen and others (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 93–113 (pp. 98, 96).

isolated from the conception of form, from the relationship of forms! If the colour were supremely great then the forms were supremely great.'[29] What makes colour so interesting for Rilke is that it is, on its own, meaningless; it can be looked at as objectively, as non-instrumentalising a way as possible and still not lose a connection to representation. When shape is detached from object, on the other hand, as in Cubist painting, the balance is lost. In Cézanne, however, the 'machinelike' inhumanity comes full circle; this is a formalism that avoids the cold calculation that later painters were accused of and offers affect under the counter: [30]

> Man merkt auch, von Mal zu Mal besser, wie notwendig es war, auch noch über die Liebe hinauszukommen; es ist ja natürlich, dass man jedes dieser Dinge lieb, wenn man es macht; zeigt man das aber, so macht man es weniger gut; man beurteilt es, statt es zu sagen. Man hört auf, unparteiisch zu sein; und das Beste, die Liebe, bleibt außerhalb der Arbeit, geht nicht in sie ein, restiert unumgesetzt neben ihr: so entstand die Stimmungsmalerei (die um nichts besser ist als die stoffliche). Man malte: ich liebe dieses hier; statt zu malen: hier ist es. Wobei denn jeder selbst gut zusehen muss, ob ich es geliebt habe. Dieses Aufbrauchen der Liebe in anonymer Arbeit, woraus so reine Dinge entstehen, ist vielleicht noch keinem so völlig gelungen wie dem Alten (13.10.1907 KA IV:616)

It is precisely through the love of the painter for the thing that objectivity comes about: love is poured into the work and consumed by it (in the same way—and using the same word, 'aufbrauchen'—as we will see that colour is used up in depiction), love is in fact the precursor or even prerequisite for the work. The seeming 'indifference', 'Gleichgültigkeit',[31] of Cézanne's work is the very opposite of the aestheticist autonomous art-object which cloaks arbitrariness in form.

Before discussing this arbitrariness, the use, that is, of the object as a pretext for style or technique, let us see how these ideas play out in the poetry written at this point of crystallisation in Rilke's project of objectivity. The poem 'Die Flamingos' was written

---

[29] Adrian Stokes, *Colour and Form* (London: Faber, 1937), p. 80. This incidentally chimes with Chirimuuta's argument in *Outside Colour* in which colour and shape are unhelpfully distinguished: 'color vision is a way of seeing things—flowers, tables, ladybirds—not, in the first instance, a way of seeing [...] colors.' Chirimuuta, p. 69.

[30] For instance, Maurice Denis of Matisse: 'You should resign yourself to the fact that everything cannot be intelligible. Give up the idea of rebuilding a new art by means of reason alone. Put your trust in sensibility, in instinct.' Quoted in T. J. Clark, 'Madame Matisse's Hat', *London Review of Books*, 14 August 2008, pp. 29–32.

[31] Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (Stuttgart: Hoffmann, 1904), I, p. 121. Rilke had read Meier-Graefe's book with enthusiasm, and in fact bumped into him at the Cézanne exhibition (7.10.1907 KA IV:606).

around the time of Rilke's visits to the Salon d'automne and while discussing the expressibility of the visual (and *a fortiori* of colour) in poetry it ironises the sterility of autonomy in art.

Die Flamingos
Jardin des Plantes, Paris

In Spiegelbildern wie von Fragonard
ist doch von ihrem Weiß und ihrer Röte
nicht mehr gegeben, als dir einer böte,
wenn er von seiner Freundin sagt: sie war

noch sanft von Schlaf. Denn steigen sie ins Grüne
und stehn, auf rosa Stielen leicht gedreht,
beisammen, blühend, wie in einem Beet,
verführen sie verführender als Phryne

sich selber; bis sie ihres Auges Bleiche
hinhalsend bergen in der eignen Weiche,
in welcher Schwarz und Fruchtrot sich versteckt.

Auf einmal kreischt ein Neid durch die Volière;
sie aber haben sich erstaunt gestreckt
und schreiten einzeln ins Imaginäre.
(KA I:575)

The poem, from the second part of the *Neue Gedichte*,[32] is an experiment in what poetry can do, which it explores by presenting what it seems (a certain sort of) painting *can't* do, that is, depict colours in their specificity. In their abstraction and substantivisation it is also implied that they are, too, out of the reach of poetry; in the battle between the sister arts both sides find themselves defeated in the face of colour.[33] And yet, for all that the flamingos' colours are not only inexpressible, but also elusive, there is little more to them than their colour. They are formed of allusions which seem to lead nowhere, the

[32] I will follow the standard practice of using the title *Neue Gedichte* and the phrase 'the collection' to refer to both the *Neue Gedichte* (1907) and *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil* (1908) unless otherwise specified.

[33] This battle is alluded to in the mention of Phryne, who was a fourth century *hetæra* who was apocryphally pardoned from a charge of 'impiety' when her robe was opened, showing the beauty of her naked body, and thus she became popular as a figure illustrating the primacy of visual over verbal art. Ryan, *Rilke, Modernism and the Poetic Tradition*, pp. 73–80; 'More Seductive Than Phryne: Baudelaire, Gérôme, Rilke, and the Problem of Autonomous Art', *PMLA,* 108.5 (1993), 1128–1141. This 'battle' is seen by Jacques Le Rider as motivating much of Rilke's (and indeed also George's) colour use. Le Rider, 'Rilke et Cézanne', p. 110.

five colour(-related)-nouns, the pink stem-like legs and the doubled movement of steigen/schreiten, and the flamingos, and the poem, are what happens in between.

Elusiveness is, here, structure and syntax: what it is that the generic poet-proxy of 'einer' cannot describe to us—the (colour of the) just-woken girlfriend—is shunted into the second quatrain, for instance, and it is not until the third line that we find out that the flamingos' colours are *not* to be found in the 'Spiegelbildern wie von Fragonard'. (That 'wie', which in other poems in the collection would act something like a fulcrum, is here a further degree of separation or mediation—as indeed is the idea of the '**Spiegel**bild', and the use of the subjunctive 'böte').

Colours collude with the narcissism of the flamingos to exclude the onlooker: this is the self-sufficient world of the Rodin sculpture or the Cézanne painting taken to its extreme. That is, in the paintings of Cézanne, each point, each 'tache' is aware of all the others: '*Es ist, als wüßte jede Stelle von allen*' (22.10.1907, KA IV:630); and in the group sculptures of Rodin, the figures touch, listen to, look at each other, while never meeting the onlooker's gaze.[34] In 'Die Flamingos', the birds, rather than aiming their beauty at the onlooker, or letting the onlooker partake in it, seduce themselves. The repetition of 'verführen' and the enjambement of 'sich selber' into the first tercet make this excess clear. The flamingos are close to parody. (For Judith Ryan, the poem is specifically a repudiation of the aestheticist ideal of the autonomous, self-enclosed artwork.)[35] The difference between the sort of art that is praised in the writings on Cézanne and Rodin, with their 'Ganz-mit-sich-Beschäftigtsein',[36] and the sort of art that the flamingos seem to represent centres on colour, and specifically its deliberate evasion. The allusion to Fragonard's colour scheme is undercut ('nicht mehr gegeben'); the birds hide the 'Bleiche' of their eyes (line 9) in the plumage in which black and red are already hidden (line 10). With Cézanne's paintings in Rilke's account, we may not

---

[34] 'Für Plastik ist noch ein Umstand ungemein wichtig: dass das Kunstwerk in sich zu Ende geht. Ein 'Aus-dem-Bild-Herausschauen' ist insofern nie der Fall [...] die Plastik, die mit dem Beschauer dieselbe Atmosphäre teilt, muß das 'Wegschauen' besser können. Daß heißt: Sie muß mit sich ganz beschäftigt sein.' (KA IV:488-9).

[35] Ryan, *Rilke, Modernism and the Poetic Tradition,* pp. 75–76.

[36] KA IV: 418.

understand the workings of colours, and in fact the very attempt to understand renders them inaccessible, but we are nonetheless granted a conditional audience; in 'Die Flamingos', however, the colours deliberately throw the observer off their tracks. This play seems to mimic the trouble that colour language poses: the colour words in the poem are not hidden from the reader, but dangled like grapes which are then whisked away (the two pairs of colours are both *followed* by the verbs which show them to be less visible than we might have expected). We are seduced into believing something there that isn't, a tactic which is mirrored in the allusions that seem to lead nowhere (we might wonder what Fragonard brings to the poem—a colour scheme, a sense of frilly, seductive excess, perhaps; but also another word beginning with 'Fr-', a preposterous word to be slyly rhymed with 'war') and the way that the flamingos repeatedly step away from the onlooker, itself an emptying out of the emphasis on 'becoming' that the *Neue Gedichte*, and indeed the writing on Cézanne, have as a motivating force.[37]

There is something banal about the comparison of birds to flowers, and almost myopic. What this comparison—between natural things that have been denaturalised—seems to be claiming is that the flamingos and the flowers are just pretexts for beautiful, exotic, sensual forms and colours, a claim shored up by the exotic rhymes ('Volière'-'Imaginäre'), and gratuitous allusions, teasing and virtuosic, and the feminine rhymes and subjunctives which exploit grammar in the name of languorousness. This is exactly the sort of reductive claim made of Cézanne's still lifes;[38] yet Cézanne's use of apples—in which they are inedible, not up for being consumed—is to expose this very instrumentalising of life for art. On this use of pretext, the poem is thus in two minds: it is exposed as sterile, an endless circling without ever getting to the core of things. However, the very sorts of communication and transposition that the poem, on a surface level reading, shows as impossible, are successful: the phrase 'sie war/noch sanft

[37] In this I agree with Michael Rogers; see 'From Flamingos to Fragonard: changes in the method and purpose of symbolism', in *Rilke und der Wandel in der Sensibilität,* ed. by Herbert Herzmann and Hugh Ridley (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1990), pp. 61–70 (pp. 68–69). For an account of the importance of 'becoming' to Rilke's early and middle periods, see Ben Hutchinson, *Rilke's Poetics of Becoming* (London: Legenda, 2006).

[38] Discussed by Meyer Schapiro in 'The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life (1968)', in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries (*New York: Braziller, 1978), pp. 1–38 (p. 16).

vom Schlaf' is both precise and evocative, the poem manages to capture the flamingos without once resorting to mere description. Thus, it can maintain, between the poem's 'intellectual' content and a truthful representation of the visual a sense of balance.

II: COLOUR, OBJECT AND MODE OF DEPICTION

Let us revisit what I have called Rilke's 'project', this time in its context:

> Wer auf sich nähme, die Geschichte des Porträts oder des Devotionsbildes aufzuzeichnen, hätte einen weiten Weg; ein gründliches Wissen müßte ihm wie eine wohlgeordnete Handbibliothek erreichbar sein, die Sicherheit und Unbestechlichkeit seines Blickes müßte ebenso groß sein wie das Gedächtnis seines Auges; er müßte Farben sehen und Farben sagen können, er müßte die Sprache eines Dichters und die Geistesgegenwart eines Redners besitzen, um angesichts des weiten Stoffes nicht in Verlegenheit zu geraten, und die Waage seiner Ausdrucksweise müßte auch die feinsten Unterschiede noch mit deutlichem Ausschlagswinkel anmelden. ('Worpswede', KA IV:307)

In this, part of the opening paragraph of the book, Rilke sets out the requirements for the historian of the portrait—but also, in his own 'Ausdrucksweise' and ability to make 'the finest distinctions', demonstrates his own qualification. The conditional formula ('Wer auf sich nähme... müßte ...') with its Rilkean subjunctive, pushes the art critic into the same irreal, parallel space that art objects such as, for instance, the 'Archaïscher Torso Apollos', occupy, a stylistic suggestion that criticism itself might be an art. The repeated 'müßte' seems to imply not only 'would have to' but also 'would have the opportunity to'; especially in this earlier piece of criticism, but also in the letters (letters which were, after all, to his wife, for all that bits and pieces from them were recycled in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*) the style, with such long and carefully weighted sentences, the indulgence in sound patterning, suggests that while writing about painting might look like a challenge, this is one taken up with enthusiasm. The job of doing justice to the object, of balancing depiction with style, counts just as much for prose as it does painting.[39] Neither the object depicted, nor the medium are to be

[39] Richard Pettit sees Rilke's style in his art-critical writing as bearing a 'marked resemblance to that of Meier-Graefe's', whose *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* Rilke had read and recommended to others in 1906: 'Both authors shunned art-historical categories and analytical comparisons in favor of a lively, nonacademic language rich in metaphors and psychological coloring.' This metaphorical use of 'coloring' seems almost a gesture of homage on Pettit's part. Richard Pettit, 'The Poet's Eye for the Arts:

instrumentalised: the subject should not be a pretext for virtuosic handling, but nor should colour, or style, be subservient to representation. This is something he saw in the painting of Paula Becker: 'Denn Das verstandest du: die vollen Früchte. | Die legtest du auf Schalen vor dich hin | und wogst mit Farben ihre Schwere auf.' ('Requiem für eine Freundin', KA I:416), an image he takes from Mathilde Vollmoeller's comment on Cézanne:

> 'Es ist wie auf eine Waage gelegt:' [she said,] 'das Ding hier, und dort die Farbe; nie mehr, nie weniger, als das Gleichgewicht erfordert. Das kann viel oder wenig sein: je nachdem, aber es ist genau was dem Gegenstand entspricht.' (KA:IV 614)

This precarious balance was a 'grundlegendes Bedürfnis' for Rilke and his project of seeing of which the *Neue Gedichte* are the most accomplished exploration and product.[40] This balance is not just found between the autonomy of the medium and the depiction of the 'thing', but also between depiction and discussion, between different models of the poem as analogue to artwork. Thus the same poem can present the autonomous artwork as irretrievably isolated from life while celebrating this autonomy as we saw in 'Die Flamingos'; can present it as timeless while gesturing towards and embodying its decay, as in the cycle 'Die Parke'.

What, then, is the object, 'the thing itself' that is to be looked at—to be, that is, the target of the abstract looking that Rilke was attempting to learn? Rilke—'whom die Dinge bless'[41]—is more associated with 'things' than any other twentieth-century poet, but what, quite, these things are is fluid, and they can be more easily defined as relations as opposed to kinds. For Orlando, as we saw, the thing itself is a laurel bush; for Rilke, too, Nature is a rich provider of things, is, in fact, more a provider of things or occasions than it is itself ever truly the subject of a poem (the flamingos are, in their captivity, only ambivalently 'natural'). Instead, the appeal of certain 'things', certain natural things that is, to Rilke at this point lay precisely in their being 'by nature' abstract: the sky in Scandinavia, the sea around Capri, the foliage of a private park. Seeing and writing

---

Rilke Views the Visual Arts around 1900', in *Imagining Modern German Culture, 1889-1910,* ed. by Françoise Forster-Hahn (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), pp. 251–73 (p. 252).

[40] Gerok-Reiter, 'Perspektivität', p. 486.

[41] W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1991), p. 204.

colour abstractly thus takes place without the loss of the object, the object consisting already in relations of forms.

Abend in Skåne

Der Park ist hoch. Und wie aus einem Haus
tret ich aus seiner Dämmerung heraus
in Ebene und Abend. In den Wind,
denselben Wind, den auch die Wolken fühlen,
die hellen Flüsse und die Flügelmühlen,
die langsam mahlend stehn am Himmelsrand.
Jetzt bin ich auch ein Ding in seiner Hand,
das kleinste unter diesen Himmeln. - Schau:

Ist das Ein Himmel?:
Selig lichtes Blau,
in das sich immer reinere Wolken drängen,
und drunter alle Weiß in Übergängen,
und drüber jenes dünne, große Grau,
warmwallend wie auf roter Untermalung,
und über allem diese stille Strahlung
sinkender Sonne.

Wunderlicher Bau,
in sich bewegt und von sich selbst gehalten,
Gestalten bildend, Riesenflügel, Falten
und Hochgebirge vor den ersten Sternen
und plötzlich, da: ein Tor in solche Fernen,
wie sie vielleicht nur Vögel kennen ...
(KA I:286)

In this poem, written in 1904 in Sweden, the poet has himself become a 'Ding', and through the sense of surrender, the substitution of thing for 'ich', a new way of seeing is opened up. The sky is seen as constituted by colours—and while there are still recognisable things, such as the clouds and the sun, the colours are detached and nominalised, and the 'stille Strahlung' of the sun is placed first. This is a sky seen unfiltered through human linguistic categories, then, and the suggestion that only birds might have previously known of the gate that appears to open makes clear the ways in which whatever is seen in the poem is usually unavailable to the human observer and maker.

Rilke hesitated before including this poem in his *Buch der Bilder*, thinking it 'all too occasional' (the occasion was a great storm and the poem was written as if 'ripped from him').[42] The suggestion is perhaps that this way of seeing is insufficiently repeatable; that is, that the language of the poem is not up to the task of conveying this experience, or rather, of recreating this experience; and the experience becomes the occasion for something else entirely. Here, unlike in 'Die Flamingos' (for example), the poem is not identical with the thing it is; this is a poem written after the fact, at a point when the 'ich' is back in the picture. What has been glimpsed may be a kind of self-contained work or construction, a set of bare, uninterpreted relations, but in the poem these have become clouds and sun, have been given names like 'Riesenflügel', 'Falten', 'Hochgebirge', 'Tor'. In this sense, looking at the thing itself has merely offered a pretext for technique, the central stanza a study in description rather than a fully-fledged example of making.

The example here seems in fact not unlike the description, four years later, of the 'helle[ ] Zusammenhänge' of a Parisian scene:

> Da sind die Tage, wo alles um einen ist, licht, leicht kaum angedeutet in der hellen Luft und doch deutlich; das Nächste schon hat die Töne der Ferne, ist weggenommen und nur *gezeigt*, nicht wie sonst hingestellt, und was Beziehung zur Weite hat: der Fluß, die Brücken, die langen Straßen und die verschwenderischen Plätze, das hat diese Weite zu sich genommen, hält sie an sich, ist auf ihr gemalt, wie auf Seide. [...] Alles ist vereinfacht, auf einige richtige helle Plans gebracht, wie das Gesicht in einem Manetschen Bildnis. Und nichts ist gering oder überflüssig. Die Bouquinisten am Quai tun ihre Kästen auf, und das frische oder welke Gelb der Bücher, das violette Braun der Bände, das Grün einer Mappe: alles stimmt, gilt, nimmt teil und tönt in der Einheit der hellen Zusammenhänge. ('Briefe über Cézanne'12.10.1907 KA IV:613).

These scenes—of Paris, the sky in Skåne—are compared to things painted ('wie auf Seide gemalt', 'Untermalung') and are treated to some degree as if they were paintings, as if these qualities of light and the balance between them form indelible things which were previously chance moments of interaction. In 'Abend in Skåne' the sky's unity and coherence is tied up with the relations of colour which play out across it (is it, in fact, '*Ein* Himmel'?), as, also, is the scene on the banks of the Seine (it is in the colours

[42] 'allzusehr Gelegentliches', letter to Westhoff, 1.2.1906; 'es wurde so aus mir herausgerissen', letter to Salomé, 3.11.1904 (it may be a different poem referred to at this point; see KA I:817).

that form the 'Einheit der hellen Zusammenhänge').[43] Colour both justifies them as proper objects of the poet's attention but also suggests their flimsiness: what could be less consequential than colour without content? The trick of this kind of impressionism is that pure form, abstraction, can be justified by the object, and yet here, where that object is the very balance of form itself, there seems an indulgent circularity that poems like 'Die Flamingos' seem to question. (As Clive Scott puts it, the impressionism of the *Neue Gedichte*, was, for Rilke, 'a means rather than an end, a means of expressing the process of exploration as a process, a means of groping among phenomena for the revealing detail or combination that would call forth the absent subject'.)[44]

Particularly in the descriptions of the sea around Capri, in which the sea's hypnotic pulse is echoed in the rhythms and repetitions of the prose, what could be exercises in virtuosity in colour become, through the use of form, justifiable. Colour words are used to create across time an impression of the spatial arrangement of the waves:

> ⟨III⟩
>
> Das Meer unter nahem grauen Himmel in drei Streifen herbewegt; der fernste schwarz und schwer; der mittlere in beständiger Erhebung, dunkelflaschengrün; der nahe ebene: sich in Schichten übereinanderschiebender kalkweißer Schaum. Wo der zweite Streifen in den nächsten hineinfällt entsteht in jeder Welle ein lichtgrüner unbeschreiblich heller durchscheinender Sturz, durch den man das Innere der Woge sieht, eine Sekunde lang, ehe sie im Schaum ihres eigenen Niederfalls verloren geht. (‚Aufzeichnungen aus Neapel und Capri', KA IV:589)

That there should be a balance between the thing depicted and medium of its depiction, in which the medium is absorbed by the task of depiction ('Die Farbe geht völlig auf in dessen Verwirklichung; es bleibt kein Rest' (614)) presupposes an object, and Rilke's distrust of abstract art has become infamous. On this model, it would seem that balance could not be achieved without some thing to be depicted, and medium deployed without the weight of the task of representation would be excessive, would make a

---

[43] Dominique Iehl sees the poem as an example of Impressionism 'im besten Sinne des Wortes', the interplay of colours bringing about form and space, as in the work of Cézanne, making the poem an illustration of what lies between Impressionism and Cubism: 'Die Farbe ist hier [...] im Cézanneschen Sinne schon raumbildend. Wesentlich sind die Beziehungen zwischen Farbe und Raum und das Gleichgewicht zwischen Raum und Bewegung, Fläche und Tiefe.' Dominique Iehl, 'Rilke und die französische Malerei nach Cézanne', *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft,* 19 (1992), 119–29 (p. 123).

[44] Scott, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism', p. 225.

work that was not whole. In a later letter to Merline (Baladine Klossowska), in response to her bafflement at Klee ('Pourquoi encore peindre? Pourquoi ne pas faire des étoffes, des tapis[?]'), Rilke explains why he thought the 'loss of the object', 'das Ausfallen des Gegenstandes', an appropriate response to the First World War, or for those, for instance, living in cities: it corresponded with the experience of fractured living undergone there ('zerbrochene Menschen finden sich dann bestenfalls durch Stücke und Scherben bedeutet' (28.3.1921)). The thing that is to find itself in balance with the mode of its depiction, that is, a sense of fragmentation, blocks the very mechanisms of depiction. Balance is then found by analogy: imbalance meets imbalance, and becomes beauty.

Artworks themselves are found among Rilke's things of this period, whether sculptures or paintings, and it is in talking about Rodin that Rilke most markedly uses the word 'Ding', or rather, 'Kunst-Ding'[45]. This is—particularly in the context of sculpture—a very distinct sort of 'thing', distinct from non-art objects as a class with which it nonetheless shares the property of three-dimensionality, but also from the 'Modell', the thing depicted. This idea of artwork as 'thing' spills over into the poems, and flows, then, backwards, in that even the 'natural' things depicted in the *Neue Gedichte*—flowers, animals, greenery—are found in hothouses, zoos and formal gardens, and are closer to human cultural products or works of art—as well as those scenes, as above, which appear as if already painted. It is telling that this way of appearing seems to Rilke like the 'plans' of a face by Manet. Patrick Bridgwater, in discussing Rilke's enthusiasm for Manet, which shortly predated his 'Cézanne-Erlebnis', suggests that, like Manet's painting, 'not a little' of Rilke's work up to 1908 used subject matter as a pretext for technique.[46] That the description of the banks of the Seine is re-used in Malte (KA III:465-6), suggesting that what in the context of a letter—a genre in which occasionality is surely a given—may have been an exercise in 'Farben sehen and Farben

[45] As Judith Ryan points out, the word 'Ding' is used at points to refer to sculptures, as opposed to everyday objects; however, in the often-quoted dictum, 'Das Ding ist bestimmt, das Kunst-Ding muß noch bestimmter sein', the 'Ding' refers back to the 'Gegenstand' or 'Vorbild' and forwards to the 'Modell'. Letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, 8.8.1903; Ryan, *Umschlag und Verwandlung,* p. 19.

[46] Patrick Bridgwater, 'Rilke and the Modern Way of Seeing', in *Rilke und der Wandel in der Sensibilität,* ed. by Herbert Herzmann and Hugh Ridley (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1990), pp. 19–41 (p. 24).

sagen' it becomes, through repurposing, style for style's sake, or rather, colour for colour's sake.

If Rilke's writing at this point seems indebted to Manet in its use of object as pretext, what must be clear, both here and with regard to Cézanne and Rodin, is the ways in which writing and painting diverge, and the ways, therefore, in which colour for colour's sake sake might contribute in writing in particular. All great writers, as Woolf suggests, may be great colourists, but not in the way that a great painter must, and the points in the letters (for instance) in which objects seem excuses for colour descriptions are lush and indulgent, akin to the sound patterning which ornamented, rather than thickened, Rilke's early poems. '[W]as sind [die Granatäpfeln] herrlich in ihrer massiven Schwere, oben noch mit dem umgebogenen Ornament des Blütenstempels; fürstlich in ihrer goldenen Schale, durch die rote Untermalung durchschlägt, stark und echt, wie auf dem Leder alter Korduantapeten. Ich habe noch nicht versucht, sie zu öffnen; sie sind auch wahrscheinlich nicht reif, denn sonst springen sie ja, glaub ich, leicht von sich selbst auf über der eigenen Fülle und haben purpurgefütterte Schlitze, wie Edelleute in großer Tracht.' (1.10.1907 KA IV:599) Where, however, play of sound for its own sake *is* an equivalent to virtuosic handling, descriptions of colour in words seem so empty as to destabilise their own precious beauty: their representational content is itself pure form—and yet the distance between colour word and colour impression is such that the words themselves barely refer, and present a formalism doubly emptied.[47]

On the level of semiotics, then, colour has radically different work to do when it is seen, and thus forms an inseparable part of what is there to the human eye, and when it is said. It would be a mistake to think of Rilke's colour-use as a mimicry of painterly technique or a literary homage, as Peter Por points out: 'in seiner Lyrik ist er nicht einfach malerisch oder durch die bildende Kunst inspiriert, […] sondern, tiefer verbunden, setzt er sich mit den prinzipiellen Gestaltungsproblemen und

[47] This questioning of style, the oscillation between pure style and purely style is, as Ben Hutchinson argues, typical of much of a certain sort of European Modernism. Ben Hutchinson, *Modernism and Style* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 128.

Gestaltungskategorien der im Raum konzipierten Kunst auseinander[.]'[48] In any case, the parallels that have proved most fruitful, such as Iehl's comparison of 'Abend in Skåne' with Cézanne or the many accounts of 'Blaue Hortensie', suggest a tail wagging a dog, in which Rilke seems 'dieser Kunst mehr voranzugehen als nachzufolgen.'[49] Rilke's interest in colour thus predates his engagement with Cézanne, but finds itself confirmed within it. That is not to say that there aren't similarities, and that the way that, over the course of the letters on Cézanne, colours are increasingly spoken of in isolation, and are promoted from adjectives to nouns ('[d]as gute Gewissen dieser Rots, dieser Blaus' (KA IV:616), 'ein horchendes Blau' (KA IV:634)) is of course a response to a self-consciously painterly way of writing. This is the 'ton nouveau de chromatisme poétique'[50] that Jacques Le Rider sees beginning with Stefan George, and in Rilke '[l]e bleu s'impose à l'œil du poète avec une si forte présence qu'il devient d'emblée un substantif, «ein Blau» et bientôt une substance, «das Blau»'.[51] Grammar signals an ontological upgrade—language responds to the world, then goes on to create it. In her essay on colour within the *Briefe* Martina Dobbe sees this as a change from 'Lokalfarben' to 'Farbflecken', but we must be clear that we are still dealing with a case of mention as opposed to use; the proper point of comparison to Cézanne's *taches* is the *word*, as Gerok-Reiter observes: 'Die Verkehr der Sprachelemente untereinander: das ist die ganze Dichtung.'[52] This can be compared to Pater's comments on Michelangelo, in which equivalents of the same structural status (i.e. 'pure form') are found in sculpture to painting: 'Well! that incompleteness is Michelangelo's equivalent for colour in sculpture; it is his way of etherealising pure form, or relieving its hard realism, and communicating to it breath, pulsation, the effect of life.'[53] What Rilke does to

---

[48] Peter Por, 'Rilke—Rodin, Cézanne, Klee: Die Schöpfung des Raumes in der Moderne', in *Proceedings of the XIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. by Roger Bauer and Douwe, Fokkema (Munich: Iudicium, 1990), pp. 50–56 (p. 50).

[49] Iehl, p. 128.

[50] See p. 46.

[51] Le Rider, *Les couleurs et les mots,* p. 257.

[52] Martina Dobbe, '"Wie sollte einer von Farben sprechen können": die Farbe und die Sprache in Rilkes "Briefen über Cézanne"', *Diagonal, Zeitschrift der Universität-Gesamthochschule Siegen*, 2 (1992), 74–84 (p. 79). Annette Gerok-Reiter, *Wink und Wandlung: Komposition und Poetik in Rilkes 'Sonette an Orpheus'* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996), p. 8; 'Perspektivität', p. 485.

[53] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), p. 38. Rilke reviewed the German translation of *The Renaissance* when it came out in 1902; the review is in KA IV:275-77. See Heide Eilert, '"...dass man über die Künste überhaupt fast gar nicht reden soll": zum Kunst-Essay um 1900 und zur Pater-Rezeption bei Hofmannsthal, Rilke und Borchardt', in *Jugendstil und Kulturkritik:*

'etherealise pure form' is to enable a conversation between elements of varying scales: at its simplest, the patterning of vowel sounds, such as Angelika Overath demonstrates in the poem 'Blaue Hortensie',[54] or more complexly the exploitation of verb forms (the most obvious examples being the subjunctive of 'Archaïscher Torso Apollos' or the participles of 'Römische Fontäne') or rhyme (as in 'Die Flamingos'), or homonymy (such as in the phrase 'alles weiß' in 'Rosa Hortensie') in which language is shown to be conscious of itself as material. What is important about the examples of 'Blaue Hortensie' and 'Rosa Hortensie' is that it is colour words that are the agents of the softening of pure representation, colour words which *already* bring with them a questioning of the possibility of cross-medial expression. Colour words add an extra dimension: they stand in for writing itself.[55]

At points in our discussion of the 'things' of the 1900s the idea of the 'thing' is in danger of becoming elided with the 'subject' of the poem—but that surely begs the question; the subject of many of these poems, what they might be said to be 'about', is the very fact of writing (or not) about a 'thing', a point made by Tony Phelan: 'The modest object becomes a measure of what human beings can and cannot achieve, particularly but not exclusively in art.'[56] That is, the subject of the poems is sometimes pretext itself. At the point where the 'theme' or paraphrasable content stops exerting its pressure, as Rilke sees in the work of Maeterlinck, the relationship of work and its 'Inhalt' alters: content becomes resettled in a mysterious force or location that causes its presence to glow throughout:

> Maeterlinck tut hier einen Schritt, der in andern Künsten, zum Beispiel in der Malerei, schon damals geschah, als man sich von dem Joch des Genre- und Historienbildes befreite, als man empfand, daß nicht im Thema des Bildes sein Inhalt liege, sondern in etwas anderm, das an allen Stellen diesen Inhalt durchdringt und durchleuchtet, über sich selbst hinaus erhebt und verklärt. (KA IV:219)

Zur Literatur und Kunst um 1900, ed. by Andreas Beyer and Dieter Burdorf (Heidelberg: Winter, 1999), pp. 51–72; Eudo C. Mason, *Rilke, Europe, and the English-Speaking World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 75–77.

[54] Overath, pp. 104–5.

[55] The equivalent in Cézanne is dimension—something which, as I have mentioned, Rilke pays less attention to at this point. This takes the form of 'imaginäre Raum', which Annette Gerok-Reiter discusses, an imaginary dimension that is, itself, perception: 'Perspektivität', pp. 502–4.

[56] Phelan, p. 78.

If what could truly be called the topic of a poem, the thing it is about, is now elusive, hiding out in this 'something else', perhaps 'thingness' lies elsewhere. 'What poems are about, extracted in cold blood, is mostly silly,' Angela Leighton writes in her essay on paraphrase. 'It can be rendered "in other words," but those easily deflate into bathos or trivia. And this is because a poem, even more than prose, makes special calls on its precise wording. Moreover, that wording has the look and sound of a thing—both a thing on the page, with a definite shape, and a thing in the ear, with a definite sound.'[57] The 'new' poems themselves, as many have pointed out, are very 'thing'-like, far more than the work which preceded and surrounded them. As part of this they insist on being 'looked at' over and above being heard (particularly—or perhaps most slyly—when it comes to colour, for instance, as we will see in the visual patterning of 'Blaue Hortensie'); the way of interacting with the poem is built in, they are 'as much experiences of kinetic motion, or rides, as they are things in a static sense'.[58] Leighton goes about reclaiming aboutness as process rather than proposition, in which reading is an 'inconclusive act of discovery'.[59] If Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* have a 'thing' that is their subject, a thing that they are about, it is most likely to be themselves. 'Looking at the thing itself' would then be recursive, or circular; but virtuously so: the mise-en-abîme of 'aboutness' enriches the poem rather than allowing it to empty out. While a thing, in these poems, cannot not also be a thing looked at, it is this looking that preserves the thing, leaving it untouched.

III: FIGURE AND GROUND

> Damals war mir die Natur noch ein allgemeiner Anlaß, eine Evokation, ein Instrument, in dessen Saiten sich meine Hände wiederfanden [...] Ich schritt einher und sah, sah nicht die Natur, sondern die Geschichte, die sie mir eingab. Wie wenig hätte ich damals vor Cézanne, vor Van Gogh zu lernen gewußt. (13.10.1907, KA IV:615-6).

---

[57] Angela Leighton, 'About About: On Poetry and Paraphrase', *Midwest Studies In Philosophy,* 33.1 (2009), 167–176 (p. 168).

[58] William Waters, 'The New Poems', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke,* ed. by Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 59–73 (p. 60).

[59] Leighton, 'About About', p. 172.

Die roten Rosen waren nie so rot
als an dem Abend, der umregnet war.
Ich dachte lange an dein sanftes Haar...
Die roten Rosen waren nie so rot.

Es dunkelten die Büsche nie so grün
als an dem Abend in der Regenzeit.
Ich dachte lange an dein weiches Kleid...
Es dunkelten die Büsche nie so grün.

Die Birkenstämme standen nie so weiß
als an dem Abend, der mit Regen sank;
und deine Hände sah ich schön und schlank...
Die Birkenstämme standen nie so weiß.

Die Wasser spiegelten ein schwarzes Land
an jenem Abend, den ich regnen fand;
so hab ich mich in deinem Aug erkannt...
Die Wasser spiegelten ein schwarzes Land.[60]

We can see this poem, written in Worpswede in 1900, as a counterexample to self-justifying aboutness. The repeated, coloured, lines of each stanza, lines in which the colour has not yet undergone the nominalisation that characterises much of Rilke's colour-use from around 1904, but is nonetheless, in being used adverbially in two cases, somewhat abstracted, are shown to be a kind of mood-bearing servant to the 'real' work of the poem, that is, the narrative content, the filling of these chromatic sandwiches. The repetition of 'nie so [colour]' disallows precision: what could have been the result of a sure and incorruptible eye, a matter of perceptual truth, is shown to be rhetorical, speaking to the emotional state of the poet (who, compared to later poems of that decade, is overwhelmingly present). The effect of balance given by the repeated lines only strengthens the impression that they are there purely for decoration; that whatever was *seen* is not, as the poem seems to want to say, quite weighty enough to balance out what was *felt*. And, like colour, Nature is here, as Rilke comes to realise in writing on Cézanne, an occasion or opportunity to write about human feelings and stories; Nature is an instrument, subordinate to maker and subject rather than a counterweight.

[60] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Ernst Zinn and Ruth Sieber-Rilke, 7 vols (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1959), III, p. 688. Henceforth SWR.

Another poem written around 1900 makes explicit the hierarchies at work, in which nature is a bearer of colour, which itself gives a tint of mood or emotion. Here both form the background to human lives:

> Der Sonntag war so seidengrau,
> das Land so weich und weit,
> wie Hintergrund für eine Frau
> in schlankem grünen Kleid.
>
> Nur Kinderstimmen waren wach
> bei einem fernen Spiel,
> in die der Regen manchmal schwach,
> in Bäumen blätternd, fiel.
> (SWR III:100)

Once again, an enveloping structure suggests a kind of balance; but this is not the dynamic, self-maintaining equilibrium of the *Neue Gedichte*; it is a balance of form that corresponds to a certain kind of calculating schema, rather than responding to the inner reality of what might be there. We might compare this balance to the kind of comparison made here: the repeated 'so+ (colour) adjective' with its implied 'daß' subordinates the atmosphere and its qualities to the woman in her dress, for which it could be the background. Colour is here to 'set off' or 'bring out' a subject.

So, there is an element of abstraction at work: both the natural surroundings and the woman are seen in terms of form (there is not, in the end, much difference between his descriptions of the land around Worpswede and his descriptions of the paintings produced there) and it was precisely this kind of abstracted seeing that Rilke praised in the Worpswede artists:

> [Die Worpswede Maler] sehen alles in einem Atem, Menschen und Dinge. Wie die eigentümliche farbige Luft dieser hohen Himmel keinen Unterschied macht und alles, was in ihr aufsteht und ruht, mit derselben Güte umgiebt, so üben sie eine gewisse naive Gerechtigkeit, indem sie, ohne nachzudenken, Menschen und Dinge, in stillem Nebeneinander, als Erscheinungen derselben Atmosphäre und als Träger von Farben, die sie leuchten macht, empfinden. (KA IV:324)

However, this is not the bare seeing of a Cézanne; there, the colours are active, the colours constitute the forms, fill them, animate them. Here humans and things are seen as barely distinct from the background or each other, are made of the same stuff and are vessels for a luminous but insubstantial colour. The sorts of relations between forms

described here seem similar to those explored in his *Notizen zur Melodie der Dinge* (1898), and the marginalia to the *Geburt der Tragödie* of around March 1900, in which the relationship between background and object is one of a mutual dependence between sameness and distinction. Here the 'object' is specifically human:

> III. Das fällt mir ein: bei dieser Beobachtung: daß wir die Menschen noch immer auf Goldgrund malen, wie die ganz Primitiven. Vor etwas Unbestimmtem stehen sie. Manchmals vor Gold, manchmals auch vor Grau. Im Licht manchmals, und oft mit unergründlichem Dunkel hinter sich.
>
> IV. Man begreift das. Um die Menschen zu erkennen, mußte man sie isolieren. [...] (KA IV:103)

The background is both necessary for the figure to be recognisable as such—just as the repetition of 'manchmals' pushes forwards the colour words—but also threatening, a semiotic quagmire ('etwas Unbestimmtes'). The children playing can only be heard against the rain which is, reassuringly, 'sometimes weak'. The work of creating individuated pieces of art (or verses of folk song) is, in Rilke's notes on Nietzsche, a way of combating the fear of the 'Hintergrund', containing the divine flow; and even in the glowing, naive, formalist vision of the Worpswede artists, the 'curiously' coloured air is able to smother distinctions, against which seeing all things as equally salient seems closer to capitulation than a triumph of artistic creation.[61] Against this we might think of Maeterlinck, for whom content, according to Rilke, was not bound to theme but resided, luminously, in a kind of dionysiac background 'das an allen Stellen diesen Inhalt durchdringt und durchleuchtet, über sich selbst hinaus erhebt und verklärt'. (KA IV:219) Here we are closer to the picture of artistic creation that Rilke takes from his study of Cézanne, in which the painting is animated by the very fact of its being in relation with itself, not relying on external, historical or thematic material but instead on its own internal activity to maintain its status—for which Musil's image of the tapestry is apposite: 'Bei [Rilke] sind die Dinge wie in einem Teppich verwoben; wenn man *sie* betrachtet, sind sie getrennt, aber wenn man auf den Untergrund achtet, sind sie durch ihn verbunden. Dann verändert sich ihr Aussehen, und es entstehen

[61] For Nietzsche's importance to Rilke, see Irina Frowen's short article on the marginalia, 'Nietzsches Bedeutung für Rilkes frühe Kunstauffassung', *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft*, 14 (1987), 21–34. Katja Brunkhorst's dissertation focuses on Zarathustra but includes a chapter on the marginalia. Katja Brunkhorst, *'Verwandt - Verwandelt': Nietzsche's Presence in Rilke* (München: Iudicium, 2006), pp. 69–78.

sonderbare Beziehungen zwischen ihnen.'[62] Musil goes on to attribute this invisible interaction to the directness of Rilke's language, the fact that the thing itself is meant, and no other: 'Wenn er Gott sagt, meint er dies, und wenn er von einem Flamingo spricht, meint er auch dies; *deshalb* sind alle Dinge und Vorgänge in seinen Gedichten untereinander verwandt und tauschen den Platz wie die Sterne, die sich bewegen, ohne daß man es sieht.' (p. 1240)[63] That is, in the *Neue Gedichte*, a poem titled 'Ein Schwan' is (at least) about a swan, 'Persisches Heliotrop' a flower, and so on. It is in the balance between this direct treatment of the thing (and the thing includes, or is constituted by, how it is seen) and what might otherwise be the background, the equal status of the various angles of 'aboutness', that the *Neue Gedichte* have claims to be 'new'; and the fact that each part knows, indicates, sheds light on the others.[64]

IV: 'DER GROßE FARBENZUSAMMENHANG'

> Schon, obwohl ich so oft aufmerksam und unnachgiebig davorgestanden habe, wird in meiner Erinnerung der große Farbenzusammenhang der Frau im roten Fauteuil so wenig wiederholbar wie eine sehr vielstellige Zahl. [...]
>
> Die linke Armlehne und die Quaste [...] haben schon nicht mehr die Wand hinter sich, sondern einen breiten unteren Randstreifen aus grünem Blau, gegen den ihr Widerspruch laut anklingt. [...]
>
> *Es ist, als wüßte jede Stelle von allen*. So sehr nimmt sie teil; so sehr geht auf ihr Anpassung und Ablehnung vor sich; so sehr sorgt jede in ihrer Weise für das Gleichgewicht und stellt es her: wie das ganze Bild schließlich die Wirklichkeit im Gleichgewicht hält. Denn sagt man, es ist ein roter Fauteuil (und es ist der erste und endgültigste rote Fauteuil aller Malerei): so ist er es doch nur, weil er eine erfahrene Farbensumme gebunden in sich hat, die, wie immer sie auch sein mag, ihn im Rot bestärkt und bestätigt. Er ist, um auf die Höhe seines Ausdrucks zu kommen, um das leichte Bildnis herum ganz stark gemalt, dass etwas wie eine Wachsschicht entsteht; und doch hat die Farbe kein Übergewicht über den Gegenstand, der so vollkommen in seine malerischen Äquivalente übersetzt erscheint, dass, so sehr er erreicht und gegeben ist, doch andererseits auch wieder seine bürgerliche Realität an ein endgültiges Bild-Dasein alle Schwere verliert. Alles ist, wie ich schon schrieb, zu einer

---

[62] Robert Musil, 'Gedenkrede auf Rilke', in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Adolf Frisé, 2 vols (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978), II, 1229–40 (pp. 1238–39).

[63] This argument is made, back to front, by Herman Meyer: 'Diese autarkische Beschaffenheit ist das Grundelement der "Objektivität" oder "Sachlichkeit" des Kunstwerks.' Meyer, 'Rilkes Cézanne-Erlebnis', p. 263.

[64] This point is made particularly well and with more subtlety than here by Tony Phelan, who enlists an early review of the first part of the *Neue Gedichte* by Stefan Zweig with its emphasis on 'ein ewiges Sicherläutern'. Phelan, p. 24.

> Angelegenheit der Farben untereinander geworden: Eine nimmt sich gegen die andere zusammen, betont sich ihr gegenüber, besinnt sich auf sich selbst. [...]
>
> Neben [einer] Drüsenwirkung innerhalb der Farbenintensität spielen die Spiegelungen (deren Vorhandensein in der Natur mich immer so sehr überraschte: das Abendrot des Wassers als dauernde Tönung im rauhen Grün von den Deckblättern der Nenuphars zu finden—) die größte Rolle: schwächere Lokalfarben geben sich ganz auf und begnügen sich damit, die stärkste vorhandene zu spiegeln. In diesen Hin und Wider von gegenseitigem vielartigen Einfluß schwingt das Bildinnere, steigt und fällt in sich selbst zurück und hat nicht eine stehende Stelle. (22.10.1907, KA IV:629-631)

> Der einzelne Farbfleck ist dabei zunächst bedeutungslos, ein Stück Materie, ohne semantische Aussagekraft. Ihm lassen sich keine Eigenschaft, kein Gegenstand, keine Wirklichkeit zuordnen. Erst durch die Verhältnisse der Farbflecken untereinander, ihre Modulation, Rhythmen und Kontraste, entsteht eine neue Lesbarkeit, ein Sinnzusammenhang: Nur im Kontext, in der gesamten Textur der "taches" kristallisieren sich Dinge und Raum heraus, kommt es zur Neuschöpfung einer Welt.[65]

Rilke's interest in this, his longest close reading of a painting in the letters, is to show the interconnectedness of figure and ground, the way that the red, the protagonist of this particular ekphrasis, is differentiated via the 'Widerspruch' of the blue of the wall, that this, the first and most final red armchair of all painting, gains its title through team effort, the 'erfahrene Farbensumme' of the painting. In the following chapter I contrast the strands of Kandinsky's practice which capitalize on this relational and cumulative effect with those which make claims for absolute values of colours; in Rilke there is no colour that is not co-operative, the product of the inner 'business' or 'conversation' of the painting. Rilke shows a distrust of the kinds of scientifically minded theories of colour which so interested painters at the time: 'Dass man Van Goghs Briefe so gut lesen kann, dass sie so viel enthalten, spricht im Grunde gegen ihn', he wrote, as I quoted above; 'wie es ja auch gegen den Maler spricht (Cézanne danebengehalten), dass er das und das wollte, wusste, erfuhr; dass das Blau Orange aufrief und das Grün Rot: dass er solches, heimlich an dem Innern seines Auges horchend, hatte drinnen sagen hören, der Neugierige.' (21.10.1907 KA IV:627) Cézanne *knew* what to paint, but through dog-like intuition, not through intellectual curiosity or textbook learning,[66]

---

[65] Gerok-Reiter, 'Perspektivität', p. 506.

[66] 'Hier' sagte sie, auf eine Stelle zeigend, 'dieses hat er gewußt, und nun sagt er es (eine Stelle an einem Apfel); nebenan ist es noch frei, weil er das noch nicht gewußt hat. Er machte nur, was er wußte, nichts anderes.' (12.10.1907 KA IV:614)

and Rilke portrays his use of colour as if Cézanne had listened, not to the inner workings of the eye, but the needs and desires of the colours themselves. The weaker colours give themselves up to support the stronger ones, like a family acrobatics team, and the resulting 'human pyramid' *is* balance; the reality of the work—to Rilke—is that it is what happens *between* the colours that makes it.

This balance is brought about by 'Spiegelungen', patterns of mirroring and repetition. The integrity of a given colour requires differentiation, a bracing of one colour against another, and then reflection, consolidation from other instances of the same colour.[67] From his descriptions of paintings, and of scenes in Paris and Naples, and from poems of the period, it would seem that Rilke is experimenting in capturing this creation of chromatic wholeness through repetition and relation (which is not intended to be a description of Cézanne's own way of working, rather a kind of recommendation for any painter—this is how painting works, 'es ist die Farbe, die die Malerei ausmacht', and those painters who do not acknowledge this are simply wrong). Of course, the way that colour features (or rather, doesn't feature) in a poem makes this transposition more complicated than merely deploying a colour word as if it were a colour—where in describing the red armchair Rilke repeats the basic terms red, green, brown etc., in painting we can be sure that one precise hue does in fact 'match' another and these more general, 'basic', terms are a (perhaps regrettable) shorthand for something in reality unnameably specific. Thus to talk, as people have, of Rilke's colour patterning as being Cézannien is misleading: as noted above, the equivalent to the 'tache' is a unit of sound or its written counterpart. Yet it is certainly true that Rilke does, in fact, use colour both within and between works in ways that he then recognises in Cézanne: the green of the park in 'Die Flamingos', that is, a green, corresponding to the foliage of the park but syntactically abstracted to the point of being mysteriously immaterial, is repeated throughout the collection, in, for example, 'alles Grün' in 'Vor dem Sommerregen' and 'im beschäftigten Grünen' in 'Papageien-Park'.[68] In the prose piece 'Die Auslage des

[67] I have left out the fascinating and somewhat baffling image of the salivary glands of a dog's mouth; for a take on Rilke's prose that sees this idea of 'Drüsenwirkung' as central to his project of objective seeing and saying, see Anette Schwarz, 'The Colors of Prose: Rilke's Program of Sachliches Sagen', *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory,* 71.3 (1996), 195–210.

[68] In general, the park offers, in the *Neue Gedichte,* an excuse for abstraction justified by the object, similar to the sky and sea of Skåne and Capri.

Fischhändlers' the repetition of a colour is consolidated by the repetition of sounds (particularly 'sch' and 's') such that the medium-specific effect equivalent to the 'tache', sound patterning, bleeds into the indirect attempt to recreate the visual relations of a particular scene, offering a kind of stepping stone between the arts:

> Silbern beschuppte, darunter einer rund nach oben gebogen, wie ein Schwertarm in einem Wappen, so daß das Silber an ihm schimmert und sich spannt. Silbern beschuppte die querüber liegen, aus altem Silber, schwarz beschlagen, und darüber einer, der, das Maul voran, zurückzukommen scheint aus dem Haufen hinter ihm. (KA I:377)

Through repetition an impression of sameness, of matching, *within* the work, is brought about; but the question remains of what the relation between colour word and colour 'in the wild' might be.

How, then, do we know when two instances of 'red'—or, famously in Rilke, 'blue'—match? Are these, like the women, the children—words which 'längst keine Mehrzahl mehr haben, sondern nur unzählige Einzahlen'—in *Malte*, an endless stream of particulars, incommensurable?[69] Does every new instance of a colour word mean a new colour, as if, like for George, words were discrete things, or is it that every colour word records a new perception? We might think back to Rilke's comments on Cézanne's blue, which is the same as Chardin's blue; these very separate instances are united not, particularly, by their being of one pigment or hue or saturation (while this may well be the case), but instead the way they are treated and put to use, in an objective, non-literary way. Similarly, we might be able to recognise a particular colour within the poetry by how *it* is put to use—the 'Grund aus Grün' in 'Migliera' 'kommt sonst nirgends vor' in *nature*, but is in function in fact identical to the background greens of the *Neue Gedichte*.[70]

What must be the most famous example of this process, in which the identity of a colour is built up by an inner 'Verkehr', is 'Blaue Hortensie', which has been seen as the paradigm case of Rilke's 'raffiniert eingesetzte Farblichkeit' of this period.[71] Here,

---

[69] KA III:496.

[70] KA I:380.

[71] Jacob Steiner, p. 93. See also Le Rider, 'Rilke et Cézanne'; *Les couleurs et les mots*, pp. 255–59.

as Steiner suggests, a 'Realität der Farbe' 'wird bewußt gemacht'.[72] The poem, as is the case with 'Die Flamingos' and many of the *Neue Gedichte*, is carefully balanced: it is hard to say quite which counts as figure and which as ground, which as vehicle and which as tenor. This is also seen in a syntactical insistence on the colours being words in the sonnet; this is then counterweighed by the very ambivalent status of these colours within the world of the poem (for instance, the first mention of blue comes before the fact that it is in fact not even carried by the flowers, but in fact mirrored; again, as in 'Die Flamingos' these are separated by a line break).

Blaue Hortensie

So wie das letzte Grün in Farbentiegeln
sind diese Blätter, trocken, stumpf und rauh,
hinter den Blütendolden, die ein Blau
nicht auf sich tragen, nur von ferne spiegeln.

Sie spiegeln es verweint und ungenau,
als wollten sie es wiederum verlieren,
und wie in alten blauen Briefpapieren
ist Gelb in ihnen, Violett und Grau;

Verwaschenes wie an einer Kinderschürze,
Nichtmehrgetragenes, dem nichts mehr geschieht:
wie fühlt man eines kleinen Lebens Kürze.

Doch plötzlich scheint das Blau sich zu verneuen
in einer von den Dolden, und man sieht
ein rührend Blaues sich vor Grünem freuen.
(KA I:481)

I want to focus on two questions which seem, across the criticism, disputed: first, is the subject of the poem, the most worthy candidate of 'aboutness', the flower, or the colour blue? For Rainer Gruenter, the poem is 'ein literarisches Stilleben. Das Stilleben des Blaus'; Käte Hamburger, too, states that it is the blue and not the flower that is thematised, and Wolfgang Müller makes this point even more forcefully: 'Das Gedicht ist ganz und gar keine Pflanzenbeschreibung. Es stellt im Grunde nur das Widerspiel zweier an der Blume wahrgenommener Farben dar, des stumpfen Grün der Blätter und

[72] Jacob Steiner, p. 94.

des verwaschenen Blauder Blüten'.[73] However, it would seem, too, that it is the 'ups-and-downs of the hydrangea's secret life' which 'disclose themselves' in its colour.[74] Second, are we talking about one blue, or several? Le Rider talks of the 'multiplicité du bleu', in which we are given '[l]e même mot, mais à chaque fois une modalité différente'.[75] This seems certainly true, but also missing the point (and in any case, the blau in 'blauen Briefpapieren' is, I think not the same word: the lauded 'abstraction' of 'ein Blau' and thereafter 'das Blau' is being opposed on the level of metaphysics to the adjectival use of the same colour word). What we have to work with is precisely the words themselves, and the repeated colour has, linguistically, far more a sense of coherence and unity than the physical colour does in the imagined poem-world. What is being depicted is consistently at odds with how it is depicted; grammar and syntax work at best parallel to pragmatics. In the first quatrain, for instance, we might be tempted to ignore the comma after 'Blätter' and see 'trocken, stumpf and rauh' as the complement of 'sind', thus giving us a straightforward comparison; as it is, the *tertium comparationis* is still their texture, but this is only implied. Again, our very first reading might push this comparison towards the more predictable formula 'the leaves are the same colour as the green'—yet this seems a category error. We have to go back and check our working at every turn. The most sensitive readings place this tension at their centre: William Waters's summary in his introductory chapter on the *Neue Gedichte* goes, '[w]hen the flowers of the 'Blue Hydrangea' 'reflect' their own blue colour 'from far away', [...] this elusiveness of the object is at the same time the poem's attempt to say what the object is[...] Non-self-identity is this blue's identity.'[76] As Tony Phelan writes, '*[t]his* blue makes present for us as readers and viewers its own diminution and loss. *This* blue is an event in time which will inevitably lead to its own disappearance, and so that loss of itself is part of its truth here and now.'[77] Is this blue general or

---

[73] 'Eine Biographie des Blaus', in *Frankfurter Anthologie. Gedichte und Interpretationen vol. 12*, ed. by Marcel Reich-Ranicki (Frankfurt am Main: Insel), pp. 137–40 (p. 139); Hamburger, 'Die phänomenologische Struktur der Dichtung Rilkes', p. 198; Wolfgang G Müller, 'Rilke, Husserl und die Dinglyrik der Moderne', in *Rilke und die Weltliteratur*, ed. by Manfred Engel and Dieter Lamping (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 1999), pp. 214–35 (p. 216).

[74] Scott, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism', p. 220.

[75] Le Rider, *Les couleurs et les mots,* p. 255.

[76] Waters, 'The New Poems', pp. 69–70.

[77] Phelan, p. 49.

particular or is it both, somehow, at once—the specific essence of blue? Is this blue more like the apples of Chardin, edibly particular, or is it instead like those of Van Gogh, glowingly general, 'als hätte sich alles, was ihre Art an Besonderem hat, in ihnen aufgespeichert',[78] examples of the post-Wendung 'Herz-Werk';[79] or is it like those of Cézanne, inedible, accidental, there, but not for use or unpacking?[80]

Questions of the colour's identity are central to the readings of the poem—most importantly, by Käte Hamburger, but more recently also Wolfgang Müller and Luke Fischer—which compare Rilke's colour-use to the idea of the 'Wesenschau' of early phenomenology. By suggesting that what Rilke is up to in the poem is giving us 'das Eidos Blau diese Hortensie'—that is, detached from contingent material relations but nonetheless specific in its shade—Hamburger can give an account of the last tercet in which the colour both changes and stays the same:

> Sehr symptomatisch für dies lyrische Verfahren phänomenologischer Reduktion ist dieser letzte einfache Vers: obwohl die Angabe »in einer von den Dolden« bedeuten muß, daß es sich um eine andere kräftigere Blaunuance, an einer anderen Stelle der Blüte, handelt als die vorher beschriebene blasse, wird durch die Aussage »scheint das Blau sich zu verneuen« wiederum von diesen verschiedenen Stellen und Nuancen »abstrahiert«, und als *das* Blau bleibt »ein rührend Blaues vor Grünem«, welches letztere nun seinerseits von seinem Substrat gelöst ist, zurück—das Eidos Blau dieser Hortensie.[81]

This tension highlights above all the reality of the poem as an aesthetic object, as constitutive of a sort of real thing in itself, made of and in language.

Were it not for this final tercet, the poem could easily have as its subject 'any old' blue hydrangea; but the temporal particularity of the moment of renewal would seem to insist on its individuality. This is true, however, not just of the tercet, but of the poem as a sort of event; and it is precisely the relationship between how one looks at the

---

[78] Meier-Graefe, I, p. 121.

[79] Bridgwater, p. 36.

[80] '[Cézanne] bedient sich zuweilen einer Komposition, die mit wahrer Wollust das Banale sucht; der Zufall kann unmöglich ungeschickter so ein paar Äpfel und Birnen auf einen Tisch rollen lassen wie er sie hinlegt; es ist nicht das Atom von Absicht dabei zu spüren.' Meier-Graefe, I, p. 167.

[81] Hamburger, 'Die phänomenologische Struktur der Dichtung Rilkes', p. 199. Müller and Fischer both take Hamburger to task for this point, both, I think, uncharitably. Luke Fischer, *The Poet as Phenomenologist: Rilke and the New Poems* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 254–57; Wolfgang G Müller, p. 225.

poem and how one might experience it across time in which the question of the blue's identity can be solved. The picture the physical location of the colour words paints is one in which green surrounds blue;[82] but the physical locations of the colours in relation to one another as described in the poem (grün **hinter** blau; blau **vor** grün), that is, in the order that one would hear them, works in fact on an axis of depth as opposed to the flat plane. The semi-mimetic layout and the three-dimensional use of colour form a kind of gyre; only in their being seen or read as such does this oscillation of different forms of self-reflexivity take place. And in this way, it is only through being read that the colour words can be imagined, and when they are, it is all at once, with one repeated after another; in each particular reading, they are one and the same colour, for all that the fate of that colour within the poem is to fade, fall away, be renewed.

V: OBJECT, MAKER, VIEWER

The fate of colour in Rilke across the board is in fact precisely this: colour is loss, renewed through repetition only to remind the reader of the way in which, once transposed from life to writing it must become a different sort of thing. 'Dès que nous exprimons quelque chose, nous le diminuons étrangement,' Maeterlinck wrote in *Le trésor des humbles*, and this applies doubly to colour words.[83] Colours require the onlooker, they, like the parrots of 'Papageien-Park' 'warten auf Zeugen' in order to take shape—yet are elusive, like the flamingos, of their own audience, leaving it with nothing but a sense of loss, as in 'Blaue Hortensie'. We need to be present, but cannot share a world. Waters' idea of the 'ride' is therefore telling: a ride, like Rilke's carousel, is an experience most at home in childhood, and the *Neue Gedichte* are in many cases elegies to the naivety of form for form's sake that carousels—and certainly the carousel of Rilke's poem with its abstracted, repeated colours ('ein Rot, ein Grün, ein Grau', 'ein weißer Elefant')—represent. It is not that Rilke's colours are tied to particular emotional states; colours, through their structural properties, *model* certain affective situations, from the literary (longing for childhood) to the state of bliss or grace gestured

---

[82] For a diagram of this, see Overath, p. 104.

[83] Maurice Maeterlinck, *Le trésor des humbles* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1896), p. 66. The line was used by Musil as the epigraph to *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*, a literary sibling, in many respects, to Malte.

towards by Cézanne or Barthes. It is not something linguistic or natural about the blues and greens of 'Blaue Hortensie' that leads us to ideas of loss and 'Vergänglichkeit' but their disappearance from view. Angela Leighton quotes Susan Sontag, who claims that an argument for formalism 'will never be complete until "form" or "style" can be thought of without that banished specter [of content], without a feeling of loss.' 'But the "feeling of loss,"' Leighton argues 'is essential to form. It is what makes the "banished specter" haunt us, its emptiness appalling and tantalizing us because it is the shape of something, or someone. Form will always evoke or commemorate content'—and colour will always evoke or commemorate that which has been left when all else has been pressed into words for safekeeping.[84]

A passage from the chapter on Otto Modersohn in *Worpswede* is often recalled when discussing 'Blaue Hortensie', and its optimism ought to be kept in mind: while the colours fade, their interaction, their harmony remains, and remains, through the mutually knowing web of 'Stellen', 'geheimnisvoll':

> Und dann sah er gepreßten Pflanzen zu, wenn sie vertrockneten. An Stelle der frischen Farben traten welke, stumpfe, Farben der Erinnerung statt der Farben des Lebens. Rot dunkelte zu Schwarz, Blau verblich wie an der Sonne und alle Grüns nahmen eine bräunliche, dauerhafte Färbung an, die sich nichtmehr veränderte. Aber trotz dieses Wechsels ging die Harmonie nicht verloren. Jeder Ton schien vom anderen zu wissen, und nach dem Schwanken einiger Verwandlungen trat ein neues Gleichgewicht ein, ebenso eigentümlich, geheimnisvoll und reich wie die Melodie des Lebens war. (KA IV: 360)

Participation has been key in our discussion of colour in Rilke, even if it has taken somewhat of a back seat until now. Readers participate by 'riding' the poems, spinning the gyroscope of imagination, just as beholders, via an exchange of glances, animate the sculpture of Rodin. And colours participate in a whole: 'So sehr nimmt sie teil; [...] so sehr sorgt jede in ihrer Weise für das Gleichgewicht und stellt es her'; 'alles stimmt, gilt, nimmt teil und bildet eine Vollzähligkeit, in der nichts fehlt'; a whole that can be a whole artwork, a whole poem, a whole thing, or a set of things that, through this participation, become one. This participation is characterised through *knowledge*: '*Es ist, als wüßte jede Stelle von allen'*; 'Jeder Ton schien vom anderen zu wissen'. In this

[84] Leighton, 'About About', p. 170.

concluding section I want to concentrate on this knowledge: the self-awareness of the 'Stellen', which becomes the exaggerated secrecy of the parks, the mysterious, terminal ineffability of the pink of the 'Rosa Hortensie'.

Knowledge has so far been characterised as something inimical to experiencing art: a kind of literal, literary knowledge, Rilke thought, got in the way of his looking properly at the paintings of Van Gogh or Cézanne, or earlier the work of the Worpswede artists. Where the 'Stellen' of the painting can know one another, should the human beholder try to get involved, to find something out, 'der stört und trübt [die] Handlung'. The proper mode is not knowing, but instead *learning*, and not a learning of facts but instead of practical knowledge, and this, in its dynamism, is a sort of analogue to the notion of the 'ride'. That is, we read in order to learn what it is we are doing when we read. I will return to this argument in my fourth chapter; here I want to concentrate on what colour might have to know, and why it is that Rilke is so insistent on this.

We return to Baudelaire's suggestive remark, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that Délacroix' colour might 'think by itself, independently of the objects which it clothes'—a description which would work equally for that of Cézanne, certainly on Rilke's account. It is a line that Walter Benjamin includes in his *Passagen-Werk*, but there it is subtly altered: 'Il semble que cette couleur pense par elle-même, indépendamment des objets qu'elle revêt.'[85] The critic no longer apologises for his 'subterfuges of language'. In his writing on colour, Rilke avails himself constantly of such subterfuges: colour, as we have seen, not only thinks by itself, but also does business, excludes, rejoices, overhears. This may seem an 'offence to healthy common sense'[86]—'Selbstverständlich,' Herman Meyer reassures his readers, 'ist dies alles mehr oder weniger metaphorisch zu verstehen. Rilke weiß so gut wie wir, daß das Gemälde nicht sich selbst malt, sondern gemalt wird.'[87] But I would argue it is, in fact, certainly 'weniger'. The terms in which this is described may verge on the fanciful, but what

[85] Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk,* ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 354 [J 27/6].

[86] Simon Jarvis, 'What Does Art Know?', in *Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter,* ed. by Peter De Bolla and Stefan H. Uhlig (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 57–70 (p. 60).

[87] Meyer, 'Rilkes Cézanne-Erlebnis', p. 262.

Rilke 'knows', and what he is encouraging us to learn, is that form is literally in conversation with itself.

I. A. Richards defended the title of his talk, 'How does a poem know when it is finished?' against accusations of the 'pathetic fallacy', saying 'the so-called metaphor that treats a poem as organic is not a metaphor, but a literal description. A poem is an activity, seeking to become itself.'[88] The interplay of language, the activity of the poem, can then know, think, remember, as Phelan suggests: 'As we read the poems we enter into their world of discourse, through the interconnections implicit in their recurrent figurations. But they also give us a sense of textual memory—not then "eine Lyrik statt einer Erkenntnistheorie", as Käte Hamburger would have it, but an unfolding of the surface of the world as "ein stetes Aneinandererinnern der Dinge" and "ewiges Sicherläutern."'[89] Or, as Simon Jarvis writes, 'Works of art [...] instead of being "texts", containers for propositional intentions, or "marks", sheer stuff, are cognitive artefacts. Works of art know something we do not.'[90]

Rosa Hortensie

Wer nahm das Rosa an? Wer wußte auch,
dass es sich sammelte in diesen Dolden?
Wie Dinge unter Gold, die sich entgolden,
entröten sie sich sanft, wie im Gebrauch.

Dass sie für solches Rosa nichts verlangen.
Bleibt es für sie und lächelt aus der Luft?
Sind Engel da, es zärtlich zu empfangen,
wenn es vergeht, großmütig wie ein Duft?

Oder vielleicht auch geben sie es preis,
damit es nie erführe vom Verblühn.

---

[88] I. A. Richards, 'How Does a Poem Know When It Is Finished?', in *Parts and Wholes,* ed. by Daniel Lerner (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), pp. 163–74 (p. 165). This use of the word 'literal' is brought up in Simon Jarvis's essay on Adorno and the knowing work of art: "The work of art does not literally think anything, does not literally know anything. Therefore this is just a metaphor.' But what is it in fact 'literally' to think something, 'literally' to know something? We do not in fact know and cannot in truth say what it would be *literally* to think something, *literally* to know something—literally, that is, in total deletion of any figurative component, in a state of total and therefore imaginary undeludedness. No absolutely literal account of thinking has ever yet been written.' Jarvis, p. 69.

[89] Phelan, p. 77.

[90] Jarvis, p. 60.

> Doch unter diesem Rosa hat ein Grün
> gehorcht, das jetzt verwelkt und alles weiß.
> (KA I:579)

In this, the counterpart of the 'blaue Hortensie', the busy-ness of colour is transformed into a set of catechistic questions verging on camp (who would rhyme 'Luft' and 'Duft'?).[91] As with the blue flower, the colour—far from the active reds and greens of Cézanne's portraits—is effete and passive. For our purposes, what seems most intriguing is not the fact that 'ein Grün' could do something so anthropomorphised as 'horchen', a use of colour we are by now familiar with. Instead it is the emphasis on knowledge, using the form of the question to make visible the epistemic inequality between poet and reader and pink and then the green, which has overheard the secret of the pink and now cannot give it further. This green is colour language in a nutshell: brought to a point of self-knowledge but then petrified at the point where it could pass that knowledge on (like, also, Modersohn's pressed flowers). This sort of knowledge is fatal to art: the knowingness, the jaded secrecy of the parks in the cycle 'Die Parke', for instance, is what seems to cause their decay.[92] The reader feels the 'angoisse d'une exclusion' that Rilke felt, according to Le Rider, while contemplating the inner workings of Cézanne's colours.[93]

It is not quite right to say that what has caused the green to fade is the sort of 'menschliche Überlegung' that disturbs the balance of colours in painting; it is here in fact within the internal relations that the green has done its fatal overhearing. The point is rather that a poem, a work of art, does not know its own fate, cannot know its own fate. What it knows is rather its own edges, it can know itself up to the very limits of what it can do. A poem, I. A. Richards suggests, can know it is finished; poems, here, like colours, know themselves by each word or 'Stelle' knowing of the others, of others of its own kind and others of other kinds. This is of course the knowledge that the reader, too, gains: not propositions, exactly, but repetition, procedure as opposed to

---

[91] Compare here the uncollected poem 'Der Duft', KA I:403.

[92] See Corbet Stewart, 'Rilke's Cycle "Die Parke"', *The Modern Language Review*, 61.2 (1966), 238; Richard Sheppard, 'The Decay of the Formal Garden: Late Romanticism to Expressionism', *Colloquia Germanica*, 6 (1972), 238–56 (pp. 244–45).

[93] Le Rider, *Les couleurs et les mots,* p. 258.

static facts. 'It may be that we should ask, not "what is the poem about?" but "how is the poem discovering?" In other words, how does the poem reorganize the very ways in which we might discover it?'[94]

The intrusion of the onlooker may seem, then, detrimental to the work of art if it involves imposing fussy human categories, but these self-enclosed systems will remain sterile if the reader does not bring life to them through the activity of reading; the poems need the input of human feeling, the life of a reader to animate them.[95] Form is no enemy to feeling; in Clive Bell's canonical formulation of an early twentieth century formalism he gives the name 'Significant Form' to the quality common to Cézanne, Giotto, a Persian bowl and so on, saying, 'in each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. [...] We have no other means of recognising a work of art than our feeling for it.' Objectivity is out of the question. 'Clara sagt: so ist es im Leben: da können wir auch nichts sehen, ohne selbst mit hineinzukommen.' ('Aufzeichnungen aus Neapel und Capri', KA IV:588). The work of art may be a perfect model of balance; but at the point, as in 'Rosa Hortensie' that the secret of this balance is sent off for safekeeping, and the viewer is excluded, it withers.

*

In 'Die Flamingos' the flamingos kept their colours to themselves, hiding them, not letting them be spoken of; it is nonetheless a poem full of allusions, to artists, antiquity, real places. Where these meet is the idea of 'knowingness', that is, a form of knowing that relies on an epistemic differential, and where the content of the knowledge is often arbitrary. This attitude is often taken towards colour: colour is often treated as something about which one might have insufficient knowledge, whether in arcane systems of colour-naming or the ability to distinguish hues for the sake of being able to make distinctions, to the seemingly inexhaustible vessels of associations which might put off a reader for whom 'reading' is 'decoding'. The next two chapters take the part

[94] Leighton, 'About About', p. 175.

[95] As Rita Felski said in a talk given at the Weston Library in June 2016, 'the artwork can't do anything by itself; you can't put batteries in it and watch it go around.'

of the reader, and argue that knowing colour and *knowing* colour are not, at all, the same. The balance that colour language strikes between hermeticism and meaninglessness, the way that its identity (and, as we will come to see, its symbolic or affective content) depends on inner relations into which the reader is brought—for only with their presence do these relations become dynamic—suggest a sociability of colour which my next two poets, to different ends, exploit.

3. Kandinsky's red corners: wandering in the poem

Colors present themselves in continuous flux, constantly related to changing neighbors and changing conditions.

As a consequence this proves for the reading of colour
what Kandinsky often demanded for the reading of art:
what counts is not the what but the how.[1]

rot
anstatt
rot
anstatt
rot
anstatt
rot
anstatt
rot
anstatt
rot[2]

In his *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* Emmett Williams offers the following commentary on Achleitner's poem: 'One of the classics of pure concrete. The plot thickens when the poem is printed with each *rot* in a different color.' It is in fact thus, with rainbow 'rot's, that the poem is usually printed; and in its black and white incarnation, it has been said, 'a highly significant level of meaning is lost: repetition is less functional […], the visual prosody is severely limited, and a

[1] Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 15.

[2] Friedrich Achleitner, (195?), in *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, ed. by Emmett Williams (New York: Something Else Press, 1967) [unpaginated].

contextual level of semiotic enquiry is eliminated.'[3] It is hard to disagree that something is lost when the colours are removed from the poem, yet this 'tensiveness between the sign and the signified', which, according to McHughes, suffers on account of this loss, also receives a twist when brought about by the opacity of an achromatic printing. Here it opens out into a discussion of, among other things, the imprecision of language when faced with the visual (is each 'rot' a discrete hue that German is failing to distinguish?), as well as a challenge to overly reductive interpretative moves (why must we read it as a progression—or indeed an utterance—at all? Is our desire to make whatever sense we can of a set of words here misplaced?). In the following chapter, concentrating on a somewhat unsung precursor to concrete poetry, Wassily Kandinsky, I will argue that it is precisely when we remove colours from text that the 'plot thickens'. Reading the poems of Kandinsky's *Klänge* (1912) against his art theory, I suggest that it is in the former, in which the absence of literal colour pushes colour words towards pure sound, that we can most fruitfully think about the poetics of colour as part of the development of avant-garde making.

Previously, the focus was on poets who, for all that they took an interest in the visual arts, came at painting and sculpture from the side of poetry, and in the knowledge that poetry was distinct from the visual arts and its criticism. Now we turn to two multimedia artists, one primarily a painter, the other what we might now call a 'performance artist', who incorporated poetry into a larger and more varied body of work. Where previously the medium of poetry was taken for granted, our starting point with Kandinsky, and, to a lesser extent with Lasker-Schüler, has to be the question of why it is that a particular work has been made with words, and not paint, ink, costume. Where before we were dealing with naturalistic colour, colour understood as a property of objects in the world, which became, syntactically and metaphorically, detached, which gained autonomy and agency within the imagined worlds of the poems, colours in Kandinsky and Lasker-Schüler seem to obey different metaphysical principles to the everyday

[3] Janet Larsen McHughes, 'The Poesis of Space: Prosodig [*sic*] Structures in Concrete Poetry', *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 63 (1977), 168–79 (p. 178).

objects they describe or are brought into contact with, and are used in surprising and idiosyncratic connections. The focus, which has been moving gradually away from the creator and towards the spectator or reader settles in the camp of this latter group, in the first instance because Kandinsky saw his work as essentially interactive. Thus, the central question of the following two chapters is of how we might read colour (a question asked, in two rather different ways, by Kandinsky and Lasker-Schüler)—and how the works might tell us to read colour.

There are, of course, parallels to be found to George and Rilke: Rilke and Kandinsky share a picture of visual art as governed by a set of distinct laws and see the work of art as a response to an essence ('Wesen' for Rilke, 'Klang' for Kandinsky) located in a world set apart from the material—a theory of art shared, of course, by many other artists of the time, such as Klee and Mondrian.[4] This set of commitments plays out differently on the ground, but, crucially, informs their common interest in, and use of, colour, which responds to this essence. With George Kandinsky shares a sense of being ahead of his time, and of having a duty to purify art and offer a sort of training to an aesthetically deficient public.[5] Both Kandinsky and George were seen as 'Propheten der Wiedergeburt' by younger poets, and Hugo Ball, whose phrase this is, wrote, 'Wenn wir Kandinsky und Picasso sagten, meinten wir nicht Maler, sondern Priester; nicht Handwerker, sondern Schöpfer neuer Welten, neuer Paradiese.'[6] The similarities are also formal, as Peg Weiss points out;[7] moreover, the sorts of colour relations we saw dictating the spaces of George's *Algabal* poems, where the colour chosen was less

---

[4] See Donald B. Kuspit, 'The Illusion of the Absolute in Abstract Art', *Art Journal,* 31.1 (1971), 26–30; and Mark A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). This takes, of course, different forms; for the canonical statement of Mondrian and Kandinsky's opposing traditions and the underlying metaphysical commitments, see Harold Osborne, *Abstraction and Artifice in Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), pp. 131–34 summarised p. 183.

[5] On the first page of the first ever edition of the *Blätter für die Kunst*—that is, nearly twenty years before Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*—George calls for a 'geistige Kunst'. Kandinsky and George moved in overlapping circles, the details of which are given in Peg Weiss's book on Kandinsky's time in Munich; George nonetheless allegedly referred to Kandinsky's work as 'Gesudel'. Berthold Vallentin, *Gespräche mit Stefan George, 1902-1931* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1960), p. 92; Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich,* pp. 81–84.

[6] Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit,* ed. by Emmy Ball-Hennings (Luzern: Stocker, 1946), p. 8.

[7] Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich*, pp. 86–91.

significant than the oppositions and relations between colours, and between colour and material, return in Kandinsky, where colours are described and defined within a closed circle of hues. What we gain from a comparison with Kandinsky is not only a new, if contrarian, poetic lineage, but also a chance to see two canonical poets through the looking glass, as it were, of a visual artist arriving at similar conclusions about colour from the opposite direction.

I turn first to the difficulties we might encounter looking at colour in the work of a figure who was primarily a painter and theorist or writer on art; the second section of this chapter looks more closely at this theoretical writing, in particular at Kandinsky's picture of colour and how it functions, and the attendant ideas of universalism and its utopian implications, and the third at his ideas surrounding the word as a medium, and thus his understanding of poetry and its relation to the world.[8] My fourth section turns to the poems; here I bring Kandinsky together with Hugo Ball in order to make sense of how people have tried to make sense of their work, and argue for a reading in which mimicking these sense-making processes forms part of the way that the texts teach us to engage with them. The sorts of effort that readers have put into 'deciphering' such poetry, that is, are pre-empted by the attention the texts pay to narrative, which is always either too clear or hidden, temptingly, behind a cipher-like veil. I thus argue that Kandinsky's poetry can be seen as therapeutic, an exercise for the reader or listener to help them get back in touch with the 'geistig' and to hone their aesthetic sense.

⋆

[8] As Kandinsky significantly revised his ideas between 1910 and the Bauhaus years, my focus here will be on the works published around the same time as *Klänge*, so, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1911/1912) and the articles 'Über die Formfrage' and 'Über Bühnenkomposition' in *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac* (1912). Wassily Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Bern-Bümpliz: Benteli, 1952); 'Über die Formfrage', in *Der Blaue Reiter*, ed. by Klaus Lankheit (Munich: Piper, 1965), pp. 132–88; 'Über Bühnenkomposition', in *Der Blaue Reiter*, pp. 189–208.

Kandinsky's *Klänge*, published around 1912, appeared in a limited print run of 345.[9] A collection often described as an 'artist's book', it was made up of thirty-eight poems and 'adorned' ['orné'] with woodcuts, some in colour, some monochrome.[10] Written between 1909 and 1911, these are poems which reject the 'hochgezüchtete Kultur der Lyrik'—represented, according to Johannes Eichner, by George and Rilke—overturning not only formal conventions (they are set more or less as prose, do not rhyme, etc.) but also generic ones (they seem to have an 'unreliable narrator').[11] They contain many of the same sorts of simplified, archetypal figures and landscapes as can be seen in his paintings of the same period, and an arguably similar (non-naturalistic) use of colour;[12] these 'homologies between surface features' have, however, led to an underappraisal of the poems as poetry.[13] Where Richard Sheppard argues against 'compartmentalized' approaches, I take the view that it is only when considering each work within the capacities of its own medium that we might see how Kandinsky extended these. While (as I go on to argue) it can be unhelpful to take Kandinsky at his word, we might take as a starting point Kandinsky's claim that the choice of medium and tools—typewriter instead of paintbrush, words instead of paint—was deliberate, and necessary to the content and essence of the work.[14] Rather than reducing the poems to explications of the paintings or woodcuts, or

---

[9] It is unclear whether it was, as the contract stated, published in the autumn of 1912; see *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art,* ed. by Kenneth Clement Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), p. 291. An English-language translation with the German text came out in 1981 allowing it to reach a larger audience, as many of the original 345 are in private collections; the original is now available online: 'Klänge (Sounds) (1913)', *The Museum of Modern Art* <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/26560?locale=en> [accessed 8 August 2016]; Wassily Kandinsky, *Sounds,* ed. & trans. by Elizabeth R. Napier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 121–29. Some of the poems from *Klänge*, as well as later poems written in Paris, were included by Carola Giedeon-Welcker in *Poètes à l'écart: Anthologie der Abseitigen* (Bern-Bümpliz: Benteli, 1946), pp. 53–60. As *Klänge* is unpaginated I give the page numbers of the German text in the English translation.

[10] 'Mes gravures sur bois', XXe Siècle, 1.3 (1938), 31. It is important to note that this was written very much after the fact, and how he describes his work in this article is not to be taken as a straightforward account of how the work was conceived at the time.

[11] Johannes Eichner, *Kandinsky und Gabriele Münter. Von Ursprüngen moderner Kunst* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1957), p. 100.

[12] For details of the history and making of the book, see Hans Konrad Roethel, *Kandinsky: Das graphische Werk* (Cologne: DuMont, 1970), p. 445.

[13] Richard Sheppard, 'Kandinsky's Œuvre 1900-14: The Avant-Garde as Rear-Guard', *Word and Image*, 6 (1990), 41–67 (p. 41).

[14] 'Mes gravures sur bois'.

treating them as merely more examples of certain themes within the larger context of his works—and bearing our discussion of 'rot anstatt rot' in mind—we should bracket off his work in other media: it is the absence of paint that has opened up space for these poems, and we should read them, first and foremost, as literary objects—which is how, as taken up by Dada poets, they have contributed to the history of avant-garde poetics.[15]

Beginning, then, with the narrower context of the work itself, let us look first at 'Hügel', the first poem in the collection, which seems to state, programmatically, the sort of relationship the reader is going to have to the speaker:

HÜGEL

Eine Masse von Hügeln in allen Farben, die sich einer denken kann und will. Alles verschiedene Größen, aber Formen immer gleich, d. h. nur eine: Dick unten, geschwollen an den Seiten, flachrund oben. Also einfache, gewöhnliche Hügel, wie man sie sich immer denkt und nie sieht.
Zwischen den Hügeln schlängelt sich ein schmaler Pfad einfach weiß, d. h. weder bläulich, noch gelblich, weder ins Blaue, noch ins Gelbe.
In einem langen schwarzen, faltenlosen Rock, welcher sogar die Fersen bedeckt, gekleidet, geht auf diesem Pfad ein Mann. Sein Gesicht ist blaß, aber auf den Backen sind zwei rote Flecken. Ebenso rot sind die Lippen. Er hat eine große Trommel umgehängt und trommelt.
Sehr komisch geht der Mann.
Manchmal läuft er und gibt seiner Trommel fieberhafte, unregelmäßige Schläge. Manchmal geht er langsam, vielleicht in

[15] The anonymous catalogue author of an exhibition of the woodcuts warns against placing too much weight on the content of the prints, or the links between prints and poems: 'In [the woodcuts] it was, however, the interplay of the colours themselves which he saw as expressing the ideas of the 'musical album' *Klänge*,' '[The prints] are complete and separate in themselves.' *Wassily Kandinsky, 1866-1944: Original Woodcuts in Colour and Black and White: Klänge 1911* (London: William Weston Gallery, 1990) [unpaginated]. For discussions which place the poetry (or at least the literary work) at the centre, see Adrian Wanner, *Russian Minimalism: From the Prose Poem to the Anti-Story,* Studies in Russian Literature and Theory (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2003), pp. 114–22; Claudia Emmert, *Bühnenkompositionen und Gedichte von Wassily Kandinsky: im Kontext eschatologischer Lehren seiner Zeit 1896-1914* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998); Heribert Brinkmann, 'Wassily Kandinski als Dichter' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cologne, 1980); Richard Sheppard, 'Kandinsky's Klänge: An Interpretation', *German Life and Letters,* 33.2 (1980), 135–46. Elizabeth Napier's introduction to her translation of *Klänge* is also excellent. Kandinsky, *Sounds*, pp. 1–11.

seine Gedanken vertieft und trommelt fast mechanisch in einem lang gezogenen Tempo: eins … eins … eins … eins … manchmal bleibt er ganz stehen und trommelt wie das weichfellige weiße Spielhäschen, welches wir alle so lieben.
Dieses Stehen dauert aber nicht lange.
Da läuft der Mann schon wieder und gibt seiner Trommel fieberhafte, unregelmäßige Schläge.
Wie gründlich erschöpft liegt er da, der schwarze Mann, lang gestreckt auf dem weißen Pfad, zwischen den Hügeln in allen Farben. Seine Trommel liegt neben ihm und auch die zwei Schläger.
Er steht schon auf. Er wird schon wieder laufen.
Das alles habe ich von oben gesehen und bitte auch euch, von oben darauf zu schauen.[16]

The poem seems undecided between wanting complete control—giving, for instance, detail oddly specific in a poem that seems otherwise to deal in what we might think of as archetypal imagery—and relinquishing this control to the reader. In the first line the reader is invited to imagine the colours ('in allen Farben, die sich einer denken kann, und will'); and the effect of the poem is shown to be constrained by the imagination, and indeed the desire to imagine, of this implied reader. (We might think of Kandinsky's student and colleague at the Bauhaus, Josef Albers, who remarked 'If one says "Red" [...] and there are 50 people listening, it can be expected that there will be 50 reds in their minds. And one can be sure that all these reds will be very different.')[17] The hills are shaped like archetypal hills, the hills of our imagination, that rarely have such an appearance in reality ('gewöhnliche Hügel, wie man sie sich immer denkt und nie sieht'), and it is taken for granted that we will share this knowledge of the ur-form of a hill. The final line, however, far from being the 'completely nonsensical note' that Richard Sheppard sees it to be, indicates a shift towards the metaphysical, as Claudia Emmert points out, but also towards the metatextual.[18] That is, it seems to suggest an anxiety regarding the degree to which the creator of a work can dictate the terms on which it is received, and ensure a uniform,

[16] *Sounds*, p.121. Many of the poems are laid out as prose, but given the book's strong graphic bent I have kept the line breaks and bold text of the original in order to preserve to some degree the layout that Kandinsky chose.

[17] Albers, p. 13.

[18] Sheppard, 'Kandinsky's Klänge', p. 140; Emmert, p. 135.

perhaps even universally identical, experience. To want this, this line seems to be saying, is to want to exist outside of the world—perhaps even to be, or act as, God—and to want one's audience there too, safely in the world of ideas.

It is clear that we are dealing, in the poem, with idealised forms that do not appear in reality; it is clear that this is a fantastic landscape, an imaginary landscape, whose relationship to the world is not one of naturalistic depiction but instead a response to an idealised or abstracted realm. This is consolidated by the first mention of a specific colour: 'einfach weiß, d. h. weder bläulich, noch gelblich, weder ins Blaue, noch ins Gelbe.' This is not, then, a specific shade of white, but instead the most pure example of that colour, the archetypal white. There is an odd stylistic disjunction between these images, stark and monumental, and the bureaucratic shorthand of 'd. h.'. The specificity of the description of the colour white seems to bridge the two, with its folk-tale rhythm and repetitions on the one hand, which bring to the fore the mythic aspects, and its insistence on precision on the other.[19] Especially when we take into account the final line, it seems almost as if it were a guide pointing out aspects of a landscape, or rather a painting of a landscape; rather than relating a narrative, it seems more the case that we are being given a running commentary—and the use of generic and first person plural play a clear part in setting the tone for this ('einer'; 'man'; 'welches wir alle so lieben'). The tension between readerly and writerly control can be refocused on the question of the possibility of shared visual knowledge: in some cases we are expected to share knowledge with the speaker, such as of these 'weichfellige weiße Spielhäschen', yet in others we are given explicit instructions as to what to imagine, and from what angle: the speaker's trust in our ability to participate in the imaginary work of the poem varies throughout the poem—and indeed, as we will see, the collection.

[19] Donald Cuspit has argued for the relevance of Kandinsky's first career as a lawyer in connection with the theory, and there is something parodically legalistic about certain of the poems. 'Utopian Protest in Early Abstract Art', *Art Journal,* 29.4 (1970), 430–437.

The relationship between the speaker and the reader can be understood, perhaps, as a consequence of the poet's own insecurities about form. What can a poem do? Where the painter knows how to direct the viewer's eye, to suggest the order in which we look at the various elements of the painting, there is a brute—and perhaps therefore untrustworthy—obviousness to the ordering of the experience of a poem. It would seem at first that a poet has a tighter grip on the reins; but the experience of a poem does not consist merely in following the unfolding of words (there is, in fact, something almost uncanny about lines such as 'eins… eins… eins… eins…' which seem to rely, blithely, on this being the case—or is it that they insist on this being the case?). Telling the reader to look at the scene from above is redundant: if they are reading on the page then this is almost certainly what they are already up to. This line comes across almost as a feint: an ironic suggestion that we might doubt the fidelity to the specifics of form in the work of a painter-poet, that the reader might be tempted to assimilate or subdue their aesthetic response to the poem *qua* poem in the knowledge that it might have been a painting. Kandinsky certainly saw himself as a poet,[20] and claimed (in 'Mes gravures sur bois' and elsewhere) that what he was doing here could only take the shape of poetry. Thus, if we stuff our reading with images we have seen in Kandinsky's painting we will end up with no room for our imagination to stretch its legs, which, it would seem, it is meant to do.

Where our imagination is, in the case of 'Hügel', given most exercise is with regard to colour. With all of the specific mentions of colour in the poem, we notice that, unlike the coloured surfaces of the early George, or the ambivalently semi-abstracted colours of the *Neue Gedichte*, these are based not on the phenomenal world but on abstracted forms of the named colours, and thus not defined by objects in the world whose colour we might recognise, but instead through or in opposition to other colours (the white is neither yellowish nor blueish; the red of the cheeks is brought alongside the red of the lips; the hills are 'all colours', as if 'colours' was a finite set of discrete hues). Colour, within the

[20] Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich,* p. 84.

poem, is entirely relational; colour, that is, remains within the poem, to be 'activated' by the imaginative work of the reader but without reference to any world outside itself.

I: THE STATUS OF THE THEORETICAL WORK

The temptation at this point would be to compare the use of colour in the poems with that in the woodcuts of *Klänge*, or in paintings of the period, or with Kandinsky's 'theory' of colour effects as described in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. Such comparisons, however, run into problems, as I have suggested; problems inextricable from the larger problem of the question of 'presence' in writing as opposed to painting. The lasting significance of Kandinsky's writing on art theory has made this problem unavoidable for those writing on his work; one solution has been to go down the theoretical route and give Kandinsky's contributions to early twentieth-century art theory primary importance, with his paintings seen as illustrations of his thinking.[21] We might otherwise look only at the painting, dismissing the theoretical works or seeing them as insufficient for, if not a distraction from, a proper understanding of the painting and printmaking. The poems pose a problem to both of these routes: it may seem that we can only really engage with them once we know where they stand with regard to the woodcuts, and once we have taken on board his ideas on mediality, and the particular picture of language he saw himself to be working with; yet a careful reading of the poems themselves shows them to contradict many of the claims made in his theoretical works of the time.

---

[21] Examples of this include Cheetham; Mark W. Roskill, *Klee, Kandinsky, and the Thought of Their Time: A Critical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); W. J. T. Mitchell, '"Ut Pictura Theoria": Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language', *Critical Inquiry,* 15.2 (1989), 348–371. In Clement Greenberg's account not only is the practice secondary to Kandinsky's 'intellectual purchase on post-cubist painting', it 'represent[s]'—at least in the case of his work from the mid-twenties on—'a misconception [...] of the very art of putting paint on canvas to make a picture.' 'Obituary and Review of an Exhibition of Kandinsky', in *The Collected Essays and Criticism Vol 2: Arrogant Purpose 1945-1949*, ed. by John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 3–6 (p. 4).

In a letter to Michael Sadleir,[22] the English translator of *Über das Geistige*, Kandinsky discusses the connection between the woodcuts and the poems:

> Die Texte stehen in keinem Zusammenhang mit den Holzschnitten. Ich habe sie darum geschrieben, weil ich gerade diese Gefühle nicht malerisch darstellen konnte. Es ist aber, wie Sie sicher selbst bemerkt haben, eine tiefe innere Verwandschaft [sic] zwischen den Texten und den Holzschnitten. Und auch sogar eine äußere: ich behandl[e] das Wort, den Satz sehr ähnlich, wie ich die Linie, den Fleck behandle.
>
> Die große innere Verwandschaft aller Künste kommt allmählich immer klarer zu Tage. Das ist für mich eine große Freude und ich bin glücklich, daß ich auch hier etwas mitarbeiten kann. Lesen Sie meine Texte ohne eine direkte Erzählung darin zu suchen. Laßen Sie sie nur auf Ihr Gefühl, auf Ihre Seele wirken.[23]

It seems clear from Kandinsky's own description that to look for similarities of theme or content would be misguided; yet previous accounts have done just that, ('here, both poem and illustration contain a man with a long, phallic sword'[24]) thus reducing both to the sorts of 'objects' that Kandinsky was in the process of ridding his art of, and which he saw as primarily pretext.[25] Moreover, in the unpublished Russian version of the collection the woodcuts and poems are in quite a different order, and the poems are laid out as prose, with fewer line breaks.[26] This, along with the letter quoted above, would seem to forestall the sorts of readings which seek to see meaning in similarities between texts and woodcuts placed side by side. If we are to compare the poems and the woodcuts at all, we must look instead to the 'innere' and 'äußere' 'Verwandtschaften'—but what exactly these 'Verwandtschaften' look like is not made clear.

---

[22] The art collectors Michael Sadleir (né Sadler) and his father, Michael Ernest Sadler, were both in correspondence with Kandinsky at the time of his producing Klänge, which is discussed in the letters, published in Adrian Glew, '"Blue Spiritual Sounds": Kandinsky and the Sadlers, 1911-16', *The Burlington Magazine*, 139 (1997), 600–615.

[23] 7.12.1911. Glew, p. 611.

[24] Sheppard, 'Kandinsky's *Klänge*', p. 136.

[25] '[The artist] uses the object as a "pretext" for pure painting, which is always more essential for him than the object.' 'The Value of a Concrete Work', *XXe Siècle,* 1.5–6 (1939), 48–50 (p. 48).

[26] Some of the poems may have been written originally in Russian, although most of these versions seem to be self-translations out of the German. For a discussion of the Russian text, including layout, see Wanner, pp. 114–22.

'Ich habe sie darum geschrieben, weil ich gerade diese Gefühle nicht malerisch darstellen konnte': the woodcuts and poems are not expressions of the same content in different media, but in each case its only possible expression. In 'Mes gravures sur bois', Kandinsky complained of the expectation that an artist would stay with one medium: of the painter, '[o]n voulait presque qu'il mange non pas à la fourchette, mais avec un pinceau'. But for different tasks, there are different tools, and the sense of rightness, an inner necessity, brought about this 'changement d'instrument': 'la force qui me pousse à mon travail reste toujours la même, c'est à dire une «pression intérieure».' Kandinsky's language has the same relation to a certain 'inner sound' or metaphysical truth as his use of paint has to the same truth. Yet even within this the question of colour is not answered, as the status of colour within the work seems still in question: does it have an identical effect when named as when put on a canvas? Or does its mediation via language mean that it has different effects? If so, in what way can poetry be like painting? If we are, in this case, to rely on the theoretical work for our understanding, we need not only to know how Kandinsky saw colour to function; we also need to know how he thought words relate to paint, *qua* medium. And if, as Richard Sheppard has noted, the implied effects or semantic content of colours in the poetry do not seem to correspond to the effects they are said to have in the theory, what does this mean for the theory?[27]

II: COLOUR UNIVERSALS

Kandinsky's writing on colour is in the most part to be found in his *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1911). The book and its arguments are remarkably 'eclectic';[28] moreover, while various sources have been suggested for his ideas on colour—scientists such as Helmholtz and Hering as well as Chevreul via his populariser Charles Blanc, philosophers such as Hegel, art historians such as Wilhelm Worringer—the majority of these are unacknowledged, aside from

[27] Sheppard, 'Kandinsky's Klänge', p. 136.
[28] This eclecticism forms the backbone of Christopher Short's argument in *The Art Theory of Wassily Kandinsky, 1909-1928: The Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

theosophical texts by Annie Besant and Rudolph Steiner, through whom, it has been argued, Kandinsky came to Goethe.[29] 'In short,' summarises Will Grohmann, 'Kandinsky's book did not appear in a vacuum'.[30] However, he was hardly faithful to these sources and professed to be suspicious of overly positivistic accounts of colour, and, at times, of theory in general—certainly that which preceded practice;[31] we might think of his now famous injunction in the English version of 'La Valeur d'un œuvre concret', 'don't think!'[32]

Kandinsky dedicates just under half of *Über das Geistige* to colour, in the chapters 'Die Wirkung der Farbe' and 'Formen- und Farbensprache.' These titles give a representative picture of colour's position within the book: it is partly a descriptive account of the supposed physical and psychic [i.e. *psychisch*] effects of colour, and partly an attempt to make of these effects a grammar. By physical effects Kandinsky has in mind fleeting sensations of pleasure, annoyance, change of temperature, and so on, as registered by the eye: 'Der Schauende empfindet ein Gefühl von Befriedigung, Freude, […] Oder es wird das Auge gereizt, wie der Gaumen von einer pikanten Speise. Es wird auch wieder beruhigt oder abgekühlt, wie der Finger, wenn er Eis berührt.' (p. 59). Psychic effects, however, are experienced as vibrations in the soul, as in the famous line: 'Im allgemeinen ist also die Farbe ein Mittel, einen direkten Einfluß auf die Seele auszuüben. Die

---

[29] 'It matters little for our present purpose that [Steiner's] is a grotesque misrepresentation of Goethe's aesthetics. These views were certainly to Kandinsky's taste and they occur again and again in his writings.' Leopold D. Ettlinger, *Kandinsky's 'At Rest'* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 10–11. For Kandinsky's possible connections to nineteenth century science and philosophy, see Gage, *Colour and Culture*; Clark V. Poling, *Kandinsky-Unterricht am Bauhaus: Farbenseminar und analytisches Zeichnen* (Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten, 1982); Short, *The Art Theory of Wassily Kandinsky, 1909-1928*; Will Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky: Life and Work* (New York: Abrams, 1958); for Worringer, see Rose-Carol Washton Long, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 10; Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich*, p. 7; for Hegel in particular, see Lisa Carol Florman, *Concerning the Spiritual and the Concrete in Kandinsky's Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014); for the relationship to Theosophy, see Sixten Ringbom, 'Art in "The Epoch of the Great Spiritual": Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 29 (1966), 386–418.

[30] Grohmann, p. 86.

[31] Discussed in Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 121.

[32] Kandinsky, 'The Value of a Concrete Work', supplement.

Farbe ist die Taste. Das Auge ist der Hammer. Die Seele ist das Klavier mit vielen Saiten.' (p. 64) The paragraph continues:

> Der Künstler ist die Hand, die durch diese oder jene Taste *zweckmäßig* die menschliche Seele in Vibration bringt.
>
> So ist es klar, daß die Farbenharmonie nur auf dem Prinzip der zweckmäßigen Berührung der menschlichen Seele ruhen muß.
>
> Diese Basis soll als *Prinzip der inneren Notwendigkeit* bezeichnet werden.

It is this 'innere Notwendigkeit' that determines the psychic effects: green is of necessity the colour of passivity, and thus causes, of necessity, in the soul of the viewer a feeling of passivity, a passivity 'von einer Art Fettheit, Selbstzufriedenheit parfümiert' (p. 94).[33] The originary explanation of the effects are left open: there's a possibility that these psychic effects are influenced or brought about by mimetic association (eg. red=fire), but this seems, to Kandinsky, unlikely (p. 61).

Kandinsky warns here and elsewhere that these are not in any banal sense 'emotions', instead intuitions of the colour's inner truth or essence:

> Immer muß unterstrichen werden, daß die Ausdrücke, wie «traurig, freudig» usw. sehr grober Natur sind und nur als Wegweiser zu den feinen, unkörperlichen Gemütsvibrationen dienen können. (*Über das Geistige* p. 119)

Similarly, in his 'Cologne Lecture' Kandinsky makes explicit the distinction between these 'Gemütsvibrationen' and 'Seelenzustände'.[34] This has not always been heeded by critics; Meyer Schapiro, for instance, uses the word 'moods' to refer to these effects, which seems misleading, although perhaps closer to the mark than Edward Wadsworth, who, in a review of *Über das Geistige* in Wyndham Lewis' *Blast 1* gave 'feelings', and in the most autobiographical sense:

> This insistance [*sic*] on the value of one's feelings as the only aesthetic impulse, means logically that the artist is not only entitled to treat form and colour according to his inner dictates, but that it is his duty to do so, and consequently

---

[33] Herbert Read notes that Kandinsky 'was not very precise in his definition of this inner necessity—he seems to have regarded it as an indefinite spiritual (or one can say psychological, or even neural) tension which was released in the act or process of composition.' Herbert Read, *Art and Alienation: The Role of the Artist in Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), p. 146.

[34] From the lecture notes published in the chapter 'Kandinsky über seine Entwicklung', in *Kandinsky und Gabriele Münter. Von Ursprüngen moderner Kunst,* pp. 106–16 (p. 116). The notes were then translated with additions from the original manuscript as 'Cologne Lecture', in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art,* ed. by Kenneth Clement Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), pp. 392–400.

> his life (his thoughts and deeds) becomes the raw material out of which he must carve his creations.[35]

It is true that Kandinsky sees feeling, in the sense of intuition, as more important than calculation or objectivity,[36] but we cannot go from this to Wadsworth's point that the artist's life becomes the raw materials for his work; the raw materials, or impetus, for the work are the vibrations, and the artist's capacity for intuition must be put to their service. These vibrations are better described as 'metaphysical essences'[37] or 'cosmic laws', the term Sixten Ringbom uses in his call for a reintegration of the spiritual in critical readings and evaluations of Kandinsky's work.[38]

There are two tensions, then within his theoretical works: first, between theory—thinking, calculation—and intuition, and second, between descriptive and prescriptive accounts of colour.[39] Both tensions we can ascribe to what Kandinsky describes as the 'großes spitzes Dreieck' (p. 29) of spiritual progress: what those at its point might be capable of (intuition), those with souls still dulled by nineteenth-century materialism will have to learn without, yet, feeling. He quotes an anecdote concerning Leonardo da Vinci, first, as here, in *Über das Geistige* and then later in 'La Valeur':

> Der große, vielseitige Meister Leonardo da Vinci ersann ein System oder eine Skala von Löffelchen, mit welchen verschiedene Farben zu nehmen waren. Es sollte dadurch ein mechanisches Harmonisieren erreicht werden. Einer seiner

---

[35] Meyer Schapiro, 'The Nature of Abstract Art (1937)', in *Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries* (New York: Braziller, 1978), pp. 185–212 (pp. 197–98); Edward Wadsworth, 'Inner Necessity', *Blast,* 1 (1914), 119–28 (p. 125).

[36] '[N]icht der Berechnung, sondern stets dem Gefühl [wird] recht gegeben.' *Über das Geistige,* p. 142. 'Neither reason nor logic can be excluded from any consideration of art, but perpetual corrections are necessary from the angle of the irrational. The feelings must correct the brain.' 'The Value of a Concrete Work', p. 48.

[37] Cheetham, p. 70.

[38] Ringbom, p. 396 and passim. He takes the term from Kandinsky, but makes rather more of it than other critics; see Kandinsky, 'Über die Formfrage', p. 168. The term 'cosmic laws' is used also by Harold Osborne; Osborne, p. 102.

[39] 'What produces the work of art? Intuition or objective calculation?' (preface to the Russian version of *Über das Geistige,* in John E. Bowlt and Rose-Carol Washton Long, *The Life of Vasilii Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of 'On the Spiritual in Art'* (Newtonville, Mass: Oriental Research Partners, 1980), p. 61. Two accounts of Kandinsky's early aesthetic theory take this tension as their starting point, Short's *The Art Theory of Wassily Kandinsky* (as before) and Matthias Bunge's *Zwischen Intuition und Ratio: Pole des bildnerischen Denkens bei Kandinsky, Klee und Beuys* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996).

> Schüler quälte sich mit der Anwendung dieses Hilfsmittels, und durch Mißerfolge verzweifelt, wendete er sich an seinen Kollegen mit der Frage, wie der Meister selbst mit den Löffelchen umgehe. «Der Meister wendet sie nie an», antwortete ihm der Kollege. (p. 85)

Kandinsky is the 'Meister' and *Über das Geistige* his 'Skala von Löffelchen'; nonetheless, his descriptions of the effects of colours are often hedged (words are incapable of grasping the nuance of the spiritual vibrations; when we are talking about a colour there is a difference between a colour in its pure state, and a colour on the canvas, where it is bounded by other colours, and of a particular lightness and saturation) and he refuses to make any absolute claims: 'Es gibt kein «muß» in der Kunst, die ewig frei ist. Vor dem «muß» flieht die Kunst, wie der Tag vor der Nacht.' (p. 76). In order to hold on to the claim that there are universal values or effects to certain colours Kandinsky has both to push their, in practice, dynamic and relational values, and suggest that the effects described are currently only available to those at the front of the triangle—the artists and prophets—which nonetheless means that those further back will at some point reach them. We can easily see the appeal of such a picture, which is nobly non-exclusive, and, moreover, constitutes the possibility of its own coming about, in that by learning Kandinsky's colour effects a painter or viewer can hone both their colour sense and exercise their soul, allowing them to progress further up the triangle.

The consequences of this differential spiritual development for the work of art are described in the essay, 'Über Bühnenkomposition': the work, Kandinsky says, ought to cause in the spectator 'Seelenvibrationen' identical to those which form the starting point of the work, but 'die zweite Vibration […] kann erstens stark oder schwach sein, was von den Grad der Entwicklung des Empfängers und auch von zeitlichen Einflüssen (absorbierte Seele) abhängt' ('Über Bühnenkomposition', p. 192). Nonetheless, this ability is not innate, and so there is no person who cannot experience a work of art: 'Jedes Werk und jedes einzelne Mittel des Werkes verursacht in jedem Menschen ohne Ausnahme eine Vibration, die im Grunde der des Künstlers identisch ist' ('Über Bühnenkomposition', p. 192).

This leads, however, to circularity: if the only thing standing between Kandinsky's use of colour and arbitrariness are the colour correspondences he provides in *Über das Geistige*, then what is to stop a critic—such as Sergei Eisenstein—accusing Kandinsky of setting up arbitrary correspondences?[40] The fear of the arbitrary was in fact a great motivator behind Kandinsky's 'theoretical' and self-interpretative works, and he warns that abstract or non-objective artworks made before an age was spiritually ready would look 'wie eine geometrische Ornamentik [...] die, grob gesagt, einer Krawatte, einem Teppich gleichen würden.' '[The abstract painter's] greatest fear', as Rosalind Krauss puts it, 'is that he may be making *mere* abstraction, abstraction uninformed by a subject, contentless abstraction, for which the term—wholly pejorative for everyone from Kandinsky and Mondrian to Pollock and Newman—is *decoration*.'[41] The content is supplied, it is claimed, by the essence of the colours themselves; however, to ward off accusations of arbitrariness Kandinsky turns to science and pseudoscience. Later on, he carried out experiments himself among his Bauhaus colleagues and students, but at the point of writing *Über das Geistige*, his interest is in theosophy, and particularly its claims about 'thought-forms' and sound-colour correspondences—not, that is, in the interest of being 'esoteric', rather, in the hope of finding a universal language of form.[42]

---

[40] 'We cannot deny that compositions of this kind [i.e. *Der gelbe Klang*] evoke obscurely disturbing sensations—but no more than this. But to this day attempts continue to be made to arrange these subjective and largely personal sensations into meaningful relationships, that are, frankly, just as vague and remote.' Eisenstein, p. 117.

[41] Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 221–42 (p. 237).

[42] Ettlinger, p. 9. Ettlinger gives an interesting account of Kandinsky's later turn to Gestalt psychology to solve the same problem. Psychologists have more recently investigated the colour-shape associations Kandinsky taught at the Bauhaus and found—as one might predict—that they are not universal. The questionnaire given out by Kandinsky to those in the Bauhaus wall-painting workshop was repeated with non-artist university students in Leipzig (and later Sharjah), and while there was a marked preference for a particular set of colour-shape associations, it was not those that Kandinsky promoted and that were thus given as answers at the Bauhaus. The conclusions in these studies were that such associations are culturally constrained—perhaps to the point of being specific to Kandinsky's colleagues and students at the Bauhaus—who may in fact have been more giving what they thought were 'correct' answers rather than responding to what they felt was correct, and the 'correct' answers were, according to Magdalena Droste, already current by the time Kandinsky arrived at the Bauhaus. See Thomas Jacobsen, 'Kandinsky's Questionnaire Revisited: Fundamental Correspondence of Basic Colors and Forms?', *Perceptual and Motor Skills,* 95 (2002), 903–15; and Jacobsen's subsequent work with the art historian

It is in this context that we need to understand Kandinsky's interest in synaesthesia: it must be as a way of satisfying a desire to find an objective, universal grounding for his claims about colour effects while not returning to '[das] seelenlos-materielle[ ] Leben[ ] des 19. Jahrhunderts' ('Über die Formfrage', p.181). It is often claimed that Kandinsky based his art on his own 'synaesthesia' (that is, 'idiopathic' or 'developmental' synaesthesia).[43] The problem with this claim, as Kandinsky would have known from his own reading in psychological research on the topic, is that an important characteristic of the cross-sensory experiences that by 1911 went by the name of synaesthesia is that they are highly idiosyncratic.[44] It was not Kandinsky's project to present private, subjective experience; rather, the correspondences underlying colours and shapes and concepts or affective states had to be assumed to be universal, even if currently inaccessible to many.[45] In *Über das Geistige* he mentions a doctor from Dresden whose patient, 'den er als «geistig ungewöhnlich hochstehenden» Menschen charakterisiert', 'eine bestimmte Sauce immer und unfehlbar «blau» schmeckte, d. h. wie blaue Farbe empfand.' (p. 62) It seems clear that Kandinsky's intention is

---

Christian Wolsdorff, 'Does History Affect Aesthetic Preference? Kandinsky's Teaching of Colour-Form Correspondence, Empirical Aesthetics, and the Bauhaus', *The Design Journal,* 10.3 (2007), 16–27; and Anatoliy V. Kharkhurin, 'Is Triangle Really Yellow? An Empirical Investigation of Kandinsky's Correspondence Theory', *Empirical Studies of the Arts,* 30.2 (2012), 167–182; Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919-1933,* trans. by Karen Williams (Berlin: Taschen, 1993), p. 88. In any case, even at the time, not all of the questionnaires corresponded with Kandinsky's answers.

[43] See, for instance Gage, *Colour and Culture*, pp. 208–9; *Colour and Meaning*, p. 266; Osborne, pp. 102–3; Poling, p. 48; Philip Ball, p. 22. The terms 'developmental' and 'idiopathic' synaesthesia are given further explanation in Simon Baron-Cohen and John E. Harrison, *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 6–11; and Harrison, p. 4. Harrison explores the diagnoses given to various figures such as Rimbaud, Schoenberg and Kandinsky, showing many of them to have no real basis. See also Kevin Dann, who gives an extensive survey of historical literature on synaesthesia in his polemic against widespread misunderstanding and the reductive overdiagnosis of artists and poets, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synaesthesia and the Search for Transcendental Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[44] Poling (p. 48) suggests that Kandinsky knew the work of Francis Galton, who makes this point clear. Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London: Dent, 1883), p. 107. The one writer who presents such experiences in line with the standard diagnostic criteria is Vladimir Nabokov (and his mother), but this seems of little interest to the critic, who might in any case come to the same conclusion as Gérard Genette: 'mais comme d'habitude chez lui, l'idiosyncrasie et la mystification sont ici difficiles à discerner.' Genette, *Mimologiques,* p. 401 n. 2. Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 29–30.

[45] Heribert Brinkmann also warns of the 'danger' of synaesthesia, even if we believe it to tap into a deeper universal experience, but this is surprisingly uncommon in secondary literature on Kandinsky. Heribert Brinkmann, p. 67. See also Eisenstein, pp. 149–50.

to provide an objective basis for his idea of 'Gemütsvibrationen', and to dismiss the assumption that such cross-sensory associations are unconsciously influenced by superficial facts (yellow is 'sour' because of lemons). The senses are but the superficial mediators of an impression which touches the soul, as he regularly insists, and 'stark fühlenden Menschen' like this patient are like 'gute, vielgespielte Geigen, welche bei jeder Berührung mit dem Bogen in allen Teilen und Fasern vibrieren.' (p. 62) An engagement with Kandinsky's work requires us to understand not the quirks of his neurons but the metaphysics of 'Materie' that he imagines to work towards uniting the creator of a work and its audience.[46]

It is, as he goes on to make clear in the two essays in *Der Blaue Reiter*, the point of art to improve the spiritual state such that the work and its audience are, in the end, united:

> Der undefinierbare und doch bestimmte Seelenvorgang (Vibration) ist das Ziel der einzelnen Kunstmittel.
>
> Ein bestimmer Komplex der Vibrationen—das Ziel eines Werkes.
>
> Die durch das Summieren bestimmter Komplexe vor sich gehende Verfeinerung der Seele—das Ziel der Kunst. ('Über Bühnenkomposition', p. 191)

By training the soul, through repeated exposure to art, we will at some point find universal agreement on these effects; and this agreement will not only be between different beholders, but also between feeling and thinking, feeling and science: 'Später kann der Leser mit dem Künstler zu objektiven Betrachtungen, zur wissenschaftlichen Analyse übergehen. Hier findet er dann, daß die sämtlichen gebrachten Beispiele einem inneren Rufe gehorchen—Komposition, daß sie alle auf einer inneren Basis stehen: Konstruktion' ('Über die Formfrage', p. 181). The work of art, then, acts as an introduction to, and a justification of, itself.

---

[46] Meyer Schapiro makes the claim that '[c]olored audition is important to [Kandinsky] because perception is then blurred and localised in the perceiver rather than identified with an external source.' Schapiro, 'The Nature of Abstract Art (1937)', p. 204. This seems reasonable but I don't think that this is precisely why Kandinsky is interested, as he would still have it that the perceptions have some basis in 'truth', or some kind of reality external to the perceiver, but experienced in modalities unavailable to the less 'entwickelt'. His interest, certainly around the time of *Über das Geistige*, seems instead based on the possibilities that synaesthesia offers for there being a kind of external reality currently perceptually unavailable to most people.

This is still a problem for the critic who would dispute the effects that Kandinsky claims colours have per se, or the critic who would dispute the idea that colours have effects that are universally felt, or could be universally felt. While we need not be looking for places where Kandinsky is going wrong by his own lights (like the critic Kandinsky scorns in in 'Über die Formfrage')[47], we may be worried that the lack of a shared belief in the effects of colours, the lack of a shared experience of colours, might mean an impoverished experience of Kandinsky's painting. Ernst Gombrich makes an interesting point that associations that seem objective to an artist are often not felt by the viewer, not just because these rest on metaphysically shaky assumptions, but because we are lacking the context, the historical constraints that make one certain colour or shape seem, to Kandinsky, 'calm' compared to another; moreover that the art lies not in the coding of affect into colours, but in the experimentation within a given system (that is, the loose set of ideas taken for granted at the time).[48] What many took away from Kandinsky's work was in fact the dynamism, the play and experimentation, which seemed closer to an underlying truth than any system could be: 'sein letztes Wort ist kein Farbenkatechismus, keine verbindliche Harmonielehre, sondern immer nur das freiheitliche Prinzip der inneren Notwendigkeit, die der einzige Führer und Verführer bleibt.'[49] 'Alles was der Künstler macht ist auch nur Spielerei. Er

---

[47] 'Eine der «wichtigen» Sorgen der heutigen Kritik der abstrakten Kunst gegenüber ist die Sorge, wie soll man denn in dieser Kunst das Falsche vom Richtigen unterscheiden, das heißt größtenteils, wie soll man hier das Negative entdecken? Das Verhalten beim Kunstwerk gegenüber sollte ein anderes sein, als das Verhalten zu einem Pferd, welches man kaufen will: bei dem Pferd deckt eine wichtige negative Eigenschaft alle die positiven und macht es wertlos; beim Werk ist das Verhältnis umgekehrt: eine wichtige positive Eigenschaft deckt alle die negativen und macht es wertvoll.' (p. 178)

[48] 'No emotion, however strong or however complex, can be transposed into an unstructured medium. Both the transmitter and the receiver need the right degree of guidance by an array of alternatives within which the freedom of choice can become expressive.' Gombrich, 'Art and the Language of the Emotions', pp. 231–32. Gombrich gives the very entertaining example of a person communicating emotions via coloured postage stamps (for which there is a limited palette, and which must, at least to begin with, add up to a certain amount).

[49] Hugo Ball, 'Kandinsky: Vortrag gehalten in der Galeie Dada (Zürich, 7. April 1917)', in *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit: ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. by Hans Burkhard Schlichting (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 41–53 (p. 50). Hugo Ball's take on Kandinsky is at times biased by his own interest in the possibility of art to respond to a higher form of the real, which in his case seems closer to a Nietzschean picture of the 'Dionysian' than Kandinsky's more ordered 'Geist'. (See Richard Sheppard, 'Kandinsky's Early Aesthetic Theory: Some Examples of Its Influence and Some Implications for the Theory and Practice of Abstract Poetry', *Journal of European Studies,* 5.1 (1975), 19–40 (p. 27).)

quält sich, sucht für sein Gefühl und Gedanken einen Ausdruck zu finden, er spricht mit Farbe, Form, Zeichnung, Klang, Wort, etc.'[50] It is to this 'Wort, etc.' that I now turn.

III: WORD AS MATERIAL (2)

> Das Wort ist ein innerer Klang. Dieser innere Klang entspringt teilweise (vielleicht hauptsächlich) dem Gegenstand, welchem das Wort zum Namen dient. Wenn aber der Gegenstand nicht selbst gesehen wird, sondern nur sein Name gehört wird, so entsteht im Kopfe des Hörers die abstrakte Vorstellung, der dematerialisierte Gegenstand, welcher im «Herzen» eine Vibration sofort hervorruft. So ist der grüne, gelbe, rote Baum auf der Wiese nur ein materieller Fall, eine zufällige materialisierte Form des Baumes, welchen wir in uns fühlen, wenn wir das Wort Baum hören. Geschickte Anwendung (nach dichterischem Gefühl) eines Wortes, eine innerlich nötige Wiederholung desselben zweimal, dreimal, mehrere Male nacheinander, kann nicht nur zum Wachsen des inneren Klanges führen, sondern noch andere nicht geahnte geistige Eigenschaften des Wortes zutage bringen. Schließlich bei öfterer Wiederholung des Wortes (beliebtes Spiel der Jugend, welches später vergessen wird) verliert es den äußeren Sinn der Benennung. Ebenso wird sogar der abstrakt gewordene Sinn des bezeichneten Gegenstandes vergessen und nur der reine *Klang* des Wortes entblößt. Diesen «reinen» Klang hören wir vielleicht unbewußt auch im Zusammenklange mit dem realen oder später abstrakt gewordenen Gegenstande. Im letzten Falle aber tritt dieser reine Klang in den Vordergrund und übt einen direkten Druck auf die Seele aus. Die Seele kommt zu einer gegenstandslosen Vibration, die noch komplizierter, ich möchte sagen «übersinnlicher» ist, als eine Seelenerschütterung von einer Glocke, einer klingenden Saite, einem gefallenen Brette usw. Hier öffnen sich große Möglichkeiten für die Zukunftsliteratur.
>
> […]
>
> Und das Wort, welches also zwei Bedeutungen hat – die erste direkte und zweite innere –, ist das reine Material der *Dichtung* und der Literatur, das Material, welches nur diese Kunst anwenden kann, und durch welches sie zur Seele spricht. (*Über das Geistige* pp. 46-7)

In this passage on Maeterlinck, Kandinsky offers a working picture of poetic language between, on the one hand, experience and, on the other, the strictures of a theoretical framework which would have each form bearing an analogous relationship to 'innerer Klang' or 'innere Notwendigkeit'. It is at this point that we might think back to 'rot anstatt rot' and the question of what each instance of

[50] Roethel, p. xxiv.

the word 'rot' is 'doing', is making happen. Kandinsky at first puts forward a one-to-one, word-to-world picture of language based on naming or labelling. Whatever spiritual qualities such a word has, it gains from the object to which it seems indexed. It is only through repetition that the spiritual qualities of the sound itself (and here Kandinsky elides his use of 'Klang' to cover both literal sound and inner sound) are brought to the fore; it is able to shed its 'pretext'—that is, any naturalistic representational work—and simply be, and be perceived.

What seems crucial here, for all that in 'Über die Formfrage' Kandinsky extends the argument to cover the visual, is that it is specifically through the voice that this change occurs: it has to be enacted over time, and either spoken, or listened to, for this to have effect; it takes place in and around the body.[51] *Klänge,* if this model is to be followed, is then intended to be read against its own presentation, or, it is intended to be read as one might a picture book to a child, but not to be treated as a work of visual art (this is of course in accordance with its title!). It is almost as if poetry were too close to painting, and the remaining inconvenient similarities erased or ignored; and this set of problems coagulates around colour words, as a particular subset of words, which seem, as we saw with Rilke, to gesture optimistically towards the possibility of a union of the arts, but function, across media, in distinct and incompatible way.

For all that Kandinsky was interested in nonsense, in pure sound and the emptying out of meaning—which surfaces later in *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche* in the discussion of the point as full stop and as semantically empty marking[52]—he doesn't make an effort to rid himself of 'the object' within his poems; we are not dealing here with a poem like 'Gadji beri bimba' (discussed later in this chapter). Rather, there are several other types of nonsense or abstraction in the poems of *Klänge*. The first

---

[51] Compare the discussion of the 'Gedankenstrich' in 'Über die Formfrage', pp. 160-1. For a convincing argument uniting both the visual and auditory see Christopher Short, 'Between Text and Image in Kandinsky's Oeuvre: A Consideration of the Album *Sounds*', *Tate Papers*, 6 (2006) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/06/between-text-and-image-in-kandinskys-oeuvre-a-consideration-of-the-album-sounds> [accessed 9 August 2016].

[52] Published as vol. 9 of the series 'Bauhaus-Bücher' (Munich: Langen, 1926); reprinted: ed. Max Bill (Bern: Benteli, 1955) pp. 24-5.

is the one discussed with regard to Maeterlinck: by repeating a word that otherwise made sense enough times, for example the word 'schneller' in the last line of 'Kreide und Russ' (discussed on pp. 141-2), one is able to decouple it from its context. However, even outside of this more obvious strategy, he introduces nonsense into the poems: '[i]n diesen Gedichten,' wrote Hans Arp, 'tauchten Wortfolgen und Satzfolgen auf, wie dies bisher in der Dichtung nie geschehen war.'[53] This nonsense falls into one of four categories of method. The first is the use of seemingly unmotivated narrative: the semblance of 'story' within the poems through formal and other means where, however, the order of events has no or seemingly esoteric significance, as in 'Hügel; the second is grammatical but logically impossible, contradictory or inconsistent statements or adjectives, which in *Klänge* is often seen with colour words, such as 'rotblau'; the third is the use of grammatical but semantically improbable or impossible statements, as in 'Blick und Blitz' ('Daß als sich er (der Mensch) ernähren wollte, entschlug der dichte weiße Kamm den Rosavogel'), or in the use of non-naturalistic colour. The fourth—somewhat rarer—involves recognisable words used ungrammatically; the line 'Bann! Ahne!' from 'Unverändert' is perhaps an example. We could add a final two categories, neither of which Kandinsky uses but which are central to Dada and sound poetry: recognisable morphemes used in non-standard ways (e.g. 'blaulala' in 'Gadji beri bimbo'), and then unrecognisable sound (with unpronounceable sound being the extension of this) of which Rudolf Blümner's 'Ango Laïna' (which begins 'Oiaí laéla oía ssísalu') is an example.[54] It is here that the discrepancy between poetry and painting becomes clear: what would a 'non-objective' poem look like? And which of the above categories would it make use of?[55]

---

[53] Hans Arp, 'Der Dichter Kandinsky', in *Wassily Kandinsky*, ed. by Max Bill (Paris: Maeght, 1951), p. 147; reprinted in *Wie sie einander sahen: Moderne Maler im Urteil ihrer Gefährten,* ed. by Hans Maria Wingler (Munich: Müller, 1957), pp. 82–83 (p. 82). Arp sees Kandinsky as the first abstract or 'concrete' poet. For a comparison of the poetry of Arp and Kandinsky, see Harriet Watts, 'The Poetry of Kandinsky and Arp: Transposed Landscapes', in *The Turn of the Century: German Literature and Art, 1890-1915,* ed. by Gerald Chapple and Hans H. Schulte (Bonn: Bouvier, 1981), pp. 377–93.

[54] *Der Sturm,* 12 (1921), 123–26.

[55] For a thorough discussion of abstraction in poetry see Sheppard, 'Kandinsky's Early Aesthetic Theory', pp. 32–40; and Richard Brinkmann, '"Abstrakte" Lyrik im Expressionismus und die

As with (certain types of) concrete poetry, and indeed as with Stefan George, the goal seems not to evade meaning per se, but to use words in ways that make them physically present: non-objective, but object-like. Wendy Steiner makes the point that 'just as logicians verge on nonsense in pursuing a language of pure and unambiguous reference, the concretist verges on it in pursuing an art with a purely object status.'[56] In Kandinsky this is not only—and, it seems, not primarily—a visual object; it is to be experienced, physically, as sound. Even before the question of repetition, then, it seems that colour words are doubly pure: if they do refer, they take us straight to the spiritual essence of an experience of colour; and if they don't, they afford us an experience of pure sound. In each case the physiological and the spiritual are united through the pipeline of colour language, bypassing intellectual processes of meaning-making.

IV: 'SPAZIEREN'

> Die großen, mit Schnitzereien bedeckten Holzhäuser werde ich nie vergessen. In diesen Wunderhäusern habe ich eine Sache erlebt, die sich seitdem nicht wiederholt hat. Sie lehrten mich, im Bilde mich zu bewegen, im Bilde zu leben. Ich weiß noch, wie ich zum ersten Mal in die Stube trat und vor dem unerwarteten Bilde an der Stelle stehen blieb. Der Tisch, die Bänke, der im russischen Bauernhause wichtige große Ofen, die Schränke und jeder Gegenstand waren mit bunten, großzügigen Ornamenten bemalt. Auf den Wänden Volksbilder: ein Held in symbolischer Darstellung, eine Schlacht, ein gemaltes Volkslied. Die «rote» Ecke («rot» ist altrussisch gleich «schön») dicht und ganz mit gemalten und gedruckten Heiligenbildern bedeckt, davor eine kleine rotbrennende Hängelampe, die wie ein wissender, diskret-leise sprechender, bescheidener für und in sich lebender und stolzer Stern glühte und blühte. Als ich endlich ins Zimmer trat, fühlte ich mich von allen Seiten umgeben von der Malerei, in die ich also hineingegangen war. Dasselbe Gefühl schlummerte bis dahin ganz unbewußt in mir, wenn ich in den Moskowischen Kirchen war und besonders im Hauptdom des Kreml. […] Wahrscheinlich nicht anders als durch diese Eindrücke verkörperten sich in mir die weiteren Wünsche, Ziele meiner eigenen Kunst. Ich habe viele Jahre die Möglichkeit

Möglichkeit symbolischer Aussage', in *Der deutsche Expressionismus: Formen und Gestalten*, ed. by Hans Steffen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), pp. 88–114.

[56] Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 216.

> gesucht, den Beschauer *im Bilde* «spazieren» zu lassen, ihn zu der selbstvergessenen Auflösung im Bilde zu zwingen.[57]

This passage from 'Rückblicke' about Kandinsky's time in the villages of the Vologda province provides us a point from which—literally—to approach Kandinsky's work. In 'Hügel' Kandinsky specified the angle from which we are to view the scene depicted in the poem. In my reading of this, I suggested that the reader not take this literally; instead, we should look at these lines aslant, an indication of the problems that one encounters in the poetry of a painter. Here, however, we should take seriously this request; as is clear from the above passage, the positioning of the viewer in relation to the painting or work is of central importance to Kandinsky. Far from asking us to look at the work from above, as in 'Hügel', what Kandinsky intends is for the viewer to wander—'spazieren'—in a picture, to move and even to live within the picture, and to become dissolved or absorbed into it to the point of forgetting the self. The picture, as are these houses, is self-contained, forms a complete aesthetic ecology. Thus, compositional elements gain meaning or effect relationally: here, there is the '«rote» Ecke' in which everything is red. We might be tempted to import our knowledge that, as Kandinsky points out, the Russian word for 'red' has etymological links to the word 'beautiful', or that red is important in Russian folk and shamanic traditions;[58] however, what is important is the arrangement of colour such that it gathers in these self-reinforcing pockets, drawing the viewer to them, organising the space in terms of semantically neutral elements—as, again, we saw in 'Hügel'.

In this section I will focus on two aspects of *Klänge*: first, the idea that these poems might themselves be like these wooden houses, discrete aesthetic worlds, by looking at the use of colour in the poems, which is here, quite aside from any 'meanings' or 'effects' that Kandinsky may have written of elsewhere, relational; second, the physicality implied in this picture of aesthetic engagement, and in

---

[57] 'Rückblicke', in *Die gesammelten Schriften, vol. 1*, ed. by Hans Konrad Röthel and Jelena Hahl-Fontaine (Bern: Benteli, 1980), pp. 27–50 (pp. 38–39).
[58] This is the approach of Peg Weiss in her *Kandinsky and Old Russia: The Artist as Ethnographer and Shaman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

particular a cashing out of 'spazieren' in the context of reading, that is, what it might mean to wander, visually and orally, or aurally, in a poem. An approach in which an understanding or experience of the work might accrue gradually in the reader is thus opposed to readings which try to leapfrog over the act or activity of reading and land straight into interpretation, thus missing the instructions for interpretation that the work itself gives, and meanings that the work itself generates. The problems with this sort of reading are most apparent in interpretations of Dada poems, and I will take a brief detour by way of Kandinsky's direct heir, Hugo Ball, who by including Kandinsky's work in the Sturm-Soirée brought to the surface the radical nature of its poetic strategies. The idea of the process of interpretation, I argue, should be seen as integral to the poem's mechanisms: the proximity of sense and nonsense and the uncanny oscillation between the two that the reader experiences are more important than the semantic content it is possible to extract. Critical accounts, however, have turned this extractable semantic content into the 'meaning' of the poem, as if it were nothing but a code to crack.[59] We might want to suggest, however, that it is in the very fact of its being somewhat like code that a Ball poem's aesthetic interest lies; the same goes, as I will argue in my next chapter, for colour.[60]

Our second poem from *Klänge* is one in which the reader's role is that of a fellow meaning-maker:

KREIDE UND RUSS

Oh, wie langsam er geht.
Wenn nur einer da wäre, der dem Menschen sagen könnte:
Schneller, geh doch schneller, schneller, schneller, schneller, schneller.
Er ist aber nicht da. Oder doch?

[59] Ettlinger makes the same point of the paintings: 'We may imagine all sorts of things when looking at his early compositions. [...] Yet [...] to search for objects is to misunderstand them, for Kandinsky did not design pictures as a sort of Rorschach test.' Ettlinger, p. 5.
[60] This has been argued by Kurt Beals in his talk, 'Post-Hermeneutic Criticism and its Precursors: Telegraphic "Nonsense" in Dada Poetry,' on the panel 'The Posthermeneutic Turn in Textual Studies,' at the GSA Annual Conference (2015).

Dieses schwarze Gesicht mit den weissen Lippen, ganz weißen Lippen, wie mit Kreide angestrichen, angeschmiert, angeschminkt.
Und die grünen Ohren!
Waren sie grün? Oder doch nicht? Oder doch?
Die Bäume verlieren jeden Herbst ihr Laub, ihr Kleid, ihren Schmuck, ihren Körper, ihre Krone.
Jeden Herbst. Und wieviel noch? Wieviel Herbste noch? Ewigkeit? Oder nicht? Oder doch?
Wie langsam er geht.
Und jedes Frühjahr wachsen Veilchen. Und duften, duften.
Immer duften sie. Hören sie nie auf zu duften? Oder doch?
Möchtest du lieber, er hätte ein weißes Gesicht und schwarze Lippen, wie mit Ruß angeschmiert, angestrichen, angeschminkt? Möchtest du das, lieber?
Oder ist doch einer da, der dem Menschen sagen wird und vielleicht schon sagt: Schneller, schneller, schneller.
Schneller, schneller, schneller, schneller, schneller.[61]

'Kreide und Russ' is one of several poems in the collection which broach the unreliability or equivocality of the visual, on the one hand, and the arbitrariness of colour, on the other. 'Waren sie grün? Oder doch nicht? Oder doch?' serves, along with lines in 'Käfig' (p. 122), 'Blick' (p. 129) and others to reinforce the overwhelming sense, felt throughout the collection, that language and vision are incommensurable. This is not, as in Rilke, the *possibility* of writing about a visual experience; instead, the lack of presence, or the discrepancy in terms of what counts as presence between painting and writing. It would be unusual to be able to ask of a painting, or indeed any object, that one is in front of, 'is this green?' When one is faced by a colour, in the case of 'normal' colour vision and an adequate shared vocabulary, there is nothing to stop one naming a colour, and also being able to make a convincing case for someone's being right or wrong if they point to a colour and name it. In a poem, however, the reader cannot rely on this shared basis; there is no answer to the question that the reader could possibly give. We are entirely reliant on the poet, and when the poet doesn't know what colour something is, nor do we. The reader must then decide whether to try to answer the question using the rest of the poem (should the images of

[61] *Sounds*, p. 127.

autumn help us decide?), or the rest of the collection (does the figure appear elsewhere, or are there similar images?), or something external to the work (empirical knowledge of human ears—or from reading Kandinsky's theoretical works), or to leave the question unanswered, or to decide that this is a question that cannot be answered. Yet it seems undeniable that there are ways that we could answer it, if only by reference to our personal preferences. We might then wonder, too, if the green ears aren't also ours for the deciding.

Colour in *Klänge* comes in several kinds, from the seemingly naturalistic ('Offen', *Sounds* p. 122) to the substantivised and abstracted ('Sehen' (p. 121), 'Blätter', (p. 127-8)); in between are, for example, coloured cloths and clothes in which the bearer of the colour seems obviously a pretext for that colour ('Sehen', 'Hügel', 'Hymnus' (p. 126-7), 'Wasser' (p. 125-6) among others), and coloured objects or substances that are presented as less important than the colour they bring with them ('Offen', 'Käfig', 'Das' (p. 122))—as well as colours that are non-naturalistic ('Fagott', 'Blätter') or contradictory ('Hoboe' (p. 124), 'Frühling' (p. 124), 'Käfig'). Apart from three instances all are either basic colour terms or modified with an adjective of saturation or lightness ('tief', hell'). Of the three words in which the determiner is in fact a thing in and of itself ('schneeweißhart' in 'Das', 'rabenschwarz' and 'kanariengelb' in 'Weisser Schaum' (p. 126)) one is part of a seemingly nonsensical multisensory phrase ('schneeweißhart kauen'). Linguistically this is a pattern not dissimilar to those of Rilke and George. The substances, as in 'Offen', which seem to be included for nothing but their colour are not entirely unlike George's precious stones; here, however, we are dealing with grass and mud, substances one would usually assume to have much more semantic value than the colours that they introduce to the poem, as Clive Scott observes:

> The red of a dress is contingent, no necessary concomitant; its arbitrariness gives it glamour, it becomes a tone in a temperament. The dress is a machine for colour, liberating fantasy and allowing the wearer to leap the barriers of class and condition. Colour in this unstable state lends itself to all areas of experience, erotic, moral, aesthetic. The green of a leaf, on the other hand, is an integral part of an inescapable chemistry, an ingredient, which, with others, *adds up* to spring. Green foliage is a decor of reassurance, a pledge of preordainedness, against which we may view chance with impunity. But the

> Impressionists sought to give these 'natural' colours the same volatility, the same nonchalant exuberance, as the artificial ones: flowers vie with dresses, networks of metaphorical correspondence are established by colour between, say, a flag, a flower, a glove, a glint in the water.[62]

The majority of colours mentioned in *Klänge*, then, seem very deliberately chosen: both in their being mentioned at all, and in their often a-mimetic contexts. This sits unstably with the colours used in 'Kreide und Russ' above, in which colour was up for the deciding; how are we to know that the colour in a given case is the right one, if the decision has here already been made? And how, in fact, are we to begin understanding why the things are the colours they are?

FAGOTT

Ganz große Häuser stürzten plötzlich. Kleine Häuser blieben ruhig stehen.
Eine dicke harte eiförmige Orangewolke hing plötzlich über der Stadt. Sie schien an der spitzen Spitze des hohen hageren Rathausturmes zu hängen und strahlte violett aus.
Ein dürrer, kahler Baum streckte in den tiefen Himmel seine zuckenden und zitternden langen Äste. Er war ganz schwarz, wie ein Loch im weißen Papier. Die vier kleinen Blätter zitterten eine ganze Weile. Es war aber windstill.
Wenn aber der Sturm kam und manches dickmäuriges Gebäude umfiel, blieben die dünnen Äste unbeweglich. Die kleinen Blätter wurden steif: wie aus Eisen gegossen.
Eine Schar Krähen flog durch die Luft in schnurgerader Linie über der Stadt.
Und wieder plötzlich wurde alles still.
Die Orangewolke verschwand. Der Himmel wurde schneidend blau. Die Stadt gelb zum Weinen.
Und durch diese Ruhe klang nur ein Laut: Hufeisenschläge.
Da wusste man schon, dass durch die gänzlich leeren Straßen ein weißes Pferd ganz allein wandert. Dieser Laut dauerte lange, sehr, sehr lange. Und man wusste deswegen nie genau, wann er aufhörte. Wer weiß, wann die Ruhe entsteht?
Durch gedehnte, lang gezogene, etwas ausdruckslose, teilnahmslose, lange, lange in der Tiefe sich im leeren bewegenden Töne eines Fagotts wurde allmählich alles grün. Erst tief und etwas schmutzig. Dann immer heller, kälter, giftiger, noch heller, noch kälter, noch giftiger.

---

[62] Scott, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism', p. 220.

Die Gebäude wuchsen in die Höhe und wurden schmaler. Alle neigten sie zu einem Punkt nach rechts, wo vielleicht der Morgen ist.
Es wurde wie ein Streben dem Morgen zu bemerkbar. Und noch heller, noch kälter, noch giftiger grün wurde der Himmel, die Häuser, das Pflaster und die Menschen, die darauf [gingen. Sie gingen fortwährend, ununterbrochen, langsam, stets vor sich schauend. Und immer allein.
Eine große, üppige Krone bekam aber dementsprechend der kahle Baum. Hoch saß diese Krone und hatte eine kompakte, wurstartig, nach oben geschweifte Form. Diese Krone allein war so grell gelb, dass kein Herz es aushalten würde.
Es ist gut, daß keiner der da unten gehenden Menschen diese Krone gesehen hat.
Nur das Fagott bemühte sich, diese Farbe zu bezeichnen. Es stieg immer höher, wurde grell und nasal in seinem gespannten Ton.
Wie gut das ist, daß das Fagott diesen Ton nicht erreichen konnte.[63]

The poem 'Fagott', (one of three read at the second Sturm-Soirée), dramatises these questions of the arbitrary. Again, it is specifically the *inaccessible* that is brought to our attention: 'Es ist gut, dass keiner der […] Menschen diese Krone gesehen hat'; 'Wie gut das ist, dass das Fagott diesen Ton nicht erreichen konnte.' Given the seeming lack of reason behind the goings on of the 'Orangewolke', the leaves which shake eerily in the absence of wind, that we are spared this knowledge seems less 'gut' than ominous; the first line is reminiscent of van Hoddis' 'Weltende', and a sense of the apocalyptic pervades the poem. Multi-sensory descriptions—the 'heller, kälter, giftiger grün' of the sky, the bassoon which tries to describe the colour—play into this; and while we might initially want to say that they are there to suggest a world whose rules are not ours, what seems more important is specifically our lack of knowledge, our inability to predict, to have any sense in advance of what the bassoon could do. Sensory unity is terrifying not only because it is beyond the ability, and the desire, of humans, but because it comes too soon, it comes before we are ready. (The speaker is privileged with some knowledge as to what the consequences might be: 'Wie gut

[63] *Sounds*, p. 121-2.

das ist, daß das Fagott diesen Ton nicht erreichen konnte', suggesting that we might also know, if not cope, at a later point.) We might wonder, then, what we do with such colours, which seem there solely as a source of confusion.

If we pay attention to the order, it is first clear that the colours come in contrasting pairs and groups; two colours next to one another, aside from the grün/grün/gelb of the second half, must not be similar; thus, we have orange-violett, schwarz-weiß, orange-blau-gelb. The confusion is not in the colours themselves (which, after all, are none of them a colour that is absolutely unimaginable as the colour of the thing to which they are attached), but instead these sudden and dramatic changes, from points often considered 'opposite' one another in nineteenth century colour diagrams. It is precisely this discontinuity that disturbs us. A bassoon playing an ever-higher note; the trees, first leafy, then bald. These extremes play the imagination like the mathematical sublime; we are simply not able to stretch to take on board both at any one time, and slip between them. Rather than the two competing colour schemes of 'Kreide und Russ', here the competition is within the poem, between the mentions of colour. Is it, in the end, that the bassoon can't reach the note, or that we are not quite able to imagine what a yellow note might sound like?

The poem offers itself as a challenge to the reader, an opportunity to exercise the imagination, to see, if only in negative, the capabilities that we could develop. Many of the poems in *Klänge* seem, as here, to be conceptual obstacle courses, filled with moments of false logic or little corners of unseeable sights, veiled faces, inconceivable colours. This is, however, not the only way in which the poems act as an aesthetic workout; in fact, by attending to the things that aren't there, such as logic or coherent narrative structure—by interpreting, that is—we miss what is.

What is there is the bare fact of language, marks on a page or sounds spoken; and it is this latter that proved Kandinsky's most fruitful contribution to avant-garde poetry. The first audiences responded in kind: 'Anno Dada wurden im Cabaret

Voltaire in Zürich zum ersten Mal Gedichte Kandinskys vorgelesen und mit urweltlichem Gebrüll von den Zuhörern verdankt.'[64] The spiritual purification that was to come about from wandering in and becoming absorbed by these poems was reflected, by Arp, Ball et al., back onto language itself: 'Die Negierung der Illusion geschieht hier noch durch Gegeneinanderstellen sich aufhebender Illusionselemente, die der konventionellen Sprache entnommen sind. Nirgendwo, auch bei den Futuristen nicht, hat man eine ähnlich kühne Purifikation der Sprache versucht.'[65] Kandinsky took for granted the purity of his materials (their worldliness compromised in any case the immediacy of their effects, but this is taken as a necessary fact about paint or, particularly, language, and one which could be bypassed but never itself improved); Ball, following here Stefan George, wants to push art in the right direction by improving not the listener but the very stuff the work is made of: 'Ein Vers ist die Gelegenheit, allen Schmutz abzutun.'[66]

In Ball's own work the reader's ability to face conceptual obstacles is taken much further; in poems such as 'Gadji beri bimba' not only does the poem threaten readerly propriety by removing most of what one usually considers as the material of reading, it seems to be a challenge to the most basic assumptions of what that practice involves. '"Gadji Beri Bimba" offers no [...] "semantic succour"';[67] and it's unclear if we are meant to 'read' it in any sense other than let the sounds, or some imagined equivalent, pass through us untuned.

Gadji beri bimba

gadji beri bimba glandridi laula lonni cadori
gadjama gramma berida bimbala glandri galassassa laulitalomini
gadji beri bin blassa glassala laula lonni cadorsu sassala bim
gadjama tuffm i zimzalla binban gligla wowolimai bin beri ban

[64] Wingler, p. 82.

[65] Hugo Ball, 'Kandinsky', p. 53.

[66] Jürgen Brokoff develops the history of this purification in *Geschichte der reinen Poesie*, pp. 507–54; Hugo Ball, 'Das erste dadaistische Manifest', in *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit: ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. by Hans Burkhard Schlichting (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 39–40 (p. 40).

[67] Richard Sheppard, 'Modernism, Language, and Experimental Poetry: On Leaping over Bannisters and Learning How to Fly', *The Modern Language Review,* 92.1 (1997), 98–123 (p. 118).

o katalominai rhinozerossola hopsamen laulitalomini hoooo
gadjama rhinozerossola hopsamen
bluku terullala blaulala loooo

zimzim urullala zimzim urullala zimzim zanzibar zimzalla zam
elifantolim brussala bulomen brussala bulomen tromtata
velo da bang band affalo purzamai affalo purzamai lengado tor
gadjama bimbalo glandridi glassala zingtata pimpalo ögrögööööö
viola laxato viola zimbrabim viola uli paluji malooo

tuffm im zimbrabim negramai bumbalo negramai bumbalo tuffm i zim
gadjama bimbala oo beri gadjama gaga di gadjama affalo pinx
gaga di bumbalo bumbalo gadjamen
gaga di bling blong
gaga blung[68]

Despite the lack of 'sense', critics have taken on the task of finding it with enthusiasm, and any even partially recognisable word in any of a number of languages has been isolated and called to attention (lau; blau; elifant, etc); the syllables ineligible for interpretation are thereafter dismissed as a kind of noise, as if Ball had hidden some needles of meaning in a particularly boisterous haystack.[69] As Susan Stewart suggests apropos of the poem, we 'produce phonemes whenever we can, even if the lexical level remains opaque, here defined only by the intervals between the clusters of syllables rather than by prior reference. [...] The mind is a grammar-making device, and it is difficult to turn it off'.[70] This grubbing around for meaning seems, however, misguided. The task is in fact harder: not to make any interpretative moves at all.

This example, can serve as an exaggerated illustration of what a reader is doing when they start to 'crack the code' of colour—the topic of the next chapter—yet even here, where there are arguably no words at all, it is colours that seem to

[68] Hugo Ball, *Gedichte*, ed. by Eckhard Faul (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), p. 67.

[69] Tobias Wilke begins his article on the physiology of sound poetry with a news story from the *taz* in which the mystery of 'dada' is solved, thus making more than clear that whatever the mystery was presumed to be, it is not that 'Da-Da: "Articulatory Gestures" and the Emergence of Sound Poetry', *MLN,* 128 (2013), 639–668 (p. 639). See pp. 654-6 for a summary of attempts to interpret or explicate 'Gadji Beri Bimba'. See also the notes in the recent critical edition, which point out similar sounding words in Indonesian and Swahili and suggest intended aural similarities to magic words. Hugo Ball, *Gedichte*, pp. 219–20.

[70] Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 73.

offer themselves up first: 'blau', 'blass', 'viola' are often picked out by commentators.[71] Colours and colour language are unmistakeable and yet in many ways inconsequential: here, if we compare the associative work that 'elifantolim' is doing as opposed to 'blaulala' it is clear that the name of an animal—even altered—seems to shut down alternatives and possible 'meanings'. Once we have seen it we can only think of elephants; we start looking for other animals, seeing this word as the key to the code. The colour word, however, defers this enthusiasm for unitary meaning; colour words are underspecific with regard to semantic fields.

'Gadji beri bimba' forms, for the careful reader, a kind of mantra in a meditation on purity; both a set of nonsense sounds to speak until each sound has been repeated, as Kandinsky points out with regard to Maeterlinck, and a distraction from that activity; the temptation and the cure at once. The reader must find—as Robert Michael Brain puts it, quoting Tristan Tzara, their 'personal boomboom'.[72] Kandinsky uses less the repetition of semantically innocent sound, usually repeating words that initially pull their syntactic and semantic weight. The frequent dialogues, however, on the one hand, and on the other, the puns in 'Unverändert'[73] and the rolled 'r' of 'Im Wald'[74] insist on language as an action, and in the last two cases, language as having material ramifications that reading triggers. The poems on the page seem in these instances unfinished until the reader has done the work of 'wandering' aloud—just as the colours in 'Kreide und Russ' seem up to the reader to fix.

---

[71] It is suggested, for instance, that these colour-seeming words are the basis for Claire Goll's claim that Ball was inspired by Kandinsky's paintings. Hugo Ball, *Gedichte*, p. 219.

[72] Robert Michael Brain, 'Genealogy of "ZANG TUMB TUMB": Experimental Phonetics, Vers Libre, and Modernist Sound Art', *Grey Room*, 43 (2011), 88–117 (p. 110).

[73] 'Bann! Ahne!'; 'Wart nur du! Ich zahle dir die Furcht bar!'; 'tin-ten' (*Sounds,* p. 123).

[74]

> Jedesmal
> als der Mann mit seinem Satz fertig wurde, sagte sie sehr
> überzeugt und das "r" stark rollend:
> sehrrr prrraktisch. (*Sounds*, p. 127)

A final poem, also included by Hugo Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire, integrates this worry that the 'action' of the poem is, in fact, determined entirely by the reader.

SEHEN

Blaues, Blaues hob sich, hob sich und fiel.
Spitzes, Dünnes pfiff und drängte sich ein, stach aber nicht durch.
An allen Ecken hat's gedröhnt.
Dickbraunes blieb hängen scheinbar auf alle Ewigkeiten.
Scheinbar. Scheinbar.
Breiter sollst du deine Arme ausbreiten.
Breiter. Breiter.
Und dein Gesicht sollst du mit rotem Tuch bedecken.
Und vielleicht ist es noch gar nicht verschoben: bloß du hast dich verschoben.
Weißer Sprung nach weißem Sprung.
Und nach diesem weißen Sprung wieder ein weißer Sprung.
Und in diesem weißem Sprung ein weißer Sprung. In jedem weißen Sprung ein weißer Sprung.
Das ist eben nicht gut, daß du das Trübe nicht siehst: im Trüben sitzt es ja gerade.
Daher fängt auch alles an……
…… Es hat gekracht……[75]

'Und vielleicht ist es noch gar nicht verschoben: bloß du hast dich verschoben': the viewer creates the viewed. Our inability to look, properly, to stretch ourselves out, properly, to see 'das Trübe', all seem to hamper our engagement with the poem. Once again we miss the action, we cannot see or see into the obscured source of the final 'Krachen'; our deficient attention blocks us from the scene. (In other poems, the reader is given the role of the active doubter: 'Doch, doch ich sah den Fisch. Doch, doch ich sah ihn' repeats the speaker in 'Einiges' (p. 124), as if to ward off the assumption from self or other that the fish diving out of sight were enough to assume that one might not see it.) The poem, however, offers us a way in: and that is precisely through reading, and specifically reading out loud.

⋆

[75] *Sounds,* p. 121.

Presenting part of this chapter at a conference, I handed out three versions of 'Sehen': in one, the colours mentioned were Kandinsky's blue, brown, red and white; in the second, these four instances of colour were substituted by red, green, white and black respectively, and in the third, white, yellow, black and red. After everyone had read their poem thinking it to be the 'correct' version, three volunteers read out the three versions, and the audience members had to decide in groups which one Kandinsky had written. The room split—as I had hoped—into three equal groups; and most people seemed convinced, privately or otherwise, that their original version was 'correct', and importantly, willing to put forward reasons of various kinds as to why: naturalistic colour ('schwarzer Sprung') or euphony; a narrative they had elaborated while reading; internal relations between colours. The fear, in the case of a-mimetic colour, is that the colours will be, as in the painting, arbitrary, merely decorative—yet the reader, it seemed, can always be trusted to rescue even the most far-fetched of colours. We might worry about the ease with which someone could 'make' the wrong poem—almost as if worshipping an idol by mistake. But the poem itself discourages this approach: any narrative that has somehow accrued falls into—or has to make—a 'weißer Sprung' (translated by Kandinsky into the Russian 'skachok', meaning 'leap', but ambiguous in German);[76] and make it over and over until any sense has been forgotten. In Kandinsky's poem more than Ball's, the stakes seem surprisingly high; our desire to hang on to sense and not let it slip through the cracks is heightened by the surface-level grammaticality, the visual promise, after the 'Sprünge' and the lawn-like row of dots, of an ending; and yet the attempts to interpret fall short, reducing the poem to recognisable images from his own biography or the bare bones of an apocalyptic tale.[77] This seems against the spirit of the work—these 'Sprünge' 'point directly away from conventional or static notions of interpretation'[78]—and of Kandinsky's work in

[76] Wanner, p. 182.

[77] Peg Weiss places the 'red cloth' in the context of the shamanic ritual—which may well be where it was lifted from, but if so, it is not clear Kandinsky intended that we know this. Weiss, *Kandinsky and Old Russia*, pp. 110–11.

[78] Kandinsky, *Sounds*, p. 7.

general, as Albers points out, and with which I began the chapter: 'what counts is not the what, but the how.' The reader should instead take their cue from the Cabaret Voltaire, and 'wander' through the poem with their voice or ears, be present in its space and simply perceive.

We will move on, in looking at the much more literally house-like poems of Else Lasker-Schüler, to think more about walking around the poem on the page, and the interaction of conceptual and two-dimensional space. This is, of course, the usual territory of the concrete poem, a purely spatial sort of object. Yet I would argue that the concrete poem that began this chapter, 'rot anstatt rot', not only gains in aesthetic value when printed without colours, but that it is at its richest when read aloud: the constant oscillation, or hobble, even, from one word to its differently shaped partner makes clear the irreplaceability of a colour word, however difficult it may be to know, quite, on what grounds.

4. Lasker-Schüler's blue rooms: an experiment in reading

'I am generally very benevolent [said Shade]. But there are certain trifles I do not forgive.' Kinbote: 'For instance?' 'Not having read the required book. Having read it like an idiot. Looking in it for symbols; example: "The author uses the striking image *green leaves* because green is the symbol of happiness and frustration."'[1]

But the nature of [literary analysis] is not that of the detective interrogating a suspect; it is, rather, a medical examination undertaken by an erotic partner.[2]

Why, in fact, does it require a more strenuous effort to believe that a narrative lacks coherence than to believe that somehow, if we could only find out, it doesn't?[3]

Kandinsky wanted to create works in which the viewer or reader could wander. This was a therapeutic wandering, conceived as an exercise in aesthetic self-improvement: the more the viewer experiences, in some meaningfully physiological way, the work of art, the keener their soul, or aesthetic sensibility. Through the experience of wandering the soul becomes recalibrated for the art of the future, more sensitively tuned to its spiritual content, and freed from the reductive desire for an objective framework within which it could be good or bad, right or wrong. In this chapter I turn to Kandinsky's contemporary, Else Lasker-Schüler, whose work similarly crossed generic and media

---

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 127 (Square brackets in original).

[2] Clive Scott, *The Poetics of French Verse: Studies in Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 5.

[3] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 53.

boundaries.[4] Wandering—'durch die Straßen willenlos irren'[5]—was, for Lasker-Schüler, an art-form: in costume or persona, as a kind of dandy—a 'sich überspannande Großstädterin', as Kafka comments to Felice Bauer, with hostile intent—and as a street performer and café cabaret artist.[6] And wandering becomes a metaphor for the act of writing: 'Was heißt ein Buch schreiben? Wandern [...] Einer Wanderung Beichte antreten über geebnete Buchzeilen, abwechselnd mit schwer zu erklimmenden Gedankenhöhen.'[7] In this chapter, however, I want to concentrate on the 'wandering' of the reader's imagination within the poem or prose piece, which, unlike the more didactic art of Kandinsky, is offered not as a challenge but as an invitation.[8] In Kandinsky, the act of 'wandering' in a poem seems in some ways constrained by overly controlling speaking personae or through the withholding of information; while he claimed to work in accordance with 'das Prinzip der inneren Notwendigkeit', thus in adherence to some sort of objective state of affairs, in his poetry the notion of objectivity seems to go into retirement, or at least be seen to be fallible: words are, in the end, inherently untrustworthy and perfect for a certain kind of wheeler-dealing with the truth, as a way of cleansing the soul of materialist positivism. Lasker-Schüler believes the opposite: 'Bei Gedichten kann man nicht lügen.'[9] This statement has, however, stymied previous accounts of Lasker-Schüler's colour use, as it is assumed that each (non-naturalistic or non-conventional) mention of colour is a translation from a 'truth'

---

[4] 'Es scheint keine ästhetische Grenze gegeben zu haben, die Lasker-Schüler nicht hätte brechen wollen.' Markus Hallensleben, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Avantgardismus und Kunstinszenierung* (Tübingen: Francke, 2000), p. 17. Hallensleben's study makes central to his argument this fact of Lasker-Schüler's work—every text ought to be read, he says, as a 'performance'. While not alone in promoting Lasker-Schüler as an avant-garde artist, Hallensleben's work has proved important in clearing the ground of the critical clichés which have haunted Lasker-Schüler scholarship.

[5] Letter to Franz Marc, published as part of *Der Malik* (1919), in *Werke und Briefe: kritische Ausgabe, vol. 3: Prosa 1903-1920*, ed. by Ricarda Dick (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 431–521 (p. 442). References will be given as WB with volume and page number.

[6] Franz Kafka, *Briefe, 1913-März 1914,* ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), p. 88. For a discussion of Lasker-Schüler and performance, see also Andrew Webber's suggestive essay, 'Inside Out: Acts of Displacement in Else Lasker-Schüler', *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory,* 81 (2006), 143–162; see also Barbara Lersch-Schumacher, '"Ich sterbe am Leben und atme im Bild wieder auf." Zur Allegorese des Weiblichen bei Else Lasker-Schüler', in *Deine Sehnsucht war die Schlange,* ed. by Anne Linsel, Peter von Matt, and Manfred Escherig (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1997), pp. 53–85, in which performance is argued to be an act of allegorising.

[7] 'Auf der Galiläa nach Palästina', WB IV.1:445-468 (p.462).

[8] Referring to George, Lasker-Schüler wrote in a letter to Karl Kraus, 'Kunst soll nicht beziehen, aber bekränzen.' 14.10.1915, WB VII:100.

[9] *Briefe nach Norwegen* (1911/1912) WB III:177-261 (p.288).

external to the work, a cipher, with this truth—imagined to be a particular emotional state, or a hidden reference to real-life objects or events—recoverable through a kind of sleuth-work or code-cracking.[10]

'Wandering' should then be opposed to this particular kind of interpretation in which *what* and *how* are both abandoned in pursuit of *why*. This desire for reasons—and the associated fear of the arbitrary—leads, even in the case of criticism otherwise alive to ideas, say, of deconstruction, to the small-scale allocation of static 'meanings' to colours.[11] Elisabeth Paefgen concludes her essay on colour in Lasker-Schüler by discussing the way that colours have 'die wichtige Funktion, Unsichtbares so zu vergegenständlichen, daß es sichtbar, aber nicht 'endgültig' definiert wird. Alles, was mit Farbe versehen wird, [...] bleibt [...]—wegen des starken Konnotationsraumes—in einer Bedeutungsschwebe. Lasker-Schüler nutzt die Farbworte [...] nicht im Sinne einer eindeutigen Symbolik.'[12] This seems sound, but contradicts the point she makes earlier in which she asserts that 'Blau ist für Else Lasker-Schüler die Farbe der Dichtung.' (p. 16) Often, poets in the early twentieth century have been treated in fact as Humpty Dumpty figures, who had at some point said, 'when I used a colour, it means just what I choose it to mean'. Our job would then be to find the explicit or implicit statement of what each colour *does* mean, to arrive at what we might, following Davidson, call a 'passing theory' of their language of colour.[13] But, as I argue in this chapter, this requires an unnecessary abstraction of the poem, and a displacement from its status as a text that

---

[10] I take Lasker-Schüler to be making a much more interesting claim than merely that poems are based in autobiography; rather, that it is characteristic of lyric poetry that a. its speakers are sincere and b. being a form of created thing it is true in relation to itself rather than the external world of which it is meant to be a representation. This is in line with certain accounts of lyric poetry; see, for instance, Jonathan Culler: '[F]iction is not the general mode of being of lyric.' Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 127.

[11] I use the word 'meaning' or 'meanings' in quotation marks to suggest its 'slipperiness' as a critical concept, a slipperiness Helen Thaventhiran has suggested comes from 'the tactics of explanation within the language-game of critical prose' which 'seem to require "meaning" to be both richly textured and suitably blank.' Helen Thaventhiran, *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 13.

[12] Elisabeth K. Paefgen, '"Grüngelblilablaurot"—farbige Dichtung. Über Funktion und Wirkung von Farben im Werk Else Lasker-Schülers', *Else-Lasker-Schüler-Jahrbuch zur Klassischen Moderne,* 1 (2000), 9–35 (p. 35).

[13] In Donald Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', in *Truth, Language and History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 89–107. (Davidson also makes use of Humpty Dumpty.)

is read. By returning to the notion of 'wandering' we might better see how it is that expressionist colour language works.

The 'experiment' of my title, then, is to do just this: taking my cue from Lasker-Schüler's use of rooms and buildings as metonyms for poetry and poets, to wander in a small number of poems as if they were rooms in a larger edifice, noticing what work colour words have been put to, what they are up to, and allowing any effect to build cumulatively, through the process of reading, or noticing. The point is not to impose either an artificial ignorance of colour—as with any speaker of German, and, perhaps, any human, certain associations will arise that colour a new interaction, on the part of the reader, with the word (red and blood, for instance). Nor is it to come away with a totalising interpretative framework: the work of Lasker-Schüler, and certainly its chromatic topography, has already been mapped and I wouldn't want to repeat this task needlessly. I am interested, rather, in providing an account of reading colour as it would be encountered 'in the wild'—the way that a reader new to Lasker-Schüler might, encountering a poem in an anthology or while leafing through a collection. What is arresting about these colours is precisely their oddness, their seeming reluctance to be ordered into a preset understanding of what colour language does, and what poetic language does, an oddness it seems good to preserve. The first section of this chapter looks more closely at the ways that a colour word might function, using an example not of poetry, but of prose; the second reads colour cumulatively across a number of poems, allowing a certain picture of colour to emerge, and the third, which turns, too, to ways others have read colour, reads colour across a single poem. The aim in each case is that the process should allow colour to rise to the surface, from which we read off, rather than in, connotation and affect.

I: DAS BLAUE GEMACH

Lasker-Schüler's prose writing has usually been considered the inferior sibling, and Werner Kraft speaks perhaps for many early critics in making the claim 'daß diese Prosa künstlerisch nicht auf der Höhe der Lyrik steht'.[14] The relation in which the prose writings stand to the poetry has been seen as that of a useful critical aid, as Hans Cohn suggests: 'They sometimes help to elucidate the poems, but they never achieve their concentrated impact. They do, however,' he adds, 'contain many useful biographical references.'[15] I don't, as the following will make clear, regard biographical references as particularly 'useful', and more importantly would dispute that we can see Lasker-Schüler's teasing references to 'wirklich lebenden Menschen', as in the subtitle of the novel of letters *Mein Herz* (1912), as 'biographical references' proper. I believe, however, that they can indeed 'help to elucidate the poems', if not quite in the way Cohn intends. For Cohn, they 'have often something of the nature of lyric exercises and contain the essence of her poetry in a more diffuse way.' This is because, on my reading, they can be considered as commentaries on or discussions of the activity of writing poetry, sometimes explicitly but often implicitly. The claim could be defended that they read like 'lyric exercises', in that the lyric is at one remove from the work, but not because it is being put through its paces; instead, it is being dismantled, experimented on.[16] The following passage shows this well:

> Senna Pascha – – – ich sitze auf dem Rosenbeet hinter den silbernen Dachfirnen des Palastes und blicke hinüber – – über einen Wald von Pharaonenbäumen ... – – unter

---

[14] *Else Lasker-Schüler, eine Einführung in ihr Werk und eine Auswahl,* ed. by Werner Kraft (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1951), p. 15. In the past twenty years the balance has swung, if anything, in favour of the prose; see, for instance, Iris Hermann, *Raum, Körper, Schrift: mythopoetische Verfahrensweisen in der Prosa Else Lasker-Schülers* (Paderborn: Igel, 1997); Vivian Liska, *Die Dichterin und das schelmische Erhabene: Else Lasker-Schülers 'Die Nächte Tino von Bagdads'* (Tübingen: Francke, 1998); Uta Grossmann, *Fremdheit im Leben und in der Prosa Else Lasker-Schülers* (Oldenburg: Igel, 2001); Doerte Bischoff, *Ausgesetzte Schöpfung: Figuren der Souveränität und Ethik der Differenz in der Prosa Else Lasker-Schülers* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002); Sabine Graf, *Poetik des Transfers: 'Das Hebräerland' von Else Lasker-Schüler* (Köln: Böhlau, 2009); Monika Lindinger, *Glitzernder Kies und Synagogengestein: Kindheit und Erinnerung in Else Lasker-Schülers Prosa* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010).

[15] Hans Cohn, *Else Lasker-Schüler: The Broken World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 1. This attitude has been for the most part superseded following Calvin Jones's suggestion in the conclusion of his useful review of Lasker-Schüler scholarship, that the relationship between poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction should be given more attention 'without, of course, viewing [the] literary texts positivistically [...]. Future critics should remain open to the openness of the texts and maintain a dialectical sensitivity to their interrelationships'. Calvin N. Jones, *The Literary Reputation of Else Lasker-Schüler: Criticism 1901-1993* (Camden, NJ: Camden House, 1994), p. 143.

[16] Elisabeth Paefgen makes a similar point, with reference specifically to the punctuation. Paefgen, p. 17.

> der großen leuchtenden Kuppel lag der Harem, und ich starre auf das Fenster meines verlassenen Gemachs mit seinen blauen Wänden. Neben der stolzen, leuchtenden Kuppel erhebt sich die schwere Fahne des Botschafters wie eine fremde, abwehrende Hand. Ich bin endlos traurig – – es ist, als ob ich ersticke unter der Traurigkeit wie unter einer Wüste von Sandtropfen. Ich habe nie eine Prinzessin oder einen Prinzen so geliebt wie mein blaues Gemach. Wie eine Mutter hat mich sein wiegender, blauer Arm umschlungen, und tiefere blaue Augen hat nie ein König des Abends gehabt wie mein hehres, blaues Gemach. Ein blauer Schwan war es, auf dem ich gleitete – – eine Wunderblume war mein süßes blaues Gemach – – hei, eine Tänzerin ... immer in seidenen blauen Schritten ... zauberleise ... und mit der Sonne hat es hellen Schattenschein getanzt und blaue Träume um die Sterne geschlungen, und hast du schon einmal ein Gemach gesehn, das blaue Haare hatte, Senna Pascha? Oh, ein Kuß war mein blaues Gemach und ich sterbe an diesem blauen, blauen Kuß. Und meine scheuen Sklavinnen umfassen sich im Schlaf – – ich singe Lieder aus tödlichen Tönen. Alle Sterne bedecken mein Gesicht …… – – – – – –
>
> O du mein blauer Rauschegarten,
> O du meine verlorene blaue Nacht ...
>
> Beim großen Propheten, Senna Pascha, halte mein Geheimnis in deinem Herzen……[17]

Tino, our narrator, sits at a distance from the room given in the title of the piece. In the first lines of this passage, through a repeated syntactical pattern foregrounding the preposition ('über einen Wald', 'unter der […] Kuppel', 'Neben der […] Kuppel') the physical relations of the different architectural features are emphasised to the point of offering almost an ungraspable excess of detail (and it would seem that the 'pharaoh trees' and the silver gables in fact impinge on Tino's own field of vision, and the object of her gazing is linguistically crowded out by the cupola, the flag, the trees.) With this set up, we move on to a description of the room Tino has left behind and is now looking into from the rose bed. Here it becomes clear that this initial factual precision was a red herring—the truth of a description is not indexed to the zeal with which the describer cleaves to spatial relations. Instead, the room is likened to a person, with eyes, and hair, and footsteps—and all of them blue. The truth of narrative description, with its obsession with surfaces and spaces, compared to the deeper—if increasingly, deliberately, absurd—truth of poetry.[18] This passage offers a demonstration of this claim by exaggerating the distinction, between a faithfulness to external forms (prose) and a

[17] *Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad* WB III.1:67-97 (pp. 70-71).

[18] Thinking of Lasker-Schüler's own claim ('Bei Gedichten kann man nicht lügen') but also of those theories of the lyric which see this as a generic marker, see n. 10.

trust in poetic forms and figures. At the centre of this distinction lie two different ways of using, or working with, colour in literature, and relating colour and truth.

The first is the silver of the gables: here, the narrator is conveying, with as much detail as possible, a world we are to understand to be external to its own description, for all that we know it not to 'exist' in the everyday world. Here, colour is used as if objectively: I, says Tino, and moreover any other person standing near me would say that the gables were silver, and that the walls of my room, as we see in the next line, were blue. Were we to be able to see inside the author's head and find that the imagined gables were gold, we could accuse the narrator of lying, of breaking some sort of commitment to reporting what they have seen.[19] This is not to say that the choice of colour in the imagined world is external to the author; rather, part of the pact between the reader and the work of fiction involves us believing that the colour has been named that corresponds to the new but nonetheless objective reality of the imagined world. Here, this can be read alongside all of the precise details of visual arrangement of buildings and elements as a form of parody of narrative prose; the very fact that it is silver adds to the 'dazzle' of this excess of realism.[20]

We then come to the following line: 'Ich bin endlos traurig – – es ist, als ob ich ersticke unter der Traurigkeit wie unter einer Wüste von Sandtropfen.' The first part belongs to the fact-based narrative parody; the second, with its 'als ob' and its lavish, large-scale, imagery, brings us into 'lyric'.[21] We might notice that, as becomes more clear in the

---

[19] With regard to pronouns, it should be noted that Lasker-Schüler's 'Ich' 'schert sich nicht um das ausschließende Prinzip der sexuellen Differenz'. Grossmann, p. 211. In most cases it is unclear what gender the speaker of an individual poem has, and given Lasker-Schüler's use of personae, some of which had varying genders in prose works (e.g. Tino von Bagdad, who is a 'Kamerad'—and who has a morphologically masculine name—as well as a 'Prinzessin' WB III.1:13), it seems unfortunate to petrify the gender of a given speaker by imposing on them a pronoun. Moreover, the system of using alternating or arbitrary pronouns when talking of hypothetical readers fits less well to the poetic 'I'. 'He or she' is clumsy and overemphasises the notion that it must be one or the other; 'he/she' is ugly and the slash does both more and less work than it ought to. I have gone with the singular 'they', with the (maligned, but logical) reflexive form 'themself'; language changes, but I take comfort in knowing that it was used by St Thomas More, among others, and can only hope that the pendulum of acceptance swings once more in its favour. 'Themself, Pron.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/334443> [accessed 25 August 2016].

[20] See p. 28.

[21] I take the category of the 'lyric', now often called into question, as one that can be usefully employed when thinking of modes and strategies of poetic making, and, more importantly, one that the literary world that Lasker-Schüler was part of took seriously. For a discussion of the use of the term, see the

following set of images for the room, there is a subtle doubling of the simile, such that we are two steps away from the 'fact of the matter' (which is, 'Ich bin endlos traurig'): first of all, it is as if Tino is suffocating under sadness, and only then is it 'as one might suffocate under a desert's worth of sand'; with the coinage 'Sandtropfen' we take a step further, and, thinking perhaps of Alice in Wonderland, wonder if she isn't in fact choked not by sadness or sand but instead by tears. This metaphorical footwork continues virtuosically in the following few lines, in which the room is compared to a princess, a prince, a mother and a king, and in each case the 'wie' is pushed slightly to one side. The room had thrown its arm around her like a mother (and not: it was as if the room had thrown its arm around her); no king had had blue eyes like her room (and not: the room was as blue as a king's eyes). This is of course the sort of figurative language, and extended syntax, common in poetry, but presented as it as a kind of dramatic monologue in prose we are invited to see it as a discussion of, or examination of, the workings of poetic language rather than a straightforward example of it. The next couple of images dispense with the 'wie' altogether: the room is a blue swan, a flower, a dancer. We have gradually been inducted into pure metaphor, a kind of language where relations—far from the nitpickingly specified opening sentences—are left to the imagination of the reader, the gaps have to be filled.

Once the swan has joined the arm we have begun to learn this logic, and to recognise how the gaps are to be filled, the relations unpacked. It has become clear that the room is not being compared to these things because they are blue; instead, they become blue by being compared to the room. What connects the images, what links the disparate if not particularly inventive set of comparisons—kiss, dancer, swan, flower—is the colour blue, which becomes attached to them regardless of the likelihood of that attachment ('have you seen a room that has blue hair, Senna Pascha?'—probably not!). Blue, it seems, moves through the poem-piece 'wie ein semantisch überfüllter Zug'.[22]

special issue of *PMLA,* 123.1 (2008). Culler also summarises (and takes to task) some of these recent approaches, Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, pp. 39–90.

[22] Sylke Kirschnick, *Tausend und ein Zeichen: Else Lasker-Schülers Orient und die Berliner Alltags- und Populärkultur um 1900* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), p. 43.

This image, however, for all its imaginative neatness, does not take into account the way that the colour acts on everything it is attached to, and is acted upon by those things. We might think back to William Gass's image, 'a random set of meanings has softly gathered around the word the way lint collects':[23] each individual collocation, however opaque the connection a thing might have with blue, 'colours' blue with something of its own associations, so that in the abstract blue (in English) comes to be associated with sadness, pornography, the infinite, and so on, and these associations in turn 'colour' any new collocation. This happens within a language, paradigmatically, but can, as the books of Michel Pastoureau and other historians of colour have shown, happen in a larger culture, that is, Western Europe—and, on a much smaller scale, it is this mechanism that is used in works of literature, and as Eisenstein suggests, film.[24] Here, of course, it is deliberate, and we would read a poem or watch a film alert to the self-conscious imposition of a pattern or direction on the associations that colour builds up. In art, then, we would find seemingly contradictory uses jarring or baffling—that within the context of a larger culture would be seen as merely curious—and are therefore more likely, I think, to seek to rationalise them so that the whole can be described in systematic ways. This poses, however, the problem, of what, exactly, the whole might be. Is it the entire œuvre? Is it the individual poem (or novel, or even chapter)? Is it the combined œuvres of several poets working in roughly the same period and with the same commitments?[25] At what point is our holding in mind the associations a colour has built up within a work no longer in accordance with the colour's own work, or a writer's own sense of what that colour might be doing, but instead finding system where there is none and, thereafter, stuffing colours into slots of 'meaning' that they do not fit?[26]

---

[23] William H. Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Boston: Godine, 1975), p. 7. See p. 31.

[24] See pp. 29-30.

[25] See, for instance, Kurt Mautz, 'Die Farbensprache der Expressionistischen Lyrik', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte,* 31 (1957), 198–240.

[26] 'Color in poetry,' as Françoise Meltzer makes clear in her doctoral thesis, 'is not a Morse Code to be translated into lengthy and obfuscating effusions by critics'. Meltzer, 'The Painted Veil: Color and Cognition in Symbolist Verse.', p. viii. In her reading of colour in the poem 'Mein blaues Klavier', Angelika Overath makes a similar point: 'Es soll nicht darum gehen, [...] ›Bedeutungen‹ wie ein Puzzle zusammenzusetzen und das Gedicht ›aufzulösen‹.' Overath, p. 144. Paefgen's article mentioned above, while giving a much more sensible and suggestive account and mostly open to Lasker-Schüler's flexibility—for instance that poets come in all colours—makes, nonetheless, some unhelpfully generalising (and to some degree effusive) claims. Paefgen, pp. 15, 16.

The critic who has focused most on colour in Lasker-Schüler, Gotthard Guder, fell, I think, into this trap, adopting a systematising approach in which colours are assumed to stand, stably across the body of work, for concepts or affective states.[27] His starting point is the fear that the poet might be exercising aesthetic panache as opposed to communicating a state of affairs:

> When colour is endowed with purely subjective meaning, or when it is applied to abstractions, its application to the respective noun can easily become arbitrary. That is to say, the expressive figuration of an image can be accomplished by the mere technique of adding a colour-adjective to an object with which it is incompatible, and thus the image would represent the poet's skill but not his experience.[28]

For Eisenstein, as we have seen, it was self-evident that abstract or subjective colour use was essentially arbitrary, and skill lay in helping the viewer to learn a new set of colour associations across a work. But Lasker-Schüler's poems were written across a span of forty years and do not form anything like the tightly composed film or play Eisenstein is thinking of. Guder's problem, as Katrin Kohl points out, is that Lasker-Schüler's colour use is 'not formulaic, but responsive to context.'[29] His attempts to incorporate the flexibility of associations that a certain colour might have leads to unhelpfully broad fields of association,[30] to self-defeating particularity,[31] or to ill-motivated or circular arguments—that is, we end up with the formulation, 'because on this occasion x is associated with y, it follows that x is associated with y': how many times does a colour have to appear in a certain conjunction before we can safely say that it has a certain

---

[27] Gotthard Guder, 'The Meaning of Colour in Else Lasker-Schüler's Poetry', *German Life and Letters,* 14.3 (1961), 175–87. See also his chapter, 'Die Farbmetaphorik als Grundtypus des bildhaften Ausdrucks', in *Else Lasker-Schüler: Deutung ihrer Lyrik* (Siegen: Vorländer, 1966), pp. 61–68.

[28] Guder, 'The Meaning of Colour', p. 185.

[29] Katrin Kohl, 'Friendship, Love and Loss in the Poetry of Else Lasker-Schüler (1869–1945)', *Oxford German Studies,* 42 (2013), 3–22 (p. 11).

[30] Blue, which has on Guder's account 'eine grundsätzlich festumrissene Bedeutung', 'steht für das Himmlische, Göttliche, das Ewige, und alles, was im Denken und Fühlen des Menschen mit göttlichen Vorstellungen verknüpft ist', and is also 'das Symbol [Lasker-Schülers] Inspiration und wird […] zum Symbol ihrer Dichtung selber.' While it would be uncharitable to deny that these are all part of the same—expansive—semantic field, if this is all we have to say then we aren't adding much to our understanding of any particular poem—and we might want to point out that it is probably true to say that *all* of her poetry is about 'das Himmlische, Göttliche, Ewige' and so on. Guder, 'Die Farbmetaphorik als Grundtypus des bildhaften Ausdrucks', p. 61. More interesting is *how* these become linked, which I move on to in my third section.

[31] For instance, 'Closer examination, however, shows that the fundamental effect of mourning which black expresses, becomes a purely aesthetic effect only where black occurs in the same poem as gold'. Guder, 'The Meaning of Colour', p. 186.

effect?[32] And what then, if we see it again, counts as sufficient reason for us to doubt that it has that effect?[33] If we have decided 'black' has a 'fundamental effect of mourning',[34] but then on one occasion black seems to be used joyfully, say, or sensuously, do we have to dismiss any sense we have of joy or sensuality, despite all evidence, or does this mean that Lasker-Schüler has made some sort of mistake, or is it that some sort of unknown force is acting on the colour to mean that it has changed its polarity? And what then of the reader new to Lasker-Schüler who doesn't have either the exhaustive knowledge nor the essay to hand?

It is this question that I want to concentrate on: on how, that is, colour *comes to* mean. I look in my third section at one poem in the light of, and against, attempts to pin down colour meanings, but let us return now to 'Das blaue Gemach' to find a description, or walking through, of the very processes by which colour gathers meaning—and, I argue, by which we then read, or are to read it.

> [1] Ich habe nie eine Prinzessin oder einen Prinzen so geliebt wie mein blaues Gemach. [2] Wie eine Mutter hat mich sein wiegender, blauer Arm umschlungen, [3] und tiefere blaue Augen hat nie ein König des Abends gehabt wie mein hehres, blaues Gemach. [4] Ein blauer Schwan war es, auf dem ich gleitete – – [5] eine Wunderblume war mein süßes blaues Gemach – – [6] hei, eine Tänzerin ... [7] immer in seidenen blauen Schritten ... zauberleise ... [8] und mit der Sonne hat es hellen Schattenschein getanzt [9] und blaue Träume um die Sterne geschlungen, [10] und hast du schon einmal ein Gemach gesehn, das blaue Haare hatte, Senna Pascha? [11] Oh, ein Kuß war mein blaues Gemach [12] und ich sterbe an diesem blauen, blauen Kuß.

As the set of images progresses the sentences become fragmented: the syntax breaks down, from conjoined or complex sentences in the first part (1-4) to simple and finally incomplete sentences in the second (5-8) with punctuation literally separating each

---

[32] Calvin Jones puts it more bluntly: 'some of the interpretations are obvious and others are arbitrary.' Jones, p. 54.

[33] The problem of circularity dogs any account of a single colour, as in, for example, Sabine Doran's *The Culture of Yellow*; for all that there are undeniable instances of yellow being associated with scandal and the 'other' at the end of the nineteenth century, to assume this in advance and read it into a work about which the claim seems less solidly made presupposes the mood, and mode, of the work, a claim that has been made about historicist accounts in general; see for instance Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You', in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 1–40.

[34] Guder, 'The Meaning of Colour', p. 186.

image. Similarly, the logic of the comparisons becomes looser: from the 'wie'-phrases which imply similes (1, 3) ('it's as if my room has deep blue eyes *like* a king of the evening'), or seem like similes shifted one place over (2), to assertions of identity (4-6), to the imaginative flexibility of the last lines.[35] There is a constant movement between different levels of possibility or fantasy: a blue arm is fantastic, but blue eyes are not in themselves unusual; a blue swan is fantastic, while a blue flower is not only likely but, if we are familiar with the context of German Romanticism, also perhaps signals an engagement with the *idea* of colour as a kind of ladder to the imagination. By the point of the dancer's 'silken blue steps', in which blue is syntactically unlikely, it is as if blue has been cast about such that it sticks to anything mentioned. In [5] it is notable that it is not the flower that is blue but the room; and in [4] we understand the mechanism to be 'the room was like a swan; the room was blue, and thus it was like a swan, could a swan be blue'; in [7] the connection begins to be more attenuated, abstract—and we might compare here the 'blaue Träume', a point of high abstraction, which could nonetheless imply a concretisation (the dreams must have some substance to have a colour). In each case the thing that is blue is blue solely because it is identified with the room. All the while, however, blue, like a snowball, is not leaving its these various objects or ideas intact after its momentary liaisons with them, but instead something rubs off; blue has picked up, by the end of the passage, certain associations with sensuousness, transport, imagination, love, softness, elegance, and so on. Yet rather than a sense of colour building up to a coherent whole, each new image seems—in part thanks to the punctuation—to dismiss the one prior to it, and the associations that it may have provisionally attracted are cast off or held in abeyance.

I want from here to turn to the poetry: to suggest, that is, that our reading ought to take colour, at least for now, as it comes, to read it only in the light of its most immediate surroundings and not fret about the context of the larger work—which a reader can only ever come to know piecemeal and provisionally. I want to think more about what colour is *doing* than what it *means*—a method implicit in the previous chapters—and follow the ways in which colour has a dynamic presence in Lasker-

[35] It has been claimed that this progression mimics the development of colour in literature from Jugendstil decoration to Modernist abstraction. Liska, p. 91.

Schüler's poems, often suggesting, as we will see, activity or perfomativity. The following poems, chosen associatively, were all first published between 1911 and 1917 (and were included in the *Gesammelte Gedichte* of 1917); I do not, however, intend to imply coherence other than that which seems to come out of the reading.

II: READING COLOUR ACROSS THE POEMS

David und Jonathan

In der Bibel stehn wir geschrieben
Buntumschlungen.

Aber unsere Knabenspiele
Leben weiter im Stern.

Ich bin David,
Du mein Spielgefährte.

O, wir färbten
Unsere weißen Widderherzen rot!

Wie die Knospen an den Liebespsalmen
Unter Feiertagshimmel.

Deine Abschiedsaugen aber –
Immer nimmst du still im Kusse Abschied.

Und was soll dein Herz
Noch ohne meines –

Deine Süßnacht
Ohne meine Lieder.[36]

The first colour is, in fact, many: David and Jonathan are '*bunt*umschlungen'. Love, here, is indexed to colour, loving, that is, is made manifest in colour. This intertwining, in refusing to differentiate hue or person, refuses, too, to distinguish between acts and their representation (wir stehn *geschrieben*). Is it that by writing their love, it is preserved—or is it that writing is the space in which it can take place? (Is it in fact in the writing that it consists?) In the second stanza, two different sorts of permanence are

[36] Else Lasker-Schüler, *Gesammelte Werke, vol. 1: Gedichte 1902-1943*, ed. by Friedhelm Kemp, 3 vols (Munich: Kösel, 1959), I, pp. 162, 302. (Henceforth GW with volume and page number.) Poems will be cited from this edition, currently the most widely available.

contrasted: that of writing, and that of the stars.[37] The former is static, fixed in a particular instance of its expression (as if colour—'bunt'—takes the place of activity), the latter dynamic ('Knabenspiele'); the former historical, the latter outside of time; the former material and multicoloured, the latter monochrome, nothing but light and its absence. The opposition of these images is underlined by the unification of the two second lines, 'Buntumschlungen' and 'Leben weiter im Stern', through form, in this case, visual patterning: each containing a predominance of a certain vowel, and seeming to constitute woven vowel-consonant texture.[38]

The word 'aber' takes on a particular role: this is a 'but' of comparison as opposed to contrast, a holding of images alongside one another, in which we are to see them as separate but nonetheless complementary pictures or modes of the love described. The form seems to be structured by an implied 'aber': every two-line stanza is to be understood as a complementary addition without necessarily stating in advance its position with regard to the one before, so, one stanza can add to, contradict, bolster the previous.[39] So too does the reader's processing of this information take the form of an 'aber': it is a *new* facet to the poem, not an embellishment of the previous. Thus, while the mention of the Bible in the first line points already to the introduction of a proper name—these are familiar figures whose names and stories we are assumed to know—the line 'Ich bin David' is framed by this 'aber': the love story is overwhelmingly particular, but also eternal, on the one hand, and iterative, on the other. That is, it is preserved for eternity, but in that preservation plays itself out over and over. If this has an addressee—which it did, Senna Hoy (Johannes Holzmann)—their presence in the poem is nonetheless provisional, for not only is the 'du' not named, they are relegated—or raised—to the level of a particular archetype.

---

[37] I use the term 'stanza' throughout, for all that in current usage they are perhaps better described as 'strophes', in order to maintain a loose connection with the idea of the work as a room. See Theresa Krier, 'Strophe', *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* ed. by Roland Greene and others (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 1360–61.

[38] Some might want to argue that the vowels have, themselves, different 'colours'. See p. 25.

[39] Dieter Bänsch forcefully criticises what he sees as the tendency to suggest that this form is somehow born of a genetic, Jewish, affiliation with the Psalms. While he's certainly right to find troublesome the idea that this is born of biology, his own account, in which the form is merely a consequence of dividing strophes by sentence-units, seems somewhat circular and insufficient. Dieter Bänsch, *Else Lasker-Schüler: zur Kritik eines etablierten Bildes* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971), pp. 21–22.

The central image of love within the poem is that of the fourth stanza: 'O, wir färbten | unsere weißen Widderherzen rot!' The activity of loving is creative, bringing hue where there was none, and bringing the hearts to what we would think of as their natural state.[40] This colouring is mutual and conjoined: the colour the hearts share binds them, as is clear from the later stanza, 'Und was soll dein Herz | Noch ohne meines—'. Self-sufficiency is sacrificed—hence, one might think, '*Widder*herzen'—for union, a union that is—and here we see the real weight of 'aber'—doomed. Their loving is made visible by, and consists in, the spread of colour into their hearts, but in allowing this, a certain vulnerability is introduced, and the hearts—'weiße Widderherzen'—are brought down from their association with the stars of the second stanza to a sort of earthliness or corporeality. Colour bound the lovers in life, and leaves each party unprotected after their parting. Hue makes of love a particularity, a unique bond; coloured-ness, whether 'bunt' or 'rot', is the marker of the earthly, unrepeatable, carnal aspect of this specific love, where parting and playing, those sides to this love that are iterable and immortal, are marked by light ('Stern', 'weiß') and limpidity (we can read 'Abschied' from Jonathan's eyes). Colour is the bud ('Knospe'), the physical and fragilely fleshly outgrowth of the repeatable, abstracted activity of love ('Liebespsalmen')—perhaps from its own organic core of 'Liebes*palmen*'. Colour gives love a body, constituted by threads or shared matter;[41] colour is therefore the poem on the page. Unlike the sung 'Psalmen' and 'Lieder' which are immortal, but unconsummatable, the poem is a text to be exhausted.

The poem's making is a one-off where its printing was repeated (it was included in both *Meine Wunder* (1911) and *Hebräische Balladen* (1913) and later the *Gesammelte Gedichte* (1917)); its reading, of course, is infinitely repeatable, and the fact that our access can only ever be to this, repeatable, form draws a line around the activity of loving as private, removed from the reader by tense: 'wir färbten'. The colourful binding *protects* the lovers from our gaze, the space set out by the twinned 'abers'

[40] Paefgen makes the useful observation that, especially in the case of hearts, hue is far less important than whether or not things are coloured, how many colour words are used to describe them, and how contrastive these colours are. Paefgen, pp. 11–12.

[41] We might think here of the poem 'Ein alter Tibetteppich' in which the kind of colourful 'umschlingen' is specified as weaving and knotting.

framing the window onto the lovers (the retelling of their love), rather than the lovers themselves.

Abschied

Aber du kamst nie mit dem Abend-
ich saß im Sternenmantel.

...Wenn es an mein Haus pochte,
war es mein eigenes Herz.

Das hängt nun an jedem Türpfosten,
auch an deiner Tür;

zwischen Farren verlöschende Feuerrose
im Braun der Guirlande.

Ich färbte dir den Himmel brombeer
mit meinem Herzblut.

Aber du kamst nie mit dem Abend-
...Ich stand in goldenen Schuhen.
(GW I:234)

The 'Sternenmantel' fates the wearer to wait for an impossibility: the addressee was never going to come (for '*Ab*end' looks too much like '*Ab*er' and '*Ab*schied'). The 'Sternenmantel' would seem to render its wearer visible but at the same time illegible: we can know they are there, but they are cloaked by light, suggesting a deflection of attempts to see or know them. 'Abschied' offers a picture of the poem as an act of inference: the parting itself is only inferred, for one, and throughout the speaker's love is expected to be understood via a reading of certain signs—not, that is, portents (although the form would seem to supply these, foreshadowing through repetition), but indices. The speaker's emotions are visible, but only as the results of a brute physical causal chain; the beloved, and the reader, must retrace this chain, find the love that is only implied.

As in 'David und Jonathan' a change of colour sits at the heart of the poem: 'Ich färbte dir den Himmel brombeer | Mit meinem Herzblut': the breaking of corporeal

boundaries and subsequent change in colour is a way of writing, and reading, love.[42] In 'Abschied', however, the change of colour is not a communal undertaking, the introduction of love through the bond that vulnerability creates between two people. The colour change does not take place in one or both parties, as if it were the result of a deliberate disintegration of dividing structures; it is instead a leakage from one into the open. It is also not a 'basic colour' (as 'rot', 'schwarz', 'weiß' would be) but 'brombeer'; this is a ripe, fertile love that has been allowed to split and stain its surroundings. Unlike in these other poems, where the colour change *is* the activity of love, here it is a consequence of the parting, at least if we understand the stanzas to bear chronologically upon one another. The heart was perhaps full, ready to act in concert with the heart of the loved one, but because they never came, it burst, discharging the 'unactivated' colour willy-nilly.

This is a sign that can be read by all—the sky has turned dark red not just for the addressee. The speaker's heart hangs on every doorpost, not just the beloved's. The poem is, then, this heart: the visible, perceivable part of an otherwise invisible, illegible love, which, unreturned, unchannelled, is firing in all directions.[43] And this visibility is at its most concentrated in colour; but not, as others might have it, through conventional symbolism—a colour is not a symbol for an emotion, but an index of it, a physical marker of affect. Signs can be misread: the speaker's heart beats loudly, so loudly that it can be mistaken for a knocking at the door.[44] The poem is a way of forestalling this, of setting straight the provenance of the signs, of letting the beloved know that they haven't misidentified these signs—or which signs they ought to have identified—without indicating in advance exactly how they are to be read. This is a matter of dignity—and indeed, we come to the end of the poem to find the speaker

---

[42] We might think also of the line, 'Immer färbt dein Blut meine Wangen rot' from 'Versöhnung'.

[43] Sigrid Bauschinger says of 'David und Jonathan', 'Lied und Liebe sind eins'. Sigrid Bauschinger, *Else Lasker-Schüler: ihr Werk und ihre Zeit* (Heidelberg: Stiehm, 1980), p. 175. Here, however, the poem is more a symptom or consequence of the love.

[44] For Andrew Webber, the word 'pochen' 'embodies [a] paradoxical condition of violent energy without effective movement. It communicates an urgent appeal both private and public. The verb beats through Lasker-Schüler's writing, syncopating the demand from outside—knocking on the door—with that from inside—the throbbing heart.' This he explores as part of what he calls her 'acts of self-displacement' which roughly coincide with how I think, on the level of structure, the word 'aber' and the two-line stanzas work. Webber, p. 146.

standing in golden shoes, perhaps raised up by the sacrifice-like activity that is the poem—or perhaps waiting in more eager hope. What they have achieved, however, is the dignity of self-determination: through their actions they have made themselves visible, and legible—they have come out from under the coat of stars, to be seen by their own light. For Bauschinger, this is an aestheticisation (and one that she sees already in the first stanza—the 'Sternenmantel' as a comfort): 'Über [das Gedicht] liegt eine gedämpfte Trauer […], die sich in Schönheit verwandelt und darin ihren Trost findet'.[45]

The turn provided by 'Aber' in the final stanza is ambivalent: for one, it is an obvious repetition of the first line. We might thus see it as a restatement of this initial turn—itself of unclear direction; or we might instead understand that despite the signs the speaker has sent out, the lover still hasn't arrived. 'Aber', we might say, is the *mode* of the poem, and indeed much of Lasker-Schüler's writing. Here, it is a creative obstinacy in the face of the inevitable. The repeated line alters the value of 'nie' from 'on one occasion, you never arrived' to 'on every occasion, you didn't arrive'. The acceptance that we saw it met with in the first stanza, which may have seemed initially passive, even pathetic, becomes one of dignity, in which the raw material of parting (itself a mode or ongoing state as opposed to a single action) is transformed into a creative, if self-sacrificing, act. And it is precisely through the lens of 'aber' that one is to read Lasker-Schüler's use of colour: every individual mention of a colour is to be placed in opposition to every other mention, and every new mention requires us to recalibrate or re-adjust how we see that colour, even if it seems to be doing the same work. 'Aber' has thus two roles: to channel the back-and-forth of defiance and acceptance on the one hand, and to direct a reframing or refocusing on the other. If we return to the passage from 'Das blaue Gemach', we can see how the rolling metaphor, tied together by the colour blue, offers not a cumulative picture of the room, but one in which the successive images are to be held up against one another. The room is wholly ungraspable, or rather, ungraspable *as a whole*, but we can follow the train of the metaphors through time and build up a non-synchronic and provisional sense of how it might be.

[45] Bauschinger, p. 136.

The ungraspable is central to the following poem, and in particular to the meeting-point of love and colour:

Giselheer dem Heiden

Ich weine -
Meine Träume fallen in die Welt.

In meine Dunkelheit
Wagt sich kein Hirte.

Meine Augen zeigen nicht den Weg
Wie die Sterne.

Immer bettle ich vor deiner Seele;
Weißt du das?

Wär ich doch blind -
Dächte dann, ich lag in deinem Leib.

Alle Blüten täte ich
Zu deinem Blut.

Ich bin vielreich
Niemand kann mich pflücken;

Oder meine Gaben tragen
Heim.

Ich will dich ganz zart mich lehren;
Schon weißt du mich zu nennen.

Sieh meine Farben,
Schwarz und stern

Und mag den kühlen Tag nicht,
Der hat ein Glasauge.

Alles ist tot,
Nur du und ich nicht.
(GW I:204)

If the beloved is to be a heathen, the lover must then be understood on a vast scale;[46] and indeed, their sorrow leads to global, metaphysical consequences:

Ich weine—
Meine Träume fallen in die Welt.

[46] Giselheer is also described as a 'Barbar', WB III.1:438.

The speaker's dreams, in the form of their tears (although linguistically inverted, in that the shape of 'Träne' can be found in 'Träume'), fall into the world. Does this mean they were once, in some sort of celestial form, realisable if never realised? Or do they change in quality, does the world taint them? Does the speaker fall with them? And is the world itself changed: are these dreams unleashed on the world, changing its structures or content?

This grand sense of scale continues into the poem; and now it seems that the speaker themself is the heathen, possessing a vast 'Dunkelheit' into which no shepherd will go. Is this 'meine' then to be understood as in opposition to the darkness of the beloved—into *my* darkness as opposed to that of another (and is this distinction topographical—'my darkness over here'—or qualitative—'my particular kind of darkness'?)—or is it in fact that darkness that ought to be understood as forming the distinction against the light of stars (l.6), and perhaps, returning to the first stanza, of dreams, which fall like stars?

The central plea in the poem comes in lines 19-20: 'Sieh meine Farben | Schwarz und stern'. The poem balances on this opposition, or what ought to be an opposition, between darkness and light; and the speaker possesses them both. This has two possible implications: first, that they are not, in fact, in opposition (and by association with night, as opposed to day with its 'Glasauge', they of course form one pole of another pair of concepts). And second, that we are in a world conceptually apart from the everyday world—or rather, as in the first stanza, conceptually tainted by the poet's world—and we must reconfigure our categories accordingly.

In the third stanza we can see how the structuring of the lines makes this ambivalence clear:

> Meine Augen zeigen nicht den Weg
> Wie die Sterne.

The obvious reading would have the stars able to show the way, unlike the eyes—but it could be read as quite the opposite of this, where the stars, like the eyes, do not show

the way.[47] Stars, as we have seen in 'Abschied' can cloak as much as reveal, just as a 'Glasauge' can glint without perceiving. The light in the poem is hidden, or untrustworthy (the word 'weiß' appears twice but is hidden both times within 'weißt').

To see, then, the speaker's colours is not quite as easy as simply perceiving them. (Where might these colours, if they were a literal part of the speaker, be? Would they be the eyes, as in poems like 'Georg Grosz'—'ascherne Augen'—or 'Ruth'—'schwere dunkle Tropfen'—where eye colour envelops the entire person? Or the clothing, like the 'Sternenmantel'?). For all that 'schwarze Sterne' are perhaps possible in this particular world, it is unclear how they might be literally seen. These are, however, the colours belonging to the speaker, and this relation of belonging seems to go deeper than a description of appearance. These are colours reflecting either an atemporal 'character' or aspect of the soul, or else a particular state of the soul or emotions as a consequence of a love as yet unrequited. To see them is then to know, or at least recognise, the speaker—or to know, and recognise, their love. Given the discussion of colour change in 'David und Jonathan' and 'Abschied' we might be tempted to say that the colours are only the consequence of love, and this understanding points back to the fourth stanza, 'Immer bettle ich vor deiner Seele; | Weißt du das?' where the imbalance between the speaker and the addressee is seen not just in a metaphorical begging but also in that the speaker does not know if the addressee knows of either the imbalance or the love itself. Here, then, the addressee must at least acknowledge its existence. Given the previous stanza, however, the colours can also be read more holistically as belonging to the whole person, the person that wishes to be understood by the addressee.

> Ich will dich ganz zart mich lehren;
> Schon weißt du mich zu nennen.

Love seems here, in 'David und Jonathan' and 'Abschied', a vulnerability, where the risks are high. If we let our edges soften such that they might allow for osmosis the substance or concentrate of our love might leach into the open, be sapped from us.

---

[47] Robert Newton contrasts Lasker-Schüler's eye imagery with Stefan George's, concluding that where George is interested in the eye's 'intellective' capacity, for Lasker-Schüler the eye is 'a window of the *soul*'. This conclusion seems, if horribly phrased, correct. Robert P. Newton, 'Eye Imagery in Else Lasker-Schüler', *MLN*, 97.3 (1982), 694–712 (p. 706).

Here, the vulnerability of being open to being known or grasped by the other is seen in more active, self-determined terms: rather than the speaker wanting to be known, they want to teach of themself. This begins (lines 17-28) with naming—and this was, of course, a practice that Lasker-Schüler was greatly interested in, giving lovers and friends new names, some of which, such as Herwarth Walden, were taken on as pseudonyms, others remaining within the friendship, but all betokening not just the real person but also the fictionalised persona they became in poems and prose works.[48] In 'Giselheer dem Heiden', however, it seems less a creative naming, a naming that might bring about, but rather a naming of what is already there. When the addressee is called on to see the speaker's colours, they are being given instructions also on how to name them. In the novelty of 'stern' (as an adjective), the particularity of the person is made clear.[49]

The seeming contradiction between 'schwarz' and 'stern' could be dissolved by noting the new oppositions that the poem sets up, not between dark and light but between seeing and blindness, and by seeing this as an indication that we are in a world of the imagination where the usual laws of light do not obtain. But we mustn't forget that it is, nonetheless, a striking example of paradoxical or oxymoronic colour, like Kandinsky's 'rotblau', and as such understandable as a kind of 'nonsense'. And nonsense is for Lasker-Schüler an enormously rich poetic resource: not, as it was with Kandinsky, a cancelling out of meaning to whittle experience down to pure sound, but an opening up to the infinite. A comment by Irving Massey seems apposite: 'For many authors concerned with metamorphosis, nonsense seems to be the place where private meaning and the divine order meet.'[50] In *Precious Nonsense,* Stephen Booth approaches this from the side of the reader, suggesting that 'the human mind ordinarily want[s] most […] to understand what it does not understand'; nursery rhymes and other nonsense give the mind the pleasure of achieving this in a way that does not undermine its own end—'it

---

[48] In Stephen Booth's *Precious Nonsense* he acknowledges his partner not, as usual, by 'saying something nice' about her but instead by simply giving her name—a move that, in a book about the mind's desire for inexhaustibly incomprehensible writing, seems especially poignant in its bareness. *Precious Nonsense: The Gettysburg Address, Ben Jonson's Epitaphs on His Children, and Twelfth Night* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. xii.

[49] This can also be seen in *Briefe nach Norwegen*, WB III:186

[50] Irving Massey, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 10.

gives us an understanding of something that remains something we do not understand.'[51] In these moments of nonsense or paradox a certain kind of expression seeps out, 'ohne', as Gottfried Benn remarked, 'das Geheimnisvolle zu entschleiern'.[52] Here, the incompatible colours are part of the speaker's defiant inexhaustibility or ungraspability: 'Ich bin vielreich | Niemand kann mich pflücken'.[53]

One reason that 'schwarz' and 'stern' can be tolerated—and this goes for most of the instances where Lasker-Schüler combines 'schwarz' and a noun that is either never or only rarely or with considerable imaginative effort black, whether 'schwar**z**er Len**z**' ('Abend'), 'schwar**z**er Blit**z**' ('Richard Dehmel') 'schw**ar**ze P**er**len' ('Karl Vogt'), '**schw**arze **Schw**äne' ('Hagar und Ismael') or '**sch**warzer **Sch**nee' ('An den Ritter aus Gold')—is through the unity of sound. Thinking again of Carroll's Alice, this is an inversion of the Duchess's, 'Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.'[54] You can sugar-coat an odd or implausible 'sense' with rhyme or alliteration to make it seem not only acceptable, but also necessary: 'rhyme justifies the line [...] by demonstrating its indispensability in a certain scheme of things. [...] For rhyme presents arguments as accomplished facts; it contains its own kind of causality, since immediately we call a word a rhyme-word, we presuppose the existence of a partner'.[55] We saw this from the opposite direction in the previous chapter: when asked to decide which colour was 'right' in Kandinsky's poem 'Sehen', several conference-goers chose the colours that alliterated with, as opposed to colours that might be plausibly attached to, the object or situation at hand.

---

[51] Booth, *Precious Nonsense*, p. 6.

[52] Gottfried Benn, 'Else Lasker-Schüler', in *Sämtliche Werke: Stuttgarter Ausgabe, Vol. 6: Prosa 4,* ed. by Holger Hof and Gerhard Schuster (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), pp. 54–57 (p. 55). (Gottfried Benn was the real-life 'Giselheer'.)

[53] In its first printing, Lasker-Schüler used the neologism 'Niemandwer', shoring up the productivity of contradiction and oxymoron, a point Andrew Webber uses to close his essay. Webber, p. 160.

[54] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; And, Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, ed. by Peter Hunt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 80. For a discussion of language, sense and causality in *Alice,* see Massey, pp. 76–97.

[55] Clive Scott, *French Verse-Art: A Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 113. Culler makes this point by quoting Jay-Z: 'The rhyme convinces you. The words connect.' Culler, *Theory of the Lyric,* p. 184.

In a collection of essays on puns, R. A. Shoaf coins the term 'juxtologist' to describe those poets (in this case, late middle English) who 'knew full well that language is "in charge"', who 'recognised that words yoke themselves together, and together with things, in most unpredictable ways.'[56] Lasker-Schüler can be seen as a 'juxtologist' of sorts, and has, certainly, a huge interest in all sorts of yoking, whether the characteristic two-line form, the use of love (always between two people, although not always romantic) as a way of structuring and exploring form, or then the yoking of names to figures, colours to characters, person to persona, life (and this is certainly more interesting than a yoking, but helpfully conceived of as such at least to begin with) to art. The poet is, however, like Tino, and unlike Shoaf's late middle English poets, using the process of yoking as a way of gaining control over situations in which the speaker is shown to be at the lower end of a power differential. (We can see Lasker-Schüler's word-play as an exercise of control, a reforming of language in the face of powerlessness, as in the 'Klaviatür' of 'Mein blaues Klavier' which I discuss in the next section.) In 'Giselheer dem Heiden' the speaker begs before the soul of the addressee, yet later demands of him that he sees—and in doing so, comprehends—their colours, which are deliberately yoked to be superficially graspable, even pleasurable, but are at second glance incommensurable, nothing other than fathomless dark and fathomless light. Rather than willingly relinquishing control to the arbitrary play of form, Lasker-Schüler harnesses its pleasures to mask or assuage a picture of interpersonal relations where the other can never fully be known, or where a certain type of love will never find its object. We might think here of the famous 'Teppichtibet', whose form is contorted by the poet: not only is the word 'Teppichtibet'—as befits a poem alluding to George's 'Der Teppich'—morphologically idiosyncratic, and its rhyme 'liebet' grammatically non-standard, but the souls are 'verwirkt' in it, and not 'verknüpft' (as they ought to be in a Tibetan rug, as Gerhard Kaiser points out).[57]

---

[56] R. A. Shoaf, 'The Play of Puns in Late Middle English Poetry: Concerning Juxtology', in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 44–61 (p. 45).

[57] Gerhard Kaiser, *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik von Heine bis zur Gegenwart: ein Grundriss in Interpretationen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 380.

Ein Liebeslied

Aus goldenem Odem
Erschufen uns Himmel.
O, wie wir uns lieben…

Vögel werden Knospen an den Ästen,
Und Rosen flattern auf.

Immer suche ich nach deinen Lippen
Hinter tausend Küssen.

Eine Nacht aus Gold,
Sterne aus Nacht…
Niemand sieht uns.

Kommt das Licht mit dem Grün,
Schlummern wir;
Nur unsere Schultern spielen noch wie Falter.
(GW I:183)

In 'Ein Liebeslied' we have a special case of 'schwarze Sterne': here they are 'aus Nacht', that is, they are one with the substance from which they usually distinguish themselves. There seems a mutual contagion: the stars are made of night, yet the night is made of gold. This indistinguishability of ground and figure continues in ways analogous to those we saw above, in which formal similarities are the logic of which images are built: 'Vögel werden Knospen an den Ästen' has birds literally becoming buds on branches—because they look like them, but also because the word 'Knospen' looks (and sounds) like a kind of mid-point between 'Vögel' and 'Ästen'. And their shoulders are like moths because the shoulders, like the lovers, are in their element at night—but also because 'Schulter' is like (sounds like, looks like) 'Falter'. This is exactly the kind of logic that the metaphorical 'train' in 'Das blaue Gemach' sought to display: the use of an arbitrary formal feature as a hinge or fulcrum for an image, an appeal to auditory and visual similarity as a justification for an otherwise far-fetched use of language.

This seems, like the 'Sternenmantel' in 'Abschied', an example of Lasker-Schüler cloaking the poem's speaker in reflective, metallic or luminous colours. One could slyly, although without much difficulty, read this as poetological (certainly if we are to draw a comparison to George), that is, that the luminosity of the verse is intended to dazzle

the reader and hide the exact biographical details of the players—or perhaps even that the light by which one reads the poem reflects off its surface and dazzles, or pleases, the reader, hiding the real love for which it has been written. This seems a legitimate move, but need not be made immediately, or indeed at all. Lasker-Schüler's poems are less interestingly poems discussing poetry (and for all its appeal the leap to the meta-poetic can easily become a critical gimmick, as Jonathan Culler points out)[58] than they are poems *doing* poetry; discussions, such as here, of cause and effect, of access to knowledge, of the performance or visibility of affect see poetry more as a *mode* than a craft or art-form (which I take to be a certain pre-requisite for classically 'poetological' poems, of which George's 'Die Spange' is an example). Self-reflexivity here does not take as its object the act of making but examines instead the ways in which something can be transferred, enacted, communicated, received, and so on. While this 'something' is often, although not always, 'the experience of love', we should see this less as the subject of the poems and more as a through-line, a common denominator, acting as a controlled variable. This can be phrased as a question: given 'love' as the subject-matter of a poem what, when varying words and images, can be said about poetry?[59]

Questions of reflectivity and luminosity of colours are not then about the material of the poem itself but are about the relation of seeing to knowing, with the emphasis not on sense-data but on significance—by which I mean that Lasker-Schüler is not interested in questions of perception, of phenomenology, but in signs and communication. We saw this in 'Abschied', and we could, were we to read more widely, find many other examples in which a change in colour is the visible part of love or loss or disappointment.[60] Lasker-Schüler does not ask 'what is red?' nor 'how can I

---

[58] 'The convention that poems may be read as statements about poetry is extremely powerful. If a poem seems utterly banal it is possible to take banality of statement as a statement about banality [...] There is a sense in which all representational poetry – all poetry which is not presented as taking place wholly within the mind itself – is allegorical: an allegory of the poetic act and the assimilation and transformation it performs.' Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 208.

[59] Bernhardt Blumenthal takes a similar line, suggesting that these 'poetic acts of love are at once ritual, entertainment, artistry, riddle-making, doctrine, persuasion, sorcery, soothsaying, prophecy, and competition: in short, play.' That is, that love itself is not of primary importance; and in his short essay he draws the connection between love and play convincingly together with Lasker-Schüler's relationship with God. Bernhardt G. Blumenthal, 'The Play Element in the Poetry of Else Lasker-Schüler', *The German Quarterly*, 43 (1970), 571–576 (p. 571).

[60] For instance, 'Dem Mönch', 'In meinem Schoße', 'Gott hör'.

make poems from language as one might a painting from colours?' nor 'how can I communicate an experience of a colour in words?' nor 'what effects do colours have on readers of poems as opposed to viewers of paintings?' Colours, and indeed perhaps also poems, are like flares, and it would make no sense to wonder if a flare was red or perhaps scarlet—nor to distinguish between orange and red flares—when one's primary reaction ought to be to find the boat that fired it. For all that I find it uninteresting, certainly when thinking about colour, to pay too much attention to Lasker-Schüler's biography, the desire to do so comes from reading the poems, in some sense, correctly, trying to look for, as the speaker in 'Ein Liebeslied', the lips behind the kisses. What we discover, however, is that, like the speaker, we look but never find; and this, then, is the question that I think many of Lasker-Schüler's poems are posing: is there something to be found, or is effect identical with cause? (Another way of putting this might be: are poems speech acts?)

In the following section I want to think more about the idea that emerges of poetry as a joint activity, a cooperation, between the committed partners of poet and reader. Here we might think back to Kandinsky, who used poetry, as he did painting, theatre, theoretical writing, to *help* the reader: there was a clear differential in spiritual aliveness between him and the audience that the poetry, as a form of training, was meant to reduce. The cooperation there was one of a teacher and a student; with Lasker-Schüler, it is of equals jointly bringing something about. The relationship that the poet and the reader must stand in is a *loving* one, as Tino to her room: attentive to what is there (we must 'see its colours'), and willing to allow for a mutual porosity. The spreading of a certain colour throughout a poem seems to happen through the reader's being open to it, through the reader acting as a willing vector or as a pathway for colour in order that it might gather meaning and build up its own significance.

III: MEIN BLAUES KLAVIER

The choices that a poet makes regarding colours form, as we saw in 'Das blaue Gemach' a virtuous circle: the form (that is, in this case, colour) of one 'thing' relates it to others with the same colour, such that the tenuousness of any of the individual links (why is

the room blue? why is a kiss blue? why is a room like a kiss?) is forgotten in the energy that the internal logic and relations provide. I turn now to Lasker-Schüler's most famous 'blue room', 'Mein blaues Klavier', to see how this works within a poem reliant on this internal energy as a mechanism of self-enactment.

Mein blaues Klavier

Ich habe zu Hause ein blaues Klavier
Und kenne doch keine Note.

Es steht im Dunkel der Kellertür,
Seitdem die Welt verrohte.

Es spielten Sternenhände vier
—Die Mondfrau sang im Boote—
Nun tanzen die Ratten im Geklirr.

Zerbrochen ist die Klaviatür.....
Ich beweine die blaue Tote.

Ach liebe Engel öffnet mir
—Ich aß vom bitteren Brote—
Mir lebend schon die Himmelstür—
Auch wider dem Verbote.
(GW I:337)

The poem, written and published thirty years after my other examples, takes at first glance a different attitude to form:[61] it is both metered and rhymed, for instance, but more importantly it has its *own* structure, its own form, as opposed to the pre-determined two-line stanzas of many of the poems. While the reasons for the specifics of its layout are not entirely transparent (why, for instance, are the first two stanzas separated out rather than forming a quatrain?) we can with some ease make claims about the ways in which the form mirrors or enacts the content. The poem describes a world that is 'verroht', brutalised, and in which the keyboard, that is, the means of expression, is broken (and so 'zerbrochen', in fact, that it has managed to acquire an umlaut, and its identity is thus broken in two: is it a 'Tastatur', keyboard, or in fact another kind of

[61] There are of course earlier rhymed poems, but there is a distinct shift in attitude to form, which Clemens Heselhaus describes as 'formaler Manierismus'; continuity is found, however, in the fact that 'sie die Form mit der ihr eigenen genialen Freiheit behandelte [und] jetzt die Form nur das schwingende Gerüst ihrer hin und her schwebenden Traumbilder ist'. *Deutsche Lyrik der Moderne: von Nietzsche bis Yvan Goll: die Rückkehr zur Bildlichkeit der Sprache* (Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1961), p. 223.

'Tür' like its partners in rhyme 'Himmelstür' and 'Kellertür'?).[62] This is then visible in the form: the uneven stanzas, the rhyme which is so close to a fairly simple alternating pattern that its oddness is all the more apparent, and a similarly simple metre, mostly iambic, of alternating tetrameter and trimeter which breaks only in the poem's central line. The poem is much more conscious of itself as craft, and this is visible in the standard interpretation, that it is 'about' the possibility of creative expression, an interpretation which is stated in two forms. One stresses the irretrievability of the lost powers of expression, such as Heinz Politzer's introductory article in the American Jewish journal *Commentary*:

> This is the plaint of Orpheus, the plaint for the song that has been lost in an unmusical, songless, mute age. […] Rainer Maria Rilke was filled with it. Else Lasker-Schüler enriched it with the realisation that song had become estranged, removed even from herself. "… Yet I don't know a single note…," an insight which embraces much of the forlornness and metaphysical irony of Franz Kafka.[63]

The other lays its emphasis on the irony to be found in the beauty and craft on the level of form—that is, by so eloquently representing a crisis of expression—and with such mimetic care—it is clear that this problem has already been solved.[64] This sort of reading gives us both a way in to, and a way out from, the more puzzling parts of the poem. That is, we can excuse the speaker for referring to odd and implausible figures, such as the 'Mondfrau' and the 'Sternenhände', and for having such a bizarrely coloured piano: if the world is broken, we oughtn't expect it to make sense—and this also means that the reader is let off the hook, and doesn't need to interpret the bits they don't understand. But this seems unsatisfying: and here I turn to my second epigraph taken from *The Genesis of Secrecy*, where Frank Kermode discusses the critical obsession with solving the 'drab enigma' of the 'man in the macintosh' from *Ulysses:* 'The real question

---

[62] This idiosyncractic form of 'Klaviatur' is also used in the piece 'An Mich', also in the collection *Mein blaues Klavier,* which begins, 'Meine Dichtungen, deklamiert, verstimmen die Klaviatür meines Herzens.' GW I:371.

[63] Heinz Politzer, 'The Blue Piano of Else Lasker-Schueler', *Commentary*, 9 (1950), 335–44 (p. 344); see also Gotthard Guder, 'Else Lasker-Schüler's Conception of Herself as Poet', *Orbis Litterarum,* 15.3–4 (1960), 184–99 (p. 192) ('this is the plaint of one whose song was stilled because her inspiration has failed'); Overath, p. 158 ('das zerbrochene Gedicht [führt] zu keinem Himmel'); Cristanne Miller, *Cultures of Modernism: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, & Else Lasker-Schüler : Gender and Literary Community in New York and Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 189.

[64] See, for example, Ruth Schwertfeger, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Inside This Deathly Solitude* (New York: Berg, 1991), p. 105. This is an argument that might convince locally but which could surely be applied to absolutely any poem that might discuss this subject, to the extent that its logical conclusion would be that the only successful poem truly to mourn expression would be no poem at all. (See Culler, n. 58.)

is, why do we want to solve it anyway? […] Why, in fact, does it require a more strenuous effort to believe that a narrative lacks coherence than to believe that somehow, if we could only find out, it doesn't?'[65] The enigma at hand is the colour of the piano, which has exercised even those critics who recognised the futility of treating the poem as a puzzle to be solved. The question seems to prove all the more urgent in situations such as this where the colour is surprising or unlikely, for all that—as I hope I have shown already—it is just as interesting to see what colours that are after all quite standard—red hearts, red lips and so on—are up to (remembering that nothing *needs* to have a colour in a poem). Not to care why the piano is blue—or worse, to believe that it doesn't matter what colour the piano is—seems to be an abdication of some readerly duty: we have failed to take seriously the sincerity of a poet or at least the speaker, or we lack certain explanatory knowledge. But I think we begin to miss the point if we get bogged down in seeking out the grounds for the one true explanation of why the piano is blue (and while an explanation is not an interpretation, it offers itself as a piece of the puzzle that can be slotted into place, allowing us finally to get on with the work of interpretation). The explanation for how it so happened that Lasker-Schüler wrote this poem (and that the piano in it is blue) is, I think, answering an entirely different question than the one that is supposedly asked: why is the piano blue?

The fear that drives people to explain or over-explain the colour can be described as follows: that whereas a colour adjective that seems to aim at mimetic representation is true insofar as it is accurate (we understand the colour to be true to a real or at least imaginable object, so, if we too were able to see, for instance, a blue hydrangea, or at least if we know what one looks like, we can agree that the ways in which Rilke describes it are correct), when a colour adjective is used non-mimetically or surprisingly it is unclear to the reader on what grounds this might be considered true, and how we could possibly share the sort of standpoint or knowledge that would allow us to agree.

---

[65] Kermode's 'cryptic and far from wholly satisfactory answer' is that there 'must be supra-literary forces, cultural pressures, which tend to make us seek narrative coherence, just as we expect a conundrum to have an answer, and a joke a point. Our whole practice of reading is founded on such expectations, and of course the existence of genres such as the pointless joke and the deviant conundrum depends upon the prior existence of the normal sort.' (p. 53). While this would seem to directly contradict Booth's readings (see n. 51) we might here distinguish between the pleasures of narrative structure and poetic or rhetorical structure in which the pleasures derive from relations of words rather than causal or linear mechanisms.

We have to place an enormous amount of trust in the poet or else dismiss it as pretty nonsense (which isn't necessarily a bad thing, or as bad a thing as some would have it, as Stephen Booth points out, and if we think back to 'An Anna Blume').

Finding answers to why this piano is blue begs the question of arbitrariness: if Lasker-Schüler *did* own a blue piano, then why indeed was that piano blue, and how might this help us understand its place in the poem? Markus Hallensleben points out that there are, in published and unpublished writings, references to a 'blaues Puppenklavier'.[66] Yet a toy piano does not a poem make: as T. S. Eliot remarked, 'When I learn that a difficult sonnet was inspired by seeing a painting on the ceiling reflected on the polished top of a table, [...] I can only say that this may be a correct embryology, but it is not the meaning.'[67] And as Peter Szondi wrote apropos of Celan's 'Du liegst', '[d]ie Bedingtheit des Gedichts durch die Zufälle des realen Lebens wird so bereits eingeschränkt, ja durchkreuzt durch die Auswahl aus ihnen, die nicht minder als jene mehr oder weniger zufälligen Begebnisse Vorbedingung des Gedichts ist oder gar mit seiner Entstehung zusammenfällt.'[68] We could decipher the poem as if it were a code or read it as a particularly opaque chapter of autobiography (what if we also found evidence of a toy that was a 'Mondfrau'?) but that would not exhaust the poem—the poem is not reducible to these facts that lie outside of it.[69]

The problem with the desire to explain the colour is that we can see other more puzzling aspects and agree that they are puzzling because they disturb the logic of the poem, such as is available to us: the 'Mondfrau', for instance, who belongs to the register of nursery rhymes and not that of elegies (she belongs, we might then say, to the form of the poem but not its 'content'), or the question of why the speaker does not know how to play the piano (did it break before they were able to learn, or are these two facts unconnected?). When it comes to colour, this sense of puzzlement seems misplaced: it is there in the poem's title. As in 'Das blaue Gemach', the colour is already

---

[66] Hallensleben, p. 294.

[67] T. S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1942), pp. 26–38 (p. 30).

[68] Peter Szondi, '"Eden"', in *Schriften II*, ed. by Jean Bollack (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), pp. 390–98 (p. 395).

[69] We might think back to the 'querelle des abécédaires' in Rimbaud scholarship; see p. 24.

a given, fixed in the world of the poem (or prose piece); our worry is pre-empted and written off in advance. We have here the additional reassurance of the possessive, '*Mein* blaues Klavier'. Where in 'Das blaue Gemach' the relationship between the speaker and her room is discussed within the piece, here the relationship too is stated in advance. The logic of the piano's colour lies with the speaker, who must, on some level, have wanted the piano to be blue, or acquiesced to its being blue. Thus, while we might discover certain facts about Lasker-Schüler's life, or look to certain cultural influences, and say that Lasker-Schüler might be referring to Kandinsky's writing, or possessed a toy piano that was blue, we have still failed to give an account of why the piano is blue.[70] The piano belongs to the speaker, that is, within the poem, and so the answer to the question, 'why is the piano blue?' can only be answered with reference to the poem, and the structures within it.

Returning, then, to the poem, let us see what these structures might be, and what the colour blue, whatever its significance, might be doing.

> Ich habe zu Hause ein blaues Klavier
> Und kenne doch keine Note.
>
> Es steht im Dunkel der Kellertür,
> Seitdem die Welt verrohte.

In the first stanza the logic has already started to come loose: where the 'doch' must be operating in tandem with 'habe' ('For all that I possess this piano, I don't know how to play it') the colour adjective and its placing implies that the colour might have something to do with this, as if it were synonymous with 'functioning', 'beautiful', 'in tune' or similar (it might make more sense if precisely the opposite were the case: a blue piano seems if anything less likely to be playable). In the second stanza we are offered what might seem quite a good reason for its being blue—it is standing in the dark, in or near the cellar, and so perhaps in normal light it wouldn't be blue after all. The title and first line, however, seem to suggest that blueness is essential to the piano. So how then can we even see its colour, if there is no light to see it by? (Again, there seems to be an implied 'aber' at the beginning of the second stanza.) Once more, affect

[70] That this is a reference to Kandinsky is suggested by Overath, pp. 156–57 (among others).

is not contained in (communicated by) the colour (that is, the hue) itself, but what has *happened* to it, how it has changed.

The second mention of the colour blue comes in the fourth stanza:

> Zerbrochen ist die Klaviatür.....
> Ich beweine die blaue Tote.

This 'blaue Tote', it was implied above, is Eurydice; yet it seems most obviously linked, through the colour, to the piano itself, that is, the means of creation and not the muse. If at any point we were unsure as to the emotional valency of blue, however, now we can be fairly certain that it is lamentable that the piano is the colour it is: on being repeated the previous instance of the word 'blau' becomes in some sense 'activated', as if this were a circuit in which a connection had finally been made. The association with 'Tote' travels back to the 'blaues Klavier', and the association with music travels forwards—that is to say that the reader modifies their previous understanding of the word 'blau' and anything that it has been associated with, while using these previous understandings to enrich their reading of the second instance. We find that these associations both point us towards, and find themselves confirmed in, the final stanza, which takes place by the 'Himmelstür', 'Himmel' being the ultimate point of convergence between 'blue' and 'dead'.

The circuit is then, in fact, a metonym for the poem: the blue piano leads us and the speaker to heaven, for all that it cannot be played and is situated as far, in the physical layout of the poem-world, and of the poem itself, as it is possible to get from 'Himmel' (in or near the cellar/first vs penultimate line). The colour blue becomes a figure of the very opacity of the poem, its puzzle, and not only does it resist our attempts to draw it into the story, to make a coherent whole, it suggests that this cannot be how to read this poem, that we would be mistaken to seek completeness in a world which is, very obviously, not, itself, whole. Its purpose is as thread, the weft to the warp of the poem's logic: by tying, over the lines and stanzas, 'blaues Klavier' to 'blaue Tote' it forces us to relate them, without the relationship being elucidated.[71]

---

[71] Yoko Tawada suggests that one might compare this linking of heaven and earth and underworld through colour and seemingly coincidental formal similarity (both angels and pianos have or are 'Flügel'—as indeed do 'Türen') to a 'Schamanenbaum' which one can climb up and down. 'Zu Else

The point is not, then, to deny that we might already know something about a colour: a reader comes to a poem with a certain linguistic competency and experience of the world, and while we can't generalise or legislate in advance for what exactly they bring with them with regard to a certain colour word this may well contribute to their reading. In this case, I have already drawn on the fact that speakers of German associate the word 'Himmel' with 'blau' (I would be for this reason interested to see how the poem is translated into Russian, a language famous for distinguishing at a far more basic level between dark and sky blue). We will have a 'prior theory' of 'blau'; but this will never be sufficient for us to be able to say, in a given instance, what exactly it is doing, or 'means', in a poem, because what it means is precisely what it is doing, its significance is constituted by the relations it finds itself in. This was, as we saw, where Guder's account failed, in that his desire to do justice to what colours were actually doing 'on the ground' meant that these relations had to be specified in impractically elaborate ways (when black and gold are seen together then black 'fundamental effect of mourning' becomes 'purely aesthetic').[72] We don't, for instance, even need to draw on the idea of blue skies to see that by association with 'Tote' the word 'Himmel' is already coloured by the word 'blau'—the poem has already guided us here.

Thus, like the blue of Tino's room, colour offers itself as a guide to the poem, and to its own use. By following a colour, we learn its meaning, and the logic of its meaning (we learn, for instance, which of our previous associations we may keep or must draw on, or on the other hand we learn, as seems often the case in Kandinsky, not to draw on them at all). My conclusion for this chapter is one, then, about reading, and how we might do it better. For Kandinsky, colour was used to recalibrate the reader's aesthetic sensibility, to make us more attuned to the sorts of truths that we might otherwise not perceive, the inner resonances of a thing or a medium. Lasker-Schüler makes us instead more aware of colour as form, as a kind of line, circuit, container, room, a structure by which to read. By paying attention to colour, to what happens to it and what it does, where it takes us, we are encouraged to pay the same sort of

---

Lasker-Schülers "Mein blaues Klavier"', in *Sprachpolizei und Spielpolyglotte* (Tübingen: Konkursbuch, 2007), pp. 45–47 (p. 47).

[72] Guder, 'The Meaning of Colour', p. 186.

attention to the 'other' that is the poem, to forge a relationship with it akin to love. I used as my epigraph a line from Clive Scott's 'Introduction about reading': 'But the nature of this acquaintance [i.e. that of literary analysis] is not that of the detective interrogating a suspect; it is, rather, a medical examination undertaken by an erotic partner.'[73] Reading, he goes on to say is 'a mode of relating'. R. A. Shoaf imagines a 'juxtological critic' who is 'not afraid of coincidence, does not seek (Cartesian) certitude' but who, importantly, 'resembles the poet, learning his patience.'[74] This is the lesson that we learn from Lasker-Schüler's blue rooms: rather than interpreting them, we must take colours on their own terms, we must follow, patiently, their lead. In doing so we must also not forget that we, too, have histories and investments—we must forget the myth of objectivity that systematising accounts encourage and be aware that, despite Rilke's hopes to the contrary, our own 'examining eye […] can, and frequently does distort [the poem].'[75] 'The proper moral to draw,' Richards concludes, 'might be: *Let us not lose the poem in our account of it*.'[76] Let us not lose the colour in our account of it.

---

[73] Scott notes Culler's call for analysis based on poetics as opposed to hermeneutics in 'Beyond Interpretation' but argues that the picture of the reader that emerges is just as totalising or 'totalitarian' as the interpretative models he pits himself against (*The Poetics of French Verse,* p. 6). Scott's wording seems to bring to mind, as Michael Minden pointed out to me, Susan Sontag's 'erotics of art' in which the aim of a critic would be to 'reveal the sensuous surface of art without mucking about in it' Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 13.

[74] Shoaf, pp. 60, 61.

[75] Richards, p. 174.

[76] Richards, p. 174.

Conclusion

P said, 'Some Poetry might be read aloud, to make him think.'[1]

But of course, desire cuts so much deeper than fact.[2]

William Empson, in the preface to the second edition of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, draws attention to a certain 'illustrative point' made by the book's reviewers:

> that in learning a foreign language the great thing is to learn to cut out the alternative meanings which are logically possible; you are always liable to bring them up till you have ‚grasped the spirit' of the language, and then you know they aren't meant. Of course, I don't deny that the method [of *Seven Types*] could lead to a shocking amount of nonsense; in fact, as a teacher of English literature in foreign countries I have always tried to warn my students off the book.[3]

There is a certain sort of structural ambiguity to colour, which I discussed in the introduction: is it 'zero meaning', or is it 'excess meaning'?[4] And what of its connotative baggage are we allowed to read in—and what ought we to read in? In the preceding chapters the question has lurked regarding what degree of knowledge of the 'source culture' might be sufficient for us to read, correctly, the colour at hand. I have argued for a method that would require no knowledge, in which anything we need to know is in fact provided by the poem itself; and have in fact suggested that such knowledge can act as a barrier to reading. We might level the same criticism made by Empson's

---

[1] Edward Lear, 'Nonsense Alphabet', *Laughable Lyrics* (1877) in Edward Lear, *The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense*, ed. by Vivien Noakes (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 420.

[2] T. V. F. Brogan and James M. Cocola, 'Onomatopoeia', *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* ed. by Roland Greene and others (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 974–75.

[3] Empson, p. xii.

[4] 'La couleur n'est pas le sens nul: elle est l'excès du sens'. Julia Kristeva, 'La joie de Giotto', in *Polylogue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), pp. 383–408 (p. 395).

reviewers at this method—is this just a case of naively ignoring the very obvious 'first meaning' that a colour has at a given time and place in order to play around with vaguely post-structuralist claims? Yet it seems the case that poetry since roughly 1890—since, that is, Rimbaud's *Voyelles*—has incorporated this aspect of colour language into its structures of meaning, has exploited its semantic ambivalence. The sorts of 'first meanings' that have sometimes, and I would argue lazily, been assumed, are buffeted or stripped away within these poems.

Part of the project of poetry, from the side of the maker and of the reader, is to marshal potential excess, to pose limits on colour's absorbency: to pin down, strip down, or bracket off connotation (George and Rilke respectively), to dig a channel for the flow of associations (Lasker-Schüler) or present a colour as stark or undecidable (Kandinsky). For George, colour language works as a metonym for poetic language per se; for Rilke it is the point at which the two incommensurable media of painting and poetry find themselves surprisingly unified, the materiality of either one dissolved by the presence of the other. As visual artists Lasker-Schüler and Kandinsky may seem at first glance to have merely transferred their interest in colour from its proper home in painting, to be using colour as part of a multi-media project; both 'compose' their poetry, arrange it, that is, as if it were a painting, let colour draw the eye and mind from image to image. But they seem both, too, interested in the ways in which poetic language is like a foreign language to be learnt, and the idea that colour, particularly but not exclusively when mediated by words, might itself be a language. Where Rilke's project was to learn to see, Kandinsky and Lasker-Schüler want us to learn to read.

What, then, is reading? For both Kandinsky and Lasker-Schüler it seems to be intellectualised feeling: feeling being something at once physical, undertaken by and manifested in the body, and spiritual; and as the interim stage, we have something like 'cognition'. For Kandinsky it was lamentable that we might think and not just look and listen, and the goal was to eliminate this stage (the stated goal, at least). For Lasker-Schüler there was no hiding from the cognitive: it is precisely the ways in which humans do this work of thinking, interpreting, reading that make them most fully themselves, for all that their surroundings are certainly lamentable. Even on the very crude level of

how the human is represented in their respective work, this difference is made clear: Kandinsky's human figures often seem little more than bearers of certain colours and our response is meant to bypass their humanness in favour of the sensory (and spiritual) effects of the colour. Lasker-Schüler on the other hand shows even the most archetypal figures as changeable in their colours, capable of gaining and losing understanding, love, favour. To 'see the colours' of another person is to learn to read them, to see them for who they are, and what they can be. 'Giselheer dem Heiden' is enjoined to see such colours, and, as we saw, this would seem a nearly impossible task. Impossible, perhaps, too, is the task of reading, and particularly reading poetry, that is, writing in which language is used in unfamiliar and seemingly overdetermined yet underspecified ways. Yet, like the colours 'schwarz und stern', the sensory coherence makes reading pleasurable, compelling. 'We practice interpretation', Irving Massey has written, 'not because we have not yet understood a work, but in spite of having "understood" it, to reaffirm its opacity, put it back into nonsense.'[5]

This thesis has looked at the poetics of colour—and has discovered that the poetics of colour leads us, primarily, back to poetics. As part of this focus I have come out—following, if obliquely, my chosen poets—against interpretation, as a critical practice, but also as a mode of reading, and particularly reading colour.[6] The point has been to make clear the self-reflexivity of colour in the poetry in question, the way it stymies

---

[5] Massey, p. 10.

[6] Similar calls for reading beyond or before interpretation can be found in Stephen Booth's 'Close Reading without Readings', in *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts,* ed. by Russ McDonald (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 42–56; Helen Vendler's 'Shakespeare's Sonnets: Reading for Difference', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences,* 47 (1994), 33–50. We might also think of Richard Strier, who takes Wittgenstein's 'Don't think, but look' as the 'guiding motto' of his book *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). All of these might be seen as forms of 'surface reading' to use Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best's (seemingly capacious) term. 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations,* 108 (2009), 1–21. More recently, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has argued for a form of reading that takes surface or 'presence' effects seriously. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004); we might usefully compare also Terence Cave's calls for a 'slow-motion' 'cognitive criticism' where the question is 'what is going on when we read a poem like this one?', involving, thus, a heightened noticing. *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 40–41. Peter Stockwell, in setting out the basis for a cognitive aesthetics, also calls for a kind of literary analysis which pays attention to textuality and texture, rather than engaging in suspicious or symptomatic 'readings' or interpretations, Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 1–2. And Jonathan Culler repeats his call from 'Beyond Interpretation' (and *Structuralist Poetics*) for a poetics rather than a hermeneutics in his *Theory of the Lyric*, pp. 5–6.

our attempts to interpret it (think, for instance, of Algabal's great black flower, a symbol of hermeticism, or of Rilke's abstracted colours which defied attempts to make them subordinate to connotative or metaphorical content, or of Kandinsky's undecidable colours, or Lasker-Schüler's unimaginable ones). Colour affirms its own opacity—but also directs our noticing, opens up paths through the internal architecture of the poem for us to learn.

We began this chapter with two quotations: the first is Edward Lear, from his 'Nonsense Alphabet.' Isolated from the 'Alphabet' as a whole, the line seems perhaps banal. In the context, though, the sense of the line is undercut by its integration in this 'nonsense':

> O said, 'An Owl might make him laugh, if only it would wink.'
> P said, 'Some Poetry might be read aloud, to make him think.'
> Q said, 'A Quince I recommend,—a Quince, or else a Quail.'
> R said, 'Some rats might make him move, if fastened by their tail.'[7]

If we *do* read the line as imparting some truth about poetry, it seems our reading has gone awry: we have not let ourselves be seduced by form, by the rhyme and rhythm, the sheer pleasure of words being linked for nothing other than their relation to the look and sound of words around them, in that most arbitrary of sequences, the alphabet. 'Desire', as the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics* entry on onomatopoeia so nicely has it, 'cuts so much deeper than fact.' And this pulls in two directions: towards musicality, but also, as in the previous chapter, when, on the basis of form, we make sense where there is none. This, as Empson suggests, 'is the essential fact about the poetical use of language.'[8] Nonsense opposes itself to the sincere intellectual activity of interpretation by leading it down the garden path: as Eliot says of Lear, '[h]is nonsense is not vacuity of sense: it is a parody of sense, and that is the sense of it.'[9] Yet 'P's suggestion points nonetheless towards the truth: even the most sensory sort of engagement with poetry, reading aloud or listening to its being read aloud, is a form of thinking. (Something that

---

[7] It ends, however, with Z, who cruelly snatches away A's—and our—comfort:

> 'We'll shut you up! We'll nail you down! We will, my little master!
> 'We think we've all heard quite enough of this your sad disaster!'

[8] He is discussing a translation by Arthur Waley, in which 'two statements are made as if they were connected, and the reader is forced to consider their relations for himself. The reason why these facts should have been selected for a poem is left for him to invent; he will invent a variety of reasons and order them in his own mind.' Empson, pp. 24–25.

[9] T. S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', p. 29.

Kandinsky, and after him Ball, exploited—by parodying processes of thinking and interpretation—in the hope of moving beyond.)

Colour has often been seen as line's sensual counterpart, erotic even, and certainly a stranger to thought.[10] Like nonsense, colour language seems to be precisely the thing it seems not to be as we approach it: when we are busy taking it seriously in its pure, sensory mode and turn our back on its liaisons with connotation, they come creeping back in, and when we try to unpack its meanings we find that they are unstable and apt to change. Kandinsky's elision of the pure sound and the pure look of colour in colour language is exemplary here: the look of a colour word is not a colour, it is a congeries of shaped lines; if you want to harness the colour of a colour word, you have to accept the very human ways in which thinking and imagining happen through and are made possible by language. It is the very opposite of onomatopoeia: whatever we believe about the naturalness of colour words (that is, whether 'red' is a human universal or if it is a category mistake to group 'red' and a certain hue, as 'red' is in fact the set of things that speakers of English have, over time, taken it to be and used it to mean) we can be sure that they are non-representational, a sort of language that ought to be directly related to nature and yet with no mimetic function and no possibility of having one. For it to come about at all, colour, in language, cannot *not* be thought.

⋆

My argument has been that reading colour—looking, that is, at how a poet has used colour—can help us see more clearly their larger aims and commitments, the attitude they took towards their art, and to their medium, language. This has resulted in four chapters, each in its own way particular to the poet at its centre; these four chapters looked at the way these poets used the materials available to them, the words and the ways of thinking about art and writing that a poet with an interest in colour and making

[10] In his book *Chromophobia* David Batchelor discusses the history of the devaluing of colour. *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2000), pp. 22–23. For a discussion of particularly racial othering, see Taussig's *What color is the sacred?* as well as Natasha Eaton, *Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation* (London: Tauris, 2013).

had to hand at the beginning of the last century. This has also meant looking, in turn, at the reader, whose participation saves colour language from becoming nonsense—or indeed stymies that process. Wherever there is Dada there are critics, audience members, students of poetry panning for nuggets of sense; wherever there is non-mimetic colour use there are scholars rifling through possessions, tracing textbooks and primers, or looking, in the poems or elsewhere, for a Rosetta stone of colour associations. I want to suggest now that reading colour might be a good analogy for reading per se, that the ways in which we read colour shed light on ways of reading: reading colour forces a conceptual separation of reading as sensing, whether seeing, hearing or voicing, and reading as interpreting, while disallowing either one to be dismissed.

We might usefully look at an example of when colour—colour perception, that is, rather than 'reading colour' in the sense I have given it above—has been used as an analogy for reading:

> Vision is inherently hermeneutic. As the neuroscientist of vision Margaret Livingstone points out, "Vision is information processing, not image transmission," providing "information about what is out there in the world, and how to act on it—not a picture to be looked at." Despite centuries of visual metaphors for knowledge that depict the mind as a mirror, the sensation we have that we are watching a full-color picture that corresponds point by point with the external world is an illusion—a complex illusion that the brain constructs so efficiently that we rarely notice the hermeneutic machinery that produces it. As Semir Zeki notes, however, "What we see is determined as much by the organisation and laws of the brain as by the physical reality of the external world." That does not mean that the hermeneutic constructions of vision are merely fictional creations, solely of our own making. [...] Color does not exist as such in the external world but is a complex construction of constancies out of a flux of inputs that well illustrates how the brain creates regular patterns for pragmatic purposes. These processes, like the hermeneutic circle, are both responsive and creative, reacting to signals that they in turn manipulate and structure in a to-and-fro, interactive manner.[11]

What is important here is this interactive character of both reading and colour-perception. In my chapter on Lasker-Schüler I pointed out precisely this aspect in the way that the 'web' of colour associations is made dynamic by the reader, by our partial and particular point of access and our ability to come close to the ways in which colour

[11] Paul B. Armstrong, *How Literature Plays with the Brain: The Neuroscience of Reading and Art* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), pp. 58–59.

does things in a text, to come, as I argued, to a 'passing theory' of colour. And just as colour vision provides Paul Armstrong with an analogy for reading, so does it provide us with an analogy for reading colour: we arrive at the poem with a picture of colour which we are called on to integrate with *its* picture of colour, following the poem's instructions. Or, as Bernard Williams puts it, we 'add our own egg':

> But th[e] reader will also have thoughts of his own, ways of understanding which will make something out of the writing different from anything the writer thought of putting into it. As it used to say on packets of cake mix, he will add his own egg.[12]

By concentrating on a particular period I have hoped to insist on the particularity *and* universality of my conclusions: colour is, in this picture, always interesting (if present), always noteworthy, always suggestive of the commitments of the poet, and must always be taken on its own terms. To take as a starting point, as I had initially intended, a certain intellectual-historical scene, would be to insist too early on the conclusions to be drawn. This approach, too, makes of colour an easy target—for even this, historically embedded, approach makes certain universalising assumptions about colour language and referentiality, entirely inappropriate to the work of someone like Kandinsky or Lasker-Schüler who—the former somewhat naively, the latter with considerable sophistication—were already on the way to reimagining language and re-designing the relationship between work, poet and reader. The ideas of my chosen poets may have been optimistic, grandiose, self-deluding, tied inextricably to their 'brand', and at times just plain wrong or wrong-headed, but they were harnessed in creating works that continue to intrigue and please very different sorts of readers, readers who may come to the works knowing nothing other than the minimum needed to be able to describe what they are doing as 'reading a poem (in German)'.

By following colour, I have argued, we are taught new routes through the internal architecture of poems whose workings seem opaque. What colour 'means' in any of these poems is decided by the relations between the reader and the work, and within the mesh of colour words found in the work. We might borrow the image of the stained glass window from Goethe's 'Gedichte sind gemalte Fensterscheiben': 'Kommt

---

[12] Bernard Williams, 'Reply to Simon Blackburn', *Philosophical Books,* 27 (1986), 203–8 (p. 203).

aber nur einmal herein! | Begrüßt die heilige Kapelle; | da ist's auf einmal farbig helle'.
Only once we have allowed ourselves to enter the poem can we read colour.

Bibliography

PRIMARY

Blätter für die Kunst ed. by Carl August Klein and Stefan George, 1892-1919

George, Stefan, *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden*, ed. by Stefan George Stiftung, 18 vols (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982) [SW]

George, Stefan, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Briefwechsel zwischen George und Hofmannsthal*, 2nd ed (Munich: Küpper, 1953)

George, Stefan, and Melchior Lechter, *Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Günter Heintz (Stuttgart: Hauswedell, 1991)

Giedion-Welcker, Carola, ed., *Poètes à l'écart: Anthologie der Abseitigen* (Bern-Bümpliz: Benteli, 1946)

Kandinsky, Wassily, *Die gesammelten Schriften, vol. 1*, ed. by Hans Konrad Röthel and Jelena Hahl-Fontaine (Bern: Benteli, 1980)

———, *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. by Kenneth Clement Lindsay and Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994)

———, 'Kandinsky über seine Entwicklung', in *Kandinsky und Gabriele Münter. Von Ursprüngen moderner Kunst*, by Johannes Eichner (Munich: Bruckmann, 1957), pp. 106–16

———, 'Klänge (Sounds) (1913)', *The Museum of Modern Art* <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/26560?locale=en> [accessed 8 August 2016]

———, 'Mes gravures sur bois', *XXe Siècle*, 1 (1938), 31

———, 'On the Spiritual in Art' [Russian Text], in *The Life of Vasilii Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of 'On the Spiritual in Art'*, trans. by John E. Bowlt (Newtonville, Mass: Oriental Research Partners, 1980), pp. 63–117

———, *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche: Beitrag zur Analyse der malerischen Elemente*, ed. by Max Bill (Bern-Bümpliz: Benteli, 1955)

———, *Sounds*, ed. & trans. by Elizabeth R. Napier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981)

———, 'The Value of a Concrete Work', *XXe Siècle*, 1 (1939), 48–50

———, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (Bern-Bümpliz: Benteli, 1952)

Wassily Kandinsky, 1866-1944: Original Woodcuts in Colour and Black and White: Klänge 1911 (London: William Weston Gallery, 1990)

Kandinsky, Wassily, and Franz Marc, *Der Blaue Reiter*, ed. by Klaus Lankheit (Munich: Piper, 1965)

Lasker-Schüler, Else, *Else Lasker-Schüler, eine Einführung in ihr Werk und eine Auswahl*, ed. by Werner Kraft (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1951)

———, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Friedhelm Kemp, Werner Kraft, and Margarete Kupper, 3 vols (Munich: Kösel, 1959) [GW]

———, *Werke und Briefe: kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Norbert Oellers, Heinz Rölleke, and Itta Shedletzky, 11 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996) [WB]

Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Briefe an Sidonie Nádherný von Borutin* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1973)

———, *Die Briefe an Karl und Elisabeth von der Heydt, 1905-1922*, 1. Aufl (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1986)

———, *Gesammelte Briefe in sechs Bänden*, ed. by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber (Leipzig: Insel, 1936)

———, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Ernst Zinn and Ruth Sieber-Rilke, 7 vols (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1959) [SWR]

———, *Werke: kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden*, ed. by Manfred Engel, Ulrich Fülleborn, Horst Nalewski, and August Stahl, 4 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1996) [KA]

Rilke, Rainer Maria, and Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Briefwechsel*, ed. by Ernst Pfeiffer (Zürich: Niehans, 1952)

Rilke, Rainer Maria, and Merline (Baladine Klossowska), *Rainer Maria Rilke et Merline: correspondance, 1920-1926* (Zurich: Niehans, 1954)

Schoenberg, Arnold, and Wassily Kandinsky, *Arnold Schönberg, Wassily Kandinsky: Briefe, Bilder und Dokumente einer aussergewöhnlichen Begegnung*, ed. by Jelena Hahl-Fontaine (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1980)

OTHER PRIMARY

Albers, Josef, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963)

Auden, W. H., *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1991)

Ball, Hugo, *Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit: ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. by Hans Burkhard Schlichting (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984)

———, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, ed. by Emmy Ball-Hennings (Luzern: Stocker, 1946)

———, *Gedichte*, ed. by Eckhard Faul (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007)

Baudelaire, Charles, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975)

Benjamin, Walter, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985)

Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; And, Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, ed. by Peter Hunt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Celan, Paul, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*, ed. by Beda Allemann, Stefan Reichert, and Rolf Bücher, 5 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983)

D'Annunzio, Gabriele, *Il piacere* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1889)

Eliot, George, *Middlemarch*, ed. by David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Goncourt, Edmond et Jules de, *Journal: mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 3 vols (Paris: Laffont, 1989)

Hellingrath, Norbert von, *Pindarübertragungen von Hölderlin: Prolegomena zu einer Erstausgabe* (Jena: Diederich, 1911)

Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, *Die prosaischen Schriften gesammelt* (Berlin: Fischer, 1907)

———, *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben: Vol 12, Prosa II*, ed. by Herbert Steiner (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1951)

Holz, Arno, *Werke*, ed. by Wilhelm Emrich, 7 vols (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1961)

Hopkins, Gerard Manley, *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Vol 3: Diaries, Journals and Notebooks*, ed. by Lesley Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Huysmans, Joris-Karl, *À rebours*, ed. by Marc Fumaroli (Paris: Gallimard, 1977)

———, *La cathédrale* (Paris: Stock, 1898)

Jefferies, Richard, *Field and Hedgerow: Being the Last Essays of Richard Jefferies* (London: Longmans, Green, 1889)

Jünger, Ernst, 'Lob der Vokale', in *Blätter und Steine* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1934), pp. 47–85

Kafka, Franz, *Briefe, 1913-März 1914*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999)

Lear, Edward, *The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense*, ed. by Vivien Noakes (London: Penguin, 2001)

Maeterlinck, Maurice, *Le trésor des humbles* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1896)

Michie, James, tran., *The Odes of Horace* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967)

Musil, Robert, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Adolf Frisé, 2 vols (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978)

Nabokov, Vladimir, *Pale Fire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)

———, *Speak, Memory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse; Zur Genealogie der Moral*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: dtv, 1988)

———, *Morgenröte. Idyllen aus Messina. Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: dtv, 1988)

Pater, Walter, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873)

———, 'Style', in *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1889), pp. 1–36

Pound, Ezra, *ABC of Reading* (London: Routledge, 1934)

Rimbaud, Arthur, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by André Guyaux and Aurélia Cervoni (Paris: Gallimard, 2009)

Ruskin, John, *The Works of John Ruskin, Volume 3: Modern Painters I*, ed. by Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: Allen, 1903)

Schlösser, Manfred, ed., *Kein ding sei wo das wort gebricht. Stefan George zum Gedenken: Darstellung, Werkauswahl, Dichterstimmen*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Agora, 1961)

Schwitters, Kurt, *Anna Blume: Dichtungen* (Hannover: Steegemann, 1919)

Segalen, Victor, *Les Synesthésies et l'école symboliste* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902)

Symons, Arthur, *Knave of Hearts: 1894-1908* (London: Heinemann, 1913)

———, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', *Harper's Magazine*, 1893, 858–67

Wilde, Oscar, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Complete Works, Vol 4: Criticism: Historical Criticism, Intentions, The Soul of Man*, ed. by Josephine M. Guy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 123–206

———, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Williams, Emmett, ed., *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967)

Wingler, Hans Maria, ed., *Wie sie einander sahen: Moderne Maler im Urteil ihrer Gefährten* (Munich: Müller, 1957)

Woolf, Virginia, *Orlando: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

———, *Roger Fry: A Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1940)

———, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1934)

SECONDARY

Adorno, Theodor W., *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, 20 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970)

Adorno, Theodor W., and Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel, 1928-1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994)

Allemann, Beda, 'Gibt es abstrakte Dichtung?', in *Definitionen*, ed. by Adolf Frisé (Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann: 1963), pp. 156–84

Allesch, G. J. von, 'Die ästhetische Erscheinungsweise der Farben', *Psychologische Forschung*, 6 (1925), 1–91

Arbogast, Hubert, *Die Erneuerung der deutschen Dichtersprache in den Frühwerken Stefan Georges: Eine stilgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1967)

Armstrong, Paul B., *How Literature Plays with the Brain: The Neuroscience of Reading and Art* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013)

Aurnhammer, Achim, Wolfgang Braungart, Stefan Breuer, Ute Maria Oelmann, and Kai Kauffmann, eds., *Stefan George und sein Kreis: ein Handbuch*, 3 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012)

Ball, Philip, *Bright Earth: The Invention of Colour* (London: Viking, 2001)

Bann, Stephen, 'The Colour in the Text: Ruskin's Basket of Strawberries', in *The Ruskin Polygon: Essays on the Imagination of John Ruskin*, ed. by John Dixon Hunt and Faith M. Holland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 122–36

Bänsch, Dieter, *Else Lasker-Schüler: zur Kritik eines etablierten Bildes* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971)

Baron-Cohen, Simon, and John E. Harrison, *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997)

Batchelor, David, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2000)

———, ed., *Colour* (London: Whitechapel, 2008)

———, *The Luminous and the Grey* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014)

Bauschinger, Sigrid, *Else Lasker-Schüler: ihr Werk und ihre Zeit* (Heidelberg: Stiehm, 1980)

Beer, Gillian, *Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016)

Benn, Gottfried, *Sämtliche Werke: Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, ed. by Holger Hof and Gerhard Schuster, 7 vols (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001)

Bernhart, Toni, *"Adfection derer Cörper": Empirische Studie zu den Farben in der Prosa von Hans Henny Jahnn* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 2003)

———, 'Die Vermessung der Farben in der Sprache: zur Berlin-Kay-Hypothese in der Literaturwissenschaft', *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik: Lili*, 38 (2008), 56–78

———, 'Quantitative Literaturwissenschaft am Beispiel der Farbensemantik', in *Literatur und Kognition: Bestandsaufnahmen und Perspektiven eines Arbeitsfeldes*, ed. by Martin Huber and Simone Winko (Paderborn: Mentis, 2009), pp. 217–34

Best, Stephen, and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108 (2009), 1–21

Biggam, C. P., ed., *New Directions in Colour Studies* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011)

———, 'The Ambiguity of "Brightness" (with Special Reference to Old English) and a New Model for Color Description in Semantics', in *Anthropology of Color: Interdisciplinary Multilevel Modeling*, ed. by Robert E. MacLaury, Galina V. Paramei, and Don Dedrick (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), pp. 171–88

———, *The Semantics of Colour: A Historical Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Biggam, C. P., Christian Kay, and Nicola Pitchford, *Progress in Colour Studies* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006)

Blumenthal, Bernhardt G., 'The Play Element in the Poetry of Else Lasker-Schüler', *The German Quarterly*, 43 (1970), 571–576

Boehringer, Robert, *Mein Bild von Stefan George*, 2 vols (Munich: Küpper, 1951)

Booth, Stephen, 'Close Reading without Readings', in *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts*, ed. by Russ McDonald (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 42–56

———, *Precious Nonsense: The Gettysburg Address, Ben Jonson's Epitaphs on His Children, and Twelfth Night* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)

Bowlt, John E., and Rose-Carol Washton Long, *The Life of Vasilii Kandinsky in Russian Art: A Study of 'On the Spiritual in Art'* (Newtonville, Mass: Oriental Research Partners, 1980)

Bozza, Maik, *Genealogie des Anfangs: Stefan Georges poetologischer Selbstentwurf um 1890* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016)

Brain, Robert Michael, 'Genealogy of "ZANG TUMB TUMB": Experimental Phonetics, Vers Libre, and Modernist Sound Art', *Grey Room*, 43 (2011), 88–117

Braungart, Wolfgang, *Ästhetischer Katholizismus: Stefan Georges Rituale der Literatur* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997)

———, 'Hymne, Ode, Elegie, Oder: Von den Schwierigkeiten mit antiken Formen der Lyrik (Mörike, George, George-Kreis)', in *'Mehr Dionysos als Apoll': antiklassizistische Antike-Rezeption um 1900*, ed. by Achim

Aurnhammer and Thomas Pittrof (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002), pp. 245–71

———, ed., *Stefan George und die Religion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015)

Braungart, Wolfgang, Ute Maria Oelmann, and Bernhard Böschenstein, eds., *Stefan George, Werk und Wirkung seit dem 'Siebenten Ring'* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001)

Breysig, Kurt, 'Begegnungen mit Stefan George', *Castrum Peregrini*, 42 (1960), 9–32

Bridge, Helen, 'Rilke and the Modern Portrait', *The Modern Language Review*, 99 (2004), 681–695

Bridgwater, Patrick, 'Rilke and the Modern Way of Seeing', in *Rilke und der Wandel in der Sensibilität*, ed. by Herbert Herzmann and Hugh Ridley (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1990), pp. 19–41

Brinkmann, Heribert, 'Wassily Kandinski als Dichter' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cologne, 1980)

Brinkmann, Richard, '"Abstrakte" Lyrik im Expressionismus und die Möglichkeit symbolischer Aussage', in *Der deutsche Expressionismus: Formen und Gestalten*, ed. by Hans Steffen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), pp. 88–114

Brokoff, Jürgen, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie: von der Weimarer Klassik bis zur historischen Avantgarde* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010)

———, 'Macht im Innenraum der Dichtung: Die frühen Gedichte Stefan Georges', in *Die Souveränität der Literatur: zum Totalitären der klassischen Moderne 1900-1933*, ed. by Uwe Hebekus and Ingo Stöckmann (Paderborn: Fink, 2008), pp. 415–32

Brooke-Rose, Christine, *A ZBC of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971)

Brooks, Peter, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005)

Brunkhorst, Katja, *'Verwandt - Verwandelt': Nietzsche's Presence in Rilke* (Munich: Iudicium, 2006)

Bullough, Edward, 'On the Apparent Heaviness of Colours', *British Journal of Psychology*, 2 (1907), 111–152

Bunge, Matthias, *Zwischen Intuition und Ratio: Pole des bildnerischen Denkens bei Kandinsky, Klee und Beuys* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996)

Burwick, Frederick, *The Damnation of Newton: Goethe's Color Theory and Romantic Perception* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986)

Cave, Terence, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Chai, Leon, *Aestheticism: The Religion of Art in Post-Romantic Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990)

Cheetham, Mark A., *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Chirimuuta, Mazviita, *Outside Color: Perceptual Science and the Puzzle of Color in Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2015)

Clark, T. J., 'Madame Matisse's Hat', *London Review of Books*, 14 August 2008, pp. 29–32

———, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne', in *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, ed. by Tom Cohen, Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller, and Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 93–113

Cohen, Jonathan D., *The Red and the Real: An Essay on Color Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Cohn, Hans, *Else Lasker-Schüler: The Broken World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974)

Conklin, Harold C., 'Hanunóo Color Categories', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 11 (1955), 339–344

Conquer, Rey, 'A Poetics of Parataxis: Stefan George's Umdichtung of Shakespeare's Sonnets', *Oxford German Studies*, 44 (2015), 365–382

Crawford, T. D., 'Defining "Basic Color Term"', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 24 (1982), 338–343

Cronin, Richard, *Colour and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988)

Culler, Jonathan, 'Beyond Interpretation: The Prospects of Contemporary Criticism', *Comparative Literature*, 28 (1976), 244–256

———, *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988)

———, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975)

———, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015)

Curtius, Ernst Robert, 'Stefan George im Gespräch', in *Kritische Essays zur europäischen Literatur* (Bern: Francke, 1950), pp. 138–57

Cytowic, Richard E., *Synesthesia: A Union of the Senses* (New York: Springer, 1989)

Dann, Kevin T., *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synaesthesia and the Search for Transcendental Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998)

David, Claude, *Stefan George: Sein dichterisches Werk* (Munich: Hanser, 1967)

———, 'Stefan George und der Jugendstil', in *Formkräfte der deutschen Dichtung vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart: Vorträge, gehalten im Deutschen Haus, Paris, 1961/1962*, ed. by Hans Steffen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 211–28

Davidson, Donald, 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', in *Truth, Language and History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 89–107

———, 'Quotation', in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 79–94

Dedrick, Don, *Naming the Rainbow: Colour Language, Colour Science, and Culture* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1998)

Delyfer, Catherine, 'Foreword', *Polysèmes. Revue d'études intertextuelles et intermédiales*, 15 (2016)

Dobbe, Martina, '"Wie sollte einer von Farben sprechen können": die Farbe und die Sprache in Rilkes "Briefen über Cézanne"', *Diagonal, Zeitschrift der Universität-Gesamthochschule Siegen*, 2 (1992), 74–84

Dönike, Martin, Jutta Müller-Tamm, and Friedrich Steinle, eds., *Die Farben der Klassik: Wissenschaft - Ästhetik - Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016)

Doran, Sabine, *The Culture of Yellow, Or, The Visual Politics of Late Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Droste, Magdalena, *Bauhaus 1919-1933*, trans. by Karen Williams (Berlin: Taschen, 1993)

Durzak, Manfred, *Der junge Stefan George: Kunsttheorie und Dichtung* (Munich: Fink, 1968)

———, *Zwischen Symbolismus und Expressionismus: Stefan George* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974)

Eaton, Natasha, *Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation* (London: Tauris, 2013)

Eichner, Johannes, *Kandinsky und Gabriele Münter. Von Ursprüngen moderner Kunst* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1957)

Eilert, Heide, '"...dass man über die Künste überhaupt fast gar nicht reden soll": zum Kunst-Essay um 1900 und zur Pater-Rezeption bei Hofmannsthal, Rilke und Borchardt', in *Jugendstil und Kulturkritik: Zur Literatur und Kunst um 1900*, ed. by Andreas Beyer and Dieter Burdorf (Heidelberg: Winter, 1999), pp. 51–72

Eisenstein, Sergei, *The Film Sense* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1975)

Eliot, T. S., *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1942)

Emmert, Claudia, *Bühnenkompositionen und Gedichte von Wassily Kandinsky: im Kontext eschatologischer Lehren seiner Zeit 1896-1914* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998)

Empson, William, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 2nd ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949)

Engel, Manfred, and Dieter Lamping, eds., *Rilke und die Weltliteratur* (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 1999)

Eschenbach, Gunilla, *Imitatio im George-Kreis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011)

Étiemble, *Le Sonnet des voyelles: de l'audition colorée à la vision érotique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968)

Ettlinger, Leopold D., *Kandinsky's 'At Rest'* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961)

Evangelista, Stefano, 'Symphonies in Haze and Blue: Lafcadio Hearn and the Colours of Japan', in *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 71–94

Fingerhut, Jörg, Sabine Flach, and Jan Söffner, eds., *Habitus in Habitat III: Synaesthesia and Kinaesthetics* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011)

Fischer, Luke, *The Poet as Phenomenologist: Rilke and the New Poems* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015)

Florman, Lisa Carol, *Concerning the Spiritual and the Concrete in Kandinsky's Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014)

Flournoy, Théodore, *Des Phénomènes de Synopsie* (Paris: Alcan, 1893)

Fóti, Véronique M., 'The Dimension of Color', in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. by Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 293–308

Frenzel-Biamonti, Claudia, 'Rosa Schätze—Pink zum kaufen: Stylistic confusion, subjective perception and semantic uncertainty of a loaned colour term', in *New Directions in Colour Studies*, ed. by C. P. Biggam, 2 vols (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), I, 91–104

Frowen, Irina, 'Nietzsches Bedeutung für Rilkes frühe Kunstauffassung', *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft*, 14 (1987), 21–34

Gage, John, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993)

———, *Colour and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999)

Galton, Francis, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London: Dent, 1883)

Gaskill, Nicholas, 'Red Cars with Red Lights and Red Drivers: Color, Crane, and Qualia', *American Literature*, 81 (2009), 719

———, 'The Close and the Concrete: Aesthetic Formalism in Context', *New Literary History*, 47 (2016), 505–524

Gasquet, Joachim, *Cézanne* (Paris: Bernheim-jeune, 1921)

Gass, William, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Boston: Godine, 1975)

Genette, Gérard, 'L'or tombe sous le fer', in *Figures I* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976), pp. 29–38

———, *Mimologiques: voyage en Cratylie* (Paris: Seuil, 1976)

George, Stefan, *Poems*, trans. by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz (New York: Pantheon, 1943)

Gerok-Reiter, Annette, 'Perspektivität bei Rilke und Cézanne: zur Raumerfahrung des späten Rilke', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 67 (1993), 484–520

———, *Wink und Wandlung: Komposition und Poetik in Rilkes 'Sonette an Orpheus'* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996)

Geuss, Raymond, 'Poetry and Knowledge', in *Outside Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 184–205

Gfrereis, Heike, *Die Seele: die Dauerausstellung im Literaturmuseum der Moderne* (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2015)

Gibson, James J., *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979)

———, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966)

Gierlinger, Frederik, and Štefan Joško Riegelnik, eds., *Wittgenstein on Colour* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014)

Gladstone, William, *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1858)

Glew, Adrian, '"Blue Spiritual Sounds": Kandinsky and the Sadlers, 1911-16', *The Burlington Magazine*, 139 (1997), 600–615

Goldsmith, Ulrich K., 'Wilamowitz as Parodist of Stefan George', *Monatshefte*, 77 (1985), 79–87

Gombrich, E. H., *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1960)

———, 'Art and the Language of the Emotions', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 36 (1962), 215–234

Greenberg, Clement, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. by John O'Brian (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1986)

Greene, Roland, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Jahan Ramazani, and Paul F. Rouzer, eds., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton, N.J. ; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2012)

Griffiths, Eric, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

Grohmann, Will, *Wassily Kandinsky: Life and Work* (New York: Abrams, 1958)

Grossmann, Uta, *Fremdheit im Leben und in der Prosa Else Lasker-Schülers* (Oldenburg: Igel, 2001)

Gruenter, Rainer, 'Eine Biographie des Blaus', in *Frankfurter Anthologie. Gedichte und Interpretationen vol. 12*, ed. by Marcel Reich-Ranicki (Frankfurt am Main: Insel), pp. 137–40

Guder, Gotthard, 'Die Farbmetaphorik als Grundtypus des bildhaften Ausdrucks', in *Else Lasker-Schüler: Deutung ihrer Lyrik* (Siegen: Vorländer, 1966), pp. 61–68

———, 'Else Lasker-Schüler's Conception of Herself as Poet', *Orbis Litterarum*, 15 (1960), 184–99

———, 'The Meaning of Colour in Else Lasker-Schüler's Poetry', *German Life and Letters*, 14 (1961), 175–87

Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004)

Gundolf, Friedrich, *George* (Berlin: Bondi, 1920)

Hagemann, Alfred P., *Natur bei Rainer Maria Rilke: Wald, Park, Garten und ihre literarische Darstellung* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015)

Hallensleben, Markus, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Avantgardismus und Kunstinszenierung* (Tübingen: Francke, 2000)

Hamacher, Bernd, 'Grau und Braun—»Vorgefühl der Gegensätze des Kalten und Warmen«: Zur Rehabilitierung der ›farblosen‹, ›schmutzigen‹ Farben bei Goethe', in *Die Farben der Romantik: Physik und Physiologie, Kunst und Literatur*, ed. by Walter Pape (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 73–80

Hamann, Richard, and Jost Hermand, *Stilkunst um 1900* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1967)

Hamburger, Käte, *Philosophie der Dichter: Novalis, Schiller, Rilke* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966)

Hanfling, Oscar, '"Ich weiß schon, was ich damit meine": Wittgenstein und das Wort "rot"', in *Farben: Betrachtungen aus Philosophie und Naturwissenschaften*, ed. by Jakob Steinbrenner and Stefan Glasauer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), pp. 182–97

Hardin, C. L., *Color for Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988)

Harrison, John E., *Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Harrow, Susan, 'Colorsteps in Modern and Contemporary French Poetry', *French Forum*, 37 (2012), 35–52

Harvey, John, *The Story of Black* (London: Reaktion, 2013)

Heider, Eleanor Rosch, and Donald C. Olivier, 'The Structure of the Color Space in Naming and Memory for Two Languages', *Cognitive Psychology*, 3 (1972), 337–354

Heintz, Günter, *Stefan George: Studien zu seiner künstlerischen Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Hauswedell, 1986)

Hellingrath, Norbert von, *Pindarübertragungen von Hölderlin: Prolegomena zu einer Erstausgabe* (Jena: Diederich, 1911)

Heselhaus, Clemens, *Deutsche Lyrik der Moderne: von Nietzsche bis Yvan Goll: die Rückkehr zur Bildlichkeit der Sprache* (Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1961)

Hutchinson, Ben, *Modernism and Style* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

———, *Rilke's Poetics of Becoming* (London: Legenda, 2006)

Hyman, John, *The Objective Eye: Color, Form, and Reality in the Theory of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Iehl, Dominique, 'Rilke und die französische Malerei nach Cézanne', *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft*, 19 (1992), 119–29

Jackson, Frank, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 32 (1982), 127–136

Jacob, Joachim, *Die Schönheit der Literatur: zur Geschichte eines Problems von Gorgias bis Max Bense* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007)

Jacobsen, Thomas, 'Kandinsky's Questionnaire Revisited: Fundamental Correspondence of Basic Colors and Forms?', *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 95 (2002), 903–15

Jakobson, Roman, *Kindersprache, Aphasie und allgemeine Lautgesetze* (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell, 1941)

Jarvis, Simon, 'What Does Art Know?', in *Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter*, ed. by Peter De Bolla and Stefan H. Uhlig (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 57–70

Jones, Calvin N., *The Literary Reputation of Else Lasker-Schüler: Criticism 1901-1993* (Camden, NJ: Camden House, 1994)

Kaiser, Gerhard, *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik von Heine bis zur Gegenwart: ein Grundriss in Interpretationen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991)

Kenner, Hugh, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951)

———, *The Pound Era* (London: Faber, 1972)

Kermode, Frank, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979)

Kharkhurin, Anatoliy V., 'Is Triangle Really Yellow? An Empirical Investigation of Kandinsky's Correspondence Theory', *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, 30 (2012), 167–182

Kirschnick, Sylke, *Tausend und ein Zeichen: Else Lasker-Schülers Orient und die Berliner Alltags- und Populärkultur um 1900* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007)

Kittler, Friedrich, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 2nd edition (Munich: Fink, 1987)

Klieneberger, H. R., *George, Rilke, Hofmannsthal and the Romantic Tradition* (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1991)

Kohl, Katrin, 'Friendship, Love and Loss in the Poetry of Else Lasker-Schüler (1869–1945)', *Oxford German Studies*, 42 (2013), 3–22

Kraus, Karl, 'Sakrileg an George oder Sühne an Shakespeare?', *Die Fackel*, 34 (1932), 45–64

Krauss, Rosalind, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985)

Kristeva, Julia, 'La joie de Giotto', in *Polylogue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), pp. 383–408

Kurz, Martina, *Bild-Verdichtungen: Cézannes Realisation als poetisches Prinzip bei Rilke und Handke* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003)

Kurz, Stephan, *Der Teppich der Schrift. Typographie bei Stefan George* (Basel: Stroemfeld, 2007)

Kuspit, Donald B., 'The Illusion of the Absolute in Abstract Art', *Art Journal*, 31 (1971), 26–30

———, 'Utopian Protest in Early Abstract Art', *Art Journal*, 29 (1970), 430–437

Lamb, Trevor, and Janine Bourriau, eds., *Colour: Art & Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Lamping, Dieter, *Das lyrische Gedicht: Definitionen zu Theorie und Geschichte der Gattung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989)

Lande, Joel B., 'Acquaintance with Color: Prolegomena to a Study of Goethe's Zur Farbenlehre', *Goethe Yearbook*, 23 (2016), 143–169

Landmann, Edith, *Gespräche mit Stefan George* (Düsseldorf: Küpper, 1963)

Landmann, Michael, 'Georg Simmel und Stefan George', in *Georg Simmel und die Moderne: neue Interpretationen und Materialien*, ed. by Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp. 147–73

Lane, Melissa. S., and Martin A. Ruehl, eds., *A Poet's Reich: Politics and Culture in the George Circle* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2011)

Le Rider, Jacques, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: historicisme et modernité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995)

———, *Les couleurs et les mots* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997)

———, 'Rilke et Cézanne: La poésie à l'école de la couleur', *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft*, 19 (1992), 109–17

Leighton, Angela, 'About About: On Poetry and Paraphrase', *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*, 33 (2009), 167–176

———, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Lersch-Schumacher, Barbara, '"Ich sterbe am Leben und atme im Bild wieder auf." Zur Allegorese des Weiblichen bei Else Lasker-Schüler', in *Deine Sehnsucht war die Schlange*, ed. by Anne Linsel, Peter von Matt, and Manfred Escherig (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1997), pp. 53–85

Leslie, Esther, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (London: Reaktion, 2005)

Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 'Des sons et des couleurs', in *Regarder, écouter, lire* (Paris: Plon, 1993), pp. 127–46

Linke, Hansjürgen, *Das Kultische in der Dichtung Stefan Georges und seiner Schule* (Munich: Küpper, 1960)

Liska, Vivian, *Die Dichterin und das schelmische Erhabene: Else Lasker-Schülers 'Die Nächte Tino von Bagdads'* (Tübingen: Francke, 1998)

Lodge, David, 'Some Ping Understood', *Encounter*, 1968, 85–89

Long, Rose-Carol Washton, *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)

Lyons, John, 'Colour in Language', in *Colour: Art & Science*, ed. by Trevor Lamb and Janine Bourriau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 194–224

MacLaury, Robert E., Galina V. Paramei, and Don Dedrick, *Anthropology of Color: Interdisciplinary Multilevel Modeling* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007)

Maeterlinck, Maurice, *Le trésor des humbles* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1896)

Marks, Lawrence E., 'On Colored-Hearing Synesthesia: Cross-Modal Translations of Sensory Dimensions', *Psychological Bulletin*, 82 (1975), 303–31

Marx, Olga, *Stefan George in seinen Übertragungen englischer Dichtung* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1967)

Mason, Eudo C., *Exzentrische Bahnen: Studien zum Dichterbewusstsein der Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963)

———, *Rilke, Europe, and the English-Speaking World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961)

Massey, Irving, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976)

Masurel-Murray, Claire, '"White Alb and Scarlet Camail": The Colours of Catholicism in Fin-de-Siècle Literature', in *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, ed. by Charlotte Ribeyrol (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 235–56

Mattenklott, Gert, *Bilderdienst: ästhetische Opposition bei Beardsley und George* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1985)

Mautz, Kurt, 'Die Farbensprache der Expressionistischen Lyrik', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 31 (1957), 198–240

Mavor, Carol, *Blue Mythologies: Reflections on a Colour* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013)

McCabe, Herbert, *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987)

McHughes, Janet Larsen, 'The Poesis of Space: Prosodig [Sic] Structures in Concrete Poetry', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 63 (1977), 168–79

Meier-Graefe, Julius, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst,* 3 vols (Stuttgart: Hoffmann, 1904)

Meltzer, Françoise, 'Color as Cognition in Symbolist Verse', *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1978), 253–273

———, 'The Painted Veil: Color and Cognition in Symbolist Verse.' (University of California, Berkeley, 1975)

Melville, Stephen, 'Colour Has Not yet Been Named: Objectivity in Deconstruction', in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, ed. by Peter Brunette, David Wills, and Stephen Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 33–48

Meyer, Herman, *Zarte Empirie: Studien zur Literaturgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1963)

Michie, James, tran., *The Odes of Horace* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967)

Miller, Cristanne, *Cultures of Modernism: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, & Else Lasker-Schüler : Gender and Literary Community in New York and Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005)

Milroy, James, *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Deutsch, 1977)

Minden, Michael, *Modern German Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011)

Mitchell, W. J. T., '"Ut Pictura Theoria": Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language', *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (1989), 348–371

Moore, A. W., 'How Significant Is the Use/Mention Distinction?', *Analysis*, 46 (1986), 173–179

Morwitz, Ernst, *Kommentar zu dem Werk Stefan Georges* (Munich: Küpper, 1960)

Mößer, Andeheinz, ed., 'Hugo Balls Vortrag über Wassily Kandinsky in der Galerie Dada in Zürich am 7. 4.1917', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 51 (1977), 676–704

Müller, Olaf, *Mehr Licht: Goethe mit Newton im Streit um die Farben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2015)

Müller, Wolfgang G, 'Rilke, Husserl und die Dinglyrik der Moderne', in *Rilke und die Weltliteratur*, ed. by Manfred Engel and Dieter Lamping (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 1999), pp. 214–35

Müller-Tamm, Jutta, 'Goethe und Schiller ausgezählt: Farbstatistik in der Philologie um 1900', in *Die Farben der Klassik: Wissenschaft - Ästhetik - Literatur*, ed. by Martin Dönike, Jutta Müller-Tamm, and Friedrich Steinle (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), pp. 313–24

Nägele, Rainer, 'Jenseits der Mimesis: Stefan George, "Ein Angelico" und Günter Eich, "Verlassene Staffelei"', *Neophilologus*, 59 (1975), 98–108

Naipaul, V. S., *A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling* (London: Picador, 2007)

Newton, Robert P., 'Eye Imagery in Else Lasker-Schüler', *MLN*, 97 (1982), 694–712

Ockenden, Ray, 'Mensch und Natur in der Dichtung Stefan Georges', in *Stefan George: Dichtung, Ethos, Staat: Denkbilder für ein geheimes europäisches Deutschland*, ed. by Bruno Pieger and Bertram Schefold (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010), pp. 353–96

Oelmann, Ute, *'Das doch nicht äusserliche': die Schrift- und Buchkunst Stefan Georges* (Stuttgart: Verband deutscher Antiquare, 2009)

———, '„Und gute Gespräche vereinten mich mit seinem Wesen". Stefan George und Rainer Maria Rilke', *George-Jahrbuch*, 11 (2016), 231–52

Orsucci, Andrea, *Orient—Okzident: Nietzsches Versuch einer Lösung vom europäischen Weltbild* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996)

Osborne, Harold, *Abstraction and Artifice in Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979)

Osterkamp, Ernst, *Poesie der leeren Mitte: Stefan Georges Neues Reich* (München: Hanser, 2010)

Oswald, Jr., Victor A., 'The Historical Content of Stefan George's "Algabal"', *Germanic Review*, 23 (1948), 193–205

Overath, Angelika, *Das andere Blau: Zur Poetik einer Farbe im modernen Gedicht* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987)

Paefgen, Elisabeth K., '"Grüngelblilablaurot"—farbige Dichtung. Über Funktion und Wirkung von Farben im Werk Else Lasker-Schülers', *Else-Lasker-Schüler-Jahrbuch zur Klassischen Moderne*, 1 (2000), 9–35

Pape, Walter, ed., *Die Farben der Romantik: Physik und Physiologie, Kunst und Literatur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014)

Park, MiRi, *Jenseits der Referenz?: Ästhetik und Poetik der Abstraktion im mittleren Werk R.M. Rilkes : 'Auguste Rodin', 'Briefe über Cézanne', 'Neue Gedichte'* (Munich: Meidenbauer, 2008)

Pastoureau, Michel, *Bleu: Histoire d'une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2000)

———, *Dictionnaire des couleurs de notre temps: symbolique et société* (Paris: Bonneton, 1992)

———, *Noir: Histoire d'une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2008)

———, *Vert: Histoire d'une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2013)

Pears, D. F., 'Incompatibilities of Colours', in *Logic and Language (Second Series)*, ed. by Antony Flew (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), pp. 112–22

Perloff, Marjorie, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1981)

Pettit, Richard, 'The Poet's Eye for the Arts: Rilke Views the Visual Arts around 1900', in *Imagining Modern German Culture, 1889-1910*, ed. by Françoise Forster-Hahn (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), pp. 251–73

Phelan, Tony, *Rilke: Neue Gedichte* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1992)

Pieger, Bruno, and Bertram Schefold, eds., *Stefan George: Dichtung, Ethos, Staat: Denkbilder für ein geheimes europäisches Deutschland* (Berlin: VBB Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010)

Poling, Clark V., *Kandinsky-Unterricht am Bauhaus: Farbenseminar und analytisches Zeichnen* (Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten, 1982)

Politzer, Heinz, 'The Blue Piano of Else Lasker-Schueler [*sic*]', *Commentary*, 9 (1950), 335–44

Por, Peter, 'Rilke—Rodin, Cézanne, Klee: Die Schöpfung des Raumes in der Moderne', in *Proceedings of the XIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. by Roger Bauer and Douwe, Fokkema (Munich: Iudicium, 1990), pp. 50–56

Read, Herbert, *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959)

———, *Art and Alienation: The Role of the Artist in Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967)

Rewald, John, ed., *Paul Cézanne, Correspondance* (Paris: Grasset, 1937)

Reynolds, Dee, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Ribeyrol, Charlotte, *Etrangeté, passion, couleur: l'hellénisme de Swinburne, Pater et Symonds: 1865-1880* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2013)

———, ed., *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016)

Richards, I. A., 'How Does a Poem Know When It Is Finished?', in *Parts and Wholes*, ed. by Daniel Lerner (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), pp. 163–74

Riley, Charles A., *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music and Psychology* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995)

Ringbom, Sixten, 'Art in "The Epoch of the Great Spiritual": Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 29 (1966), 386–418

Ripoll, Élodie, 'De l'unique au multiple. Emplois et fonctions de la couleur dans le roman français (1720-1839)' (FU/EHESS, 2015)

Rivers, W. H. R., *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, Vol. II: Physiology and Psychology*, ed. by Alfred C. Haddon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901)

Rochas, Albert de, 'L'audition colorée', *La Nature*, 644 (1885), 274–75

Roethel, Hans Konrad, *Kandinsky: Das graphische Werk* (Cologne: DuMont, 1970)

Rogers, Michael, 'From Flamingos to Fragonard: changes in the method and purpose of symbolism', in *Rilke und der Wandel in der Sensibilität*, ed. by Herbert Herzmann and Hugh Ridley (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1990), pp. 61–70

Roskill, Mark W., *Klee, Kandinsky, and the Thought of Their Time: A Critical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992)

Ryan, Judith, 'More Seductive Than Phryne: Baudelaire, Gérôme, Rilke, and the Problem of Autonomous Art', *PMLA*, 108 (1993), 1128–1141

———, *Rilke, Modernism and the Poetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

———, *Umschlag und Verwandlung: poetische Struktur und Dichtungstheorie in R. M. Rilkes Lyrik der mittleren Periode (1907-1914)* (Munich: Winkler, 1972)

Saunders, Barbara, *The Debate about Colour Naming in 19th Century German Philology: Selected Translations* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007)

Schäfer, Armin, *Die Intensität der Form: Stefan Georges Lyrik* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005)

———, 'Gärten in der Lyrik Stefan Georges', in *Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte des Gartens = Gardens in social history*, ed. by Walter Gebhard (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 151–65

Schapiro, Meyer, 'The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life (1968)', in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: Braziller, 1978), pp. 1–38

———, 'The Nature of Abstract Art (1937)', in *Modern Art: 19th & 20th Centuries* (New York: Braziller, 1978), pp. 185–212

Schur, Ernst, 'Ziele für die innere Ausstattung des Buches', *Zeitschrift für Bücherfreunde*, 2 (1898), 32–34, 137–41, 227–32

Schwarz, Anette, 'The Colors of Prose: Rilke's Program of Sachliches Sagen', *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 71 (1996), 195–210

Schwertfeger, Ruth, *Else Lasker-Schüler: Inside This Deathly Solitude* (New York: Berg, 1991)

Scott, Clive, *French Verse-Art: A Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)

———, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism', in *Modernism, 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James Walter McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 206–27

———, *The Poetics of French Verse: Studies in Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You', in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 1–40

Segalen, Victor, *Les Synesthésies et l'école symboliste* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902)

Sheppard, Richard, 'Kandinsky's Early Aesthetic Theory: Some Examples of Its Influence and Some Implications for the Theory and Practice of Abstract Poetry', *Journal of European Studies*, 5 (1975), 19–40

———, 'Kandinsky's Klänge: An Interpretation', *German Life and Letters*, 33 (1980), 135–46

———, 'Kandinsky's Œuvre 1900-14: The Avant-Garde as Rear-Guard', *Word and Image*, 6 (1990), 41–67

———, 'Modernism, Language, and Experimental Poetry: On Leaping over Bannisters and Learning How to Fly', *The Modern Language Review*, 92 (1997), 98–123

———, 'The Decay of the Formal Garden: Late Romanticism to Expressionism', *Colloquia Germanica*, 6 (1972), 238–56

Sheringham, Michael, 'Language, Color, and the Enigma of Everydayness', in *Sensual Reading: New Approaches to Reading in Its Relations to the Senses*, ed. by Michael Syrotinski and Ian Maclachlan (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), pp. 127–52

Shoaf, R. A., 'The Play of Puns in Late Middle English Poetry: Concerning Juxtology', in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 44–61

Short, Christopher, 'Between Text and Image in Kandinsky's Oeuvre: A Consideration of the Album Sounds', *Tate Papers*, 6 (2006) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/06/between-text-and-image-in-kandinskys-oeuvre-a-consideration-of-the-album-sounds> [accessed 9 August 2016]

———, *The Art Theory of Wassily Kandinsky, 1909-1928: The Quest for Synthesis* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010)

Simmel, Georg, 'Psychologie des Schmucks', in *Gesamtausgabe VIII.2: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen, 1901-1908*, ed. by Volkhard Krech and Alessandro Cavalli (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), pp. 385–93

———, 'Stefan George: eine kunstphilosophische Betrachtung', in *Gesamtausgabe V: Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1894-1900*, ed. by Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and David P Frisby (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 287–300

Skard, Sigmund, 'The Use of Color in Literature: A Survey of Research', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 90 (1946), 163–249

Sontag, Susan, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009)

Steinbrenner, Jakob, and Stefan Glasauer, eds., *Farben: Betrachtungen aus Philosophie und Naturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007)

Steiner, George, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975)

Steiner, Jacob, 'Die Farben in der Lyrik von George bis Trakl', in *Rilke: Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Karlsruhe: Von Loeper, 1986), pp. 86–104

Steiner, Wendy, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)

Stern, J. P., *The Dear Purchase: A Theme in German Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Stevens, Adrian, and Fred Wagner, eds., *Rilke und die Moderne: Londoner Symposion* (Munich: Iudicium, 2000)

Stewart, Corbet, 'Rilke's Cycle "Die Parke"', *The Modern Language Review*, 61 (1966), 238

Stewart, George R., 'Color in Science and Poetry', *The Scientific Monthly*, 30 (1930), 71–78

Stewart, Susan, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979)

———, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Stockwell, Peter, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)

Stokes, Adrian, *Colour and Form* (London: Faber, 1937)

Strathausen, Carsten, *The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision around 1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

Strier, Richard, *Resistant Structures: Particularity, Radicalism, and Renaissance Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995)

Syrotinski, Michael, and Ian Maclachlan, eds., *Sensual Reading: New Approaches to Reading in Its Relations to the Senses* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001)

Szondi, Peter, '"Eden"', in *Schriften II*, ed. by Jean Bollack (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), pp. 390–98

Taussig, Michael, *What Color Is the Sacred?* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2009)

Tawada, Yōko, 'Zu Else Lasker-Schülers "Mein blaues Klavier"', in *Sprachpolizei und Spielpolyglotte* (Tübingen: Konkursbuch, 2007), pp. 45–47

Thaventhiran, Helen, *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

Thompson, Evan, *Colour Vision: A Study in Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1995)

Thompson, Evan, Adrian Palacios, and Francisco J. Varela, 'Ways of Coloring: Comparative Color Vision as a Case Study for Cognitive Science', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 15 (1992), 1–74

Travis, A. S., *The Rainbow Makers: The Origins of the Synthetic Dyestuffs Industry in Western Europe* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1993)

Vago, Davide, *Proust en couleur* (Paris: Champion, 2012)

Vallentin, Berthold, *Gespräche mit Stefan George, 1902-1931* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1960)

Vendler, Helen, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets: Reading for Difference', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 47 (1994), 33–50

Wadsworth, Edward, 'Inner Necessity', *Blast*, 1 (1914), 119–28

Wanner, Adrian, *Russian Minimalism: From the Prose Poem to the Anti-Story*, Studies in Russian Literature and Theory (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2003)

Waters, William, 'Stefan George's Poetics', in *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George*, ed. by Jens Rieckmann (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2005), pp. 25–49

———, 'The New Poems', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, ed. by Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 59–73

Watts, Harriet, 'The Poetry of Kandinsky and Arp: Transposed Landscapes', in *The Turn of the Century: German Literature and Art, 1890-1915*, ed. by Gerald Chapple and Hans H. Schulte (Bonn: Bouvier, 1981), pp. 377–93

Webber, Andrew, 'Inside Out: Acts of Displacement in Else Lasker-Schüler', *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 81 (2006), 143–162

Weiss, Peg, *Kandinsky and Old Russia: The Artist as Ethnographer and Shaman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995)

———, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979)

Wilke, Tobias, 'Da-Da: "Articulatory Gestures" and the Emergence of Sound Poetry', *MLN*, 128 (2013), 639–668

Williams, Bernard, 'Reply to Simon Blackburn', *Philosophical Books*, 27 (1986), 203–8

Williams, Rosalind H., *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982)

Wilson, Edmund, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York: Scribner, 1931)

Winkelvoss, Karine, *Rilke, la pensée des yeux* (Asnières: PIA, Institut d'allemand d'Asnières, 2004)

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Remarks on Colour*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. by Linda L. McAlister and Margarete Schättle (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977)

Wolsdorff, Christian, and Thomas Jacobsen, 'Does History Affect Aesthetic Preference? Kandinsky's Teaching of Colour-Form Correspondence, Empirical Aesthetics, and the Bauhaus', *The Design Journal*, 10 (2007), 16–27

Wolters, Friedrich, *Stefan George und die Blätter für die Kunst: deutsche Geistesgeschichte seit 1890* (Berlin: Bondi, 1930)

Zhang, Dora, 'Naming the Indescribable: Woolf, Russell, James, and the Limits of Description', *New Literary History*, 45 (2014), 51–70