Peter Weibel

Colour and Time (2001)

No familiar SHAPES
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Or sea or sky, no COLOURS of green fields,
But huge and mighty FORMS, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.
The Preludes, William Wordsworth

There is a new generation of colour painters for whom the difference between colour and form—this difference being for Runge still so fundamental that he claimed “colour is to form like sound is to word”—is almost comparable with the distance between Italy and Norway. Form relating to colour as Italy to Norway does not really seem plausible. Form is not the south of painting nor is colour its north. Does it make any sense to talk about southern forms and northern colours, as so popular? Is there anything such as an abstract Italy and a formal Norway? Is each painted tree that is recognizable as such thus an offspring bastard of a thing between Italy and Norway, of a marriage between colour and form? Then one could also claim that colour and form are two football teams. Colour 1:0, then the picture is abstract. And there are matches with the results 5:5, 2:1, 5:3 (a realistic picture of nature). 0:10 would be a drawing, but of what kind? But this is exactly what it is all about for the new generation, it is to question these plausibilities, which up to now were used to formulate the difference between colour and form.

The Runge relationship is based on the assumption that it concerns the tension between the uniformed, meaningless on the one hand, and the formed, meaningful on the other. Furthermore colour is pushed into the role of music and form into the role of literature. Hence, there would be only

... one abstract, musical or one narrative literal form of painting.

Rungen’s comparison is based on the “genre-converging” ideal of early Romantic art, the union of the arts (music, painting, sculpture) under the primacy of music.

But also the modern discussion about colour and form is characterized by the complementarity of absence and meaning, of keeping quiet and talking, of sense and nonsense. Of shapeless and form. In the practice of art, in both figurative and abstract use of colour, reaching into the rhetoric of colour, contradiction between natural colour and depicted colour, object- and local colour on the one hand, abstract colour lierased from the object on the other hand, we find exactly the presence of sense that is fed from the world of objects instead of signs, which alone would be the proper domain of painting. The splitting of the elids of painting into form and colour is basically a repetition of the splitting of being into idea and matter, into form and material (content). If this idea now allows us to define all things as formed material, then painting is formed colour. The material of which signs are made, the colour, would thus be that which is shapeless. Modern aesthetics are still related to Greek ontology. But if painting be subjugated to obscuring the ontological crisis, then it might be better to plunge into the pool of confusing terms; at least this seems to be what the new generation of painters is saying, recalling the beginnings of ontological discussion, before logoscentrism triumphed in a fundamental splitting and denial. So holding the paintbrush, or, with Anaxagoras, they ask whether the spirit, nous, is, what gives the form, or with Demokrit, the idea. Eidos, the original word for picture or idea, does really mean form, but also, like mponge, shape. So whoever promotes the primacy of colour does not crown the order of all things with spirit, idea, form, gestalt. But on the other hand he somehow reintroduces in the discussion on picture and gestalt exactly that which determines the world as it appears, and hence also picture world, namely colour (the material things are made of as it were, given that form is obviously the material from which ideas are made). Scholastics adapted: “Forma est, qua ens est id, quod est”, so I could say: “Colour is where being is” or, in simple words, this generation of painters tends towards the identity of colour and form, toward self-identity. Colour stands only in relation with itself and has none with form, constituting itself. The colour gains its authenticity through the artistic creation of the painter, from his/her consciousness and perception, rather than from nature. Charlotte in Goethe’s “Elective Affinities” formulated the classic antithesis to this: “As everything is related to itself, it must have a relationship with others, too”. So Goethe votes for a natural order that should be unimpeachable and votes against a self-referral “new creation”, liberating itself from nature with the “weapon of consciousness”, and constituting itself. Therefore a painter who is beyond colour and form does work on consciousness. The liberation from nature, from a natural order, using colour as a weapon, led only seemingly paradoxically to a new form of nature and landscape painting in Germany (Richter, Kiefer), England (LeBrun, McKeever) and Austria. The move toward nature follows the logic that one heals best were the pain is. This logic of necessity corresponds with the fact that one turns to that which is in need, and this is nature. That is not only in the ecological sense, but mainly in the ontological sense. These painters talk de rerum naturum – of the intrinsic nature of things.

Colour’s liberation from nature was revolutionary and highly relevant for progress in modernism in fine arts, hence the creation of colour absolutely free from the object, and so it is now modern practice progressive sens objects. Besides also the colour’s art radical and a sight, where the of objects, outer. The guidelines of the world, but rather an exterior need spiritual need. The pertaining corresponds with Kandinsky. One landscapes of the but this is inapp. ontological redef form, as if percei amongst these to be still connecter where colour was to an inner reali of objects. To per inner necessity, a Colour’s new art with money. Col anything. After c would be colour’ longer stands for just as with mon value in exchange Colour can be ex dress, for bread. a green triangle, dress or blood or anything, just t
form into the role of literature. Hence, there would be only one abstract, musical or one narrative literal form of painting. Runge’s comparison is based on the “genre-converging” ideal of early Romantic art, the union of the arts (music, painting, sculpture) under the primacy of music. But also the modern discussion about colour and form is characterised by the complementarity of absence and meaning, of keeping quiet and talking, of sense and nonsense. Of shapeless and form. In the practice of art, in both figurative and abstract use of colour, reaching into the rhetoric of colour, contradiction between natural colour and depicted colour, object- and local colour on the one hand, abstract colour liberated from the object on the other hand, we find exactly the presence of sense that is fed from the world of objects instead of signs, which alone would be the appropriate domain of painting. 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So whoever promotes the primacy of colour does not crown the order of all things with spirit, idea, form, gestalt. But on the other hand he somehow reinserts in the discussion on picture and gestalt exactly that which determines the world as it appears, and hence also picture world, namely colour (the material things are made of as it were, given that form is obviously the material from which ideas are made). Scholastics adapted: “Forma est, quae ens est id, quod est”, so I could say: “Colour is where being is”. In simple words, this generation of painters tends towards the identity of colour and form, toward self-identity. Colour stands only in relation with itself and has none with form, constituting itself. The colour gains its authenticity through the artistic creation of the painter, from his/her consciousness and perception, rather than from nature. Charlotte in Goethe’s “Elective Affinities” formulated the classic anathema to this: “As everything is related to itself, it must have a relationship with others, too”. So Goethe votes for a natural order that should be unimpeachable and votes against a self-referential “new creation”, liberating itself from nature with the “weapon of consciousness”, and constituting itself. Therefore a painter who is beyond colour and form does not work on consciousness. The liberation from nature, from a natural order, using colour as a weapon, led only seemingly paradoxically to a new form of nature and landscape painting in Germany (Richter, Kiefer), England (LeBrun, McKeever) and Austria. The move toward nature follows the logic that one heals best were the pain is. This logic of necessity corresponds with the fact that one turns to that which is in need, and this is nature. That is not only in the ecological sense, but mainly in the ontological sense. These painters talk de rerum naturam – of the intrinsic nature of things. Colour’s liberation from nature was revolutionary and highly relevant for progress in modernism in fine arts, hence the creation of colour absolutely free from the object, and so it is now equally legitimate and necessary in a post-modern practice, if we want to give the word post-modern a progressive sense, to restyle colour in the twilight zone of objects. Besides rendering line and surface absolute, it was also the colour’s autonomy that rendered the evolution of art radical and abstract. In this space devoid of air and signs, where the design could no longer follow the dictate of objects,outer reference was replaced by inner reference. The guidelines for the design came not from the outside world, but rather from inside, the inner world. Instead of an exterior necessity bound to the object, an “inner, spiritual necessity” was striven for. “Beauty is that which corresponds with an inner spiritual necessity”, said Kandinsky. One is tempted to describe Brandl’s paintings as landscapes of the soul, as colourful journeys of perception, but this is inappropriate not only with reference to the new ontological redefinition of the relation between colour and form, as I perceive to be central for Brandl as protagonist amongst these new colour painters. Instead it seems also to be still connected to some kind of Fijn de sicle aesthetics, where colour was a psychological equivalent, an equivalent to an inner reality. Today it is all about a liberation also from the inner world, after it was liberated from the world of objects. To proclaim the colour’s independence from an inner necessity, and inner reference too.
colour does not mean fines hominis, but rather osius,
primary nature (ontological-temporal), presence of being, a
yearning for a new “human reality”. So this colour painting
is about Something. So if, as a consequence of the
ontological redefinition of the relation between form and
colour in the context of an imaginary self-identity,
paradoxically ending up in a nihilism of colour, because the
relationship between colour and form is inscribed between
death and being, meaning that colour and death or colour
and life would be the real elective affinities; so if colour
intrudes upon the world of dots, lines and surfaces, then it’s
the triumph of the “blue flower, which sounds so softly in
blemished rock” (Viktor Vogel, Transfiguration), O. Trakl), as
becoming grows from being. Time is the gift of ont-
semiotic intertwinenment of being and colour. The
existentialistic gesture in Brandl’s painting derives from this
relationship of “Being and Time” (Heidegger) and
“Being and Nothingness” (Sartre). Colour plays the role of
the time, just as dot, line and surface have their role in
space. If colour be the annulment of form, as time,
according to Hegel be the annulment of space, then, the
negation through colour in the space of forms, must be
time. The new use of colour as a temporal moment is not
only the attempt to turn the being on the panel painting
into a becoming, but also directs the observer’s attention to
new phenomena of perception. It is already a scientific
triviality that colour is easier to grasp than form. But this is
not Brandl’s aim, he deals with the influence of time on
perception, with the relationship between colour and
memory. What do we remember, having looked at the
multifarious colour dots and surfaces in a meadow? How
can I succeed in localising the manifold manifestations of
colour in the exterior world in my memory? How do I take
in the colour forms and surfaces instantaneously? Which
will be the colours, colour dots and forms I will remember
when looking at a picture now? This connection between
colour and memory in the zone of objects, can only be dealt
with in the twilight zone between objectivity and
abstraction. Time as colour, perception of form as a
performance of the memory and not as the finding of an
analogy – it is this shift of accentuation in Brandl’s best
pictures that provides their semi-abstract and semi-
figurative, a stylistic twilight, continuing the objective and
ontological character, their historic legitimacy. The
connection between colour and memory, between colour
and time, is also cogent when coming back to the role of
colour as material as was discussed at the beginning, and
when remembering Bergson’s work Mater and Memory.
Colour as memory deserts our secure metaphysical order.
Time creates the prerequisites for us to experience being
within our finite experience, in our transitory nature. And
in this respect, Brandl’s pictures are pictures of death.
Obviously time is not intrinsic things, but in us it is a
human category. Just like colour? “Time is nothing but the
FORM of the inner state. As time cannot be the
determination of an outer appearance. It does not belong to
a GESTALT, or position etc., but determines the
RELATIONSHIP of the ideas in our INNER STATE.” (I.
Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, §6) When trying to determine
time, we meet many terms that we already discussed when
dealing with colour (form, gestalt, inner sense or state,
appearance). It is very tempting to replace the word time
with colour in Kant’s text in order to show how convincing
our description of the relationship between colour and time
is. As, since Aristotle, time does not belong to the being, it
arises as a pure notion of transcendent imagination. This
transcendental power is also intrinsic to colour and Brandl’s
painting. Wordsworth’s description of landscape does
explicitly contain the three terms which are fundamental
for any kind of analysis of painting. This almost ontological
equivalence of picture and being, of painting and
landscape, arises from transcendental categories. And as
such they do not only form "troubles" for dreams but also
for the art of painting.

Brandl’s pictures teach us that colour is to form as in the
relation of time to being. Brandl is a colour artist in the
purest sense. In his work, colour runs and flows as steady as
time in a pure succession and repetition (again and again he
paints for weeks layer after layer) of successions of moments
and colour dots. He paints against time, for time and with
time. The annulment of time in memory, destruction of time
as a continued presence, presence as eternity in the identity
of colour and form, these form the ontological basis of his
painting of becoming. And exactly thereby his nihilism of
colour can be transformed into a subversive transcendence:
“Just that the old complaint, that everything is vain, can
become the most serene of all thoughts.” (Novalis) In this
context, Brandl’s colour paintings are pictures of life.
Brandl’s time painting is the work of a person who, in his
muteness, cannot speak other than by staging colour and
who cannot query meaning other than by questioning
colour. In his battle of colours, where colour is the flesh of
forms in the same way as the body is the flesh of existence,
colour crosses the flow of time. “Liede”, cries the painter as
Aristotle and then dies. But colour lives and lives so much,
our would like to paraphrase according to Artaud: “Colour
and hence also the art of painting have not exist yet begin
to exist.” In Brandl’s colour painting, colour crosses the flesh
of existence as urgently as a dream. With colour as a
weapon of consciousness, he overcomes the picture’s
empirical character and breaks the unity of representation.
If still representing something, (in the worst case) it is
feelings. He presents colour on the canvas as on a stage. If
it remained mere stagy, this would only be an expression
of power over his means, over the reality presented and the
effect on the receiver. However, Brandl does not turn into
a post-modern Hollywood artist because his theatre of colours
recognises overexertion, circulating around death and its
equivalents such as time, will, sacrifice, void, like Artaud’s
theater of cruelty. Just as someone poisoned strives for
healing, yet the poison being his basis, his eccentric place,
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