

Holger Brantl: Günter Halle - Schütz und Peter Weibel (Hrsg.), Neue Galerie Graz, O.F. Feldner

Peter Weibel

Colour and Time (2004)

1,20-23 (Beilage)

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 is so popular? Is there anything such as an abstract Italy and a formal Norway? Is each painted tree that is recognisable as such thus an offspring bastard of a shag 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 10:0, then the picture is abstract. And there are matches with the results 5:3, 2:1, 5:5 (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 unformed, 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. 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 practise 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. The splitting of the eidos 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 logocentrism 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 ideas. Eidos, the original word for picture or idea, does really mean form, but also, like

morphe, 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, quo 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-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 do 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 where 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 sense objects. Besides also the colour's art radical and a signs, where the of objects, outer The guidelines f world, but rather exterior need spiritual necessity corresponds with Kandinsky. One landscapes of the but this is inapp: ontological redei form, as I perceive amongst these n: be still connected where colour wa to an inner reali from the inner w of objects. To pr inner necessity, a Colour's new abs with money. Colc anything. After c would be colour' longer stands for Just as with mon value in exchange Colour can be ex dress, for blood. a green triangle, dress or blood ar everything, just l

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 practise 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. The splitting of the eidos 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 logocentrism 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 ideas. Eidos, the original word for picture or idea, does really mean form, but also, like

morphe, 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, quo 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-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 do 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 where 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 equally legitimate and necessary in a post-modern practice, if we want to give the word post-modern a progressive sense, to resettle 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 Fin de siècle 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's new absoluteness is instead far more comparable with money. Colour is "naturally" no longer bound to anything. After colour's supreme materialism, the next step would be colour's nihilistic semiotics. Indeed colour no longer stands for anything, hence is applicable everywhere. Just as with money, the value of colour is determined by its value in exchange. Colour can be exchanged for everything: for a chair, for a dress, for blood. Colour stands for every form: a green leaf, a green triangle, a green horse, a green car. Whether chair, dress or blood are red – same colour for all. Colour sticks to everything, just like money or blood. This nihilism of

colour does not mean *finis hominis*, but rather *ousia*, 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" (*Verklärung* (Transfiguration), G. Trakl), as becoming grows from being. Time is the gift of ontosemiotic intertwinement 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 style, 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 *Matter 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 to 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 transcendental 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: "That just 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. "Lethe", cries the painter as Aktaeon and then dies. But colour lives and lives so much, one would like to paraphrase according to Artaud: "Colour and hence also the art of painting have not yet begun 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 staging, 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 theater 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,

from which he judge nature. A lost medium subject, the landscape author. This state of Brandl does not stage colours. With the colour impressions we show objects, but encodes the unity of the representation because, as we all know, or, for that representation, colour light, neither in landscape does not represent itself. Colours remain colour faith, passion, poison the light, the now, ex light to colour" is no Colour as a code does not exist, that's seen, not even on the trees". In the heart of shadow, Brandl is to colour as a code, as Colour being the weapon blood colour – death just a colour code, the washable, everything the banks of which across for the first time ferryman, gripping the triviality of time, the guides us to the source picture: *ousia*. In the material for the free

but rather ousia,
al), presence of being, a
So this colour painting
quence of the
on between form and
y self-identity,
n of colour, because the
m is inscribed between
ur and death or colour
finitities; so if colour
es and surfaces, then it's
ch sounds so softly in
guration), G. Trakl), as
s the gift of onto-
d colour. The
ainting derives from
e" (Heidegger) and
Colour plays the role of
e have their role in
f form, as time,
nt of space, then, the
e of forms, must be
aporal moment is not
on the panel painting
e observer's attention to
already a scientific
ip than form. But this is
influence of time on
etween colour and
ving looked at the
s in a meadow? How
fold manifestations of
memory? How do I take
taneously? Which
forms I will remember
s connection between
bjects. 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 style, 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 *Matter 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 to 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 transcendental 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:
"That just 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. "Lethe", cries the painter as
Aktaeon and then dies. But colour lives and lives so much,
one would like to paraphrase according to Artaud: "Colour
and hence also the art of painting have not yet begun 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 staging, 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 theater 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,

from which he judges things, so it is that Brandl paints
nature. A lost medium, painting, searching for the lost
subject, the landscape, just as, once, a play, searched for its
author. This state of colour could be described as code.
Brandl does not stage a theater of colours but encodes the
colours. With the colours he does not encode the
impressions we should gain from the painted forms and
objects, but encodes the colour itself. In this way he breaks
the unity of the representation, the expression of power,
because, as we all know the code is just as exchangeable as
money, or, for that matter, death. Where there is no
representation, colours do not have a shadow, there is no
light, neither in landscape nor in painting. As there colour
does not represent shadow and does not simulate light.
Colours remain colours and as such encode, in a game,
faith, passion, poison, love, time, transcendence, the tree,
the light, the now, exertion. What was at one time "from
light to colour" is now "get away from light or you will die".
Colour as a code means, that one cannot only paint what
does not exist, that's clear, but also paint what cannot be
seen, not even on the painting, but is still there, e.g. "fluid
trees". In the heart of darkness, where colours have no
shadow, Brandl is tortured by the nervus demonstrandi: the
colour as a code, as Aristotelian point.
Colour being the weapon of consciousness he gives time its
blood colour – death. Yet, if time is just a colour and blood
just a colour code, the one as exchangeable as the other is
washable, everything remains in flow. This flow, this river,
the banks of which are perception and time, we do indeed
cross for the first time in Brandl's pictures. Brandl, the
ferryman, gripping tightly both oar blades, one being the
triviality of time, the other the nihilism of colour, and
guides us to the source of perception, the colour, the
picture: ousia. In the presence of colour he paints time as
material for the freedom of consciousness.