

Johannes Meinhardt  
"A Choreography of Light", 2012

The fact that Raimund Girke holds a special place in painting not just in relation to the 1960 and 70s, but today as well is largely thanks to the central metaphor of his oeuvre, which informs above all his later works: the metaphor of colour as pure energy, as light. And the colour that radiates most purely, which transforms itself, as it were, into quintessential energy, is white. "White is the colour that is closest to light." From this it follows that for Raimund Girke "white" is not just one colour among many, even if it is the colour that gathers all the others into itself; "white" designates painting as intensity and light in general. A painting must be white for it to be pure energy.

This definition of painting also indicates that the white colour-light (Farblicht) in a painting possesses pure energy, a specific reality beyond the mere material reality of the paint, the bonded pigment. Yet this specific reality of the colour-light belongs to the same material world of the paint as matter: it is a radiance of the colour, an effect of the colour in a very literal sense. The radiant colour-light is engendered by the paint matter as its absolutely real result. It is misleading to designate this colour-light as "immaterial" as opposed to the materiality of the colour substance, for the reality of energetic radiance or of light belongs to the material world of bodies and substances and does not claim to belong to an intellectual or spiritual world of meanings, of signs or of consciousness. The colour-light is only immaterial in the sense that it is perceived within the real, physical world and as constituent to it, not as body or matter, but as a specific phenomenon that brings into play its very own way of being perceived. The colour matter transcends itself through the senses and draws from itself the pure colour-light as another state of colour, without transposing to an a-sensual, spiritual world for this purpose.

The metaphor of colour as pure energy, as colour-light, is sustained in the way space becomes metaphor. Whereas the actual light radiance of a neon tube, for example, lights three-dimensional space and its colour-light evokes a literal colour-light space – such as Dan Flavin created in his works – Raimund Girke's metaphor of colour-light as a pictorial phenomenon gives rise to an independent colour-light space in the painting. Given that Girke's paintings do not literally radiate, could not be used as light fixtures because their white only glows within the irrefutably aesthetic reality of the painting as perceived, they do not light the three-dimensional space of the viewer, but rather a specific dense non-quantifiable pictorial space, the colour-light space of the painting, which differs fundamentally from the viewer's three-dimensional space.

The glowing of the white in the colour-light space of the painting becomes even more intense and more emphasised when the white is accentuated by coloured shaded disruptions, or when it stands out from a dark background that is even partly black. "Black and grey intensify the white, carrying it while playing a merely subordinate subservient role. They modulate the white in its finest nuances and cause it to pulsate. The white become even brighter and more intense, standing out as it does due to these accentuations and shadings. At the same time the pictorial space, the colour-light space of the paintings, becomes more unquantifiable, deeper and also denser when the white radiates out of a dark background."

Unlike a light source that sends out light waves once the physical or chemical preconditions

are fulfilled, the metaphorical transformation of colour into light, the transition of colour into the state of pure energy, does not happen of itself. This transition, which also facilitates the viewer's shift into aesthetic perception and experience, is itself made possible by the artist's handling of paint, by the hand's physical action when inscribing the paint onto the pictorial plane. From the very outset, Raimund Girke did not see the application of paint as producing semantic or expressive signs, but as a material action that leaves traces which show nothing other than this very action, making the process visible. Such a way of applying paint has more to do with a dance by the hand and the whole body, than with writing: in the case of writing, it is clear in advance that the hand's action is subject to the legibility and identifiability of the written signs, that the hand reproduces signs and does not produce open movements the traces of which are meaningless but highly real. So, like in a dance that is more than the mere imitation of movements, the body produces its tensions, rhythms and speeds in both the body and the hand applying the paint.

By mimetically reliving, grasping this choreography of traces of movements, the viewer can realize the inscribed tensions, rhythms and speeds in his own body. This process of comprehension causes haptic and optical moments to coalesce to the point of being almost indistinguishable: the trace of the dance is seen, becoming available to physical perception only in the mimesis of the movement. And because Raimund Girke produced the white of his paintings by superimposing several layers, the levels of reading and discernment are also layered in the choreography of the hand.

The metaphor of colour as pure energy unfolded by Raimund Girke is not just an unavoidable but also a necessary one. It approximates more closely to the phenomenal and sensual experience of a painting than any attempt at a strictly conceptual definition. Metaphor literally means a "bringing over", a shift to a place beyond, and such a movement is brought about by the viewer himself when he transitions from an objective to an aesthetic appreciation of material bodies. The attunement of aesthetic experience is itself metaphorical: it is itself already a transition that opens up other possibilities for the senses to perceive and reflect.

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