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FORM AND COLOUR THE COMMON VISUAL LANGUAGE OF ART AND DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

THE COMMON LANGUAGE OF ART, CRAFT AND DESIGN

Art education in Ireland and most of the world tends towards a duality of approach: craft and design with its emphasis on usefulness, problem-solving and planning on one hand, and fine art with its emphasis on form and content on the other. The new Junior Certificate syllabus for Art, Craft and Design attempts to integrate these complex areas into a single core of "elements". They form the central structure of the new course. A11 the related activities of the course find their common impetus from these elements. These elements are the basic materials through which a common, coherent and transmittable visual language is to be structured. AS teachers begin to use this structure, I believe it is important in the setting of curriculum and specific class plans to have the widest understanding of the problems this structure was developed to shed light on. In particular, the way in which this system, which was rarely used before this century, was to be used in its most integrated and far-reaching way in the teaching of Itten 1888/1967. Johannes Itten is no arbitrary historical example in the use of formal elements. In studying his approach, I believe I have found that his educational method resembles very clearly the approach taken in the new Junior Certificate syllabus. In relation to art education, Itten's teaching in its

simplicity, care for the students, inner expression based on universal elements, stands in stark contrast to the general rule which tended to treat visual education as superfluous and a private language for the gifted. Of all the senses through which we experience the world, sight is by far the most important. The visual experience in a historical sense can be seen in the product of that experience long before verbal thinking found its structure in writing.

The visual experience can be said firstly to have form, that is we perceive the world through basic structural elements. These are dot, lines, shapes and basic forms. These forms combine and stand for the spatial nature of the external and internal world. Geometry is the scientific systemisation of this form/space structure. The mathematic abstraction of geometry is enriched in art as a language to articulate our experience of plants, landscapes and objects that have weight, movement and life. The second and interrelated area of visual experience is colour.

Colour is light. The sensation of this light, physically and mentally, is the way that form comes to life for us, having in its slightest nuance the deepest significance for us. Without light we do not perceive form visually. Without light there would be no life so it is not surprising that the product of light, colour, should hold equal importance for us as form. These basic elements of experience are among the most important and basic building blocks of our perception of the world.

Everything the multiformality and multicolarity of the visible world plus whatever artists and scientists make visible, the world of the spirit and the intellect can be made visible, through these elements. There are not only interactions on the one hand between colours, and on the other between forms but between colours and forms. No colour is conceivable without form and no form without colour. Conversely any colour can be pictured in any form and any form in any colour. Form is the body of colour and colour is the soul of form.(1)

The visible elements are everything we see. Art, Craft and Design are the ways in which we express our visual awareness, thus it is not surprising that these elements should be found at the core of any course on these disciplines. The dismantling of the duality within these areas depends on the formulation of a common visual language through the use of the elements. This is not a new hope. many art theorists and educators have worked Some of the most important and to realise this goal. influential was the work done in the Bauhaus in the 1920's and '30's in Germany. The Bauhaus was set up by Walter Gropius, architect, with the express idea of uniting the different areas of art, craft and design. Itten was chosen to design and run the introductory the history of and possible то examine course. influences on Itten's method of teaching and the lessons it can teach us in teaching the Junior Certificate is the object of this dissertation. In both the Junior

Certificate and Itten's teaching method the core of elements was the foundation of all lesson plans. The enabling of the pupil to use the art elements creatively is seen in the new syllabus and in the work of Itten as the key in any attempt at the creative use and understanding of the language of art, craft and design. What are the art elements and how do they relate historically to art education? Can these basic visual elements be a basis for the development in the pupil of visual awareness of his or her world? Itten's work was a reaction to the historical development of the art elements in the way we perceive things visually.

The dissertation will be divided between the two main areas that all visual awareness is made up from : form The remarkable fact that although these and colour. fundamental realities have been the object of man's fascination throughout history, efforts to systemise their use in visual education, in comparison, is relatively recent. With the work of Sigfried A. Forsius in 1611 we find the first attempts to synthesize colour into a structured model.(2) The first models were improved by Philip Otto Runge in the early 19th Century.(3) Itten's major work on colour The Art of Colour(4) in this century has become almost the standard text on the subject. Although geometry (the science of basic forms) has a long history, its use as a general method for developing visual awareness came about at

exactly the same time as Runge's first models of colour in the early 19th Century. The work of Euclid and the ancient Greeks was of great importance in the development of art history in the work after the Renaissance of Leonardo de Vinci and Durer, but a slavish admiration for the products of Greek culture inhibited its development into a free language. It is with the work of educators such as Pestalozzi in the 19th Century and Itten, Klee and Kandinsky in the Bauhaus in the 20th Century that form is used systematically in visual thinking. Itten's use of this tradition in his lessons is a very useful sign post to the structuring of lessons within the Junior Certificate. If everything we see can be understood in visual terms under these two headings, then the clear understanding and use in class frees us and the pupils judgement of art, craft and design based on from historical models and puts the freedom of pure language at the disposal of the creativity of the pupil. The Junior Certificate sets high goals for this language. A fuller understanding of its structure and use would be a basic foundation of my understanding as a teacher and the relationship and responsibility to the student. Itten describes the learning process from books and teachers like travelling by carriage, "but the carriage will serve only while one is one the highroad. He who reaches the end of the highroad will leave the carriage and walk on foot".(5)



FOOTNOTES INTRODUCTION

1: Karl Gerstner,. <u>The Forms of Colour</u> (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p.12.

2: ibid., p.10.

3: ibid., p.18.

4: Johannes Itten, <u>The Art of Colour</u> (New York Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1961). p.67

5: Itten, Johannes. <u>The Elements of Colour</u>, (London, Thames and Hudson 1963) p.10

CHAPTER ONE

FORM:

Form is the spatial nature of the world of objects and structures both external and internal. The science of understanding form is geometry. All geometry and formal problems in art deal with a world of three dimensions. Any object may be appreciated in zero, one, two and three dimensions, corresponding in visual terms to point, line, These in turn are the objects of plane and solid. geometry. All two dimensional design that tries to represent an image of the world must be a projection of the three dimensional world. Because we are bi-focal, all humans vision of the world is in three dimensions. The understanding of basic forms has been at the heart of the relationship between our inner and outer worlds for thousands of years. This relationship constitutes the body and structure of art, craft and design. The history of forms is crucial to the nature of our present day approaches to art and design education. This is so because the whole culture of the west including all art and design has been so heavily influenced by Greek models since the Renaissance. I hope to show that it is only relatively recently that an approach has been found, that does not involve copying, which can relate free use of form as a visual language to the tradition of art and design. It is not surprising perhaps that the key, ie.

form, was almost invented by the Greeks in the way we understand it.

The early history of form is very closely related to geometry in the west. The Greeks were the first to make geometry a rational instrument for obtaining knowledge of They did this as early as the Sixth Century the world. B.C. by conceiving a point as a dimensionless element, a line as a series of adjoining points, a plane, a set of parallel lines side by side, and a solid as a series of adjoining planes. By this abstraction they invented an unprecedented instrument of simplicity for appreciation and invention of form. It may shed light on how the Greeks should invent such a complete way of looking at the world to look at the examples of Greek art that still It is thought that neither Greek or Roman survive. artists ever formulated any laws of perspective, yet their art shows a perception and mastery of three dimensional form that we can only wonder at. Greek and Roman artists created these works with their mastery of space by intuition and observation. What we needed centuries to discover appeared as self-evident to the Euclid in the Third Century B.C. wrote a Greek mind. relationship, treatise on "figures and their configurations, magnitudes and proportions called the Elements".(1)

Plato inscribed over the entrance to his academy "Let no one enter here who is not versed in geometry."(2)

Greek fascination with measure may The be better understood when we consider that to their mind the measure of all things is man. This is to be understood both literally and metaphorically. The smallest unit of measure in ancient Greece was the dactylos, a Vitruvios the Greek sculptor, First fingerbreadth. Century A.D. established the conformity between the human body and elementary geometry. "A man standing with outstretched arms is to be inscribed in a square, one with his legs apart in a circle, with the navel as centre."(3) The basic geometry necessary for perspective understood in the Second Century B.C. was In his treatise on conic sections, Appolonius of Perga describes that any object seen at a distance is seen in a conicsection, thus expanding with distance. In Byzantine art that was to follow the demise of Greek and Roman cultures, the form of art was to take another direction.

Between the end of the Roman Empire and the discovery of its art again in the Renaissance, form was to be conceived largely in the symbolic, psychological sense. Religious faith became the measure of man. There was no need for naturalism. Man's gaze was turned towards God and not the world. In the Renaissance Lecome Battista Alberti, Piero della Francesca and Paolo Uccello first found one point perspective and then developed this into constructions with two horizontal vanishing points that was even more effective.

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The Canon of Proportion: according to Vitruvics' Law of Proportion



Fig. ii A. Durer, Perspective drawing instruction

This opened the language of form to every, artist, sculptor and architect of the Renaissance and was to dictate our understanding of art until the present But the deference to Greek art created a century. climate of thought about form that led to the slavish copying of Greek and Roman models. This in fact was to become the mainstay of art education until very recently. Where the Greeks had perceived a natural language to articulate and understand, the art academy was to dictate suffocating rules set in stone. This placed art education at a distance from simple thought and real development in form, after the early Renaissance reverted to the science of geometry.

Appreciation of form as a basic language that was useful in an educational sense was to disappear until the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. Drawing as a tool to develop appreciation of culture was esposed by many educational systems but only in the vaguest sense. A very clear description of how form was taught prior to this may be seen in the description by Pestalozzi (1801-98) as a prelude to the introduction of his new method of teaching drawing in the third chapter of <u>How Gertrude</u> <u>teaches her children.</u>

"The usual course of our art education is to begin with inaccurate observation and crooked structures; then to pull down and build up again crookedly then turns over, until at last and late, the feeling of proportion has matured. Then we come at last to that which we should have begun, measurement."(4)

Pestalozzi's subsequent attempts at the development of the elemental language of forms comes at precisely the same time that attempts were being made to systematize This was the age of the enlightenment. colour. The beginning of mass education of the Bourgeoisie was beginning in Europe. Many factors may have played a part but it is interesting that an attempt was being made to synthesize both the areas of form and colour in visual terms at the same time. Education, and particularly art education at this time, was no longer the province of an So as an educational thinker who could not ignore elite. the need for a simple universally applicable language for art and design, Pestalozzi lamented the notion that drawing was a luxury. When he was making his pedagogical method, he placed it among the core disciplines of his Along with number and languages, form was curriculum. the third means of development in the pupil. Form as a subject was subdivided into "exercises in form with reference to truth, (Geometry) and exercises in form with reference to beauty (Drawing)."(5) Pestalozzi's method was to start the appreciation of form with geometric line drawings of simple forms gradually moving to the complex. He devised an elemental alphabet of forms in line, curves and angles and called it the "ABC of Anschaung,"(6) and was published in 1803. Pestalozzi's method was used in Prussia in the early Nineteenth Century and influenced



greatly the approach to secondary education in that country.

Pestalozzi's followers such as Joseph Schmid and Hermann Trusi continued teaching through his method. Krusi's drawing curriculum used linear drawing and perspective as a result of observation and of geometric and optical laws, light and shade, tonal work and finally the direct observation of nature. Krusi's son continued his work on drawing and an account of it was published in 1872 in the treatise by Joseph Naf "Sketch of a plan and method of education."(7) Pestalozzi's importance lay in seeing art as an educational necessity and trying to simplify it to make it applicable to every student. He believed that art was not to be taught for art's sake but because it is a basic way in which we think about the world. This interest in the formal characteristics of art and design is echoed in the work of artists such as Cezanne who was to lay the foundations of modern art by his single minded application of his discoveries in form and colour. But general art education remained fettered to reproduction of earlier models as the standard for excellence.

This then was the history of the teaching of form in art that Itten was to inherit when he began his art training in Geneva in 1910. Itten had already been trained and worked as a teacher at primary level.

He was horrified to find that art was still being taught in the "medieval manner,"(8) in the academies.

The professors set themselves up as examples to their students and the students followed them. The star students were those who made the best job of copying their professors. Pestalozzi's formal teaching had no place in such a system. Art was not so much an instrument of self expression as of slavish copying of the past. Itten left the academy and became a student of Adolf Holzel in Stuttgart where he learned pictorial composition which was the only area where formal analysis was applied in art education at this time. Itten however realised the universality that formal analysis offered to the teacher of art and design. Having learned this basic language Itten began to teach during the war years 1915-16 and it was his formal approach to teaching that brought him to the attention of Walter Gropius. When Gropius set up the Bauhaus with the express idea of creating a general course for art, craft and design he made Itten head of the Basic Course, realising the potential Itten's approach had for making a foundation of understood principles for all the diverse subjects taught Itten came into daily contact with in the Bauhaus. Kandinsky and Klee who were developing a very closely related method based on the elements which culminated in the treatise "Point and Line to Plane" (9) which Kandinsky published in 1947 and Klee's "Pedagogical Sketchbooks"(10)

Both works dealt specifically with the formal analysis of visual language. Itten devised his curriculum foundation on the interaction of the elements in form and colour for craftsmen, architects, designers, sculptors and painters. The Bauhaus was to become one of the important exemplars in art education this Century.

The core of Itten's method was its simplicity, he called his core "the elementary study of forms."(11) As in the world of colour, with the three primary colours, red, vellow, and blue, there were three fundamental shapes, the square, triangle and circle. The basic two their three dimensional shapes have dimensional equivalents in the cube, pyramid and sphere. Itten's classes consisted in isolating specific elements and examining their use according to the rule of opposites. This approach of having a core of art and design elements and applying them in drawing three-dimensional and twodimensional art, craft and design classes is very similar in approach to the method recommended in the new Junior Certificate syllabus. Itten says

"the laws of form and colour opened up to them the world of objectivity. As work progressed it became possible for the subjective and objective problems of form and colour to interact in many different ways."(12)



Itten constructed his classes on the principle of An element would be chosen, for example: opposites. The students would be asked for words that proportion. represented the opposite characteristics of the element, large, small, near, far etc. Itten describes a class on proportion and its relativity to a group of eight- to ten- year olds. He traces the outline of the child's hand. Then he asks the child to draw an apple in correct proportion to the hand, then a grape and then a fly on This done he asks the child to draw an the apple. elephant on the page to correct proportion, the child realises this is impossible. Then he asks the child to draw the elephant with a keeper on a new page, then to draw his hand, in the hand an apple and on the apple a fly.(13) The basic understanding of how to represent the relative proportions perceived in real life in the abstract synthesis of form in two dimensions is taught almost as a game. The exercises were bas composition on this general theory of contrast. The exercises were based in The areas of contrast were suggested by the pupil, hence the pupil played an important role in actually dictating the work to do on the particular elements chosen for study.

"The chiaroscuro (dark, light) contrast, the material and texture studies, the theory of forms and colour, the rhythm and the expressive forms were discussed and demonstrated in terms of their contrast effect, the students had to understand contrast in three ways. They had to experience contrast with the senses, then objectivise them intellectually and realise them synthetically."(14)

Itten also structured all his classes on form and colour around their application in a craft area chosen by the pupil in exactly the same way the structure of the Junior Certificate demands. He used examples from history of art as support studies in which the chosen work was analysised in terms of the element being studied by the student. This principle of opposites and the three steps to understanding of objects based on the elements has obvious worth to any art teacher teaching the Junior Certificate as it was based on teaching art through a very similar pedagogical structure. At the heart of Itten's method lay his respect for the language of art, craft and design and the individual life of the student.

"Teachers should make no attempt to urge their own forms and colours on their students. They should acknowledge, protect and encourage the subjective talent in each of them. The objective laws of form and colour help to strengthen a person's powers and to expand his creative gift."(15)

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER ONE

1: Karl Gerstner, <u>The Forms of Colour</u> (Cambridge Mit Press 1986)p.5.

2: ibid., p.20

3: ibid., p.21

4: Efland, A.D. <u>A History of Art Education</u> (Teachers College Press 1990) P.135.

5: ibid., p.136.

6: ibid., p.136.

7: ibid., p.139.

8: Johannes Itten, <u>Design and Form</u> the basic course at the Bauhaus (London, Thames and Hudson) P.5.

9: Kandinsky Complete Writings on Art Volume 2 (London, Faber and Faber, 1982).

10: Klee Pedagogical Sketchbooks (Pralger, 1953)

11: Johannes Itten, <u>The Elements of Colour</u> (London, Thames and Hudson 1963) p.15.

12: ibid., The Art of Colour (London, Thames and Hudson) p.170

13: ibid., Design and Form P.20.

14: ibid., The Elements of Colour p.75.

15: ibid., The Art of Colour p.111.

Chapter 2.

14

Colour

"Colour basically is light, it is the visible spectrum of electromagentic waves,"(1) this is the province of physics so therefore our understanding of the elements of colour began in this field. Isaac Newton in 1676 used a prism to split white light into what we know now as the visible spectrum of colours which is a gradual gradation of colour from red, through yellow to blue and violet at the furthest end of what the human eye can see of the spectrum. There are other wave lengths but we cannot see The first model for colour appeared before it was them. realised how colour could be devided form white light by the Swede Sigfrid A Forsius in 1611.(2) But it was not until much later that the first logical and clear model was devised by Philip Otto Runge in 1810. It was in the form of a colour sphere with the equator being the pure hues and the poles being white and black. So, right from earliest models, colour was understood in two the interconnecting ways the hue or colour saturation and the amount of black or white mixed with it to produce tone. This hue-tone relationship is still at the heart of colour models today. Goethe also published a treatise on colour in the same year as Runge.(3) This was the age of the enlightenment and colour for the first time began to be seen as a coherent system.





One of the first artists to attempt to combine theory and practice was Turner in his later paintings based on Goethe's theories. These paintings are seen often as the precursors of Impressionism whose theoretical base is grounded in the chemist M.E. Chevreul's (1786-1889) theory of colour.(4) Chevreul is a clear example of how basic colour theory may be used in different visual He was the dyemaster of the Goeblin disciplines. tapestry and textile works in Paris. He was a chemist whose work published in "De la Loi du Contraste Simultane des Colours et de l'Assortiment des Objects Coloris,"(5) in 1839 became an inspiration to the whole art movement, being used as the scientific foundation of impressionist and neo-impressionist painting. Itten parallels his work in textiles a century later, teaching colour at the textiles college in Zurich.

Of the two main areas of visual education, colour was seen as the least definable and most abstract area by art educators and thinkers of the period. The theories were very new and added to this the lack of availability of ready mixed mediums in colour. Mass production of artists materials as we have it today was to come much later, basic education tended to leave these far reaching discoveries in colour to the theorists and the most advanced artists. Delacroix wrote of 19th Century art education,

"The elements of colour theory have been neither analyised nor taught in our schools of art, because in France it is considered superfluous to study the laws of colour, according to the saying ' Draftsmen may be made, but colorists are born.' Secrets of colour theory? Why call those principles secrets which all artists must know and all should have been taught?"(6)

The definable formal characteristics of line, shape and form were much more widely recommended and used than something as seemingly subjective and intangible as colour. The development of colour as a practical tool in all areas using visual language became the province of theorists and artists.

The outstanding German theorist and teacher was Adolf Holzel based his theories on colour on the work Holzel. of Goethe, Schopenhauer and Bezold, (7) stressing in particular the study of colour contrasts in relationship to the work of the OldMasters. Itten attended Holzel's lectures on colour theory in Stuttgart and this emphasis on colour contrasts as in the area of form was to become a major part of Itten's method. Holzel's lectures impressed Itten profoundly with the importance of the study of the Old Masters. However, this study could become an obstacle he felt, leading to academic copying in the absence of a watchful self-criticism. It was however, from the close study of the work of colourtheorists that Itten became convinced that they possessed a science of colour from which he would develop his own model for teaching.

When Itten began teaching the basic course at the Bauhaus in the winter term of 1919-1920 this was the tradition of colour theory that he inherited and had to simplify into a basic system that could be taught to craftsmen and artists of very different backgrounds and abilities. His study of colour was to be the major work of his life and his book on colour The Elements of Colour, that grew out of his experience as a teacher, is a landmark in the understanding of colour in this century. What is so remarkable about book this is the way that Itten transformed the theories on colour into a simple and universally applicable language. I believe it is not only relevent to the education of art and design at third level but may be, and was designed to be, applied at any level.

In his treatise Itten states that "colour aesthetics may be approached from three directions:

impression (visually),

expression (emotionally),

and construction (symbolically).(8)

What does Itten mean by these categories and what relevance do they have for our way of teaching colour? The impression (visual) approach to colour Itten defined as the narrowly observed minute modulations of colour, this deals with the objective materialised nature of colour. The expressive/emotional approach is grounded on the psychological effect of colour.







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Fig. iii Subjective color grids from personal students work



Fig. iv Itten: Complimentary Contrast

The constructive symbolic approach deals with colours symbolic value either to identify socially accepted references, black for death etc. or as symbolic terms for ideas.(9)

Itten lived in a time when developments in colour chemistry, fashion and colour photography had refined peoples' awareness and aroused general interest in the area of colour. The way in which colour is being used in this strictly material way is of the greatest importance to any student hoping to use colour as a psychological or symbolic tool. Itten believed that, "We can only be released from the bondages of the subjective only through the knowledge and awareness of objective principles".(10) However, Itten balances this view by saying

"Symbolism without visual accuracy and without emotional force would be mere anaemic formulation; visually impressive effect without symbolic variety and emotional power would be banal imitative naturalism; emotional effect without constructive symbolic content or visual strength would be limited to the plane of sentimental expression."(11)

The two main areas of the objective study of colour Itten saw as "the quality" of colour, meaning its position or location inside the colour circle or solid and "brilliance" meaning the degree of lightness or darkness of a colour. Any lessons on colour should centre around putting these strictly visual contrast effects at the disposal of the student. Any appreciation of, for instance, the possible variation in a green field would

be very difficult for a young student to appreciate without the keener perception brought about by the knowledge of the possible mixes inherent in quality and Itten's colour circle and colour brilliance of green. star are examples of a final simplicity of approach, applicable for any purpose. The psychological effects of cold-warm contrast and the subjective colour in perception and discrimination of colours develop as a result of knowledge of these colour structures and become a foundation for understanding and development of the students work.

"Education should naturally give every child the opportunity to evolve organically out of himself. Subjective colour combinations are one key to identification of the individuals natural mode of thinking, feeling and doing."(12)

But this Itten's believes can only happen as with any form of thinking by creating a certain tension between subjective and objective approaches, "the student needs a grounding in universal principles, whether he likes it or not. They will generate within him natural tensions, prompting new creations."(13) He believed that teachers, physicians and vocational counsellors would gain valuable insight from subjective colour analysis.

Itten's work parallels the structure of the Junior Certificate also in the way he stresses the use of historical references to deepen the knowledge gained through personal exercises in colour.

"It is advisable to illustrate each contrast by analyses of paintings from the past and present. A learner benefits greatly when he encounters works that directly challenge and interest him. One individual will feel drawn rather to the exponents of light-dark contrast, another to those of hue, of form or of architectural composition. The strong colorism of the Expressionists will enlist the preferences of some".(14)

This leads the student to an understanding of symbolic If visual colour theory gives the student the colour. necessary vocabulary to understand themselves better through subjective colour then the circle will continue widening and colour effects will be achieved which will embrace the symbolic and universal level. The subjective colours are important for the inner being but there is a universal symbolism in colour. Colour complementaries are an objective fact in the way most humans see. For instance if you stare at a red square on a white page for long, then close your eyes, the complimentary (green) Green is the sum of all other colours will be seen. except red. This universality is carried over into the area of symbolic colour. They tend to relate to the society the student is part of. For instance, in China, people in mourning wear white, this is reversed to black These symbolic colours are very in our culture.(15) important especially in the area of design. If the responses to certain colour is asked for student design products, unconscious combinations in some symbolic reactions seem to control the response.

This surely is important for anyone thinking about what they see and interpreting it.

Itten believes that to understand colour merely in emotional or symbolic terms and to communicate only these areas to a student denies them the fundamental visual power and beauty that is gained in the understanding of all aspects of colour. This is why the formal elements of colour are at the centre of the Junior Certificate Itten's formal structure to develop the svllabus. subjective and cultural understanding of the student parallels exactly the structured use of the Junior Certificate syllabus. To underestimate the educational value of colour is to deny the student knowledge of the basic laws of design and richest wonders of life. For Itten colour was life,

"for a world without colour appears to us as dead, nothing affects the human mind more dramatically than the apparition of a gigantic colour carona in the heavens, thunder and lightning frighten us, but the colours of the rainbow and the northern lights soothe and elevate the soul".(16)

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER TWO

- 1: Karl Gerstner, The Forms of Colour p.14.
- 2: ibid., p.23
- 3: ibid., p.24.
- 4: Itten The Art of Colour p.41.
- 5: ibid., p.20.
- 6: Efland, <u>A History of Art Education</u> p.89.
- 7: Johannes Itten, The Elements of Colour p.33
- 8: ibid., p.63.
- 9: ibid., p.41.
- 10: ibid., p.110.
- 11: ibid., p.111.
- 12: ibid., p.23.
- 13; ibid., p.89.
- 14: Itten The Art of Colour p.62.

15: ibid., p.39.

16: Itten The Elements of Colour p.8.



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Fig. i Kandinsky's correlations of basic colors and basic forms

CONCLUSION

"Art education involves two problems: to further and strengthen the learner's individual creative aptitudes and to teach the general objective rules of form and colour, supplemented by studies from nature."(1) Art, craft and design are generally recognized as being fundamental to human beings' development of understanding of their culture and of nature. The products of this understanding are ranked as some of the greatest human However, historically education achievements. has placed much more emphasis on language skills than visual awareness. This fact I believe has a lot to do with the late development of the formal analysis of visual language. Art when it was taught to the younger agegroups tended much more towards art appreciation in the narrow sense of accepted historical reverence than empowering the pupils to understand themselves and their world by thinking visually. This educational model was used at a basic level and by the academies. Aesthetics analysed art, craft and design into exclusive areas that emphasised to differences rather than the shared visual heritage in the structure of their language.

Through the development of the formal language of form and colour a completely different approach is possible that has equal relevance at all levels of art education. By placing pure language at the disposal of the student the real education of the student can begin. The use of form and colour elements does not present a systematic syllabus, it is however the essence of a method of teaching that is only limited by the pupils imagination. The hope is that all the distinct areas may be integrated through this language thus freeing the disciplines from their rigid boundaries. These boundaries will become more representative of the characteristic interests of the student rather than the inherited abstractions of art, craft and design. The essential first steps in escaping these subjective constraints are to be found in teaching the objective laws of form and colour.

This combination of individual development and structured language is at the core of both the Junior Certificate Syllabus and Itten's method of teaching. The great difficulty with this method as with all formal languages would be its tendency towards abstraction. The Junior Certificate syllabus addresses this by having as its basic aims the personal and social development of the student. The development of understanding, personal identity and self esteem are all aims of the syllabus.

"To promote in the student an informed, inquiring and discriminating attitude to his or her environment and to help the student relate to the world in visual, tactile and spatial terms."(2) "To develop a sense of personal identity and self esteem through practical achievement in the expressive, communicative and functional modes of art, craft and design".(3)

This may appear to be placing a heavy burden on a subject that many see as superfluous to modern culture. However I believe that art, craft and design historically has been one of the key methods of reconciling the inner life of the individual and the needs of their culture. Teaching intuitively towards these aims, form and colour as a common visual language may be used as the basic stuff of development as opposed to becoming an abstract straight-jacket.

The academic approach treated art education in a similar way to learning an instrument. This concentrated the development of visual awareness towards activity, reproducing historical models of excellence. This is almost totally based on developing skill abilities, founded on psycho-motor activities. The approach required by many of the aims in the Junior Certificate syllabus also includes the use of visual language in an inquiring cognitive way. This creates possibilities for developing abilities requiring skilled psyco-motor use of the materials and media but this skill becomes integrated with the pupils wish to express themselves. The personal development or affective related aspects of the curriculum are developed through this model of teaching

as the objects being examined are the objects of the pupils everyday experience. The need to relate this to the example of art history is achieved through the use of art history references that are relevant to the students work.

Itten's work using form and colour reflects clearly the aims of the Junior Certificate. The formal structure of his classes as I have shown centred on the use of visual elements. All the areas of art, craft and design were covered through observation from natural models, covering both two dimensional and three dimensional work. These visual experiments were then supported by historical reference as support studies. Finally all students supplemented case work with a complementary craft option. Itten's deep knowledge of both form and colour is reflected in his innovative use of them in his classes.

The worth of Itten's example transcends the mere technical achievements of his teaching method, it is his ideas on the aims of teaching that have the deepest relevance. There are many beautiful passages in Itten's theoretical work that hint at a resolution in developing language and the creative will of the student.

"There is no field of human activity in which talent plays so decisive a role as in education. Only the talented educator will respect and protect in a child the incredible miracle of his or her humanity. Respect for the human being is the beginning and end of all education."(4)

FOOTNOTES CONCLUSION

- 1: Itten Design and Form p.1.
- 2: An Roinn Oideachais Junior Certificate
- 3: ibid.
- 4: Itten Design and Form p.4.

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