

red

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notes

1. Goethe, L., 'Theory of Colours', (1840), VI-69., reprinted in Matthaei, R., (ed.), Goethe's Colour Theory, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1970, p. 219.
2. Jarman, D., Chroma, Vintage, Random House, London, 1995, pp. 109-110.
3. Minh-ha, Trinh T., When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics, Routledge, New York & London, 1991, p. 83.
4. Lyotard, J.F., "Foreword: After the Words," in Guercio, G., (ed.), Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966-1990, Massachusetts University, 1991, p. xvi.
5. Minh-ha, Trinh T., When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics, Routledge, New York & London, 1991, p. 89.

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red

"Colour itself is a degree of darkness." (1) There is black and white and then there is red.

Red is a primitive colour - one that attracts. It is something difficult to resist or conquer. Commonly associated with fullness, red is the colour of the heart and of inflamed passion. It is the colour of the planet of Mars and the infernal worlds of war and demons. A colour of rage and sacrifice, flares and flags, anger and racing blood, fire and a candle's licking flame.

Red is the colour of the setting sun and of the glaring world after you have stared into its blaze. Red is also the colour of our contained insides - beloved and territorial. Sanguine. It is hidden and held in by the pallor of our skin covered flesh. Only the ethereal, transparent, and aerial is barred to red for it is blue which best expresses these qualities. "The blood of sensibility is blue." (2)

As the carnal colour of uncontrollable passion and animal instinct, red speaks against itself.

"The symbol of red lies not simply in the image, but in the radical plurality of meaning." Trinh T Minh-ha sees red as the colour-sign of contingency. "At once an unlimited and profoundly subjective colour," the ecstasy of red is that of transgression. Its embrace is that of the acceptance of our limited capacity to know and understand the world. Red is the colour used to challenge our fixed visions of art and culture. Red reminds us "that society cannot be experienced as objective and fully constituted in its order; rather only as incessantly recomposed diverging forces wherein the war of interpretation reigns." (3)

There are a multiplicity of ways in which individuals seek to manifest their identity within the mechanisms of a broader cultural context. This multifarious 'identity' is never fixed. It is always reinterpreted or reconstituted with reference to changing contextual relations. It is thus not unlike the colour which we call red.

Lyotard writes that "words are a medium for speech as colours are for vision or sound is for hearing. . . The definition of a word is its usage. And usage is a homeless wandering and a faithfulness to an absent voice. It is without end." (4)

"To think that red is red, no matter whether the red is that of blood or that of a rose, is to forget that there is no red without non-red elements, and no single essential red among reds." (5)

Martina Copley, 1997