
In talking over this technique I often met objections, especially from artists whose work lay in the domain of drawing. They may be summed up as follows: That the artist has no need to subordinate himself to a law imposed upon him, but need only follow in complete freedom the dictates of his own temperament; that these suggestions gave no new artistic impulse, but were rather a special technique, which, if really practised, would be monotonous and even deadening; that it is unjustifiable to choose a particular slant for the shading, and that, in any case, it is impossible to arrive at any real creative composition by this means.

As these objections were repeatedly raised, I think it advisable to mention one or two of my own
experiences with regard to this technique. For Rudolf Steiner did not set up a dogma, nor a theory of art; he only gave advice that was practical. If it were taken and acted upon, one learnt much that was new and could work out new applications of it for oneself.

Everyone who decides to test these suggestions in practice will reach his own results by his own path. Very much was made clear to me by a casual, barely indicated sketch of Dr. Steiner’s. I have never seen it since. He had done it for the sculptor, Miss Maryon; it was an example of pure diagonal shading, and was shown to me by her about the time when Dr. Steiner had been speaking about this kind of shading.

I have drawn the sketch from memory. [See Fig. 1.] It represented a woman bending towards a group of children. It was shadow-like, yet the whole figure and movement were there. Moreover, one had the feeling that the figure could move, bend more, or stretch out its hands further. It left the spectator free. It also left the artist entirely free to alter details at any moment until the whole picture was completed. A definite outline would not have allowed this. One of the first discoveries one makes when using this method is that an outline drawn in advance is enslavement. An artist who starts his picture by fixing the outlines deprives it of the purely artistic element and weakens its effect. By seeking form without contours, he is able, up to the moment of completion, to compose his picture in the element of creation, in the process of becoming – “Werde-element.”

“You must make a plane (Fläche) and direct all your feelings and attention towards it, and then do the same with the other planes,” Dr. Steiner often said to us when we were carving the architraves in the Goetheanum, “and you must wait eagerly, and in suspense, to see what sort of a boundary will emerge between the two planes. You should never determine this in advance.”

This applies equally well to drawing. Abandoning the definiteness of the line brings in an element of the unexpected, of the unknown, that demands greater alertness and more inner activity. If one really succeeds in working by this method, it brings about a liberation from what is so destroying in art the fact of being bound fast to an intellec-

tual conception, coming from the head. It concentrates and deepens the consciousness of an activity in feeling itself, with which one experiences the contrasts of cold and warmth, lightness and heaviness, and fashions the forms out of this inner touch. These are not thought out in advance, but are directly created.

“It is only in your head that you are sentimental,” Dr. Steiner said to us eurythmists. “Your heart knows what is right.”

A kind of rhythm, an inner rhythmic law which is felt when this shading technique is used, helps to draw one’s rhythmic experience into the sculptural medium.

“Do not follow the form.” This advice made me particularly unhappy when drawing trees. For it was so much a matter of course to follow with a pencil the movements of the forces of growth through the trunk and branches. While occupied with this problem, I remembered an old engraving by Piranesi. Although otherwise engraved in his usual style, there was, in the centre of the picture, a little tree done throughout in diagonal shading. It looked quite powerful, as if the line of its shape were followed, yet it was more living and more irradiated by light and air. One of the earliest experiences in this domain is, that this style of drawing is precisely the best way to get what Rudolf Steiner called the “intensive” effect, the “illumination from within.”

I should like to show by a simple example that an apparent limitation to one given slant of shading actually provides the artist with more abundant possibilities of form, although the uniform character of the whole is accentuated to a high degree.

Let us take three equal triangles, turned in different directions, drawn first in outline, and then in diagonal shading. [See fig. 2.] In the first case, whatever the position of the triangle, the form is repeated in the same way. In the second case, the need is felt to shape it differently each time, according to its place in the composition as a whole. If, instead of simple triangles, a face turned in different directions is drawn, it can be seen how infinitely varied, and how productive of freedom, this uniform principle proves to be.

continued on next page
It is only a sign of lack of self-confidence to think that a law recognized can detract from the artist’s freedom and personal experience. The musician, far more than the plastic artist, has to seek the springs of his creativeness in his inner life, yet he has no fear of weakening his experiences when he studies the objective laws of the world of music. A more intense subjective life also means for the plastic artist an objectifying of experience—an inner enrichment—if he decides to school his temperament in the world of form. It also means greater freedom of expression than personal arbitrariness can ever attain. Yet the artist’s path ‘between Expressionism and Impressionism’ requires a more intensive, and also a more patient, study still.

“You should paint this picture fifty times, then it would be right,” I heard Dr. Steiner say to an artist who undoubtedly was gifted with ability.

If we compare the character of line-drawing in our time with that of the first centuries of Christianity, from the Byzantine to the pre-Renaissance period inclusive, we get quite different feelings. It is as if the medieval monk, from perception that was, so to speak, poured out into an undefined whole, wished to fix his inner life or vision and to realize it in lines defined by contours. He felt his way by meditation on the gold-ground, and the signs written upon it stimulated his consciousness into life. When certain modern schools seek to approach this experience of the signs, their line-drawing acquires a forced, affected character, for the creative consciousness of the modern artist is diametrically opposed to that of the pre-Renaissance period. It naturally has a tendency to define, to separate, to make abstract. And the line is an expression of this tendency.

"Only in intellectual subjects is the line really in place,” was Dr. Steiner’s opinion.

It needs both an effort of will and a wrestling with our own experience to pass on from objects to ‘what lies between things.’ When we have gained this experience of the whole we shall be able to recognize a boundary as a sign of spirit. But if our shading “follows the form” we shall involuntarily use the boundary as a line. This involves something else.

As a guiding maxim, Rudolf Steiner often applied to all departments of art the sentence from Goethe’s Prose Aphorisms (“Sprüchen in Prosa”): “He to whom Nature begins to reveal her open secrets feels an irresistible longing for her worthiest commentator, Art.”

“The Beautiful is the manifestation of secret laws of Nature, which without it would remain eternally hidden,” says Goethe in another passage.

If we try to penetrate to the secret, natural laws of light and shade we find an essential difference between these and the law of colour. This tendency to flow into forms and movements can be seen not only in the colours of solid forms—flesh-colour, for example, or colour in plants—but also in the transient phenomena of the sky. But if we see an illuminated face slowly moving in the light, we realize at once, from this simple study, that light and shadow have nothing to do with form. Their effects only become visible; they reveal the objects, but they themselves belong to a world that has nothing in common with forms, that in fact does not ‘follow the form’.

If we penetrate further into the nature of these two elements, light and shade, we find, in the first place (as is known from the simplest optical experiments), that light has a tendency to expand, to appear larger, but that shade has an inward, diminishing effect. [See fig. 3.]

The expanding quality of light may be described as a tendency to escape, to become lighter, to strive upwards, while the dark can be felt as a contracting, coagulating force that drags down into weight or gravity.

If anyone tries to feel this duality in himself, and to analyse it, he becomes aware that the left half of his body is more related to the expanding forces, and the right half to

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the forces of contracting. The inner gesture which sets up a relationship to these two forces—the gesture of a living, mobile equipoise reveals in man himself the diagonal direction from the top left-hand to the bottom righthand side.

The stroke carried from the top right to the bottom left (for the spectator) which brings about the interplay of light and shade, whether the artist is working from the light into the shade or the reverse, is in harmony with the 'secret laws of Nature.' It is the task of art to interpret these laws.

I was asked several times: “Do you think that by this method still greater things can be achieved in light and shade than Rembrandt achieved?” Certainly not. Rembrandt’s God-given art is unique, and will remain so. And until a recognized method (or, in other words, a method groped for by conscious feeling) has been inwardly evolved to the point of being transformed into a new creative power within us, a very long history of personal experiences, and an inspiration equal to the task, will be necessary. Perhaps, too, these potentialities in art, as yet only imagined by us, will be realized in a future we cannot determine. But we should have to renounce all hope of a future art, founded anew in the reality of the spirit, were it not that we can learn from the spiritual nature of the very elements of which art is composed—whether it be word, sound, colour, or light and shade—to “make these our teachers,” as Rudolf Steiner once expressed it.