

Vasily Kandinsky on Color, 1911

KANDINSKY



**ÜBER
DAS GEISTIGE
IN DER KUNST**

DRITTE AUFLAGE



PAINTING

V

THE EFFECT OF COLOUR

When you let your eye stray over a palette covered with colours, two main results are produced.

1. The first is a purely physical effect when the eye itself is enchanted by beauty and the multiple delight of colour. The observer is pleased, he experiences a pleasure similar to that enjoyed by an epicure in tasting a delicacy. The eye is stimulated as the tongue is tickled by a spicy dish. Or it is refreshed and soothed as a finger soaking in.

All these are physical sensations which, as such, are only of short duration. They are superficial and leave no lasting impression if the soul remains unaffected.

Just as in handling hot we experience a physical feeling of cold that is quickly forgotten once the finger has been warmed again, so the physical effect of colour is forgotten once the eye is turned away. Just as the phos-

When you let your eye stray over a palette covered with colors, two main results are produced:

The first is a purely physical effect when the eye itself is enchanted by beauty and the multiple delight of color... all these are physical sensations which, as such, are only of short duration. They are superficial and leave no lasting impression if the soul remains unaffected.

Then, there is the psychic effect. The first, physical elementary force develops the channel, through which the deep, inner emotion reaches the soul...

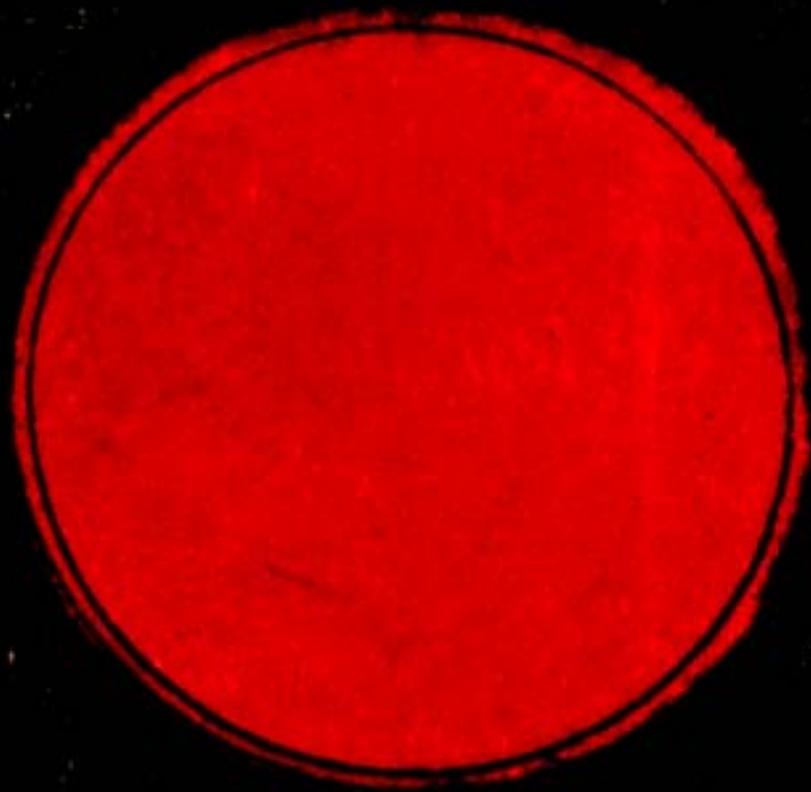
Through this, color is a means of exercising direct influence upon the soul. Color is the keyboard. The eye is the hammer, while the soul is a piano of many strings. The artist is the hand through which the medium of different keys causes the human soul to vibrate.

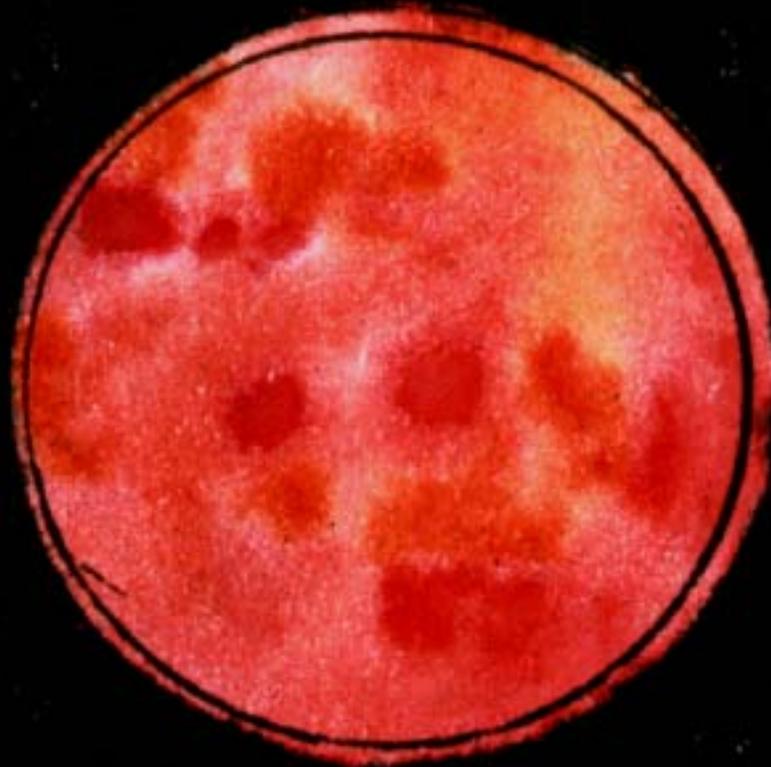
It is thus evident that color harmony can rest only on the principle of the corresponding vibration of the human soul. This basis can be considered as the principle of innermost necessity.



To let color work on us... A very simple method should be used, with the entire question condensed into as elementary a form as possible.

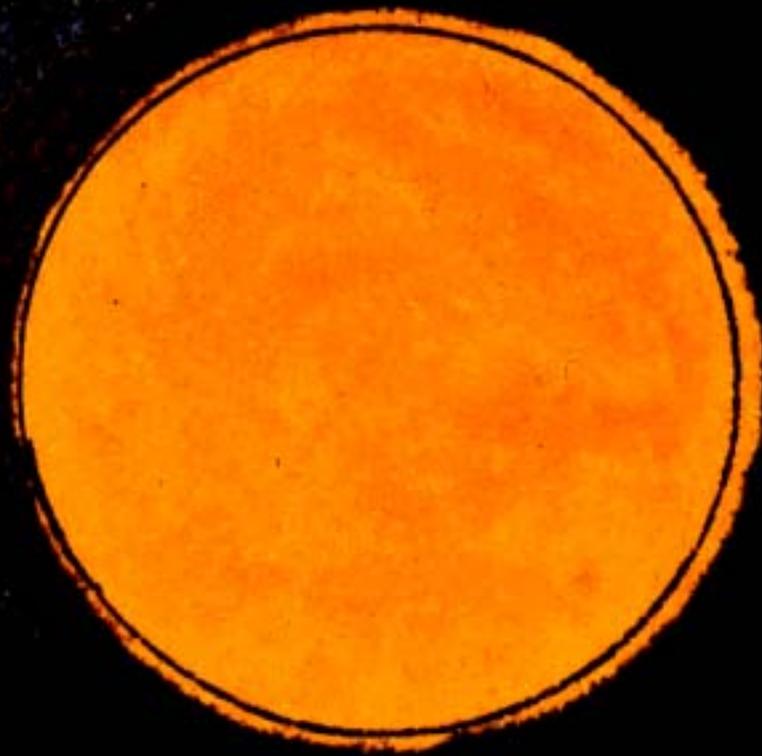
Red, as we imagine it, as an endless typically warm color, has an inner, highly vivid, lively, restless appeal, which, however, does not possess the irresponsible and self-dispersive character of yellow, and, in spite of all energy and intensity, it creates a strong note of almost tenacious immense power. It glows in itself and does not radiate much vigor outwardly, achieving a manly maturity.





This ideal Red, in reality, endures great changes, deviations, and mutations. It is very rich and varies broadly in its material form. Think of the varieties of saturn red, vermilion, English red, rose-madder from the lightest to the darkest shades. This color shows a possibility of adhering to the basic tone and still appearing characteristically either warm or cold. The light, warm red (cadmium medium) has a certain similarity to medium yellow (as a pigment it also contains much yellow) and arouses the feeling of strength, energy, ambition, determination, joy, triumph (louder). In music, it sounds like a trumpet accompanied by the tuba, a persistent imposing, strong tone.

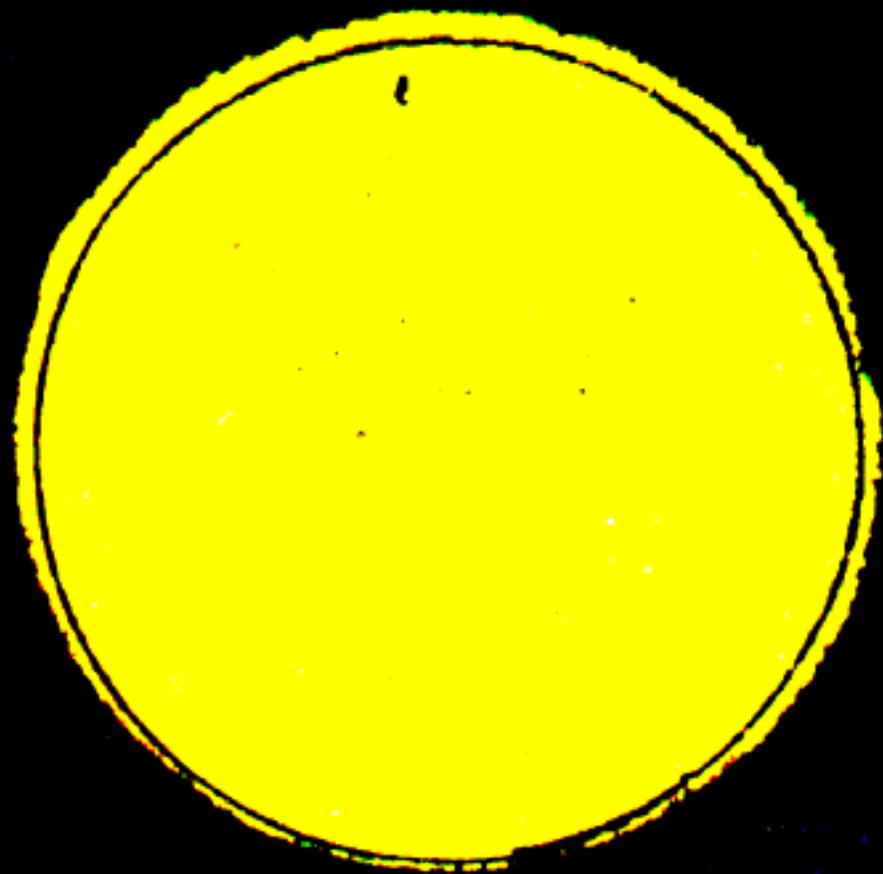
Warm red, intensified by yellow, produces orange. Through this admixture, the movement of the red becomes the nucleus of the impulse spreading out towards the spectator. The element of red, which plays a great part in orange, retains the accompanying note of its usual gravity. It is like a human being aware of his own power and emanating happiness and health. The appeal, exercised by this color is like a medium-sized church bell reminding one of a strong alto voice or the singing of alto violins.



Yellow is the typical earthly color and never contains a profound meaning...

The initial movement of yellow is the tendency to advance toward the spectator, which can be increased to a degree bordering on intrusion by increasing the intensity of yellow, and also the second movement of yellow, spreading beyond the boundaries, the dispersion of the power into its surroundings are similar to the capacities of any material power which blindly assails an object to burst aimlessly in every direction. On the other hand, yellow, in any geometric form, if gazed at steadily, disturbs its observer, hurts but also stimulates.

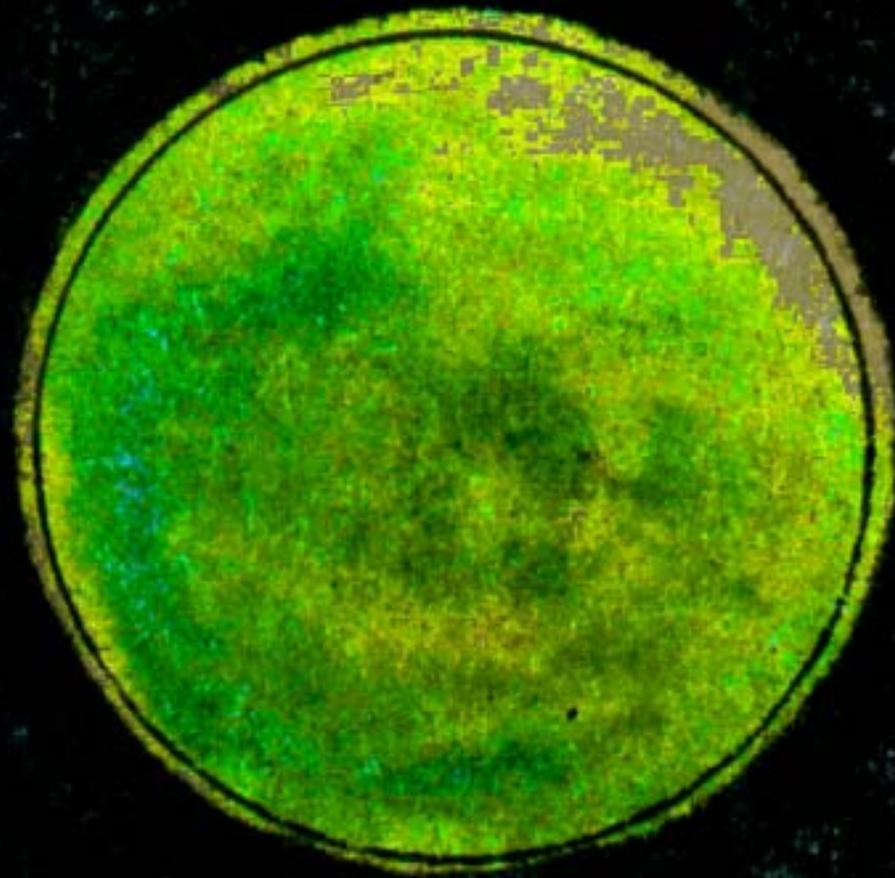
This quality of yellow, which has a great inclination toward the lighter colors, can be brought to a power and a height unbearable to the eye and to the mind.



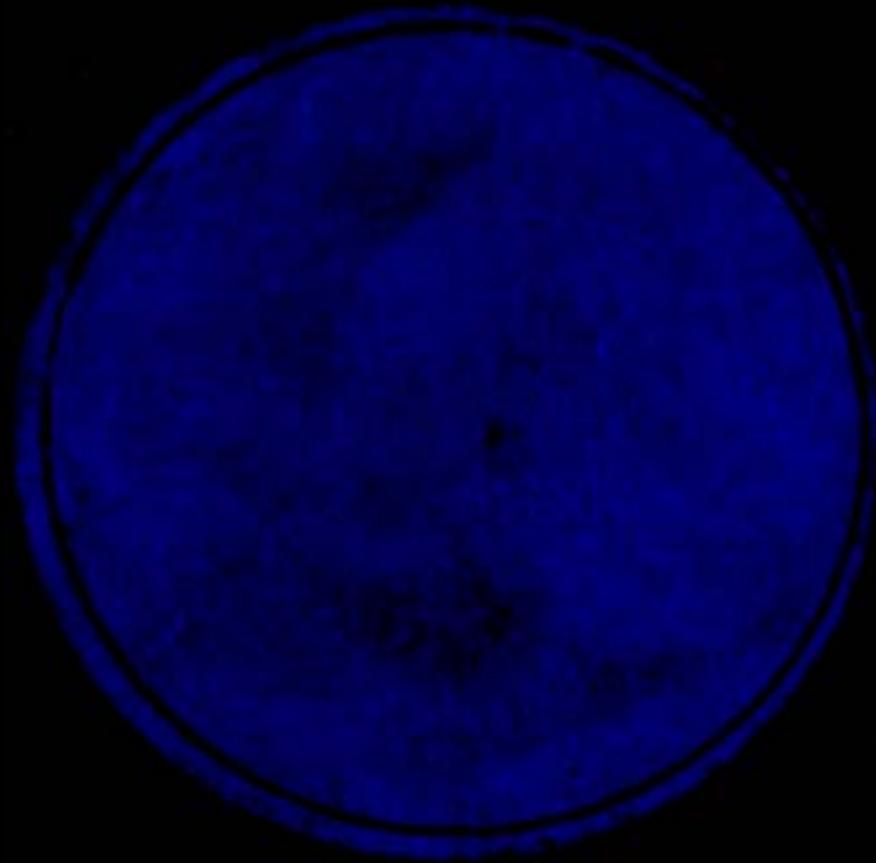
Yellow easily becomes acute and cannot attain deep significance. It is difficult for blue to become acute, as it is incapable of rising to great intensity.

An ideal balance in the mixture of these two diametrically opposed colors is green.

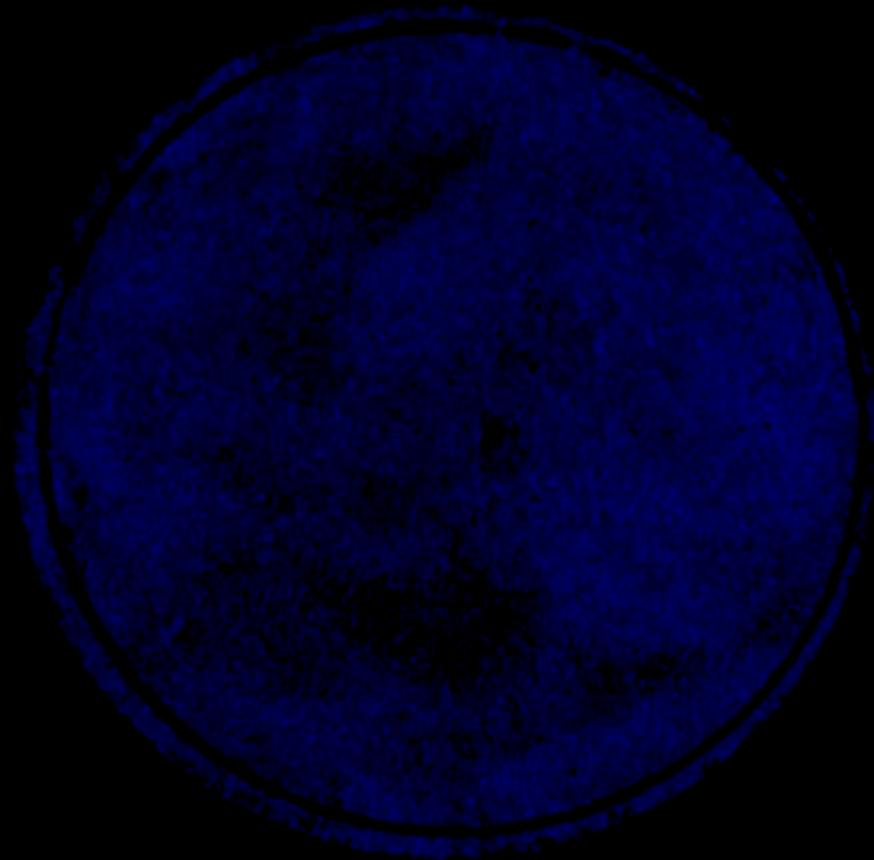
Absolute green, which is the most restful of colors, moves in no direction, has no corresponding appeal such as joy, sorrow or passion, and demands nothing. This persistent lack of movement has a quieting effect on tired souls—though it becomes tiresome after a time...



If we allow blue (in any desired geometric form) to work on the mind, the inclination of blue to deepen is so strong that its inner appeal is stronger when its shade is deeper. The deeper the blue the more it beckons us into the infinite, arousing a longing for purity and the supersensuous. It is the color of the heavens just as we imagine it, when we hear the word heaven.



Very dark blue develops an element of repose.



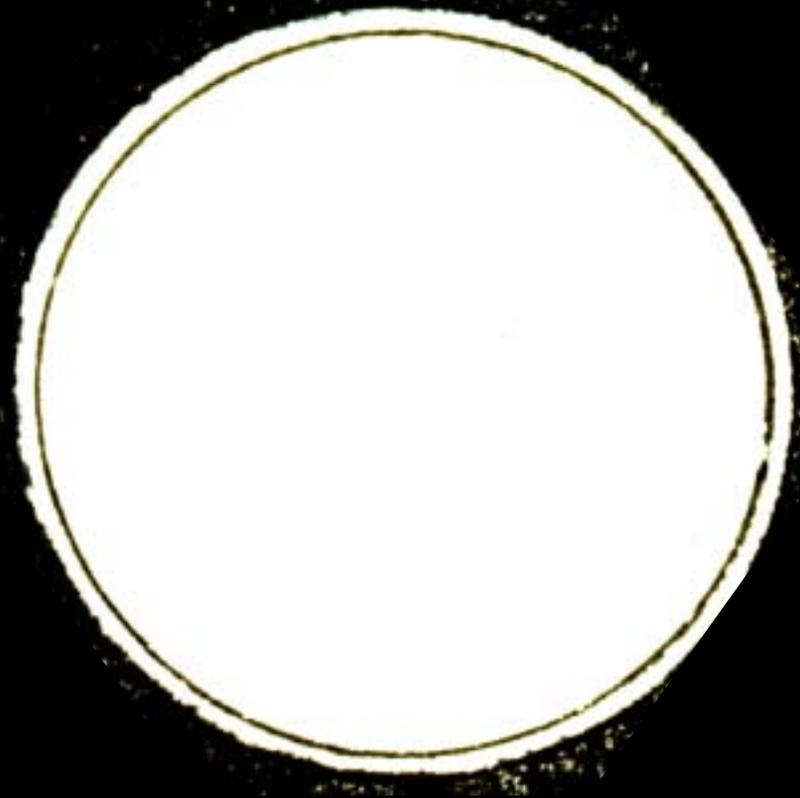
When blue sinks into black, it echoes a grief that is hardly human
Attaining an endless, profound meaning in the deep seriousness of all things where there is no end.

As orange is red brought closer to humanity by yellow, removing red through blue creates violet, which has the tendency to move away from humanity.

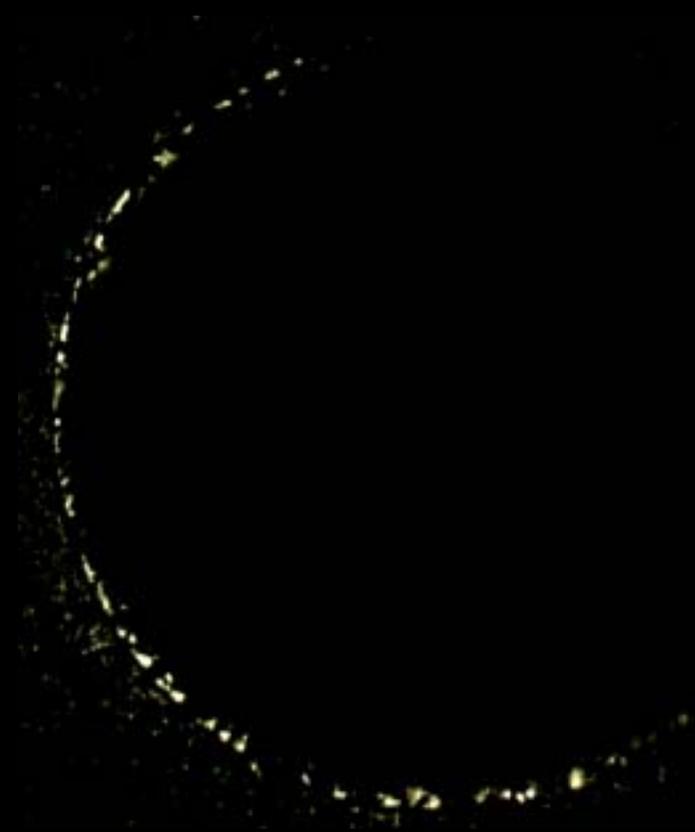
“Violet, a cooled-red both in the physical and spiritual sense, possesses an element of frailty, expiring sadness. This color is considered proper for dresses of older women, as the Chinese actually use as the color of mourning. It is similar to the sound of an English horn, the shepherds flute, or the deep, low tone of wood instruments (for example, a bassoon).”



White is a symbol of a world from which all color, as a material quality and substance, has disappeared. This world is so far above us that we cannot perceive any sound coming from it. There is a great silence which, graphically represented, appears to us as a formidable, indestructible wall, though infinitely cold, reaching up into eternity. For this reason, white affects us with the absoluteness of a great silence. It is not a dead silence but one full of possibilities. It is a 'blank,' infinitely young, a 'blank' which emphasizes the Beginning, as yet unborn.



Like a nothingness after sunset, black sounds like an eternal silence, without future or hope. Black is something extinguished like a burned pyre, something immobile, corpse-like, which has no connection with any occurrences. and accessible to all things. It is like the silence of the body after death, the end of life. Outwardly, it is the least harmonious color yet, for that reason, any other color, even the weakest, will appear stronger and more precise in front of it while in the case of white all other colors are minimized in their appeal and some are dissolved completely and retain but a mute, weakened shadow





As a great circle, or a serpent biting its own tail, (the symbol of eternity and endlessness) these six colors stand before us. To the right and left stand two great possibilities of silence, birth and death.



All I have said of these simple colors is very provisional and coarse. These feelings quoted as parallels to these colors (such as joy, sorrow) express the material conditions of the soul. Variations of color, like those of music, are of a much subtler nature, and awaken in the soul much finer vibrations than words could.

ON THE SPIRITUAL IN ART
BY VASSILY KANDINSKY



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