

BLACK AND WHITE DRAWING IN THE ELEVENTH CLASS

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The series of drawing exercises begun in the 9th grade can be continued in the 10th or 11th grade. In our case it followed in the 11th because in the 10th year painting was begun again, which proved especially fruitful at this age. To continue with all artistic subjects in one school year would not be possible for reasons of time. However, before we turn to painting, however, let us consider black/white drawing in its continuation in the 11th class.

The practical exercises were brought in relationship to the development of black/white drawing since the 15th century. In this way a feeling for continuity is awakened in the students. They are included in the progress of development and experience themselves as living at a point of time when something new must be created and seeds sown for the future. That gives impulses which can become part of the meaning and goals of their own lives. Ideals of a will character arise.

The work followed the drawing block done in the 9th class. In addition to Dürer, a new great master in black and white art came into view: Rembrandt. It is not only instructive, but downright exciting to put comparable works of both artists side by side and take in their effect. What a difference of concept, nature and presentation of the idea of the picture in black and white. In Dürer's work, the objects are firmly outlined and fully worked on in detail; in Rembrandt the forms emerge directly as out of a creative world of polar black and white forces. Delineation is less definite, loose, lively and open. The formative forces of the surroundings press through them, as it were. Often the effect is as of a fleeting sketch. These are not idealized forms, but aspects of daily life. But what gives the pictures their greatness is the whole background which surrounds them, the dynamic power of light and darkness which is active not only in the forms but also between them, above them, and indeed over the whole picture. That is the essential characteristic quality. The objects in the picture appear not only illuminated from outside, but reveal their nature by the amount of light and darkness allotted to them. For example, the light and shadow zones and around the two men crucified with Jesus in the picture "The Three Crosses" are produced not by an outer relationship of light and dark, but are the expression of soul and spiritual elements. Rembrandt experienced these forces in himself and created his pictorial compositions out of these experiences. Dürer still used the symbol on occasions, for example in the Melancholia, where he symbolizes twilight through a bat-like being. Dürer arrived at the creation of his pictures in a different way. He studied in the objects of the outer world the laws of light and shade and put what he had worked on into a composition. Right from their inception the compositions of both artists are different. Rembrandt's black/white art is not a repeat of Dürer's, but without these Rembrandt's would be unthinkable.

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All this leads to a study of the stroke used by the artist. Dürer was concerned with taking hold of sense-perceptible reality; he tried to create space not only through light and shade, but also through perspective and construction. He was modelling in his drawing, following the forms of the objects by choosing the angles of his strokes accordingly. His drawings differ only little from those of contemporary sculptors. The structure in his drawings is best studied in woodcuts like the series "The Private Revelation of John", through which Dürer became famous at an early age. To experience the whole power and liveliness of the forms cut in wood one must try to draw them oneself.

It is a good exercise, for a short time, to draw like Dürer or Rembrandt. Things one has made one's own by drawing them one knows in a different way than if one has taken them in as a superficial impression or a fleeting word in a lesson.

This outlines the first drawing exercise. It consists in copying the structured drawing of a Dürer woodcut in part enlarged in charcoal. Not every student succeeds at once. Some have to try again before they properly achieve the unique stroke technique. The strokes must be made with assurance, decision and characteristically. All chance or arbitrariness must be avoided, the subjective element held back. The students must give themselves up entirely to the movement of the form, even if it appears to them at first as unaccustomed or even strange. Generally when he succeeds in this he is surprised, even riveted by the effect which arises for him from the drawing. There is something fascinating in those forms which enters into his limbs. The students sense something of the power and dynamics of the line technique of such drawings. Every stroke has an individual note and yet forms part of the movements of the rest. It is a flowing of forces, comparable to the flowing movements of a water course. Drawing exercises of this kind do not have a tiring, but a refreshing effect. The teacher's own studies are once again an indispensable preparation for the success of the lessons.

Experiences of another kind await the student in drawing studies from Rembrandt. Rembrandt's engravings are a comprehensive and unique work. The structure of the drawing in such an engraving cannot be copied in the same way as a Dürer woodcut. Here one must hold more onto the principle. The gentle strokes creating surfaces in the engraving can be followed and copied quite clearly in the lighter parts, but not in the darker ones where they are lost in dense multiple layers. For this reason the light-coloured engravings or suitable details are better for the study of such structures than those in which darkness dominates. Of course the latter are stronger and more characteristic in expression. The sculptural element is less marked in comparison with Dürer. The surfaces made up of strokes move less with the form; they stand more apart from it and are more characteristic as surfaces. Space is given another quality, it is lifted into the imaginative. Depths are developed in the picture by using different strokes in shading which cross. As an example in addition to the already mentioned "Three Crosses" the Faust can be used. In copying this someone skilled in drawing will find shaping the figures less hard than forming the dark spaces between, where it depends on the many-layered modulation in the surfaces of the depths. In conjunction with the light parts these provide the stage for the soul-spiritual drama, which lies at the basis of the pictured event and draws the observer into its spell. In this Rembrandt is inimitable.

In the lesson, one can use different picture motifs and divide them according to level of difficulty. In this the wishes of the students can be borne in mind. Groupings according to motif arise with enlarged drawings of these done in advance. Such self-drawn enlargements cannot be simply replaced by enlarged projections from slides because they do not reproduce the differentiations in the darker parts. A pen and Indian ink are used as drawing medium in addition to hard pencil and modern drawing equipment. The pen reacts most sensitively to the intention of the drawer. Just as an engraving cannot really be compared with a woodcut, so also it depends no less in the present exercises on a definite and sure stroke technique. This alone will give the drawing expression and character. Concentration and artistic discipline are required and practised in all studies. It is always interesting to experience again how one group of students is inclined to Dürer and another to Rembrandt. They will accordingly use their time more for one study or the other, willingly giving up their free time to complete it.

Looking at the students' work together comparing the Dürer and Rembrandt studies, and what has been experienced in drawing will lead to the question as to how the work is to continue. The step in development from Dürer to Rembrandt is clearly apparent. It shows the trend of gradually coming away from the representative objective form in favour of making a more direct statement in Light and Dark. The final consequence of this development would be the complete absence of representative forms, and this has actually happened in art. This leads to the question of the effect on artistic technique. The representative element in the picture influences also the structure of the drawing to a greater or lesser extent. If such content is missing, the inducement to change the shading technique with which one has started is also missing. The different values of light and dark can also be brought out without difficulty by keeping strokes in one direction. The need to bring in strokes in other directions does not exist. Removing the representative element therefore has the effect of simplifying the structure of the drawing. A simplification greater than that of developing the whole Black and White composition from one direction of strokes is scarcely thinkable - unless one were to renounce strokes and stipple. There are three possible directions: horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and the latter feels the most natural. It is normally also the angle of writing. This gives a free view ahead, for a new beginning is won. It is a question of finding the way into a world, which is first without given image, without firm limits, without representative forms, yet not without content. The only equipment is the sureness which the hand has achieved and a feeling for the effects of light and dark.

Here must be mentioned that Rudolf Steiner, when developing the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart, made the suggestion that students in the upper school should work in diagonal shading in Black and White drawing. This recommendation was based on knowledge which was won in looking for a new artistic expression for creating the window motifs of the Goetheanum in light and dark. Assia Turgenieff developed these motifs in the referred to stroke technique as black and white shading and in the second Goetheanum correspondingly as shading on glass. She reports on this in her book "Rudolf Steiner's Designs for the Glass Windows at the Goetheanum". The technique may at first seem unusual, but it is not altogether new.

Stangely enough, we find it was used by a number of artists in Italy as early as the 15th century. Some major copper engravings by Mantegna and Pollaiuolo have been done with diagonal strokes throughout, though not with the same consistency. The evolution of printmaking, from woodcuts with their outline quality to the fully developed plasticity between light and dark seen in Dürer's copper engravings appears at an intermediate stage with these artists of the quattrocento, with particular emphasis given to dealing with area. It takes the place, as it were, of areas of colour, which cannot be used here. One gets the impression that those artists fought shy of taking that final step into the illusion of three-dimensionality, a step finally taken in the Renaissance period.

It is not possible, at this point, to go into detail as to the further evolution leading on the one hand to the different forms of realism and on the other to abstract art. There has been a feeling, shared by many, that a new level has to be found in art, between the two extremes. Rudolf Steiner's suggestion to bring the spiritual element back into the art of light and shade, by bringing new life into the area aspect was made in response to this need. What he was aiming at was: "to reflect, in the sphere of art, the effects produced by the light of the spirit." An "intense" effect was to be achieved, i.e. the effect of "light flowing from within", as distinct from an extensive effect, illumination from without. Such life can be given by a method of drawing that does not emphasize form but rather area. Lines going with the form, the shape, will enhance it, making it heavy (example 1), whilst lines going against the form or shape will make it lighter so that it is floating. Shapes lose their isolation, tied in with the environment surrounding them (example 2). (See examples at end.)

The following reflection may be helpful. The objects around us are made visible entirely due to light and shade. They therefore seem to be as one with them. But they are not. On the contrary, light and shade are quite separate entities. A solid has a volume, is tangible (occupies a limited space); a shadow is not, nor is it light. A shadow is not actually connected with the solid but appears on it, beside it, above and below it. It moves away from it, travels, jumps over obstacles, climbs up rock faces and houses, and floats in the air in the form of shadowy air. It may assume grotesque and indeed ghostly forms that make it difficult to recognize the connection with the object that throws the shadow. It is this that makes shadow play so magical. The living, mobile, floating quality is part of the nature of light and shade, linking us with the elemental sphere. "We should look for whatever is there around things, between things, whatever takes us into the etheric realm", Rudolf Steiner once commented when correcting an etching.

Laws exist also in the sphere of light and shade. There is the well-known phenomenon of a white circle on a black background appearing to be larger than a black one of equal size on a white background. What is here called an optical illusion, in reality reveals the nature of the thing. The light element radiates, expands, and so a light-coloured form appears larger. The dark element contracts, condenses, so that the form appears smaller. Added to this is the fact that the light element strives upwards, wanting to volatilize; the dark element is drawn downward, into gravity. These tendencies can be experienced in an experiment: they indicate to the artist the qualitative aspect of the media he is using in his work.

The polarity between the forces of light and darkness is also at work in man,

and I can experience this if I try to sense them within me. Our experience of them is differentiated in accord with the orientation our organization has in space. Thus our thinking is felt to be related to light, in the head, the unconscious pole of our limb system is to darkness. (Dürer's Jerome.) Between above and below - light and dark - lies the movement of our arms. There we must distinguish between the right and left, the right side where the emphasis is more on the will, and the left which is more the side of feeling. "The left comes from the heart", they say. In weighing one against the other, more darkness is given to the right side, with its tendency towards gravity, more light to the left, the "lighter" side. Anything before our eyes is light, anything behind us remains dark.

In class we frequently go through this process of calling sensations into awareness. The class find out for themselves how light and dark relate in these different respects. When a boy then tried to demonstrate what they had discussed to the class by corresponding arm movements, the left arm followed the light element moving forward and up, the right arm the dark element, pointing downward and behind. (See sketch.)

This gesture has been known to the students for a long time as the expression of the "I" (German word "Ich") with which a human being describes his own being (Swabian expresses it only as "I" (ee).) The experience of light and dark in the human being is at the same time also an ego experience, in that he must seek the living balance in himself between light and darkness.



A similar gesture is shown by the central figure of the large "Group" sculpture in Dornach which was intended for the First Goetheanum. The arm position of this figure, which steps ahead between the powers of temptation that are polar opposites maintaining the middle position, also points to above right and below left, as seen by the observer. It is the angle that often comes about quite naturally when working in black and white. So the art of black and white inspired by Rudolf Steiner appears to have its foundation in human nature itself.

The students now face the assignment to find their way into this new method of drawing. First the different types of strokes and what they are able to express must be explored: thick, delicate, longer, etc. It will be found that it is harder at first to produce an unlimited, even surface than one containing forms which mostly arise unintentionally. Every group of strokes drawn somehow on the paper will at first show fixed limits and therefore also forms. How can this be avoided? By loosely distributing single lines and then placing new strokes in the spaces between with deliberation, as many as one thinks necessary. It is an ongoing process of equalization. In this way, a more or less close tissue of interrelated diagonal strokes is produced, forming a surface. The assignment to create such a surface with continuous transition from the greatest lightness to the greatest darkness, seems simple, but is not if a living surface is to come into being. Every stroke must be made with deliberation, decision and assurance. The more character the strokes have, the more expressive will the surface be. Increased will forces and persistence are necessary. Above all the original diagonal direction must be kept to, every deviation has a disruptive effect. The shading must not be produced with mechanical strokes. Any kind of routine must be avoided.

This time the drawing is done with deep black chalk which can be used in different ways to give broader strokes. It is important that the thin strokes also come out really black, not grey, on the white paper. Here it is just the dead black on the white background which is effective and exciting. We are, as it were, working into the "spiritual" with the "dead". The deep black is for ever evoking bright after-images in the white flashing up like lightning. With regard to the original print of Dürer's Apocalypse, Wölfflin spoke of the "writing in letters of flame" in the powerful lines drawn by Dürer's stylus. Such effects can also be experienced here.

As the next exercise a drawing can be made which corresponds to the experiment described above. Two equally large circles are to appear, the one light on dark and the other dark on light. The clean definition of forms is now added to the technique of shading. Of course, working out of such circular shapes is not as such an artistic task, but it is necessary for observing the phenomena described. There is much that can be developed from these.

The next assignment consists now of transforming the composition of circles, so that the tendencies we have observed come to expression. The circles that are at rest must be brought into movement, their forms changed accordingly. The light circle, felt to be striving upwards and raying out wants to metamorphose into a shape like a chalice or a blossom, the dark one to condense, striving downwards in drop-like form. The whole thing should not be taken as a stable state, but as a living active force and form. What matters above all is to create the transitions. The task is elementary, but not easy. The students are called upon to be inwardly active, to be mobile in imagination. An outward view must be transformed into an inward view. Exercises of this kind do not lead to a fantasy world, but educate a clear imaginative vision.

The results are manifold and are the expression of the individuality of the students and their possibilities at the moment. For example there are pieces of work which show a certain stiffness despite their sure strokes, while others show a lively comprehension, however they lack the necessary care. Both must come together. Further practice and specific help will lead further. One more point is still of interest: despite the wide variety of results a basic motif emerges, a kind of Palmette motif which in earlier civilizations, especially in Greece, found many applications. The two shapes forming the motif: fan and bud forms (light and dark form) were originally experienced as Sun and Earth motifs.

From this first attempt at creating something, other assignments may arise. One can let the students take the light and dark side each on its own and use it freely. In this way it cannot be avoided that the continuing process of concentrating the picture leads to motifs that are reminiscent of specific sense impressions. That is quite natural and also justified. In this way there arise on the lighter side morning moods, blossom moods or also winter landscapes; on the other, the dark side, can give rain or thunder moods, moonscapes, night landscapes can arise, etc. One should not, if possible, give themes such as this as direct assignments, but start from purely working in light and dark. There is a difference whether such motifs appear only in the process in working through the composition, or arise from a representative concept which one depicts. The imagined picture will always show the sign of a certain limitation, while what arises out of freely feeling one's way will be more generous and better composed out of black and white.

The development of cubism shows a certain parallel to this. On its way to the abstraction of the representative form it went through pure abstraction and arrived at a newly created sculptural product, which however was not a representation, but a newly created artistic product. In contrast to cubism all things abstract and geometrical were avoided in our attempts in favour of exploring the creative powers which lie at the basis of sense reality.

Such a drawing block, which usually takes six weeks, demands much of the students as regards their capacity for entering into things sensitively with inner mobility and persistence. Practising structures with the aid of masterpieces gives them pleasure. Many would like to continue still longer. The transition to their own creative work on the basis of diagonal shading does not come easily to many of them. This new kind of drawing requires a change which demands a certain time to become familiar with it. A new understanding and a new commitment of will are necessary. The first successful work will have an effect that convinces the students and spurs on to personal creativity. A fruitful process of mutual stimulation and competition takes place. Where it has come in single instances to a crisis, this marked a fruitful transition to new creativity.

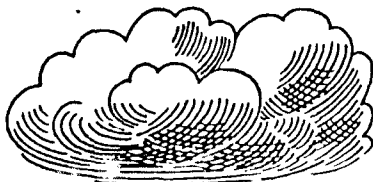
One could find confirmed again and again that development is aided not by things that come easily, but by things that require effort. With different stages of metamorphosis a path has been travelled in such drawing blocks on which the students have acquired capacities that will be theirs for ever.

FROM: Der Künstlerische Unterricht in der Waldorfschule.

This concludes this extract from the book by Jünemann and Weitmann. A large part of the book deals with painting. If there is enough demand for it, it might be possible to arrange for a full translation to be made; the publishers have offered the color plates for an English edition. This translation was begun very laboriously by myself two summers ago because I felt the book was so important, and while struggling I happened to meet Anna Meuss at an anthroposophical conference in England. She took it and worked over my translation, and said that that was much more work than translating it herself from scratch. Anna is a professional translator who comes from what is now East Germany, but she has lived in England for many years. She translates professionally for the homeopathic doctors in England and attends their conferences; she also makes the English translations in the Weleda Calendar.

E. Nobbs

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