Mascha Wieland

# Entangled with Colour

## New Materialist Explorations in English Colour Writing

TÜBINGEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Entangled with Colour:
# New Materialist Explorations in English Colour Writing

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"All of human life takes place at the bottom of an ocean of ever-changing light."

(James Turrell, *A Life in Light* 24)

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| "IPwT" | "In Parliament with Things" |
| *MtUH* | *Meeting the Universe Halfway* |
| "PP" | "Posthumanist Performativity" |
| "TFoT" | "The Force of Things" |
| *TLM* | *The Living Mountain* |
| *TLoC* | *The Limits of Critique* |
| *UoL* | *Uses of Literature* |
| *VM* | *Vibrant Matter* |

# 1 INTRODUCTION: SPINNING THE COLOUR WHEEL

> The intense frost, the cloudless sky, the white world, the setting sun and the rising moon, as we gazed on them from the slope of Morrone, melted into a prismatic radiation of blue, helio, mauve, and rose. The full moon floated up into green light; and as the rose and violet hues spread over snow and sky, the colour seemed to live its own life, to have body and resilience, as though we were not looking at it, but were inside its substance. (Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* 29-30)

Colour, usually perceived as an immaterial phenomenon, develops a substantial and enveloping character in Nan Shepherd's poetic description of a moonrise in the Scottish Cairngorm Mountains. It spreads over the landscape and colours everything in "prismatic radiation". Yet, this is more than a colouring of the atmosphere; the colour has "body and resilience", it becomes substantial. This *colour-matter*, as I will call it, "seemed to live its own life". It exhibits a certain agency and acts upon the narrator by enveloping her and drawing her "inside its substance". Thereby, her perception changes since she no longer looks *at* colour, as a subject looking at an object, but colour surrounds her and takes her in.

This enveloping in a floating colour realm is not only happening *in* the text, only experienceable for the narrator, but it also becomes strangely visible and tangible for the reader in the reading process. The "rose and violet" hues emerge from the page and cloak the reader inside a colourful space. When "blue, helio, mauve, and rose" spread over the Cairngorm plateau in the text and tint it in a "prismatic radiation", colour does not remain there, imprisoned on the page, but it reaches out and can also affect the reader with its prismatic agency. Colour as it were materialises through the text and the reader possibly finds themselves also "inside its substance".

This effect is intensified by the extremes of landscape that set the scene for this colour spectacle. The reader follows the gaze of the narrator through a world of "intense frost, the cloudless sky, the white world" in which coldness and monochromy seem to be the defining features. "[T]he setting sun and

the rising moon" then promise the emergence of softer impressions, blurring the dazzling "cloudless sky" and "white world". And indeed, colour enters the stage and transforms this world. It does so slowly, it "melt[s]" the scenery into colour, "into a prismatic radiation of blue, helio, mauve, and rose". This colour description with its subtle differentiations of colour shades evokes a completely different landscape now. While we are suspended in this bluish, violet and pinkish colour realm, a new colour is introduced in the text: green suddenly appears. It seems to be an intruder in this well-composed scenery. Is it not too shrill for dusk, too intense, too lively? And where exactly is this "green light" into which "the full moon floated"? It is not attributed to a specific part of the surrounding scenery, neither to the ground nor to the sky. Yet, it must be somewhere above if the moon is about to float into it. Although this "green light" cannot be clearly located, it appears viscous because the moon "float[s]" into it. This floating movement points to a strange materiality of light colour and slowly builds up towards the narrator's observation that the colours seem to have "body and resilience". Taking a closer look at the verbs used to describe what happens to the landscape and what the colours do, we can observe that they all indicate a certain materiality of colour. Firstly, the scenery around the narrator ("frost", "sky", "world", "sun" and "moon") "melted" into different shades of colour. Secondly, the moon "floated" into the green, until, thirdly, the violet hues "spread" over the world. Melting, floating and spreading – these movements allude to a viscosity and materiality of colour. Colours move slowly, thickly and soak the world in colour. Green light above and "rose and violet hues spread over snow and sky" – this is the *colourscape* into which the narrator has led the reader.

However, this colourscape is not the same for every reader due to the specific use of colour terms. We find "white", "blue" and "green" as designating terms of a certain group of colours – they are "basic color terms" (Berlin & Kay 2) that are part of many languages worldwide.[1] These terms refer to

1 In 1969, Berlin and Kay identified basic colour terms that are part of languages all over the world. Their studies indicate "that the referents for the basic color terms of all languages appear to be drawn from a set of eleven universal perceptual categories, and these categories become encoded in the history of a given language in a partially fixed order" (Berlin & Kay 4-5). Their findings show that

> although different languages encode in their vocabularies different *numbers* of basic color categories, a total universal inventory of exactly eleven

"universal perceptual categories" (5) and not to a specific shade. In doing so, these terms leave open enough room for the reader to interpret their own, for example, green hue in the unfolding colourscape. Green can range from the green of leaves to metallic green, bending towards yellow or blue. Other colour terms used in the quotation, such as "violet", "helio, mauve, and rose", leave less room for interpretation. These are clearly designated shades of colour; the terms are all derived from the colour of specific flowers. Yet, which reader (colour experts, painters or botanists may be an exception here) knows the exact shade of "helio", for example?[2] Although these colour terms refer to a very specific shade, it is not guaranteed that these narrowly defined shades are the ones the reader visualises while reading. This lack of exactness is, however, not a disadvantage. On the contrary, the uncertainty about what a specific colour referred to by a specific colour term should look like creates possibilities for individual colour experiences. No one can know whether the red I see is also the red you see. Why should this be different when reading texts? In Shepherd's example above, the experience of colour does not depend on an exact representation of a certain hue. It is rather the creation of a colourscape and the experience of being affected by colours emerging from the very words on the page that is significant. The text passage highlights the agency, the doing of colour instead of merely serving as a representation of a certain visual colour experience. Colour is agential here.

Such an experience of colour can be found not only in *The Living Mountain* but is also constitutive for other texts which I will call *colour writings* accord-

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> basic color categories exists from which the eleven or fewer basic color terms of any given language are always drawn. The eleven basic color categories are *white, black, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange,* and *grey*. (2, original emphasis)

Moreover, "[i]f a language encodes fewer than eleven basic color categories, then there are strict limitations on which categories it may encode" (2). The order is the following: if a language has only two colour terms, they are always white and black. If a language has a third colour term, it is red. As a fourth follow either green or yellow; if it contains five, then it is yellow and green. Languages with six colour terms add blue; with seven they add brown; and if a language contains eight or more colour terms it is (either) purple, pink, orange or/and grey (2-3).

2 *Helio* is a pink-purple hue that receives its name from the heliotrope flower.

ing to their specific take on colour. Very often, colour is employed for symbolic or descriptive purposes in literary texts and thus fulfils representational functions. Colour writings, however, foreground colour itself and highlight its dynamic and agential side. Moreover, colour is no longer thought of as an immaterial, non-tangible phenomenon that can only be accessed by vision. It is rather presented as entangled with matter, thereby adding a substantial and tangible character to it. Further, such colour-matter is no longer something we can look *at*, it rather acts upon the narrator as well as the reader and envelops them in its colourscape. Thus, in colour writings, we do not experience colour as an immaterial phenomenon but encounter a colour-matter which exhibits a certain agency that affects the narrator and possibly also the reader in various ways.

In this study, I set out to explore the doings of colour in selected English colour writings.[3] My search for an agential colour-matter in English literature has produced a corpus of texts that qualify as colour writings throughout different literary periods: I will explore fin-de-siècle poetry by John Addington Symonds ("In the Key of Blue", 1893) and William Sharp ("The White Peacock", 1891), short stories and a novel by Virginia Woolf ("Blue & Green", 1921; "Kew Gardens", 1921; *The Waves*, 1931), and contemporary lyric essays by Derek Jarman (*Chroma*, 1994), Han Kang (*The White Book*, 2017) and Maggie Nelson (*Bluets*, 2009). This selection spans three continents as Symonds, Woolf and Jarman are from England, Sharp is Scottish, Nelson is an US-American author and Han[4] is from South Korea. While all texts are originally published in English, Han's *The White Book* is an exception here. Originally published in Korean, her text was translated into English by Deborah Smith. I chose to include this translation into my corpus of English colour writings because, despite its origin in another language, the English translation allows an original experience of the doings of white that are worth analysing in the context of my study. I thus treat Han's English text as an author-translator hybrid and include it into my analysis of English colour writings.

My endeavour to trace the doings of colour in English colour writings

3 The adjective *English* refers to the language in which these colour writings are published and not to a nationality.

4 Han Kang is a Korean name. The surname is Han.

follows three key research questions. First, how is it possible to come close to colour by means of words? Second, how do texts create vivid colourscapes unfolding from the page and involving the reader in such a way that they can experience colour as a dynamic and as it were tangible presence? Third, what kind of relationalities are created between colour, matter, text and reader?

My assumption is that we will find answers to these questions if we take a closer look at the relation between colour and matter as we encounter it in these texts. How do these texts produce colour-matter, entangling colour and matter with each other? And how does this colour-matter relate to words? Usually, when reading colour writings, we visually perceive black ink on white paper; yet, colours make themselves felt as a certain substantial and as it were tangible presence in these texts. While the relation between colour and matter has been analysed by different disciplines, ranging from physics to philosophy and the fine arts, the topic has – to my knowledge – so far not been approached by English literary studies. In contrast to the topics of colour semantics and figurative uses of colour terms, the issue of a substance, or, materiality of colour and how we as readers can experience the agency of such a colour-matter in literary texts has not yet been discussed.

I will approach this topic in several steps. As the title of my introduction suggests, I want to *spin the colour wheel* and let different facets of colour arise.[5] I will, metaphorically speaking, spin the colour wheel at different speeds: slow enough to perceive different colours individually, more rapidly to let a whirlwind of colours arise and even fast enough to experience white on its own. I want to use this image of the colour wheel to express the multifaceted world of colour that will be investigated and presented in this study.

Following this introduction, chapter 2 will venture into "Chromatic Explorations". Colour is a vast and fascinating topic offering versatile options

5 A colour wheel, also called Newton's colour disk, is a cardboard disk on which the seven colours of the visible spectrum are painted. If the disk is spun fast enough, the individual colours begin to blend and disappear; what remains is a dull white. This is because the colours on the spinning wheel change faster than human eyes can perceive the individual colours and transmit the incoming signals to the brain. Hence, the reflections of all the colours blend and white appears because white consists of all the colours of the spectrum. For a demonstration of this phenomenon, see Verheyden (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDsmM6hND7E).

to engage with and I will begin my study with a question to which no single answer can be found: *What is colour?* Every discipline responds to this question differently and I will introduce some answers in order to familiarise my reader with a variety of possible facets of colour. Section 2.1 "Prelude: What Is Colour?" will thus serve as a prelude to my later engagement with colour from a literary studies perspective. In this section, we will have a look at how physics and physiology define colour, how philosophy engages with the topic, how colour theories try to systematise colour and how colour is a key concern in the fine arts. This overview will of course be far from exhaustive. Its purpose is to get a feel for possible angles from which colour can be examined. Since I am particularly interested in the relation between colour and matter, this connection will receive special attention.

In section 2.2, I will turn to "Facets of Colour and Its Semantics" and introduce different existent approaches to colour from a literary studies perspective. Section 2.2.1 presents "The Changing Palette of Colour Words". This section will introduce the field of colour semantics and trace some historical developments of colour words as they appear throughout English literature. Section 2.2.2 turns towards another prominent field of colour research in literary studies, namely the "Figurative Use of Colour Words". Colours are traditionally imbued with cultural meaning and by including colour words in their texts, many authors make use of these meanings by employing colour in symbolic and metaphorical terms. We will see how colour symbols, metaphors and metonyms can convey complex meanings and thereby fulfil important functions for a hermeneutic reading that focuses on the meaning of colour in the text.

With the period of the fin de siècle, a new take on colour in literary works emerges that finds a continuation as well as further development in modernist texts and finally resurfaces again in the 1990s and stays with us until today. It is the *performative* side of colour in literary texts, the *doings* of colour. I follow Karen Barad's understanding of performativity here as she suggests that "[t]he move towards performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions" ("Posthumanist Performativity" 121-22).[6] In my project, the performative side of

6 I will discuss Barad's concept of a *posthumanist performativity* in more detail in section 4.1.

colour entails that colour writings challenge colour's representational function (e.g. referring to a specific hue or serving symbolic purposes). Neither does colour only represent something, nor is it a mere descriptive element. It is much more than that: colour exhibits a certain agency and affects the narrator as well as the reader in various ways. As already pointed out above, this side of colour in literary texts has not yet received attention in the field of English literary studies. The task of this research project, then, is to explore the various ways in which colour makes itself felt and acts upon the narrator and the reader.

With this task in mind, we move "Towards a Material-Discursive Dimension of Colour" in chapter 3. I will trace the beginnings of this specific development of literary engagements with colour in section 3.1 "Writing Colour: The Emergence of Literary Colourscapes in the Fin de Siècle and Virginia Woolf's Modernist Texts" and will examine some examples in more detail by means of close readings. What is special about these engagements with colour? Colour itself is foregrounded in these texts and they pave the way to a performative understanding of colour in literary works. Colours are an intense and dynamic presence here and the texts evoke certain colourscapes that envelop the reader in the reading process by addressing their senses and building rich textures of colour. What we find here are early examples of *colour writings* and thus they deserve a close analysis.

In the first part, I will argue for "A Turn to Colour in the Fin de Siècle". Colour as a topic in its own right can be traced back to the end of the 19th century when fin-de-siècle authors became engrossed in the topic. By means of close readings of John Addington Symonds' essay "In the Key of Blue" and William Sharp's poem "The White Peacock", I will illustrate how fin-de-siècle authors experimented with experiential qualities of colour. This focus on experience will further be contextualised with the help of Walter Pater's *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873) whose aesthetic ideas highly influenced the authors of the fin de siècle.

In the second part, "Lost in Colourscapes: Virginia Woolf's Modernist Texts", I will analyse and interpret three texts by Virginia Woolf which each presents a mode of engaging with a doing of colour and thereby stresses a performative exploration of colour. I will contextualise Woolf's texts with contemporary movements in the fine arts and philosophy, that is, impressionism and phenomenology, respectively. Both contextual influences will

become evident in Woolf's literary sketch "Blue & Green", in her short story "Kew Gardens" and in the interludes of *The Waves*. With Woolf we will move closer to experiencing colour as exhibiting a dynamic and affective agency drawing the reader into its colourscape and we will also encounter colour's materiality and solidity.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, we can observe another turn to colour: on the one hand, in different research disciplines and, on the other hand, in English literature itself. This turn to colour will be the topic of section 3.2 "Encountering the Material-Discursive Dimension of Colour". From the 1990s until today, research on colour in cultural and literary studies abounds.[7] While this research mainly focuses on studies regarding the topic of colour in earlier (literary) periods, it misses an interesting development in contemporary lyric essays in which colour takes centre stage. This development, also beginning in the 1990s, has not received attention so far. Thus, I will place these lyric essays at the centre of further explorations in my study. I will dedicate three chapters to three contemporary lyric essays, which are Derek Jarman's *Chroma*, Han Kang's *The White Book* (translated by Deborah Smith) and Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*. While *Chroma* engages with many different colours, *The White Book* and *Bluets* focus only on one colour, that is, on white and blue, respectively. These lyric essays qualify as colour writings in so far as colour is not only an intense and dynamic presence but exhibits a certain agency that affects the narrator and possibly also the reader in various ways. Colour becomes as it were tangible and we can experience a certain materiality of colour as colour and matter form unique entanglements in the text. These lyric essays bring the reader close to a materiality of colour and while reading there is rarely a moment in which the reader would not be involved in colour. Text and reader co-produce colour in the process of reading and with these colour writings we arrive at a dimension of *material-discursive* colour. I borrow the adjective *material-discursive* from Karen Barad who introduces this term in order to express the inextricable entanglement of matter and meaning (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*[8] 146-53).[9] To understand what

7 Please see section 3.2 for a list of examples.

8 *Meeting the Universe Halfway* will be abbreviated as *MtUH* in the following.

9 Barad's term *material-discursive* is reminiscent of Donna Haraway's term *material-semiotic* (see Haraway "Situated Knowledges" 595). This is not the only instance in

this material-discursive dimension of colour further implies, we have to move on to the next chapter.

Several questions arise when facing these three contemporary colour writings: how can we pay better attention to how text and reader intra-actively produce material-discursive colour? How can we describe the entanglements between colour, matter, text and reader in a way that does justice to the complex relationalities that are at play? How can we better notice how colour draws us into its colourscapes in these texts? To arrive at answers to these questions, I want to suggest a specific methodology. As pointed out several times now, colour writings foreground colour itself as well as its agential potential. In order to describe and analyse what colour is doing in colour writings, we need what Jane Bennett calls "a better discernment of […] the active powers issuing from nonsubjects" (*Vibrant Matter*[10] ix). When we read colour writings, we actually encounter the nonhuman, in this case colour. To be able to talk about the doings of colour and the entanglement of colour and matter, redefinitions of received notions of matter and agency are required. In this regard, the New Materialisms offer interesting and helpful conceptual tools. Especially Karen Barad's theory of an "agential realism" (*MtUH* 26) with its focus on relationalities between matter and meaning as well as Jane Bennett's "vital materialism" (*VM* xvi) with its highlighting of a "vibrant matter" (viii) are of interest to me. In chapter 4 "Rethinking the Reading of Colour", I will thus propose a methodology that combines new materialist concepts with an *attentive reading*.

Section 4.1 "Thinking with the New Materialisms" will initially provide an overview of main premises of the New Materialisms. We will then zoom in on two key concepts of the New Materialisms, namely Karen Barad's *agential realism* and Jane Bennett's *vital materialism*, which yield inspiring ideas and tools for attentive readings of the three colour writings by Jarman, Han and Nelson. At this point in the introduction, I would like to briefly introduce some key ideas by Barad and Bennett. This will serve to understand the implications of a material-discursive dimension of colour and to better comprehend the previews of the three attentive readings in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

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which Barad seems to lean on Haraway's thinking without making it explicit. Yet, to explore these similarities in more detail would go too far here.

10 *Vibrant Matter* will be abbreviated as *VM* in the following.

A key point of Barad's *agential realism* is to think matter and meaning as always already entangled: "Matter and meaning are not separate elements. They are inextricably fused together, and no event, no matter how energetic, can tear them asunder" (*MtUH* 3). To understand Barad's suggestion of the entangled relation between matter and meaning, one has to take a look at both her definition of matter as well as of meaning. Matter is, in Barad's terms, not "a property of things" but it "must be understood in more dynamic and productive terms – in terms of intra-activity" (150). What does she mean by "intra-activity"? Barad explains:

> The neologism "intra-action" *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies.* That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the "distinct" agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements*. (33, original emphasis)

From this perspective, "*[m]atter is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency*" (210, original emphasis) and thus, matter is "neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes" (137). On the contrary, "[m]atter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things" (137). With this, Barad also redefines the notion of agency for the posthuman realm: agency is not an attribute that human beings possess and nonhumans lack; nor is agency linked to intentionality or subjectivity (177). Barad frees the definition of agency from anthropocentric privilege and redefines it as "*'doing' or 'being' in its intra-activity*" (178, original emphasis). As "*a matter of intra-acting*" (178, original emphasis), agency permeates everything and is an inherent principle of the world in its becoming.

How does Barad define meaning then? Meaning is not a "property of individual words or groups of words" (141). Further, "[m]eaning is neither

intralinguistically conferred nor simply extralinguistically referenced" (148). With this, she rejects both structuralist notions of meaning-making in which language is conceived as a self-contained system of signs as well as representationalist concepts of meaning-making which assume that there exists a world *out there* that is only meaningful as it is represented by language and knowledge. Following Foucault, Barad argues that the production of meaning is created through discursive practices; they "define what counts as meaningful statements" (146).[11] What are discursive practices in Barad's sense? She elaborates on this as follows:

> Discourse does not refer to linguistic or signifying systems, grammars, speech acts, or conversations. To think of discourse as mere spoken words forming descriptive statements is to enact the mistake of representationalist thinking. Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. (146)

Barad further highlights that discursive practices are *material* practices and she claims that "the notion of discursive practices must be appropriately reconceptualized to take account of their intrinsically material nature" (148).[12] Hence, from an agential realist point of view, "[m]eaning is made possible through specific material practices. Semantic contentfulness is achieved not through the thoughts or performances of individual agents but through particular discursive practices" (148). Thinking discursive practices as "the mate-

11 For more information on how Barad builds on Foucault regarding her definition of discursive practices, see *MtUH*, pp. 146-48.

12 In "Posthumanist Performativity", Barad acknowledges that "Foucault's analytic of power links discursive practices to the materiality of the body" (127). Yet, she criticises Foucault for denying a body's materiality its own active role:

> For all Foucault's emphasis on the political anatomy of disciplinary power, he too fails to offer an account of the body's historicity in which its very materiality plays an *active* role in the workings of power. This implicit reinscription of matter's passivity is a mark of extant elements of representationalism that haunt his largely post-representationalist account. (128, original emphasis).

rial conditions for making meaning" enables a posthumanist understanding of meaning in which "meaning is not a human-based notion; rather, meaning is an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility" (335).

What does this definition of meaning hold for the study of literature? Literature is traditionally the place where words and sentences create meaning. Language is the decisive component of meaning-making and the reader's contribution in the process of meaning-making is to make sense of the words that are written on the page. Yet, Barad's move to entangle meaning with matter introduces new possibilities to explore this relation also in literary texts and to make matter matter for literary studies as well. I want to define meaning-making in the reading process along these lines, namely as a doing in which matter and discourse become inextricably entangled. I will understand the reading of colour writings as a "material-discursive practice[…]" (*MtUH* 141) which produces unique experiences of colour through the intra-action of text and reader. Colour produced in the process of this intra-action is always *material-discursive colour*, as I will call it. The term *material-discursive colour* thus points to the intra-active entanglements that are created when text and reader meet. These entanglements are manifold and always in the process of becoming. During the reading process as well as in different reading sessions these entanglements undergo constant change. In the analyses of my three contemporary colour writings to follow, we will see how colour and matter become entangled in various ways and how these entanglements become entangled with the reader and the world *out there*. Barad's emphasis on the "*mutual constitution of entangled agencies*" (33, original emphasis) clearly shows that her new materialist concept of an agential realism puts relations first. It is a deeply relational theory and so is my understanding of the reading process. Therefore, Barad's theoretical considerations offer inspiring ideas and tools for thinking the relationalities between colour, matter, text and reader from a new perspective, namely as an intra-active becoming.

Above, I further claimed that colour is agential in colour writings.[13] To

13 In this study, I use the adjective *agential* as the adjectival form of *agency* (i.e. the capacity to act) to express that colour exhibits a certain agency. This applies whenever I will use *agential* or *agency* to describe the doings of colour in colour writings. This terminological clarification is in so far important as I want to distinguish this specific use of *agential* and *agency* from Barad's use of these terms. I do not use *agential* and *agency* in a Baradian sense in these cases because her use of the terms has

explore this agency in more detail, Jane Bennett's *vital materialism* offers an interesting perspective: her theory is concerned with "the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman […] things" (*VM* ix). She develops the concept of a "vibrant matter" (viii) that exhibits a certain "thing-power" (2) and becomes efficacious in "human-nonhuman assemblages" (xvii). Thing-power is "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6). When nonhumans exhibit thing-power, they "provoke[…] affects" (4), they "make things happen" and "produce effects" – they are "vibratory" (5). While Bennett conceptualises thing-power for what we traditionally understand as things, that is, solid, stable and fixed, often "man-made items" (xvi), I want to stretch the concept of thing-power to the material-discursive colour which we can encounter in colour writings. This colour is also "vibratory" (5) in that it oscillates between different 'states': there are colour words on the page, colour is entangled with materialities of different sorts in the text, and colour-matter provokes affects in the reader or addresses their senses.

Bennett herself points out two disadvantages of the term *thing-power*: first, thing-power "tends to overstate the thinginess or fixed stability of materiality, whereas [her] goal is to theorize a materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension" (20). A second disadvantage is "its latent individualism, by which [she] mean[s] the way in which the figure of 'thing' lends itself to an atomistic rather than congregational understanding of agency" (20). With this critique, she arrives at another notion of vibrant matter in the form of "human-nonhuman assemblages" (xvii). Inspired by two concepts, namely Latour's "actant" (viii) and Deleuze and Guattari's "assemblage" (xvii), Bennett develops "a theory of *distributive* agency" (21, original emphasis) and she claims that

> [w]hile the smallest or simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus […], an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency

broader and different implications. Although Barad also derives *agential* from the noun *agency* (*MtUH* 44), her understanding of agency highlights that agency is "*not something that someone or something has*" (178, original emphasis). Thus, agency is *not* an attribute of something or someone but she uses it to express that agency is an inherent principle of the world in its on-going becoming (178).

> always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces. (21)

With this, her theory of a vital materialism turns out to be as well deeply relational. We can think the reading of colour writings as a human-nonhuman assemblage: every reader-text intra-action holds the potential to create specific colourscapes in which material-discursive colour makes itself felt and its vibrancy can be experienced via different senses. Material-discursive colour, text and reader are all actants in this process.

Yet, we cannot take it for granted that we are naturally receptive for the agency of the nonhuman. Bennett claims that the "image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter […] prevent[s] us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the inhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies" (ix). Thus, Bennett pays special attention to how human beings can *notice* such nonhuman agency. Noticing the vibrancy of matter requires "a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body" (xiv). A certain openness is required on the human side in order to experience material vibrancy:

> The capacity to detect the presence of impersonal affect [that is, material vibrancy] requires that one is caught up in it. One needs, at least for a while, to suspend suspicion and adopt a more open-ended comportment. If we think we already know what is out there, we will almost surely miss much of it. (xv)

It further requires "a certain anticipatory readiness […] [and] a perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power" (5). And this is where Bennett draws, amongst other resources, on literary texts to "learn how to induce an attentiveness to things and their affects" (xiv). "Thoreau, Franz Kafka, and Whitman" (xiv) were instructive to her in this regard. She especially refers to "Franz Kafka's short story 'Cares of a Family Man'" and its protagonist Odradek, a spool of thread, as "a literary dramatization of [the idea of im-

personal or nonorganic life]" (7). Here, Bennett clearly refers to literary texts merely as examples, or "dramatization[s]" of her theoretical concepts and thereby treats literature still in a representationalist framework in which literary texts mimic and exemplify a vibrant matter that can be experienced in the world *out there*. Moslund et al. support my assessment of Bennett in the introduction to their edited volume *How Literature Comes to Matter*:

> From a literary point of view, Bennett may be criticised for using literature simply as exemplifications of her theoretical points – she refers to Kafka's story as a "literary dramatization" of her idea of "thing-power" and impersonal life of matter (2010: 7) […]. ("Introduction" 18)

In contrast to Bennett, I will treat literary texts themselves – in my case colour writings – as vibrant matter and thus make Bennett's vital materialism fruitful for a discussion of literature from a performative understanding rather than a representationalist one. In general, Bennett's interest in the vibrancy of matter is driven by a desire to explore what a material can do (*VM* 60) and my intention is a similar one. I want to explore the doings of material-discursive colour in the intra-play between text and reader. In doing so, I want to try what Bennett calls "to bear witness to the vital materialities that flow through and around us" (x) – in my case while getting involved in colour writings during the reading process.

The question now arises as to how we can describe and analyse the vibrant and agential doings of colour in my selected colour writings. While new materialist theories provide theoretical concepts, or tools, to apply in a textual analysis, the question of *how* to approach the texts with these tools is still not answered. What we need is a new reading strategy. This reading strategy should, on the one hand, appreciate the performativity of literary texts and, on the other hand, pay tribute to the various experiential qualities that can emerge during the reading process. I propose that we need an *attentive reading* that enables us to notice the doings of material-discursive colour. With this proposal of a new reading strategy, we arrive at the second methodological component of my study that I will develop in section 4.2 "Attentive Reading".

My understanding of an attentive reading follows a postcritical perspective on reading as it is proposed by Rita Felski. According to Felski, postcritical readings "stress attachment as well as detachment, […] engage the vicissitudes of feeling as well as thought, and […] acknowledge the dynamism of artworks rather than treating them as objects to be deciphered and dissected" ("Postcritical Reading" 4). Reading in a postcritical way stresses relationalities and the experiential qualities of the reading process. Inspired by Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, Felski understands reading as a way of relating: "Reading […] is a matter of attaching, collating, negotiating, assembling – of forging links between things that were previously unconnected" (*The Limits of Critique* 173). Referring to Marielle Macé, Felski points out that both mind and body are crucially involved in the reading process: "Reading […] is not just a cognitive activity but an embodied mode of attentiveness that involves us in acts of sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering, and engaging" (176). My attentive reading shares these two important perspectives – that is, "forging links" and an "embodied mode of attentiveness" – with Felski's postcritical reading. An attentive reading also broadly follows Derek Attridge's understanding of the text as an "event" (*The Work of Literature* 8), since it highlights a text's performative side and stresses that both affect and intellect, feelings and meanings are important components in the reading process (8). As I have already argued earlier, it does not suffice to read colour writings for meaning in a semantic sense alone, we also have to take into account the various ways in which material-discursive colour makes itself felt in the reading process and envelops the reader in vivid colourscapes. An attentive reading must thus be a reading beyond the hermeneutic circle in that it involves the reader's experience of material-discursive colour in the reading process. An attentive reading is not a critical or suspicious reading but rather an affirmative one in that it acknowledges all experiences that emerge in the reading process and does not dig for any hidden meaning in the text. An attentive reading is also different from a close reading as proposed by the New Critics because an attentive reading depends on the reader's experience and does not ban it from the academic practice of analysing texts. These initial distinctions serve as a rough orientation where to situate an attentive reading in the vast field of available reading strategies – but what exactly is an attentive reading then?

I will develop the method of an attentive reading in close dialogue with Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*. Shepherd's relation with the Cairn-

gorm Mountains exemplifies the relationship between reader and text in the context of an attentive reading. Attentive reading is a deeply relational reading strategy. Its aim is to train attentiveness to the doings of colour in colour writings. This means that we attempt to become involved with the text in such a way that we can focus on the relationalities that are activated in the reading process, which in turn enables us to experience colour as an agential and vibrant actant that involves us in sensuous and affective entanglements. We will learn from Shepherd's way of walking into the mountains that if we as readers attune ourselves to the rhythm of our texts and follow their movements, we may experience astonishing and surprising facets of material-discursive colour as we let ourselves in for the experience the text may grant.

With Shepherd, we will learn that an attentive reading focuses on two main modes which are *openness* and *attentiveness*. To cultivate an openness towards experiences of colour that emerge in the reading process assists the possibility to perceive and think of colour in new ways. The capacity to be astonished plays a special role here: noticing moments of astonishment while reading is one way to engage with the agency of material-discursive colour. While openness is the basic attitude of an attentive reading, attentiveness describes a more specific practice with which the reader can encounter the text. The main premise of this second mode is that both body and mind should be engaged in the exploration of the reader-text relation. Colour writings do not only activate the mind in order to make sense of what is written on the page but they also affect the body as they encourage us to sense, perceive and feel the relations we enter into while reading. These texts address our senses when colour forges links with different materials and we can experience material-discursive colour produced in the reading process: the silent fall of white snow in *The White Book*, the taste of brown chocolate or the touch of a soft brown blanket in *Chroma,* the cool blue of the ocean in *Bluets*. Colours also trigger affective reactions in the narrator and reader alike as we will especially see in my attentive reading of *Bluets* in chapter 7, in which the colour blue unleashes desire as well as despair in the narrator and I as a reader also get involved in blue's affective capabilities. In combining the two modes of openness and attentiveness, an attentive reading does not follow a specific set of rules; its two modes should rather be understood as a certain way of how we can encounter the text, or, in Marielle Macé's words, as a "certain kind of conduct" (224).

Such an attentive reading shows similarities to Bennett's suggestion of

how we can notice the agency of vibrant matter as presented earlier, namely by "detecting […] [with our senses] inhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies" (*VM* ix), by practising "a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces" (xiv) or by adopting "a perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power" (5). Nan Shepherd did not get to know Bennett's theory since she died in 1981; yet, her approach to the Cairngorm Mountains is highly reminiscent of Bennett's agenda. In *The Living Mountain*, Shepherd pays attention to the agency of nonhuman forces that circulate around and within her body and thus practises a 'new materialist' approach to her surroundings *before* theories of the New Materialisms were even published. This closeness to new materialist theory is yet another indicator that an attentive reading developed in dialogue with Shepherd holds potential for tracing and describing the doings of material-discursive colour in my selected colour writings. Moreover, Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* is one example that suggests that *literature* – and not just theory – is the place where a vibrant and agential matter is explored and, above all, can also be experienced.

With this twofold methodology, we are well equipped to attentively read the three selected lyric essays and explore the doings of colour. Before I will do so, there remains one question that still needs to be investigated: is it a mere coincidence that all three contemporary colour writings are written in the form of the lyric essay or is there more to it? I will suggest that the genre of the lyric essay is a decisive component in the entanglements of colour, matter, text and reader. In section 4.3 "Some Remarks on the Lyric Essay", I will introduce definitions of the lyric essay and point to aspects of in how far this literary form can influence the experience of material-discursive colour.

In the following three chapters, I will eventually conduct long attentive readings of my selected contemporary colour writings. The point of departure for this endeavour are the three research questions formulated at the beginning. Equipped with new materialist concepts and tools to think with and by means of an attentive reading, I will explore possible answers to these questions in the chapters to follow. My aim in this is to trace the various doings of colour as we can identify them in the three lyric essays. I want to develop a perspective on colour for literary studies that perceives colour as agential and vibrant, and as affecting the reader and enveloping them in its colourscapes.

What I hope to find are manifold facets of what colour can do when text and reader meet.

In chapter 5 "A Journey into Colour: Kaleidoscopic Explorations in Derek Jarman's *Chroma*", we will delve into Jarman's very unique universe of colour and explore the multilayered colourscape that emerges in the reading of *Chroma*. The explorations are in so far kaleidoscopic as reading *Chroma* recalls the experience of looking through a steadily rotating kaleidoscope which produces always new patterns of colour in front of one's eyes. Only that in *Chroma* we do not experience colour visually but encounter it in its material-discursive form as it builds connections with the fields of (art) history, philosophy, emotions and anecdotes but also with materials of all kinds, may that be brushes, pigments, oil paint, food or fabric. I will analyse how *Chroma* makes the reader an accomplice in generating the text's unique colourscape. The first section 5.1 "Sensuous Colour Poetics of *Chroma*" will be dedicated to how material-discursive colour affects the reader via their different senses. I will describe how colour unfolds via the shape and sound of colour words, how we can feel colour during the reading process as well as how *texture* is a decisive concept in this regard, and how the text itself encourages its readers to sense, perceive and feel the relations with colour into which we enter while reading. Section 5.2 "Colour-Matter Entanglements" turns towards the specific relationalities between colour and matter that are forged in *Chroma*. These relationalities will be investigated by analysing lists of pigments that are interspersed throughout the text, by paying attention to the thing-power of poisonous pigments and by witnessing how Jarman becomes suspended in what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the "middle ranges of agency" ("Making Things, Practicing Emptiness" 79) when engaging with his painting materials. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of how Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the *rhizome* can assist us to understand how the reader moves through *Chroma*, and thus through colour, in the reading process.

In chapter 6 "'Only White Things Will I Give': Material Colourscapes in Han Kang's *The White Book*", a very different colourscape is created: as the title already implies, this colour writing focuses on the colour white. This reduction to one colour is, however, not a limitation; on the contrary, it is rather a brilliant opportunity to investigate the manifold nuances one colour can bring forth, especially when combined with different materials. I will begin my attentive reading of *The White Book* by introducing some cultural

context. As already mentioned earlier, Han Kang is a South Korean author and I treat her colour writing, translated into English by Deborah Smith, as an author-translator hybrid. Even though the texture of white as well as the white colourscape emerging in the reading process can be experienced without any preliminary cultural knowledge, providing some context information can widen the possibilities of noticing the doings of white in *The White Book*. When talking about white, some preliminary remarks on cultural differences between a Western and East Asian coding of this colour are helpful. Thus, I will point out some of these differences, especially involving the concept of *emptiness*, in order to widen the awareness of cultural implications of white. In the attentive reading to follow, we will see how by writing along a list of white things, *The White Book* writes nuances of white into being in a great diversity of shade and texture. I will investigate "The Texture of White" in section 6.1 on three levels: first, in terms of the book's layout; second, by an attentive reading that focuses on the entanglements between colour, matter, words and affects in which we get involved during the intra-active process of reading; third, by paying attention to the intermedial dialogue between text and interspersed black-and-white photographs in order to describe their contribution to the process of meaning-making. In section 6.2, I will turn towards "Whitescapes". While all whitescapes are generated in the intra-action between text and reader, the way in which these whitescapes involve us differs. I will trace three types of whitescapes – visual, acoustic and tactile – in order to present a variety of how material-discursive colour can activate experiential qualities in the reader.

In my last long attentive reading in chapter 7 "Desiring Blue: Material-Discursive Interferences in Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*", we will encounter the colour blue and its affective force. In this colour writing, blue is moving close, putting the narrator under a spell and eliciting desire as well as despair. After a short outline of an understanding of affect in a nonhuman context, I will investigate the affective force of blue along a triad of entangled concerns which are *collecting*, *becoming* and *not knowing*. In section 7.1 "Collecting Bluets: A Material-Discursive Doing", Nelson's material-discursive practice of collecting "blue facts" (Nelson, "True Blue") will be in the focus. These blue facts include, for example, anecdotes of different blue things, the narrator's perception of blue, or emotions and affects triggered by the colour blue. As we learn in the text, Nelson collects blue things that she then turns into

material-discursive blue facts in the process of writing. I am interested in how matter and meaning are entangled in this practice of collecting bluets. Section 7.2 "Becoming with Blue: Interferences of Reading" will think the creation of material-discursive blue with the blue Morpho butterfly. Inspired by the physical process of interference that causes the butterfly's brilliant blue wings, I will argue that *Bluets*, too, creates a specific 'interference pattern' that enables an intense material-discursive experience of blue for the reader. I will further draw on Barad's concept of "apparatuses" (*MtUH* 146) in order to shed light on how *Bluets* creates interference patterns at different levels, namely inside each proposition, between propositions, and between the propositions and the reader's disposition.[14] In section 7.3 "Dwelling in Uncertainties: The Art of Not Knowing", I will examine how Nelson relishes a dwelling in uncertainties and being in the realm of not knowing. I am especially interested in how far this space of *not knowing* constitutes the very condition of possibility for being attentive to a becoming with blue.

With this, the introduction comes to an end and I want to invite my reader to discover the, in Shepherd's words, *prismatic radiations* of colour writings. Let's spin the colour wheel.

14 *Bluets* is written in the form of numbered sections which Nelson calls "propositions" (*Bluets* 28).

# 2 CHROMATIC EXPLORATIONS

## 2.1 PRELUDE: WHAT IS COLOUR?

To begin with: colour is colourful, affective, playful, powerful; colour is green, yellow, blue and red, turquoise, verdigris, tangerine, ultramarine and all shades in between. Human beings can distinguish between millions of different colour gradations; calculations range from seven and a half million (Geldard 86) to ten million (Witting 380). Hansen calculates that we can distinguish between 200 different colour hues, 500 degrees of brightness and 20 different degrees of saturation (slide 7). These are the numbers of colour gradations which the human eye is able to perceive; our ability to recognise a specific colour gradation with certainty is, however, significantly lower and ranges from 10,000 to 20,000 colour gradations (Witting 380). These numbers are still impressive and also slightly intimidating – for who would say of themselves that they are able to tell thousands of different colours apart? Such a counting of perceptible colours attempts to take control over the shifting colour palette, to put colour into boxes. But colour cannot be held fast. It plays with our perception – and our perception plays with colour. Close your eyes and open them again – what do you see? Colour – it surrounds us wherever we go, except in the pitch-dark; but then again we are surrounded by achromatic black. Try to shut out colour during the day by closing your eyes; even then you cannot avoid seeing a tangerine shimmer behind your eyelids, flickering colour patches, stripes, circles.

Colour is a multifaceted phenomenon that has fascinated people throughout all times and places. Until today, it is a topic that has produced a wide-ranging collection of thoughts, ideas and texts dealing with the fascination of colour. Human beings have developed physical and philosophical explanations, tried to capture colour in photographs, ground minerals into fine colourful powders, worked with them in the fine arts and transformed colour into symbolic meaning in literature. Colour oscillates between illusory appearance, meaningful association and tangible texture. Engaging with colour definitions is as varied and colourful as looking through a kaleidoscope and seeing all the colours dance in front of one's eyes. There exist infinite possible angles from which to approach colour; I have compiled a selection

of relevant approaches for this study and, thus, this section will present the following: first, it will introduce an explanation from the field of the natural sciences, addressing the question of what colour is and how colour perception works, it will then engage with philosophical concerns regarding colour and systematisations developed by colour theories, and it will end with insights into material practices with colour in the fine arts.

The natural sciences provide a physical and physiological theory of colour perception. At the outset, science tells us, there is no colour in the physical world. To describe the physical world as colourless seems to be quite counter-intuitive since we normally perceive the world *out there* in colour, as if colour was already there. But colour is not just there in the world, it has to be created through specific relationalities. Human beings can perceive electromagnetic radiation with wavelengths in the range of around 400 to 700 nm as colour. In this range, electromagnetic radiation can be transferred into a perception of colour by our visual organ (the eye), optic nerves and our brain (Tipler & Mosca 1193). The shorter wavelengths of the spectrum result in the perception of violet light, the longer ones in red light (1193) – in between these marks, the spectral colours, which we can also perceive in a rainbow, appear. In the late 17th century, Isaac Newton discovered that white light contains all the colours of the spectrum (1218). With the help of a prism, he split daylight into what he finally identified as the seven colours (violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red) of the visible spectrum in order to show that white light actually consists of an unequally distributed mixture of all colours found in the spectrum. Yet, despite Newton's rather arbitrary identification of seven colours[1], there are no clear boundaries to be found between these seven

1 Pesic explains Newton's choice to split the spectrum into exactly seven colours and points to the fallibility of this categorisation: Newton "relied on a musical analogy to compare the seven notes of the diatonic scale and the seven colors he likewise attributed to the spectrum. A close examination of his use of this analogy discloses its power and implicit limitations" (121). Pesic further points out that Newton "admits that he imposed the seven colors by analogy with the (Dorian) mode without being able to demonstrate that those specific colors must necessarily be placed at those scale steps" (125). Newton even considered to replace the seven colours by five to fit the scale of a major sixth (127). This shows that "he was open to altering his musical enumeration of spectral colors" (127) and the choice of seven colours was a rather arbitrary decision in regard to the colours one can perceive in the spectrum.

colours; they rather blur and merge into one another and thereby create the spectral field of colours human beings can perceive.

How exactly does human colour perception work? The step-by-step explanation is the following: a source of energy (e.g. the sun) emits radiation (e.g. light, among other kinds of radiation); this light can be more precisely described either as electromagnetic waves or photons. Another model to think of light from a physical perspective is the one of light rays.[2] Light rays as such are colourless and invisible. As soon as light rays transgress from one medium to another (e.g. air to water, air to substance) they are refracted[3] and according to the consistency of the medium these rays enter into, light gets either reflected, absorbed or transmitted (1199).[4] The specific material which light hits upon defines, with its specific absorption, transmittance or reflection rate, which colour we see. Only the light rays that are reflected by the medium can strike a visual organ, for example the human eye. Human eyes function as an optical instrument with which to detect colour. Light rays strike the eye, and receptors on the retina, which are called rods (responsible for light-dark perception) and cones (responsible for colour perception), receive a sensory stimulus. Cones are sensitive to certain wavelengths of light: in the human eye, three different types of cones exist which are sensitive to short, middle and long wavelengths of light, or, in other words, to those wavelengths which our brain then interprets as blue, green and red, respectively. All other colours we can perceive are created via a mixture of these three incoming wavelengths. This trichromatic theory of colour perception was proposed by Hermann von Helmholtz and Thomas Young already in the 19th century (Myers 222). But at the moment when rods and cones perceive wavelengths, there is still no colour involved. Only when the incoming sensory stimulus is transferred into an electric signal, or nerve impulse, and

2 In physics, the description of light as a ray is a model concept that is generally used for the description of lens systems. Since such a lens system is contained in our eyes, light rays are also used for the description of the process of seeing colours.

3 The only exception is when light hits the interface vertically; then, light is transmitted without any refraction (Tipler & Mosca 1199).

4 The reflected light rays are the ones which strike our eye and which we can thus see; the absorbed ones enter into the medium and are converted into thermal energy which is then stored; when light rays transmit a medium, they just go through it and are neither absorbed nor reflected.

thereby forwarded by the optic nerve to the brain, does this information get translated into colour (Tipler & Mosca 1265). This translation works according to Ewald Hering's opponent process theory of colour, also developed in the 19th century. The incoming signals received by the three types of cones are processed by three colour-opponent channels which are red-green, yellow-blue and white-black (Myers 223). In the case of the red-green channel, for example, this means that in the retina and the thalamus some neurons are 'switched on' (stimulated) by red and 'switched off' (inhibited) by green. In turn, other neurons are stimulated by green and inhibited by red. When we perceive one of these colours on a certain spot of the retina, the opponent colour cannot be perceived at the same time on the same spot. This explains why it is impossible to see a greenish red; but bluish and yellowish reds are possible. In a final step, these colour-opponent cells transfer the signals to the visual cortex of the brain and, finally, we see colour. (223) This is, in short, how it works – colour explained by the natural sciences. What we can thus conclude from these processes of colour perception is that colour is not just simply there but is rather created by means of many factors involved.

This explanation is accompanied by ontological and epistemological questions which have long been at the centre of philosophical debates. Colour has been and still is a topic of continuous engagement in philosophy, ranging from metaphysical problems to logical colour puzzles, and from thoughts on colour language to phenomenological engagements with colour perception and experience. In what kind of colour problems is philosophy especially interested? Barry Maund, who contributed one of the most complete overviews on the topic in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, elaborates:

> Colors are of philosophical interest for a number of reasons. One of the most important reasons is that color raises serious metaphysical issues, concerning the nature both of physical reality and of the mind. Among these issues are questions concerning whether color is part of a mind-independent reality, and what account we can give of experiences of color. These issues have been, and continue to be, inextricably linked with important epistemological and semantic issues.

Philosophers try to answer the metaphysical question of "*how can it be that we see a world full of colours, if no such properties could belong to the world* [as science tells us]*?*" (Chirimuuta, "Touchy-Feely Colour" 30, original emphasis). Especially interesting for philosophy in this is the question of *where* colour is and what we can know about it. Is it part of a mind-independent world or is it a reality of the mind? Science shows that "physical objects do not have colors" (Maund 1.1). This view is called "eliminativism" and is combined in the scientific tradition with "subjectivism", that is "the view that color is a subjective quality" (1.1). From a physicist view, "[o]ceans and skies are not blue in the way that we naively think, nor are apples red, (nor green). Colors of that kind, it is believed, have no place in the physical account of the world that has developed from the sixteenth century to this century" (1.1). Maund notes that "[t]here has been a strong resistance among philosophers" (1.2) to this scientific point of view since physical and physiological explanations of colour are insufficient to explain the experience of perceiving colour.

So, how does philosophy approach colour?[5] Maund identifies major perspectives on colour in the philosophical tradition that range from primitivist to relational points of view. A prominent primitivist view, which he calls "*Color Objectivism*" (2.1, original emphasis), holds that "color is an objective, i.e., mind-independent, intrinsic property, one possessed by many material objects (of different kinds) and light sources" (2.1) – colour is a non-relational property of things out there in the world. This view brings with it certain difficulties: "Since the only way to determine what primitivist color a body has is by the way it appears, this raises the question of which is the body's real color" (2.1). As we know, the colour of a body changes, for example due to different light conditions or different observers. Dispositional theories, on the other hand, take this into account and argue that "[c]olors are perceiver-dependent, dispositional properties – powers to look in distinctive ways to appropriate perceivers, in appropriate circumstances" (1.6). These are relational theories of colour which

5 This part on philosophy and colour attempts to provide a rough overview on engagements with colour in the field of philosophy that are of interest to my study. I will not go into detail and sketch only some engagements while neglecting others. For comprehensive overviews on colour and philosophy, see, for example, Barry Maund "Color" and Marcos Silva (ed.) *How Colours Matter to Philosophy*.

> were first put forward in the seventeenth century, when there was a felt need to reconcile the new mechanical world view – which found no place for colours (as we see them) in the physical world – with the insight that visual perception is in some way caused by external events. The dispositionalist states that the colour orange is the disposition of an object to cause an orange experience in normal human perceivers in standard viewing conditions. This is a dispositional property shared by satsumas and marigolds, as well as oranges and mangoes. Dispositionalists normally struggle at the point at which it becomes necessary to categorize normal perceivers and define standard conditions. (Chirimuuta, "Touchy-Feely Colour" 28)

Maund points out further relational theories "in recent philosophy of color", which are even more radical and which he subsumes under the name of "Color Relationalism" (2.5). Theories in this field question and modify "both physicalist and dispositionalist accounts" (2.5). In his encyclopaedia entry, Maund refers especially to two philosophers, namely to Edward Averill and Jonathan Cohen. According to Maund, Averill holds the position that "colors of bodies are relational properties" while Cohen, in a similar vein, proposes that "colors are relational properties of a certain sort – relational with respect to perceivers and circumstances of viewing" (2.5). In these relational approaches, the uniqueness of the different parts involved (perceiver, light, object, etc.) is acknowledged. Maund explains Cohen's approach further:

> According to Color Relationalism, there are no such properties as *blue*, *red*, *yellow*, *orange*, etc. […] What there are, instead, are relational properties: blue-for-perceiver *A*-in-circumstances C1, red-for-perceiver *B*-in-circumstances C2, yellow-for-perceiver *D*-in-circumstances C3, and so on. (2.5, original emphasis)

Subsumed under the label of relational theories are also "Action-based Theories of Color" (2.6). These theories describe colours as "hybrid properties combining aspects of the perceiver's environment and phenomenology" (2.6).

One of the philosophers in this field is Alva Noë who developed, according to Maund, an "*enactive approach to perception*" in which he stresses the role of "perspectival properties" in colour perception (2.6, original emphasis). For Noë, Maund elaborates, "color is a relational property, involving the object and the environment, and [it is] crucially related to perceivers" (2.6). Another relational theory called "*Color Adverbialism*" (2.6, original emphasis) is proposed by Chirimuuta and Kingdom:

> colours are not properties of external physical objects, or of brains, or of our mental states; instead, they are properties of perceptual processes or interactions which involve objects, brains and mental states. […] colour is to be thought of as an emergent property of the perceptual process itself. (226)

Chirimuuta goes even further and claims in another paper that not only "brains and mental states" (Chirimuuta & Kingdom 226) are involved in the process of colour perception but also touch:

> in a touchy-feely vein, I can think of the colour not as an entity that may or may not be there, but as the *way* that the tomato presents itself to my sight. Or equivalently, I can think of the colour as the selective grasp of the tomato made by my sight – a "take" on the tomato which is particular to me or my species, one due to my particular retinal sensitivity, and to the particular use that my visual system makes of spectral information there gathered. ("Touchy-Feely Colour" 35, original emphasis)

At the centre of Chirimuuta's "relational phenomenology of colour" is

> [t]he idea […] to think of colours as the *way things look to me*. One can say that the experience of a thing as being coloured flags a relation

> which holds between the thing and oneself – the perceptual relationship by means of which one comes into visual contact with the thing. (35, original emphasis)

Chirimuuta takes the idea of grasping the red of the tomato by sight from Merleau-Ponty who proposes to think of vision as an active sense, more like touch, and not as passive ("Touchy-Feely Colour" 31, 33). She backs this with empirical evidence: "Empirical work gives credence to Merleau-Ponty's (1968) claim that the gaze is something like a grasp. That is, we use the foveating gaze, the targeting of an object on the highest acuity region of the retina, to gain a visual handle on the thing" (33).[6] But not only vision is active here; Chirimuuta writes that "the tomato presents itself to my sight" (35). In this example, the coloured object seems to be the initiator of colour perception and only then the eye (actively) perceives it.

This conceptualising of vision as grasp is closely related to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological interest in the relation between colour and sensation, that is, in the role of the human body in colour perception. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, he writes that colour is not only perceived through the eye but by "my entire body" (218). For him, sensations are not "a certain indescribable *quale*; they are presented with a motor physiognomy, they are enveloped by a living signification" (217, original emphasis). Colours are not "self-enclosed states or indescribable qualities offered to the observation of a thinking subject" (217) but they relate the body to the world. And the body also plays an active part in this relating: "Our settling into a certain colored milieu, along with the transpositions of all color relations that it entails, is a bodily operation; I can only accomplish this by *entering* into this new atmosphere because my body is my general power of inhabiting all of the world's milieus" (325, original emphasis). Merleau-Ponty presents various examples of how a certain colour perception affects the body and causes specific motor reactions in order to show how colours have effects on bodies.[7] Another important as-

6 This "highest acuity region of the retina" (Chirimuuta, "Touchy-Feely Colour" 33) is called the "fovea" (Snowden et al. 30). The fovea is "the point where [our] vision is focused"; it is "the area of our vision where we have our highest acuity" (30).

7 Concerning the influence of colour on human motor function, Merleau-Ponty refers to experiments conducted with people with specific motor disturbances: "The ges-

pect in regard to colour perception for Merleau-Ponty is the relation of colour to materiality, as we can see in this example:

> The red patch I see on the rug is only red if the shadow that lies across it is taken into account; its quality only appears in relation to the play of light, and thus only as an element in a spatial configuration. Moreover, the color is only determinate if it spreads across a certain surface; a surface too small would be unqualifiable. Finally, this red would literally not be the same if it were not the "wooly red" of a carpet. (5)

Merleau-Ponty points to the material contextual and relational conditions that play an important role in colour perception: shadow and light, the surface on which the light plays, the background against which a colour appears as well as the material on which the light shines. He observes that "[a] color is never simply a color, but rather the color of a certain object, and the blue of a rug would not be the same blue if it were not a wooly blue" (326). While the above presented relational theories mainly focus on the interrelation between observer and colour, Merleau-Ponty also stresses the importance of the interdependence between colour and matter in his phenomenology.

Next to scientific and philosophical theories about colour there is another field in which attempts are made to explain colour. It is the field of *Colour Theory* – a field of research of its own, yet inspired by and interwoven with insights from various disciplines. Colour theories attempt to categorise colours into types and kinds, and they provide a systematic understanding of how colour mixture works by creating colour systems. Some colour systems are more theoretically oriented, others more practically. They try to facilitate working with colours and communicating about colours, may that be in the context of art, consumer electronics, printing or dyeing of fabric. Colour systems, as might be no surprise, serve as a rich ground for debate until to-

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ture of raising the arm [...] is modified differently in its amplitude and its direction by a red, yellow, blue, or green visual field. In particular, red and yellow encourage smooth movements, whereas blue and green encourage jerky movements" (216). For more examples of how body movements correspond to visual stimulation by specific colours, see pp. 216-17, 222.

day since there is not one correct answer to how colours should be logically arranged in a reasonable order. It is rather a question of application that is decisive for the 'correct' colour system to use.

Goethe's colour circle, Runge's colour sphere, Blanc's colour star, Itten's colour wheel, Munsell's colour tree or Küpper's colour rhombohedron – all attempt to illustrate a systematic approach to colour and its possible mixtures. With different foci, they illustrate the relation of primary, secondary and tertiary colours; hue, value, brightness and saturation of colour; analogous, complementary or triadic colour relationships; and in the case of Goethe's colour circle even the connection between colour and emotion. For companies working with paint in all kinds of fields, the American *Pantone* colour system is one possibility to refer to in order to communicate about colours precisely. *NCS*, the *Natural Colour System*, is a Swedish alternative to simplify and ensure a unified communication about colour.[8]

What are the basic distinctions that colour systems establish? One distinction is made between (coloured) light and object colour (Kueppers 173). Coloured light is light that directly strikes our eye with (a) certain wavelength(s) without being reflected by a substance. When this light appears achromatic, it is simply called *light*; when it appears coloured, it is called *coloured light* (173). Laser light, for example, can produce monochromatic light (e.g. green or red) by using only a very narrow section of the spectrum. The artists James Turrell and Olafur Eliasson are famous for their art installations with coloured light.[9] Painters working with pigments, on the other hand, engage with object colours. These are colours that are defined by the reflection and absorption rate of a substance (173), since, as explained before, the reflected wavelengths striking our eyes produce the colour we see. Object colour

> can be transparent so that one can look through it; in this case it is 'translucent.' [Think, for example, of glass here.] On the other

8 This list only points out some engagements in the field of colour systems so as to get an idea of the diversity in this field; there are innumerably more. See Silvestrini and Fischer's *Colorsystem* for more examples.

9 James Turrell's work will be addressed in more detail in chapter 7.

> hand, pigment can be nontransparent [sic]; in that case it is 'opaque.' [Think, for example, of oil paint here]. (173)

Which kind of colour – coloured light or object colour – one is referring to makes a decisive difference in terms of the three primary colours[10] from which all other colours can be mixed. Red, green and blue (RGB) are the primary colours for the additive mixture of light. Taken evenly together, these three colours result in us seeing white light and with different mixtures of red, green and blue all other colours can be created. Defined by the organic conditions of the human body, these three colours are thus the primary colours of our vision. As described earlier, the three differently sensitive cones in the human eye react to wavelengths with these hues. These colours are, however, not the primary colours for working with object colours. Here, red, yellow and blue are the three primary colours from which to mix all the other colours. Mixing yellow and blue paint, for example, results in green. When mixing all three primary colours (red, yellow, blue), the result is a muddied dark colour since all the different mixed materials of the paints have specific absorption and reflection rates, and the more pigments are added together, the more light gets absorbed and the less reflected – light is swallowed by matter. This is the subtractive mixture of colour.[11] Next to these two three-colour-theories,

10 Being a technical term, the *OED* defines *primary colour* as follows:

> Designating each of the colours from which all other colours can be derived by combining them in different proportions. Also: designating each of the seven colours of the spectrum (now *historical*). In terms of light the colours are now recognized as red, green, and blue; in terms of pigment, as red, yellow, and blue (black and white were formerly also included). (''primary, adj., II.4.'', original emphasis)

11 A very famous colour debate in history is the one between Goethe and Newton, which also perfectly illustrates the two different colour systems of an additive and a subtractive mixture. Following the discoveries of his prism experiment, Newton claimed that all colours taken together result in white light. Goethe was indignant at this assumption since he saw an obvious disproof in the mixing of differently coloured paints resulting in a muddied brown or grey but never in white. Yet, this critique was from the very beginning based on false assumptions on Goethe's side: ''Newton was essentially referring to the additive synthesis based on light, while Goethe was referring to the subtractive, about colours as paints'' (Franco Taboada 53-54) and hence, they were talking about two totally different issues.

a theory based on a description of human perception assumes four colours to be the primary ones in regard to colour perception. As already introduced earlier, Hering developed an opponent process theory of colour perception and proposed that blue, red, green and yellow should be considered as primary colours since these are the colours that appear relatively 'pure' and not as mixtures of other colours to most people.[12] Silvestrini and Fischer cite Hering's thoughts in *Zur Lehre vom Lichtsinn* ("On the Theory of Sensibility to Light"):

> Hering […] concludes that there are not three but four elementary colour sensations or psychological primaries which code our perception by means of so-called opponent-processes. In 1878, Hering wrote: "Yellow can have a red or green tinge, but not a blue one; blue can have only either a red or a green tinge, and red only either a yellow or a blue one. The four colours can with complete correctness therefore be described as simple or basic colours […]. (Silvestrini & Fischer "Ewald Hering")

This brief presentation of a few selected colour theories already demonstrates that colour tends to elude a uniform categorisation and depends on the relationalities in which it is created.

The fine arts add yet another universe of colour knowledge to the so far presented approaches by providing a deep and thorough understanding of colour materials and colour's aesthetic effects. Paintings in oil or with acrylic paint, etchings, drawings, sculptures, mobiles, installations – colour is an essential part in nearly every field of the fine arts. It plays an important role in regard to the effect a work of art has on the perceiver. Thinking of colour in the fine arts brings to mind pigments, paints, powders, papers and all kinds of other materials that can be used to add colour to a work of art. Artists interested in colour material and its usage find a rich corpus of (practical) manuals

12 Only one century later, the physiological basic assumptions of his theory were confirmed when discovering colour-opponent processes in visual neurons of the thalamus (Myers 223, 225) and a physiological explanation was thus provided.

on diverse topics ranging from Rutherford Gettens and George Stout's *Painting Materials: A Short Encyclopaedia* to Ulrich Binder's *Physik der Farbe* to Patrick Baty's *The Anatomy of Colour: The Story of Heritage Paints and Pigments* to David Coles' *Chromatopia: An Illustrated History of Colour* to Mark David Gottsegen's *The Painter's Handbook* or Pip Seymore's *The Artist's Handbook*, to list only a very small selection of a huge field of specialised literature.

An artist who intensely engaged with his colour materials and developed precise knowledge of painting techniques is Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo is primarily famous for his paintings, but he was also an acute observer and excellent scientist. His thoughts on painting echo many of the approaches to colour that I presented earlier. Thus, he serves as a perfect example for the field of fine arts to close this section and round off the thoughts on what colour 'is'.

Leonardo did not only embrace poetry, music and painting, but also physics (especially optics), engineering, geology, anatomy and botany (Müntz 90-94). This range of interests becomes even more fascinating when we consider that Leonardo was in all these fields a "self-taught man" (77), who gained most of his knowledge through intense studies and observations of his surroundings and through experimenting with different materials and techniques. From his observations, Leonardo deduced precise advice on how to paint and use colour. Here, for example, he explains how to prepare the background that surrounds an object which casts a shadow: "The ground which surrounds the figures in any painting, ought to be darker than the light part of those figures, and lighter than the shadowed part" (da Vinci 108). In his *Treatise on Painting*, we can find minute observations of light and plenty of considerations about how colours behave in shadow.[13] He gives accounts of how the material constitution of a surface influences an object's colour:

13 The chapter headings in the *Treatise* give an impression of all the other topics that Leonardo draws upon and which span a wide field: "Drawing – Proportion" under which he lists subjects such as "Anatomy", "Motion and Equipoise of Figures" and "Linear Perspective". Then, "Invention, or Composition" containing "Expression and Character"; "Light and Shadow" containing "Contraste [sic] and Effect" and "Reflexes"; and "Colours and Colouring" under which are subsumed remarks on "Colours in regard to Light and Shadow", "Colours in regard to Back-grounds [sic]", "Contraste [sic], Harmony, and Reflexes in regard to Colours", "Perspective of Colours" and "Aerial Perspective". It ends with "Miscellaneous Observations" of landscape, etc. (See chapter headings in da Vinci).

> Polished and glossy surfaces show least of their genuine colour. This is exemplified in the grass of the fields, and the leaves of trees, which, being smooth and glossy, will reflect the colour of the sun, and the air, where they strike, so that the parts which receive the light do not show their natural colour. (125)

On the other hand, the "objects that are the least smooth and polished shew their natural colours best; as we see in cloth, and in the leaves of such grass or trees as are of a woolly nature; which, having no lustre, are exhibited to the eye in their true natural colour" (125). In these detailed observations, two constituents that are responsible for us seeing colours in the world, play a major role: light as well as the material it shines upon. For Leonardo, objects have a "natural colour" that changes due to light conditions.[14] Müntz observes that "nothing escaped him [Leonardo] – sunlight effects, rain effects, effects of mist and dust, variations of the atmosphere. He investigated the changes undergone by the tones of nature by watching them through coloured glasses" (62). From his observations and experiments, Leonardo deduces very concrete instructions for how to use light effects for a specific purpose. The following example presents the instruction "Of the Light proper for painting Flesh Colour from Nature" (da Vinci 143):

> Your window must be open to the sky, and the walls painted of a reddish colour. The summer-time is the best, when the clouds conceal the sun, or else your walls on the south side of the room must be so high, as that the sun-beams cannot strike on the opposite side, in order that the reflexion of those beams may not destroy the shadows. (143)

Next to such recommendations for an ideal environment for painting we can find in his writings about colour "for the first time […] a difference which was to become significant in later systems – the difference between primary

14 These observations and assumptions recall the philosophical debates presented earlier, for example dispositional theories or relational theories by Merleau-Ponty.

and (corresponding) secondary colours" (Silvestrini & Fischer "Robert Grosseteste, Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci"; see also da Vinci 125-28) and Leonardo "forestalled Chevreul in laying down with perfect clarity the laws governing complementary colours, showing, for instance, that red gained in intensity when placed in juxtaposition with green" (Müntz 92). In addition to observations of light and shadow as well as of different colours and an attempt at their systematisation, the engagement with painting materials is characteristic of Leonardo's writing. In parts, the *Treatise* is a practical painter's manual when it comes to the use of pigments. Müntz notes that Leonardo "devoted much study to the preparation of different pigments" (63) – we can find, for example, a very detailed description of the pigment verdigris and how to handle it:

> This green, which is made of copper, though it be mixed with oil, will lose its beauty, if it be not varnished immediately. It not only fades, but, if washed with a sponge and pure water only, it will detach from the ground upon which it is painted, particularly in damp weather; because verdegris [sic] is produced by the strength of salts, which easily dissolve in rainy weather, but still more if washed with a wet sponge. (da Vinci 128)

Leonardo warns the reader of a wrong use of verdigris and traces this back to its history of production as it is "produced by the strength of salts". He continues with a recipe for the correct usage of verdigris and "How to improve the Beauty of Verdegris [sic]" (128):

> If you mix with the Verdegris [sic] some Caballine Aloe, it will add to it a great degree of beauty. It would acquire still more from Saffron, if it did not fade. The quality and goodness of this Aloe will be proved by dissolving it in warm Brandy. Supposing the Verdigris has already been used, and the part finished, you may then glaze it thinly with this dissolved Aloe, and it will produce a very fine colour. This Aloe

> may be ground also in oil by itself, or with the Verdegris [sic], or any other colour, at pleasure. (128-29)

In these lines, one can see Leonardo's deep engagement with his painting materials since he is well informed about the pigment's behaviour, how to prepare it, with which other materials to mix it and how to apply it on the canvas so that it displays its green colour permanently. Painting enabled him to unite many different interests: observations, experiments as well as theoretical considerations. This combination results in Leonardo's unique aesthetic engagement with colour that is highly informed by scientific approaches considering perspective or optics as well as by a detailed knowledge of the painting material at hand.

Issues concerning the relation between colour and matter run like a thread through all these approaches. In some instances, this relation is at the heart of an engagement with colour, whereas in others it is more at the periphery. For artists working with pigments and dye, knowledge about how the colour of a certain material changes with use and over time is essential. Over the centuries, artists and art theorists have accumulated a wealth of knowledge concerning this topic. Colour theories, on the other hand, are more interested in the relation between colours themselves and attempt to create systematic accounts of how different colours relate to each other when mixing them. Yet, they cannot avoid material issues when creating these concepts since for additive and subtractive mixtures different 'kinds' of colour have to be distinguished: coloured light and object colour. These are fundamental assumptions on which colour systems are built. In philosophy, issues concerning the relation between colour and matter take centre stage. The question of where colour is and how we can know it is essential for philosophical concerns. Theories range from primitivist views, which assume colour to be a quality inherent in objects and a mind-independent reality, to relational accounts, which stress the relational character of colour perception in which colour only comes into existence when different parts work together such as perceiver, surroundings, light sources, objects, etc. In their phenomenological considerations, Chirimuuta and Merleau-Ponty go even so far as to extend colour perception to an action in which the whole body (and not just our eyes and

brains) is involved. These relational theories also show similarities to how the natural sciences explain the process of colour perception. For physics, the world is colourless; only when electromagnetic radiation hits upon an optical instrument that is sensitive to the different wavelengths (e.g. human eyes) and able to transfer them into colour (e.g. human brains) does the world become as colourful as we encounter it every day when opening our eyes. The purpose of this prelude was to get a feel for possible angles from which colour can be examined. All of the presented engagements with colour provide their own explanations to the question *What is Colour?* We can conclude that no single answer can be found to this question. Colour remains a multifaceted phenomenon and in the next section, we will take a look at the facets that the field of literary studies can contribute.

## 2.2 FACETS OF COLOUR AND ITS SEMANTICS

Colour in literature is a topic of its very own. Rey Conquer begins his study *Reading Colour* with the observation that "[t]he central, and most obvious, problem that colour poses for literature – whether for those writing it or those reading – is that it is not there" (1). And it is true: on the book page, colour is visually conveyed by (usually) achromatic black words on a (more or less) white page – it is a rather achromatic experience. But it is far from true that colour is not *there*. Colour is there in literary texts; literature abounds with colour. What is true for colour in general, namely that it oscillates between illusory appearance, meaningful association and tangible texture, as shown in the previous section, is also true for what colour is able to do in literature. Colour as a topic or means to convey meaning has a long tradition in English texts ranging from figurative uses to phenomenological and material engagements with the topic, as I will illustrate in the following.[15] Colour words can transmit symbolic meaning, create metaphors, evoke philosophical

15 The aim is, however, not to provide an exhaustive picture of the use of colour in English literature throughout all times and places. Colour is an issue too complex, even if reduced to the field of literature, and to explore this would certainly be a worthwhile research project of its own. My aspirations are to provide an idea of how colour has been employed in English literary texts in order to illustrate its variety and to point out specific developments.

questions, serve as descriptive embellishments of narrative settings, produce specific atmospheres, convey emotions of characters, affect the reader, build associations in the reader's imagination or serve phenomenological observations. Colour can also be materially-discursively created in the intra-action between text and reader and it can make itself felt as a material presence in the reading process, as I have pointed out earlier in the Introduction and as we will see from chapter 3 onwards.

In order to meet this wealth of colour in literary texts, I want to further pursue the question *What is colour?* but now shifting the focus of my chromatic explorations to the field of English literature and literary studies. In the remaining sections of chapter 2, I will point out two characteristic engagements with colour from a literary studies perspective as they illustrate the richness and complexity of colour in literary texts. First, I will discuss and trace the appearance of colour words in literature throughout different literary eras and introduce a range of studies that provide important contextual information on how colour words have been used throughout time. The next part will be a short excursus into colour symbols, metaphors and metonyms, presented by means of selected examples, as this topic addresses a traditionally important function of colour in literary texts.

### 2.2.1 THE CHANGING PALETTE OF COLOUR WORDS

Many studies explore the appearance of colour words in texts throughout the history of English literature and try to deduce insights into literary developments. In her study *English Colour Terms*, Kerttula identifies three phases of colour words, "which partly overlap" (336), in the history of the English language and she summarises her results as follows:

> In the first phase, the analysis of colour with an emphasis on brightness, first shininess and then other brightness aspects were analysed. This phase started during the Proto-Indo-European period. The second phase, where the analysis of hue was separated from the overall analysis, follows the lines indicated by Berlin and Kay, with the exception that red […] appears before black. This phase also started in

> the PIE period, but it did not become dominant in English until the Middle English period. The third phase, the use of brightness and saturation qualifiers, was adopted when hue analysis had become the established and primary method of analysing colour (from the 13th century onwards). (336-37)

This summary gives a first hint to the overall development of colour words in English. But how exactly do colour words vary throughout time in literary texts? Since colour words highly depend on historical and cultural context, one might first turn to the field of colour semantics which provides an important basis for further engagements with the function of colour in literature. Colour semantics is concerned with "the means by which languages communicate [certain] types of visual impression" (Biggam 9) such as "hue, saturation, tone and brightness" (2) or even "texture" (5).[16] Focusing on lexical semantics, Biggam traces the use of selected colour terms in different languages throughout history and makes us aware of their contingency. This is of course a difficult endeavour because even if colours are historically and culturally coded, this code is never definite or unambiguous (Pape viii). This said, scholars in the field of colour semantics still try to trace meanings of a colour word as precisely as possible. One "early precursor of modern colour semantic investigations" (11), Biggam remarks, is William Gladstone with his seminal three-volume work *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age* (1858), in which he investigates "Homer's colour vocabulary" and "notice[s] some 'strange' examples of colour description in Homeric Greek" (Biggam 11), such as "sea-purple" (Gladstone 461) or "wine-coloured oxen, smutty thunderbolts and violet-coloured sheep" (487). In his analysis of these unusual colour descriptions, Gladstone concludes that by "wine-coloured oxen, and his violet sheep, [Homer], in all likelihood, means no more than dark or tawny" (481). Gladstone observes further that "[t]he idea of green we scarcely find" and he wonders why "there is no other word in the poems that can even be supposed to represent a colour, which, not the rainbow only, but every day nature, presents so largely to the eye" (468). The same goes for today's

16 This list is not exhaustive and can vary depending on cultural and historical context, see Biggam, pp. 1-8.

common description of the sky as blue, which Homer "never once" uses to describe the sky even though he "had before him the most perfect example of blue" (483). From these analyses Gladstone infers that "we must therefore seek another basis for his system of colour" (483) which differs from our modern understanding of colour semantics.[17] "Of light, shadow, and darkness […], Homer had lively and most poetical conceptions" (490) and thus it makes perhaps more sense to study his colour palette in relation to these aspects. This is but one example to stress that a reader's "own colour system is not the only possible way to categorize colours" (Biggam 7) and Biggam further appeals: "It is necessary to gain a facility for open-mindedness on colour matters, or many foreign and historical usages will be misinterpreted, certain literary passages will not be appreciated as they were intended and the cultural significance of certain colours will be missed" (8). Gladstone's analysis of a Greek antique text illustrates exemplarily how studies in colour semantics provide important historical and cultural context information to interpret the use of colour words in any literary text, also in the field of English literature.

An estimation of colour that favours light-dark contrast above hue still pertains in the Middle Ages, as Bruns notes:

> Im Grunde ging es damals weniger um Farbe als um Licht – je lichthaltiger eine Farbe, desto höher wurde sie eingestuft – und außerdem um eine Variante des Lichts, deren Faszinationskraft bis ins späte Mittelalter anhielt: um den Glanz, die Reflexion des Lichts auf glatten Oberflächen. (18)[18]

17 Another conclusion which Gladstone draws from these findings is, however, wrong: "he deduced that early Greek speakers could not actually *see* those hues for which they had no names" (Biggam 12, original emphasis). Biggam points out that this assumption has been disproven by others (e.g. as early as in 1879 by Grant Allen's *The Colour-Sense*) (see Biggam, pp. 13-15) and has ever since served as ground for linguistic debates on colour terms (e.g. by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or by Berlin and Kay's *Basic Color Terms*) (see Biggam, pp. 17-20).

18 For a more detailed engagement with the topic of brightness and hue in the Middle Ages, see, for example, John Gage's *Colour and Meaning*, M. J. Huxtable's *Colour, Seeing, and Seeing Colour in Medieval Literature*, Klaus-Dieter Barnickel's *Farbe, Helligkeit und Glanz im Mittelenglischen: Bedeutungsstruktur und literarische Erscheinungsform eines Wortschatzbereichs*, or *Licht, Glanz, Blendung: Beiträge zu einer Kulturgeschichte*

This fascination with luminosity plays a prominent role in the production of medieval texts and has effects on their materiality: medieval illuminated manuscripts are famous for their brilliant display of (multi-)coloured text and accompanying illustrations. Derek Jarman is also fascinated by these manuscripts and, in *Chroma*, he observes that "[t]he Middle Ages set you adrift in an ocean of ideas which glow like phosphorescent plankton on its moody surface" (48). Medieval manuscripts conserve these colours for the reader until today, as Jarman notes:

> To understand the passion for gemlike colour, look at the illuminated manuscripts – the passing centuries rubbed the colour off old walls, but in the manuscripts hidden from the light that creates and destroys, you can see colour bright as the day it was laid down by the illuminator. (48)

Illuminating these manuscripts was an art in itself and the use of bright colour represents their high value.

The prioritising of light-dark contrast over hue in relation to colour words can also be observed on the content level in Old English poetry. Mead points out that Old English poetry contains a "comparatively small number of genuine color-words" (171), namely black, white, grey, brown, red, yellow and green. Other colours like blue appear only once in the primary texts he analyses (171) and violet, indigo or orange "do not appear at all" (172).[19] However, "[i]n marked contrast with the small number of color-words is the great variety of terms expressing light and darkness. These are in many cases used symbolically, and find their proper place in the religious poems or in passages having a religious turn" (174). In this use, "darkness [applies] to hell and devils, and the light, to heaven and angels and saints" (175). Yet, not all medieval literature is characterised by such a "meagerness" (172) of colour words

*des Leuchtenden*, edited by Christina Lechtermann and Haiko Wandhoff.

19 Mead makes his readers aware of difficulties he faced in identifying these colour words since the words, which "possibly are to be taken as color-words, [...] are so indefinite in their application as scarcely to permit us to decide whether a color-effect is intended or not" (170).

referring to hue. Mead identifies a "richness of color that appears in Chaucer, or the medieval romances, or in Shakespeare" (172), thus reaching into the Elizabethan era. In Chaucer's *Prologue*, he notices a use of colour words which are still "simple, – black, white, brown, blue, green, grey, pers (sky-blue), red, yellow" but which are, in contrast to the use in Old English poetry, "deliberately employed for a picturesque effect" (172). Based on his findings, Mead finally draws two "notable" conclusions: first, "that the color-sense in the Old English poets is comparatively feeble, and that conventionality plays a large part in the passages where color is used at all" (206). Second, compared to the colour use of later times, he notes that

> [g]enuine freedom in the employment of color-phrases does not come until long after the Norman Conquest, but the tendency to individuality in this respect is one of the most striking characteristics of Elizabethan poetry, as it is also of nineteenth century literature. (206)

Moving on to another literary era, Mead's observations are complemented by Pratt's analysis of the use of colour words in English Romanticism and the juxtaposition with their appearance in Early Modern texts. Pratt's results show, on the one hand, a further increase in colour words from Early Modern times to Romanticism[20] and, on the other hand, a broadening of the semantic fields in which colour words are used. While in Elizabethan times, especially in the works of Shakespeare[21] and Spenser, colour words were mainly used in the word field connected to "man" and the colour palette was thus a "distinct-

20 The exact numbers are the following: "the vocabularies of Spenser and Shakspere [sic] together contain 139 color-terms. Of these Elizabethan terms the Romanticists retain 96, and add to these 135, making a total of 231 terms" (Pratt 91).

21 Siegfried Wyler dedicates a whole study to Shakespeare's plays in regard to their colour structure. He points out that the *Tragicall History of Hamlet* "moves between black and red, no other colour term or hue such as blue, yellow or green has found its way into Shakespeare's play" (58). This coincides with Pratt's analysis: "The Elizabethan vocabulary as used by Shakespere [sic] and Spenser was strong in Reds, Whites, and Blacks; *i.e.*, in human colorings" as these are the colours "with which their object of interest – Man – was studied by them" (90, original emphasis).

ly […] human one" (Pratt 91), Pratt identifies a clear increase of colour words used in connection with nature – which she distinguishes in categories such as "flowers and fruits", "the sky", "the land" and "the waters" among others (viii) – during the Romantic period. However, the colour vocabulary does not one-sidedly tilt towards the field of nature but finds a balance: "The Romantic vocabulary […] though keeping Reds and Whites at the head numerically, was also much developed in the Greens, Blues, Purples, and Browns" (91). This shows, she concludes, that "the Romantic period, while lifting Nature and Nature-study into prominence, did not avert its eyes from humanity; it thus has two centers of interest and two co-existent and nearly equal fields of color-treatment" (91). Furthermore, Pratt observes "an increasingly aesthetic handling of color" (93) in Romantic texts as they add "shades and tints" (92) to a more "meager list" (92) of Elizabethan colour words: the Romantics "coined new color-terms that instead of being intensive or dramatic, are discriminative and aesthetic" (92). From these analytic results, Pratt derives key features of Romantic texts:

> Man and Nature are conceived […] as connected, interdependent, and mutually influential; and on this closeness of relationship there depends that dignifying of the senses which, with the greater pantheism from which it springs, was first developed by Wordsworth […]. Color was to Wordsworth but one of the media through which, as through all else sensuous, he perceived Eternal Truth. (101-02)

Cronin also points to the increasing importance of colour words in 19th-century poetry in his study of Romantic poetry and the works of Robert Browning and Gerard Manley Hopkins. To him, the "central problem" for these poets to engage with was "how […] the self, the feeling, thinking human consciousness, [is] related to the world in which it lives" (Cronin 5). The senses play a key role in this relationship: "The world impresses itself on us through our senses: we see, hear, taste and smell it" and thus, on "the level of our sensory experience […] the drama of the self's engagement with the world is most persistently acted out" (5). For 19th-century poets, Cronin notes, it was important to "establish their literary credibility by proving their expertise in

rendering sensory experience" (5). Conveying colour experience in their texts was one possibility to do so as "[c]olour […] and the words that we use to describe it, are on the frontier of the self's encounter with the world" (13). These results clearly show how an appreciation of sense experience in the creative production of literary texts is directly linked to an increase in colour words.

The invention of industrial colour had a remarkable impact on the increase in colour vocabulary in the Victorian era. New *artificial* hues, such as mauve or magenta, were developed in further consequence of the discovery of the first aniline dye mauveine by William Henry Perkin in 1856 (Ribeyrol, "Introduction" 2). With the invention of new hues, the necessity to find names for them arose. The 19th century saw an enormous increase in colour names, unprecedented in the history of the English language (Kerttula 271).[22] This productivity in regard to new colour names was fuelled by

> the expansion of the first mass media, newspapers and magazines. This multiplied the amount of written language circulating around and disseminating words. […] [N]ew colour terms were introduced in advertisements, articles on farming, reports of social events, etc. (273)

Since Perkin's discovery, the production of commercial synthetic dyes and the fast development of new colours have been unstoppable. In 2003, Zollinger calculates that "[i]n the last 145 years, several million different colored compounds have been synthesized, with *ca.* 15,000 colorants, over time, produced on an industrial scale" (1, original emphasis). This development had an enormous impact on the experience of colour:

> The second half of the nineteenth century indeed marked a key turning-point in the experience of colour as, on the one hand, its physiological and psychological perception became the object of increasing,

22 Yet, "many of these creations either lost their significance later or did not gain a proper foothold" (Kerttula 272).

> scientific study, while, on the other, its very body was undergoing transformation by chemical synthesis. (Ribeyrol, "Introduction" 7)

Next to these contemporary developments, Ribeyrol even ascribes to the Victorian era a "chromophilia, which was intimately related to their interest in the past, whether antique, biblical, medieval or Renaissance" (6). The studies mentioned earlier by Gladstone, Mead and Pratt were all published during the second half of the 19th century and affirm the increasing interest in colour also in the field of literary studies at the time.

We have now seen how the palette of colour words changes throughout literary history and how the analysis of colour vocabulary can give some indication of broader cultural contexts. In the next section, we will turn to another decisive function of colour in literary texts.

### 2.2.2 FIGURATIVE USE OF COLOUR WORDS

Colour words are not only used descriptively in literary texts but they are very often employed to convey meaning figuratively. Think, for example, of the symbolic function of white in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* or in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which also black is employed as contrast; the colour red in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* or the red room in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; and yellow in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" or the yellow book in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In all these instances, colour accomplishes a symbolic function in that it is used as "a concrete image to express an emotion or an abstract idea" (*Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, "symbol and symbolism"). It is certainly an advantage that colours are always already in one way or another culturally imbued with meaning and thereby coded. This semantic charging makes them especially attractive for figurative use.[23] Meanings of colour are also influenced by historical background as well as psychological,

23 John Gage's *Colour and Culture* and *Colour and Meaning* (in both, however, contributions on literary texts are rare) or Charles A. Riley's *Color Codes* engage with this topic in more detail.

religious and folkloristic usages. Especially the psychological dimension of colour is foregrounded by Goethe as he famously draws attention to sensual-moral effects of colour in the didactic part of his *Theory of Colours*. For him, the effects of colour "are immediately associated with the emotions of the mind" (Goethe 304), which in turn influence their symbolic meaning.[24] Goethe's theory marks a turning point in the interpretation of colour due to the foregrounding of emotional value, experience and psychological effects of colour (Schausten, "Die Farben Imaginierter Welten" 19-20). Heller follows this line when she analyses in her empirical study *Wie Farben auf Gefühl und Verstand Wirken* thirteen "psychologische Farben" (21) with regard to their emotional associations and places them in their symbolic context. Red, for example, is "[d]ie Farbe aller Leidenschaften – von der Liebe bis zum Hass. Farbe der Könige und des Kommunismus, Farbe der Freude und der Gefahr" (Heller 23). Literary texts play with these established colour codes, sometimes they adopt them but more often they break them up and develop their very own colour symbolisms. Following such colour traces through a text by analysing their appearance and function can provide insights that contribute to a better understanding of the text. Both Rettenberger and Frank, in their studies on Hawthorne's and Melville's colour symbolism, point out that colours in these works never convey only one meaning but are diversely coded in a text-immanent network. In Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the red letter on Hester's bosom was originally intended to symbolise adultery. However, it is recoded by Hester herself and other community members to mean *able* as she becomes acknowledged as an exceptionally strong, helpful and sympathetic woman (Rettenberger 119). Scarlet, or red, thereby embraces a range of possible symbolic meanings with positive as well as negative connotations, as pointed out by Heller above. The symbolic value of red is, however, not restricted to the letter A on Hester's bosom. Throughout the novel, Retten-

24 In his colour circle, Goethe attributes to each colour a certain quality that the colour produces when we are looking at it: "yellow, red-yellow (orange), yellow-red (minium, cinnabar)", for example, excite "quick, lively, aspiring" (Goethe 306) feelings. On the other hand, "blue, red-blue, and blue-red [...] produce a restless, susceptible, anxious impression" (310). Based on these impressions, he supposes that colours have a symbolic meaning that is inherent in each colour and "coincide[s] entirely with nature" (350): "If, for example, pure red, were assumed to designate majesty, there can be no doubt that this would be admitted to be a just and expressive symbol" (350-51).

berger remarks, red is employed as a leitmotif that connects the scarlet letter, a rose-bush and Hester's daughter Pearl with each other (119). Through this complex network of links, the ambiguity of the symbolic value of red is even more enhanced (122). Such an ambiguity of colour words is also identified by Frank in his analysis of Melville's work: "Typisch für Melville ist, daß alle Farben bei ihrer symbolischen Verwendung sowohl positive als auch negative Bedeutung haben und auch in ganz verschiedenen Bereichen gleichzeitig schwingen können" (146). Frank further notes that white, in *Moby Dick* an important symbol of fear, danger and death (76), also serves to introduce the white whale indirectly before it even appears (97). A range of different colour words – all somehow referring to white – are employed humorously and often negatively (98) as well as in relation to traditional positive symbolic values (e.g. in connection to beauty or Christian symbols) (103) throughout the novel. 'White words' thus build a network that finally leads to the appearance of the white whale (102) – the symbolic creature par excellence.[25]

In the process of imbuing colour words with symbolic meaning in literary texts, metaphor and metonymy play a crucial role. While metaphor is "the use of language to refer to something other than what it was originally applied to, or what it 'literally' means, in order to suggest some resemblance or make a connection between the two" (Knowles & Moon 3), metonymy "involves either part-and-whole relations […] or else naming by association" (4). Both figures of speech are flexible and open to creative impulses. Kövecses points

25 For an excellent analysis of the contrasting meaning of the colours black and white in American literature, see also Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*. Morrison observes that in early American literature "images of impenetrable whiteness […] appear almost always in conjunction with representations of black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent or under complete control" (33). From this she concludes that "these images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness – a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing" (33). Referring to literary works by Poe, Faulkner, Hemingway, Styron and Bellow, Morrison further notes that

> [i]f we follow through on the self-reflexive nature of [these literary works'] encounters with Africanism, it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil *and* protective, rebellious *and* forgiving, fearful *and* desirable – all of the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable. (59, original emphasis)

out that metaphors can express culture specific values and meanings while at the same time they can give hints to the author's individual and creative ideas (49). Knowles and Moon differentiate between *conventional metaphors* and *creative metaphors* (5-6). While conventional metaphors "are institutionalized as part of the language" (6), creative metaphors "are those which a writer/speaker constructs to express a particular idea or feeling in a particular context" and "[t]hey are typically new […] although they may be based on pre-existing ideas or images" (5).

A good example of a skilful figurative employment of colour is Derek Jarman's *Chroma*. It is not only an outstanding text in terms of its material and experiential engagement with colour, as we will see in chapter 5, but also worth discussing in terms of figurative uses of colour. In *Chroma*, Jarman[26] experiments with already existing conventional colour metaphors and metonyms, he invents new ones to challenge a normative discourse or adds new connotations to a specific colour to enrich its meaning. Already the chapter headings in *Chroma* are metaphorically rich: "White Lies" (9), "On Seeing Red" (31), "Green Fingers" (63) or "Into the Blue" (103). Metaphor is a figure of speech that Jarman likes to employ in his writing, perhaps because it directly opens up a wide imaginative realm into which the reader is lifted by using relatively few words. By means of the chapter "On Seeing Red" (31), I want to exemplarily illustrate how Jarman playfully employs metaphor and metonymy by, on the one hand, adopting culturally established meanings while, on the other hand, adding his very own connotations in order to enrich the meaning of red. Jarman suggests a whole variety of associations in relation to red and thereby illustrates the wealth of this colour's figurative meanings. In terms of metaphor he uses, for example, the phrases "[r]ed with anger" (40) and "red hot sex" (36), and he proclaims that "[l]ove, like the heart, is red" (32). We find metonyms, for example, in the expression "red is without doubt the colour of war" (32), in which the colour red stands for the shedding of blood on the battlefield, and another example with red light in the "Red Light district of Soho" (35), which stands for "an area of a city or town where prostitution and other commercialized sexual activities are concentrated. […]

26 Derek Jarman is the author as well as the narrator in *Chroma*. Since it is an autobiographical text, I will always refer to the narrating voice as Jarman's own voice throughout this study.

With reference to the red light traditionally used as the sign of a brothel" (*OED*, "red light, n., 2."). In other instances, Jarman uses red descriptively, such as in "Coca Cola red of Father Christmas" (37) or when he writes that "[r]ed hair was associated with evil" (40). These uses of red literally refer to the colour red; yet, at the same time, they open up a whole range of associations of Christmas and the festive season in the former example, and red hair as a sign of witchcraft in Christian Europe in the latter. All these examples have in common that they are rather conventional associations with the colour red. To these figurative meanings of red, Jarman adds his own meanings which are influenced by his experience of being part of a queer community:

> […] I took off to the *Red Light district* of Soho. Our queer world was imprisoned in shadows. Not the shop windows in Amsterdam or Hamburg where the girls flaunted themselves in the *red light*. *Red Hot Mammas*! *Scarlet Women*! In our world the *flashing red light* warned us that there was a police raid. Caught *red-handed*, we waited for hours carrying a number like a lottery ticket before we were questioned and checked out. *Red-tape*. Home alone again. *Red hot with anger*. These nights cost you, the bank statement hovered towards the *red*. I sacrificed time and money pursuing *red hot sex*, which the legislation had made so difficult to find. (35-36, my emphasis)

In the red-light district, his experience as a queer person is radically different from the experiences that heterosexual men can find there. For Jarman, and for other queer people, the colour red might be associated with "red hot sex", but not with the one that the "[r]ed hot mammas" or "[s]carlet women" invite to. Red has a completely different meaning in the context of a red-light district to him: it symbolises danger and violence, a "police raid" that often results in the humiliating procedure of being supposedly "[c]aught red-handed" and being exposed to homophobic "[r]ed-tape". And even the consequences are red when he finds himself "[r]ed hot with anger" and his bank account is turning "red" because of penalties he has to pay. Jarman exchanges the semantic field of heterosexual experience in the red-light district with his own experience as a queer person looking for sexual encounters with other men.

The many examples of figurative uses of red are carefully chosen to create the impression of an atmosphere in which passion and sex are never to be thought of separately from danger and violence. Red traditionally symbolises all of this, as we have seen earlier, and is thus perfectly suited to illustrate Jarman's experience. So, how does Jarman figuratively use red in the example above? First, the metonym "Red Light district" sets the scene. The next *red* is a literal description of the "red light" that is characteristic of this area and gives the red-light district its name. This red light is, however, not only a coloured light but is already coded as it stands for sex and promiscuous women. These women are called "Red Hot Mammas" and "Scarlet Women" – they already carry the colour red in their name. These are conventional metaphors, yet the red in their names can be traced back to different origins: while the "scarlet woman" or "scarlet lady" (*OED*, "scarlet, C2. a.") has its origins in the bible as it refers to the Whore of Babylon who was dressed in scarlet and sat on a scarlet beast (*The Bible*, Revelation 17.1-6), the term "red-hot mama" is U.S. slang (*OED*, "red-hot, adj., C2") and here, the colour red is combined with *hot*. "Red-hot" is a fixed term which originally refers to heat that is sufficient to make an object or substance (e.g. metal) red-hot ("red heat, n., 2."). This term can also be used figuratively in which it then refers to "a thing, action, feeling, etc." that is "burning, urgent, violent, furious; fervent, passionate" ("red-hot, adj., 2.a."). In the case of the red-hot mamas, the latter two adjectives, fervent and passionate, may be the ones that apply in this context. Coming back to the passage in *Chroma*, we now encounter a totally different red light than the one in the red-light district. The "flashing red light" that warns Jarman and his queer community of a police raid. While this is again a literal description of the flashing light they see, a red light is also a symbol for "an indication of danger; a warning" (*OED*, "red light, n., 1."). Red now changes its meaning and stands for danger rather than lust. We have entered another semantic field of red and the next metaphor makes this even more clear: arrested by the police, they are "[c]aught red-handed". This is also a conventional metaphor, a fixed term in which "red-handed" means "in the very act of committing a crime or misdeed; that is still bearing the obvious evidence of guilt" ("red-handed, adj., 1.c."). This adjective is an example of a metonym that turned into a metaphor; a process that is not uncommon according to Knowles and Moon (57-58). The red hands originally stand for a person who "has just committed murder or homicide; having the hands

stained with a victim's blood" (*OED*, "red-handed, adj., 1.b."). In the way Jarman uses the term, *red-handed* refers to a crime in general; or, more precisely, in his case, the 'crime' he committed is pursuing homosexual intercourse – an act for which one could still get arrested by the police in England in the 1980s and 90s.[27] He comes into contact with "[r]ed tape", the next colour metonym Jarman uses. The expression *red tape* refers to "[r]igid adherence to official rules and formalities; (excessive) bureaucracy, esp. in public business. Chiefly *depreciative*" ("red tape, n., 2.", original emphasis). Here, the "[w]oven red or pink tape used to secure legal documents and official papers" ("red tape, n., 1.") stands for bureaucratic processes as a whole. The encounter with the police and with the official state apparatus cause Jarman to be "[r]ed hot with anger". This *red hot* is different from the *red hot* of the 'mamas' earlier. Here, the other range of figurative meanings of *red hot* come into play and refer to a feeling that may rather be "burning, urgent, violent, furious" (*OED*, "red-hot, adj., 2.a."). When "the bank statement hovered towards the red", this red signifies debt according to the tradition that the amount of money owed to the bank is printed in red colour on the bank statement. The last appearance of red in the passage turns again to the topic of sex. Yet, this time, it is a metaphorical description of Jarman's own experience as a homosexual man pursuing sex in Soho. Here, all the above-mentioned figurative uses of red come into play: *red hot sex* in this last instance is full of passion

27 In 1967, the UK's Sexual Offence Act "decriminalized sexual acts between men in private, but 'private' was defined very narrowly, and made penalties even harsher for any acts not occurring in private" (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite). Paul Burston, a journalist and author, reflects on the situation of homosexual men in the UK during the second half of the 20th century:

> It's a commonly held misconception that the 1967 act legalised male homosexuality. It didn't. It partially decriminalised it under certain conditions. In the years that followed, gay sexuality was policed more aggressively than before and the number of men arrested for breaching those conditions actually rose considerably. [...] Policing in the 80s and early 90s was virulently homophobic, whipped up by hysteria around Aids [...]. Gay saunas were raided. "Disorderly house" charges were pressed against gay bars and nightclubs. [...] I'm not saying that the 1967 Act wasn't revolutionary. In many ways it was. [...] But it was also very limited. It allowed the law to go on punishing us for things heterosexuals took for granted – the freedom to have sex at 16, the freedom to express our love in public, the freedom to be ourselves. (Burston et al.)

and desire while at the same time it is always dangerous due to legislation, as it may result in being caught by the police.

All these examples illustrate how Jarman recodes the symbolism of the red-light district and shows that *red* does not only stand for red shop windows and prostitutes but can signify homophobia and danger alike. Jarman thus creates new connotations of red that are of vital significance especially for queer people in that they express their experience. His figurative uses of red attack and change the "normative, emotional and ideological implications" (Nünning & Nünning 70) of conventional metaphors and make a so far neglected aspect of experience visible. Used figuratively, colour words are perfectly suited for expressing complex meanings. The specific achievement of literary texts is that they pick up already existing colour codes and develop them further in order to create new meanings or to criticise established discourses. In the above-mentioned examples, colour symbols, metaphors and metonyms fulfil important functions for a hermeneutic reading which focuses on the meaning of colour in the text.

# 3 TOWARDS A MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE DIMENSION OF COLOUR

## 3.1 WRITING COLOUR: THE EMERGENCE OF LITERARY COLOURSCAPES IN THE FIN DE SIÈCLE AND VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MODERNIST TEXTS

Next to the issues of colour semantics and the figurative use of colour words, I would like to draw attention to another function of colour in English literature which has received less attention so far but is very significant for *colour writings*. In the literary texts just presented and discussed in the previous chapter, colour words are mainly employed for specific purposes and are not a dominant feature of the text as a whole (*Chroma* is an exception here). From the fin de siècle onwards, I argue, this changes and a turn to colour can be witnessed. Colour becomes more prominent in literary texts due to aesthetic and phenomenological concerns as we will see in this chapter. This development continues in modernist writing, for example in Virginia Woolf's texts. With fin-de-siècle and modernist literature, colour steps on the stage and takes on a central role. Readers are invited by literary texts to lose themselves in colourscapes and experience colour first-hand. Such a foregrounding of colour is characteristic of colour writings, as already mentioned in the Introduction. This turn to colour requires a shift in how to read and understand colour in literary texts, namely no longer as a matter of referential or symbolic meaning but the focus is now on a reading for colour's *performative* function and thus on what colour words can do in the text and the effects they achieve.[1]

To lead into the discussion, I want to begin with a counterexample, a poem by Christina Rossetti. Nowadays "regarded as a leading Victorian wom-

1 From the point of view of literary history, the performative dimension of this turn to colour can also be embedded in a general shift of modern literature towards more performative dimensions of representation. In his article "The Romantic Paradigm: Ambiguity, Then and Now", Reinfandt traces this development towards performance: while a "referential/mimetic representation as depiction" had been characteristic of the Enlightenment, Romanticism developed a new understanding "of representation as a performance of perception/experience/speaking in writing" which then was "supplanted by mere (?) linguistic, semiotic and textual performance" in modernist modes of narration (287-88).

an poet" (*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, "Rossetti, Christina Georgina"), Rossetti provides an example of colour poetry that stands in stark contrast to what will follow later in fin-de-siècle poetry and modernist writing. Her poem with the first line "What is pink? a rose is pink", first published in *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872), is structured along a list of basic colour terms which are then connected to an object that has this colour:

What is pink? a rose is pink
By the fountain's brink.
What is red? a poppy's red
In its barley bed.
What is blue? the sky is blue
Where the clouds float thro'.
What is white? a swan is white
Sailing in the light.
What is yellow? pears are yellow,
Rich and ripe and mellow.
What is green? the grass is green,
With small flowers between.
What is violet? clouds are violet
In the summer twilight.
What is orange? why, an orange,
Just an orange!

(Rossetti 202)

It is characteristic of this poem that on each question follows a short answer: "What is red? a poppy's red" (line 3). The reader follows the implicit lyric persona through their associations with different colour terms. These references – a rose for pink, grass for green, etc. – are rather common associations in a British cultural context. The references are all taken from the semantic field of *nature* or *park* with flowers, landscapes, animals and fruits. Colour is attributed to a thing; it is a quality that a thing possesses and in this it recalls philosophical positions held by Colour Objectivism. Yet, what makes

these associations unique is the line that follows, for example, "What is red? a poppy's red / In its barley bed" (3-4). Line four adds context to the before isolated colour association and thus enriches the association with a contextual quality. These contextual lines point to the relational character of colour: a specific hue, such as red, green or blue, is rarely perceived in isolation when it is related to a thing. It is always in relation to an environment that we perceive a specific hue. The poppy's red is framed, and hence defined, by the barley's yellow or green (depending on its ripeness). Characteristic of these contextual lines is that in them no colour word as such appears. They play with the reader's imagination by encouraging them to add the colour context themselves: "What is blue? the sky is blue / Where the clouds float thro'" (5-6). The clouds' colour is automatically added by the reader to the image that is created through the poem's lines. Drawing on experience, the colour of clouds floating through a *blue* sky are probably white big cumulus clouds or white fleecy clouds. The green lines leave more room for interpretation: "What is green? the grass is green, / With small flowers between" (11-12). Each reader can imagine any colour of their choice for the "small flowers between". Other lines do not point to certain things but to the atmosphere created by light: the white swan is "[s]ailing in the light" (8) and "clouds are violet / In the summer twilight" (13-14). By switching between more concrete and more abstract contexts during the reading process, the reader changes their focus between these layers, they focalise on a concrete image or zoom out to capture the atmosphere of the evoked situation. Lines nine to ten stand out in their synaesthetic quality as they add smell to the visual experience: "What is yellow? pears are yellow, / Rich and ripe and mellow". This is a small interruption in the otherwise very 'visual' poem and it somehow foreshadows the second, this time humorous, interruption that the reader encounters in the last two lines: "What is orange? why, an orange, / Just an orange!" (15-16). These lines are funny and surprising, highlighted by the exclamation mark, and give the until then picturesque and rather serious poem a twist. They play with the etymology of the colour term *orange* deriving from the fruit orange (Kerttula 225-28) and let colour and thing (i.e. the fruit) collapse into each other. The final lines play with the oscillating image of colour term and thing falling together, erasing the dividing line, while at the same time, the term *orange* and the fruit orange remain in separate realms of colour concept and thing. This twist adds a thoughtful and surprising note to the otherwise rather easily

accessible poem and qualifies it, together with other poems in this nursery rhyme collection, as a poem of "great sophistication" (xxiii), as Humphries observes in his introduction to Rossetti's poetry and prose.

While at a first glance Rossetti's poem appears to be a simple nursery rhyme to familiarise children with colour words, it actually turns out to poetically point to different philosophical positions on colour. The poem draws on referential and relational issues of colour and language and shows how colour can also indirectly be evoked by merely describing the environment without using any colour words. Yet, through its question and answer form, the poem highlights references between colour words and things situated in the world *out there*. The reader becomes a teammate in this game, switching between colour words and things. Things are the answer to the posed questions and thus the lasting impression in the reader is not a colour but a thing that is further enriched by context or additional sensuous qualities. A different reading experience is created by the poems I want to take a closer look at in the following: they employ colour in order to create literary colourscapes in which the reader gets involved in such a way that they can lose themselves in colour.

### 3.1.1 A TURN TO COLOUR IN THE FIN DE SIÈCLE

With the fin de siècle and its Aesthetic and Decadent movements came a turn to colour. Authors were no longer primarily interested in referential functions of colour words but rather moved towards experimentations with experiential qualities of colour. Fletcher points out that fin-de-siècle poets "write as if they are all eye" ("Introduction", xix) and he illustrates this by "urban 'impressions'" (xx) in Oscar Wilde's "Symphony in Yellow" and Arthur Symonds' works. Literary texts of the Decadent movement indulge in iridescent descriptions, even in "Farbexzesse" (Birus 158). Especially the characters in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Joris-Karl Huysmans' *A Rebours* (in English translation *Against Nature*) like to employ the most differentiated colour words, for example in elaborate colour descriptions of gemstones (Birus 157).[2]

2 The beginnings of a turn to colour in the fin de siècle is also identified by Rey Conquer who examines the function of colour in German poetry at the turn of the century. He argues that

John Addington Symonds and William Sharp are two authors who wrote in this literary and cultural environment and who evoke their very own colourscapes in their texts. The fin-de-siècle author Symonds devotes himself to capture shades of blue in his essay "In the Key of Blue" (1893), which counts as "an important contribution to fin-de-siècle writing" (Booth). The essay is unique in that it provides reflections on the proper use of colour words and readily applies them in a "series of [poetic] studies of what might be termed 'blues and blouses'" (Symonds 4). These lines of poetry are included in the essay and are thus framed by contextual prose parts. Fletcher points out major topics of these poetic studies in his endnote to Symonds' text:

> The title ["In the Key of Blue"] furnishes an example of the fusion of different senses and arts, prevalent among symbolists, aesthetes, and decadents;[3] 'blue' also has overtones of the melancholic and the forbidden. The homoerotic poet addresses his favourite gondolier, imaged as a moving painting, expressing admiration for the strong harmoniously-formed bodies of working men. The discreet use of scientific imagery is also of interest. (418)

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> [t]his period is one, as Jacob Steiner points out, in which colour first seems to play a new role in poetry, and is a period marked also by connections between literature and the visual arts and ideas of visuality per se, and of scepticism around language, and of interest in surfaces and appearances, colour being the obvious meeting point of these. (34-35)

Jacob Steiner, mentioned above, observes: "Jedem Leser fällt auf, daß in der Lyrik vom Fin de siècle bis zum ersten Weltkrieg die Farben eine besondere Rolle spielen. Sie treten zahlreicher auf als in irgendeiner früheren Epoche der deutschen Literatur und haben eine bis dahin nicht gekannte Qualität" (86). This new quality of colour could perhaps best be described by what Eva Eßlinger identifies as an achievement of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, an important Austrian fin-de-siècle poet: "[seine] Kunst [hat] sich vom Prinzip der realistischen Repräsentation emanzipiert [...] und [befindet] sich über die Intensivierung der Farben im Impressionismus auf halbem Weg in die Abstraktion der Moderne" (216).

3 Many fin-de-siècle writers were interested in the topic of synaesthesia and the time between "the 1890s until the 1920s [...] was the heyday of psychological research into synaesthesia" (Conquer 25). In France, it was especially Baudelaire and Rimbaud who experimented with synaesthetic effects in their poetry (see Denisoff, p. 34 and Conquer, p. 25).

We find a wealth of topics in this description, which are all very interesting; yet, a major concern of the studies, namely, how to *write* the shades of blue into being via language is not addressed. Symonds points to the difficulty of *writing colour* already in the very first sentence of his essay: "The nomenclature of colour in literature has always puzzled me. It is easy to talk of green, blue, yellow, red. But when we seek to distinguish the tints of these hues […] we are practically left to suggestions founded upon metaphor and analogy" (Symonds 1). We lend the colour terms either from "some object in nature", as in "grass-green", "sky-blue" or "orange" (remember Christina Rossetti's poem here), or "we use the names of substances from which the pigments are compounded", such as "yellow-ochre" or "madder" (1), or even the newly invented synthetic colours such as "mauve" or "magenta" (2). For Symonds, such precise designations of colour hues are impractical for poetic use:

> It is obvious that for purely literary purposes these designations have a very unequal value. Some of them are inadmissible in serious composition. The most precise often fail by interpreting what is absent from the reader's mental eye through what is unknown to his intelligence. Not everybody is familiar with jade, cadmium, almandine, Nile-water. (2)[4]

Some of these tints, however, "have been accepted into common parlance" (3), such as "blood" and "rose" which "contribute largely to the phraseology

4 I would like to stress that Symonds deemed all these colour terms, either derived from objects in nature, pigments or synthetically produced materials, as unsuitable for literary use. This becomes evident in the last line in which he explicates that "[n]ot everybody is familiar with *jade, cadmium, almandine, Nile-water*" (2, my emphasis). Ribeyrol refers to nearly the same passage in Symonds to reinforce her claim that 19th-century aesthetic circles were highly critical concerning the newly invented synthetic dyes: "This chromatic revolution, devised for an expanding textile industry, destabilized the terminology of colour as noted by Symonds, who deemed such commercial hues unsuitable for poetic use" ("Introduction" 8). This is in my opinion an insufficient interpretation of Symonds, who was not only critical about colour words of synthetically produced colours but also saw difficulties in too specific colour words derived from any field whatsoever.

of red" (3). Not every attempt to write colour is lost then and he even argues that "[t]he poverty of language upon which I am insisting is not wholly disadvantageous to a stylist. It forces him to exercise both fancy and imagination in the effort to bring some special tint before the mental vision of the reader" (3). And this is exactly what Symonds attempts to illustrate in his blue studies: "It struck me that it would be amusing to try the resources of our language in a series of studies what might be termed 'blues and blouses'" (4). Symonds highlights that his notes for these colour studies are "caught by accident" and are "not sought deliberately" (5). In doing so, he stresses the process of composition which is not based on the effort of an intellectual mind but is rather a recording of impressions which he perceives as they impinge on him in the process of observation. This aspiration – to write only about what he perceives – is also discussed in regards to the sixth study and he makes his readers aware of a possibly richer colour palette under different light conditions: "It might have been possible to discover a concord of blue and green under intenser [sic] conditions of light and colour, as when, in the afterglow, barges laden with fresh-cut grass glide against the purples of the east. Yet, as I saw the harmony, I give it here in verse" (11). In the end, he does not invent a more suitable palette but stays true to his actual perception. (However, by mentioning the alternative colour palette in the prose part of the essay, he ultimately evokes this alternative colourscape and makes it also available to the reader). Symonds provides more insights into the compositional context of his poetic colour studies: the idea for the colour studies came to his "mind at Venice, where the problem of colour gradations under their most subtle aspect presents itself on all sides to the artist" (3). His object of study is "a *facchino* with whom [he has] been long acquainted" and the task was "to pose him in a variety of lights with a variety of hues in combination" (4, original emphasis). In Venice, Symonds tells the reader, he has been "especially attracted to the qualities of blue in the dresses of both men and women, and to the behaviour of this colour under various effects of natural and artificial light" (3). He is a keen observer of shifting colour hues and pays close attention to the appearance of different shades of blue in relation to "flesh-tints", "complexion", "the greenish water of the canals" or the influence of "strong sunlight" (4). Both the referential character of colour words as well as relational aspects in colour perception figure prominently in Symonds' essay and are thus reminiscent of Christina Rossetti's poem. Symonds' verses, however,

achieve a totally different effect. Leaving the theoretical comments on the suitability of colour words in poetry behind, he turns to his poetic studies which could also be described as a colour travelogue: Symonds[5] and Augusto, the nineteen-year-old facchino (6), travel through Venice and nearby countryside and each time Symonds perceives a striking scene, he conserves it in lines of poetry. Blue is studied in relation to many colours: we are taken on a journey through "symphon[ies]" of "black and blue" (5), "blue and white" (7), "blues and brown" (8), "pink and blue" (9), "blues and gold" (10), "blues and green" (11) and "blues and red" (12). The first study is full of rich blue hues and shall serve as an example here:

> *A symphony of black and blue –*
> *Venice asleep, vast night, and you.*
> *The skies were blurred with vapours dank:*
> *The canal stretched inky-blank,*
> […]
> *Pitch-dark! You were the one thing blue:*
> *Four tints of pure celestial hue:*
> *The larkspur blouse by tones degraded*
> *Through silken sash of sapphire faded,*
> *The faintly floating violet tie,*
> *The hose of lapis-lazuli.*
>
> (5-6, original emphasis)[6]

Symonds evokes a very nuanced colourscape of blue – "*[a] symphony of black and blue*" – in these lines. The background is "*[p]itch-dark*" and the blues seem to gleam in front of it. Rich "tints of pure celestial hue" define the scene: "*larkspur*", "*sapphire*", "*violet*" and "*lapis-lazuli*". Nothing, however, is "*celes-*

5 Since the poems are part of a non-fictious essay, I refer to the narrating voice as Symonds' own voice.

6 Since these poetic lines are part of the essay, I refer to page numbers here, not line numbers.

*tial*" in these colour words, they are adopted from either flower or gemstone. In combining these colour words, Symonds draws a line from the heaven above to the gemstones mined underground.[7] His colours are thus very material colours.[8] And this materiality is even enhanced as he modifies the tints in connection to pieces of cloth:

> *The larkspur blouse by tones degraded*
> *Through silken sash of sapphire faded,*
> *The faintly floating violet tie,*
> *The hose of lapis-lazuli.*

As much as the blue hues stand out from the black background, they are in themselves subdued in tone, "*degraded*" and "*faded*". Whereas in Rossetti's poem the thing is finally the prominent impression and not the colour, the verses by Symonds work differently. Although he does only twice mention the word *blue* and mainly refers to blue tints which derive their names from things, the lasting impression is a composition of *blue shades*. One seeming difficulty, which Symonds pointed out before, is the following: does every reader know the difference in shade between sapphire and lapis-lazuli? Does every reader know what larkspur looks like, not to mention that larkspur blossoms can have many different shades of blue? In my opinion, this is not an obstacle for experiencing the colourscapes evoked in this scene. The colour experience does not depend on exact representation but on the capacity to imagine different shades of blue. Such a variety of hues is even supported as the blue tints are presented in combination with pieces of clothing and this

7 Ribeyrol sees such a link of heaven and earth in the colour blue, too: "Blue was certainly a very popular colour at the time [Victorian era], bringing together both pigment and light, the earthly and the celestial" ("Introduction" 12).

8 See also Ribeyrol for a reading of Symonds' essay in connection to a "material history" of blue ("Introduction" 2). She especially points out that "Symonds's poetic and pictorial fantasies on Augusto's blue blouse [...] need to be recontextualised as culturally charged evocations within [a] material history of colour" that is based on "the centrality of blue in Western culture" due to a "complex history of blue dyes and pigments since the Middle Ages" (2).

is also where the reader perceives the hues: in the folds of blouse and hose, in the shimmering "*silken sash*" and the "*floating*" tie. The clothes' texture adds a tactile component to the colour experience and makes it even richer, bringing forth a depth of colour. In this, it recalls a painting, with the texture of paint on the canvas adding depth to colour. Symonds even describes his studies as "word-painting" (15) and he is aware of the fallacies which a presentation of colour in language entails compared to one in painting (15-16). However, he sees a certain advantage in literary presentations of colour in that they activate the imagination of the reader and involve them in the unfolding colourscapes: "Sympathetic minds are stimulated to acts of creation by the writer, while pictures make demands upon their assimilative faculties alone" (16).

William Sharp's fin-de-siècle poem "The White Peacock" (1891) is another example in which colour plays a central role and stimulates the reader's mind. The poem gradually builds up a colourscape into which the majestic figure of the eponymous white peacock enters. Forty-four lines lead up to its entrance, building an atmosphere full of expectation as the reader awaits the appearance of the white peacock. This expectant tension is foremost created by the syntax of the poem:

> Here where the sunlight
> Floodeth the garden,
> Where the pomegranate
> Reareth its glory.
>
> (lines 1-4)

For the length of forty-four lines, the repetitive use of the local adverbs "here" and "where" sets up the environment for the white peacock to emerge. This environment is described in colourful and sensuous terms, thereby gradually preparing an enhanced contrast to the stunning white appearance of the peacock in line forty-five. The scenery is a Mediterranean one from the beginning, in which "the sunlight / Floodeth the garden" (1-2), "pomegranate" (3), "oleanders" (6), "magnolias" (10), "ilexes" (12), "cactus" (16), "fir and cypress" (18) grow and "where the Scirocco, / faint in the hollows / Foldeth his

soft wings in the sunlight" (32-34). The sunlight "[f]loodeth" (2) the garden and creates a play of light and shadow which contributes to the "dreamlike" (39) atmosphere of the garden scene. This atmosphere is enhanced through sea metaphors and similes as they create a floating movement:

> Where the oleanders
> dream through the noontides;
> And, like surf o' the sea
> Round cliffs of basalt,
> The thick magnolias
> in billowy masses
> Front the somber green of the ilexes
>
> (6-12)

By combining plants ("oleanders" and "thick magnolias") with water metaphors, the solidity of these things is transformed into an amorphous fluid state[9] by means of which the scene is given a dreamy touch. In the beginning of "The White Peacock", up to line eleven, no colour words appear; a colourful scenery is solely implicitly evoked by the mentioned blossoms, greenery and water images. From line thirteen onwards this changes and colour words and words related to light conditions flourish in the poem:

> Here where the heat lies
> *Pale blue* in the hollows,
> Where *blue* are the *shadows*
> On the fronds of the cactus,
> Where *pale blue* the *gleaming*
> Of fir and cypress,
> With the cones upon them
> *Amber* or *glowing*

9 As we will later see, this is also a key element of Virginia Woolf's modernist texts.

With virgin *gold*;
Here where the honey-flower
Makes the heat fragrant

(13-23, my emphasis)

Heat, colour and fragrance create an infatuating mixture that evokes a rich sensuous experience. Words related to colour, light and shadow abound as can be seen by the emphasised parts in the quotation above. This sensuous mixture makes the scene brim with life, while at the same moment it bemuses with its sober colours of "*pale* blue" (my emphasis) and thereby enhances the dreamlike atmosphere.[10] Flowers are listed in the following lines – strange and unusual flowers indeed: "[…] dream-flowers, / The cream-white poppies" (29-30) and the oxymoronic "white violets" (37). With this, the colour palette slowly shifts towards white and prepares the stage for the entrance of the white peacock:

Here, as the breath, as the soul of this beauty
Moveth in silence, and dreamlike, and slowly,
White as a snow-drift in mountain-valleys
When softly upon it the gold light lingers:
White as the foam o' the sea that is driven
O'er billows of azure agleam with sun-yellow:
Cream-white and soft as the breasts of a girl,
Moves the White Peacock, as though through the noontide
A dream of the moonlight were real for a moment.

(38-46)

10 We have already seen a subdued colour palette in Symonds' verses above. This seems to be a common feature of the time, especially in Decadent poetry: "Its obsession with twilight is usually interpreted as a reflection of the fin de siècle's sense of itself as the tail-end of the Victorian era, but it is just as much an indication of the Decadents' experience of the unstable world as constantly in flux" (Thain 228-29).

Formally indicated by the lengthening of the lines, the whole scenery described so far is again taken up in these lines in which the white peacock appears, moving "slowly" and majestically through the garden: the "dreamlike" atmosphere is even enhanced as "noontide" (also mentioned in line seven earlier) and "moonlight" fall together; variations of sea metaphors are employed, this time with white "foam" and "billows"; the gold of the cones seems to radiate and illuminate the peacock's white plumage on which the "gold light lingers" as on a "snow-drift"; the colours "azure" and "sun-yellow" are now used as contrasting and at the same time highlighting the white of "foam o' the sea" to which the white hue of the peacock is compared. Just as the garden is described in sensuous detail, the peacock is also introduced through its colours and elegant movements. Up to line thirty-seven, colours, water metaphors and similes are used to describe the garden through which the peacock moves; this changes from line thirty-eight onwards as from now on similar colours, metaphors and similes are employed to describe the pale colours that create different shades of white on the peacock's plumage. The peacock thus merges with its surroundings through the colourful and sensuous evocations in the poem – and this entanglement is further pursued in the remaining lines. The "White Peacock" is mentioned only twice in the poem, in line forty-five and fifty-six. The second occurrence is preceded by blue allusions to the prior scene of blue shadows in the garden (14-18). Now, it is the peacock's fan that catches the pale blue: "Dim on the cream-white are blue adumbrations, / Shadows so pale in their delicate blueness / That visions they seem as of vanishing violets" (49-51). Landscape and bird are entangled through colour, light and shadow which supports the symbolic function of the white peacock in the poem: the figure of the white peacock symbolises – and this line appears twice in the poem – "the breath, […] the soul of this beauty" (38, 54) that we encounter in the garden. It may be a strange image that a *white* peacock should symbolise its *colourful* surroundings. Yet, in the same way as white light contains all the colours of the spectrum so can the white peacock bundle all the colours of the garden in itself and raise it to a transcendental level – the peacock is the "breath" and "soul" of the garden's beauty.

This poem illustrates very well how sensuous descriptions of a Mediterranean garden and the symbol of the white peacock, which can paradoxically be read as symbolising the garden's chromatic beauty, contribute to an emerging colourscape in which the reader can lose themselves. In contrast to the

colour metaphors and symbols presented in section 2.2.2 earlier, colour is foregrounded in "The White Peacock" and plays a central role in the poem. Sharp's poem is one example of how *experience* is a key concern in fin-de-siècle poetry. Walter Pater, in his seminal work *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873)[11], famously states in his preface: "To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find, not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics" (xxix). Metaphysical questions about beauty are not of interest to Pater, since "[b]eauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative" (xxix). We have seen such a concrete approach to beauty in Sharp's poem. Even though it includes a slightly transcendental touch with the white peacock being described as "the breath, […] the soul of this beauty" (Sharp 38, 54), the garden scenery is a unique one and enables a specific sensuous experience of this very place. In Pater's view, aesthetic criticism, the encounter with an artwork, should aim at "seeing one's object as it really is[12], [it] is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly" (Pater xxix). This is already moving into the direction of phenomenological conceptions that will later be discussed in the context of Woolf's modernist texts. For Pater, relevant questions when analysing an artwork are: "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? […] How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?" (xxix, original emphasis). In his conclusion, he encourages his readers to stay curious and open for new experiences: "What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions" (152). Art can support this as it "comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments'

11 Thain identifies this text as a major influence on the fin de siècle: "Walter Pater's *The Renaissance*, a hugely influential work for the period, contains much that explains the preoccupations of fin de siècle poetry" (226).

12 Adam Phillips, in his notes to *The Renaissance*, points out that this phrase is taken from Matthew Arnold: "'*To see the object as in itself it really is*': originally Matthew Arnold's 'On Translating Homer' (1862) and repeated in the opening paragraph of Arnold's 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864)" (159nxxix, original emphasis).

sake" (153). To experience these moments as intensely as possible, or in Pater's often-quoted words, "[t]o burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life" (152). This key phrase of Pater's conclusion is in its entirety

> based around a temporal paradox: the desire to celebrate the flux and transitory nature of life by stilling the moment and preserving it. Pater's injunction to "burn always with this hard, gemlike flame" takes a signifier of temporal flux – the flickering flame – and combines it with an image of stasis – the flame being hard and gemlike. (Thain 226)

Colour, too, is always already temporal and flickering as hues change according to light conditions. Creating colourscapes in a poem, as we have seen with Symonds and Sharp, is a possible way to 'conserve' these flickering colour impressions and create with their help a vibrant chromatic atmosphere in and through the text that can be activated in every single reading process. Pater "is now also seen as a significant precursor of 'modernism'" (Fletcher, *British Poetry and Prose 1870 - 1905* 483) and the fin de siècle is nowadays appreciated as "one of transition to the 'modern'" (Fletcher, "Introduction" xxxiii). The two poems by Symonds and Sharp anticipate in their attitude towards a writing of colour the mindset of modernist writers in this regard.

### 3.1.2 LOST IN COLOURSCAPES: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MODERNIST TEXTS

In Virginia Woolf's modernist works "Blue & Green" (1921), "Kew Gardens" (1921) and *The Waves* (1931), prismatic colourscapes unfold from the page in the reader's imagination. These colours do not serve as symbolic representation but are rather a "*presentation*" as Marlene Marcussen suggests: "This means directing attention to *what* is presented, but also to *how* it is presented" (155, original emphasis). In the three selected texts, Woolf employs colour to create atmospheres, to observe a moment or place, and to point to the cyclical and everchanging being of the world. Each text presents a mode

of engaging with a *doing* of colour, rather than focusing on the meaning of colour. Hence, these texts continue the turn to colour that began in the fin de siècle. These emerging colour writings, in which colour takes centre stage, focus on the performative side of colour.

This turn is accompanied by ground-breaking developments in the fine arts and philosophy alike. With the emergence of Impressionism and related movements – such as Post-Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Fauvism or Orphism – from the second half of the 19th century onwards, a radically new approach to painting develops. A "historical witness of the movement, Gustave Geffroy" (Courthion 12), observes: "Impressionism […] is painting that approaches phenomenalism, the appearance and significance of things in space, and which tries to catch the synthesis of these things in their momentary appearance" (Geffroy qtd. in Courthion 12). As much as this is true for Impressionism, it could also be a comment on Woolf's work – as we will see especially in "Kew Gardens" and *The Waves* – or on the fin-de-siècle texts analysed earlier. The impressionist art movement serves as a common cultural background for both the fin de siècle and Modernism. Thus, many impressionist premises recall Symonds', Sharp's and Pater's reflections on or dealing with colour while at the same time they anticipate aspects of my analysis of Woolf's texts to follow.

With the impressionist movement, the old aesthetic debate regarding *colore* and *disegno* revives. Whereas *disegno* (drawing or design) has over centuries been thought to be of prime importance in the theory of painting, *colore* (colour) regains significance in impressionist movements and takes priority (Wetzel 438). "The Post-Impressionists[, for example,] used colour in innovative ways. It became an expressive medium in and of itself, not simply a means to portray things in nature" (Sim 62). Related to this primacy of colour, impressionist movements discovered the importance of light for their work and developed the field of *lightpainting* ("Lichtmalerei" (Wetzel 438)). The French Neo-Impressionist Robert Delaunay observes in his essay "Ueber das Licht", translated from French into German by Paul Klee in 1913: "Im Verlauf des Impressionismus wurde in der Malerei das Licht entdeckt" (Delaunay 255) and one aim of impressionist painters was "daß das Licht sich dabei zur darstellerischen Selbstständigkeit erhebt" (256). Such an autonomy of light and colour cannot only be experienced in paintings of the time but also in the three selected texts by Woolf, as we will see. Delaunay stresses fur-

ther features of impressionist painting techniques that are also characteristic of Woolf's employment of light and colour:

> Die Natur ist von einer in ihrer Vielfältigkeit nicht zu beengenden Rhythmik durchdrungen. Die Kunst ahne [sic] ihr hierin nach, um sich zu gleicher Erhabenheit zu klären, sich zu Gesichten vielfachen Zusammenklangs zu erheben, eines Zusammenklangs von Farben, die sich teilen, und in gleicher Aktion wieder zum Ganzen zusammenschließen. (256)

The importance of rhythm, the interplay of different colours as well as the interplay between parts and wholeness conveyed through colour, which we all find in this formula, are characteristic of *The Waves*, too. Nature is no longer there to be depicted but Delaunay calls for an attention to 'imitate' the *movement* of nature, the *how* is favoured over the *what*, and with this we move from a representational to a performative understanding of art. Woolf herself was especially influenced by Post-Impressionism through her close contact with Roger Fry, who organised the first post-impressionist exhibition "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" including works by Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gaugin and Matisse in Britain in 1910 (Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* 109). Sim explains that

> Post-Impressionists wanted to re-present common objects and everyday scenes in new ways through innovative approaches to form and colour. Rather than transforming the everyday as such, they wanted to change its manner of presentation in painting and to reinvigorate our relationship to our everyday, lived environment through art. (62)

Woolf aims at a similar effect in her writing as she points out the importance of the everyday as a topic of literature: "Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small" ("Modern Fiction" 107). She further explains: "'The

proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss" (110). Throughout her career, Woolf has been highly interested in the challenge to transfer perception into language, and thoughts on this underly many of her writings: "Virginia Woolf's diaries are pervaded by speculations on the connection between direct experience of the visible world and the written word" (Mildenberg 104). Mildenberg further observes that "Woolf never stops seeking after that which is given to us in immediate experience without being obstructed by the habits of daily life […] offering a perhaps surprising image of the writer as […] a literary phenomenologist" (105).

With this observation we arrive at the second influential development of Woolf's time, that is, the rise of phenomenology in philosophy. Phenomenology was founded by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century and has been most prominently further developed by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Dan Zahavi, a leading 21st-century phenomenologist, describes a key aspect of phenomenology as follows:

> phenomenology is primarily interested in the *how* rather than in the *what* of objects. Rather than focusing on, say, the weight, rarity, or chemical composition of the object, phenomenology is concerned with the way in which the object shows or displays itself, i.e., in how it appears. There are important differences between the way in which a physical object, […] a work of art, a melody, a state of affairs, […] presents itself. Moreover, it is possible for one and the same object to appear in a variety of different ways: From this or that perspective, in strong or faint illumination, as perceived, imagined, wished for, feared, anticipated, or recollected. Briefly stated, phenomenology can be seen as a philosophical analysis of these different types of givenness. (9-10, original emphasis)

Another key aspect of phenomenology is that its focus of analysis

> is on the intersection between mind and world, neither of which can be understood in separation from each other. We are what we are as a function of our world-involvement, and the world understood as the fundamental context of meaning is also only what it is because of our involvement with it. (30)

From this follows that "the relation between mind and world is an internal relation, a relation constitutive of its relata, and not an external one of causality" (29). In her study *Modernism and Phenomenology*, Mildenberg "highlight[s] a kinship of method and concern *between* modernism and phenomenology" (2-3, original emphasis). This observation invites us to also read Woolf in a "phenomenological tradition" (Sim 33). Modernist writers and artists

> never present us with perfect, representative and finished models of life and the modernist self. Rather, what we encounter in their works is a dynamic stream of words or brush strokes echoing the raw stream of experience as it is originally offered to us, the unmediated dimension of experience. (Mildenberg 22-23)

Modernist writers thereby "[c]halleng[e] traditional processes of writing, reading and representation" and focus "on how seeing and perception take place, [and again,] on the *how* rather than the *what*" (23, original emphasis). Woolf famously appeals to writers of her time: "Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness" ("Modern Fiction" 107). This recalls one central aim of Husserl's phenomenology, that is, to "provide a description of things as they were met in immediate experience" (Mildenberg 9). Another similarity between Woolf's writing and phenomenology can be found in a characteristic of her stories: they are "not concerned with a pure description of the object alone or an idealist return to the subject alone" (Sim 33) but are rather interested in "the complex interplays between the perceiving subject and the object world; the way minds constitute things and things

in turn constitute minds" (29). In this, her writing approach falls together with what a phenomenological analysis aims at, namely "not to investigate either the object or the subject, either the world or the mind, but to investigate their interrelation or correlation" (Zahavi 34).

In the following analyses of Woolf's early sketch "Blue & Green", the short story "Kew Gardens" and the interludes in *The Waves*, both influences of Impressionism and phenomenology will become evident. Woolf develops early on a phenomenological approach to colour that she later refines in the interludes in *The Waves*.[13] Her texts invite the reader to experience colour as a dynamic and affective "actant" (Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory" 369)[14] that draws the reader into prismatic colourscapes.

"Blue & Green" may be best described as two chromatic sketches in which prismatic colourscapes unfold in "densely imagistic prose" (Goldman, "'I Grow More & More Poetic'" 100).[15] In the original Hogarth edition, the green and blue sketches "have the appearance of paintings [hanging

13 What I call *phenomenological approach* from here on is not to be confused with a phenomenological analysis as conducted in the field of philosophy. Above, I have merely introduced some basic premises of the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, which is of course much more complex (see Zahavi for more details). Nevertheless, as pointed out above, there exist certain similarities between Woolf's approach to writing and basic premises of phenomenology which allow Woolf's approach to be called phenomenological as well, even if not in a strict philosophical sense.

14 Jane Bennett describes Latour's ''actant'' as a ''term for a source of action; an actant can be human or not, or, [...] a combination of both'' (*VM* 9). Latour derives this term from A. J. Greimas' actantial model in semiotics and transfers it to his work in the field of science studies (Latour, *Politics of Nature* 264n26). An actant is then an alternative term for ''actor'' in the attempt ''to rid [the latter term] of any trace of anthropomorphism'' (75). For Bennett, who adapts Latour's term for her own theory of a *vital materialism*, an actant ''makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalysing an event'' (*VM* 9). The term actant will be discussed in more detail in section 4.1.

15 Almahameed calls ''Blue & Green'' an ''experimental sketch'' (26) and points to similar terms used by other scholars: ''Virginia Woolf's experimental sketch 'Blue & Green' has been seen by some critics such as Jean Guiguet (1965) and Dean Baldwin (1989) as an impressionistic and meditative sketch'' (26). As ''Blue & Green'' obviously engages with the attempt to write colour into language, I want to accentuate this by calling the text a *chromatic sketch*, or more precisely, two chromatic sketches, since ''Blue & Green'' is split into two parts.

in a gallery], as the paragraphs are almost square and are positioned in the centre of two pages opposite one another" (Sim 72). This impression is further enhanced by the title that heads each sketch and ends with a full stop, "GREEN." and "BLUE." ("Blue & Green" 66). For Sim, this is an indicator to understand the sketches as "an attempt to render colour in language, but the common names for colour, such as 'blue' and 'green', are deemed inadequate" (72). In her opinion, the full stops point to the "limited expressive capacity of these names" (72). I do not agree that these colour words limit the expressiveness of colour; quite the contrary is the case: they rather open up possibilities for the reader to generate their own associations with green or blue. Perhaps a green colour patch or object appears in front of the reader's mind's eye when reading these headings. If not, the associations that follow in the text will help. The reader is led into an imaginative and highly sensuous colour dream in which camels, green parakeets and a blue sea monster appear. The simple colour words of the headings are complemented, or as Sim calls it, "juxtapose[d]", "with detailed descriptive paragraphs that represent colour perception in an alternative form" and "offer[…] associative portraits of sensations of colour" (72). The sketches can be compared to a painting that is produced by words alone – it is, to quote Symonds again, a "word-painting" (15). This word-painting generates colours not on a canvas that can be visually perceived by the beholder, but it creates a colourscape that dynamically unfolds from the page in the reader's mind. Hence, the sketches are "an attempt, like Post-Impressionist painting in its early stages, to create affect in the reader through the creative and imaginative rendering of colour in language" (Sim 74).

In contrast to Rossetti's poem "What is pink?", in which the verses do not allow colours to be experienced separately from the objects they are connected to, "Blue & Green" introduces colour rather as a phenomenon, a colour experience that unfolds from an initial interplay of light and glass: "The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards. The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green" ("Blue & Green" 66). The rather unusual "pool of green" is the lasting image here. Whereas in these first sentences, light is the protagonist that produces the green colour, this role is given over to the "fingers of glass" in the next sentence: "All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble" (66). Now it is no longer the light but the "fingers of the lustre" that produce the green pool and a third component

is introduced, "the marble", thereby highlighting the relational character of colour. Interestingly, both light and lustre "drop" green into a "pool" thereby liquifying colour which is usually perceived as rather immaterial. Colour thus becomes thick and viscous – a tactile quality is added to the visual one. The production of this green pool is further complicated through the ambiguity of where this green is actually produced: "the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble" (66) – do the "fingers" produce the colour on the marble as the result of the interplay with light or do they themselves liquify and drop down? In contrast to the heading "GREEN." (66), Woolf does not use an abstract colour term here to introduce colour to the scene but already from the beginning, this colour has a material presence as a "pool of green" (66).

From this ambiguous description, the sketch opens up to associative realms that blur the boundaries between observation and imagination:

> The feathers of parakeets – their harsh cries – sharp blades of palm trees – green, too; green needles glittering in the sun. But the hard glass drips on to the marble; the pools hover above the desert sand; the camels lurch through them; the pools settle on the marble; rushes edge them; weeds clog them; here and there a white blossom; the frog flops over; at night the stars are set there unbroken. (66)

Exotic birds appear, adding a sound quality to the scene with their "harsh cries". Plants add a tactile quality with the "sharp blades of palm trees". As if the reader could have forgotten the colour green by now, it is added in hindsight to keep it present: "green, too". Then, the phrase "green needles glittering in the sun" ambiguously plays with associations oscillating between the form of the palm tree blades and the fingers of the lustre. While the above quoted paragraph is mainly structured by semicolons and hyphens to create the impression of a flow of associations, the only full stop creates a sharp break – additionally emphasised by the "[b]ut" – bringing the scene back to the initial setting and highlighting its ambiguous state: "the *hard glass drips* on to the marble" (my emphasis). This dripping sound triggers further associations: "the pools hover above the desert sand" – pools, usually associated with water, hover over desert sand, usually associated with drought.

But we remember: these are not pools of water but pools of colour. This even strengthens the impression of contrast since to the contrasting images of water/drought the colour quality green/sand is added. In the next phrase, camels move through these pools of colour just before the scene reverses its focus and the "pools settle on the marble". In the next instance, a pond scene emerges with "rushes", "weeds", "white blossom" and a "frog". Here we encounter the only other colour term, "white", in the whole green sketch. Yet, although it specifies the colour of the blossom, it does not make a crucial difference to the otherwise implicitly evoked colourscape. Different shades of green, yellow and brown – which are possible colours that the reader can associate with camels, sand, weeds, frogs, etc. – are present throughout the reading so that the "white blossom" simply adds another colour to this palette. Finally, introduced by "the stars", "[e]vening comes, and the shadow sweeps the green over the mantlepiece" (66). After the lustre has dropped green "[a]ll day long" (66) upon the marble, the colour slowly fades out and then enters blue. This transition is again introduced bit by bit. Before blue appears, the mantlepiece morphs into the "ruffled surface of ocean" (66): "No ships come; the aimless waves sway beneath the empty sky. It's night; the needles drip blots of blue. The green's out" (66).

The blue part begins with "the snub-nosed monster" that "rises to the surface" (67). Although it is not further specified here, it can be assumed that this surface is the surface of the ocean as mentioned before. Blue permeates the whole scene: it is the colour of the monster, which has "[s]trokes of blue line the black tarpaulin of his hide" and which is "shedding dry blue scales" (67). The first sentences of the blue part focus on this monster which "spouts through his blunt nostrils two columns of water, which, fiery-white in the centre, spray off into a fringe of blue beads" (67). The oxymoron *fiery-white water* adds again a tactile quality to the scene by its allusion to heat. Yet, despite this fire association, the scene seems to overflow with water images. Water sprays off in "blue beads" and "[s]lushing the water through mouth and nostrils [the monster] sings, heavy with water, and the blue closes over him dowsing the polished pebbles of his eyes" (67). Water takes on the form of "blue beads" while the eyes of the monster are "polished pebbles" – both are round forms that establish an intra-textual connection, linking water and monster. This is further highlighted by the alliterations in both phrases. Blue water moves around the monster and also through it. There are no bounda-

ries to the water's movement. And similarly, there are no boundaries to blue. Blue is also the colour of the "ribs of the wrecked rowing boat" (67). Words such as "tarpaulin" and "hide" (67) are employed ambiguously to describe the monster while at the same time pointing to the wrecked boat that appears some sentences below. They blur the line between this monster being either a stranded fish ("hide") or a "wrecked rowing boat" (67) (sealed by a "tarpaulin"), and begin to subtly build a transition between the two images. Both the monster and the boat are out of their watery element, stranded on the beach and facing death.[16] This oscillation between the two images intensifies further below with the description of blue scales: "Their metallic blue stains the rusty iron on the beach" (67). Now the scales are specified as "metallic blue" alluding to a materiality that is closer to solid metal than to organic scales. This sentence builds the transition from the focus on the monster to a wider view over the beach. After pointing to the "[b]lue ribs of the wrecked rowing boat" (67) and thereby alluding to decay (of the monster and the boat alike), the text moves on to the sentence "[a] wave rolls beneath the blue bells" (67), which evokes the sound of church bells. The "wave", Gharib interprets, alludes to a crowd of people going to church – it is a "mourning procession" (Gharib 185). This interpretation is supported by the final image of the "cathedral's different, cold, incense laden, faint blue with the veils of madonnas" ("Blue & Green" 67) with which, for the first time in this chromatic sketch, the colour blue is loosely connected to its symbolic use as the colour of the Madonna's veil. This has, however, no meaningful symbolic significance in this sketch but is rather just another shade of blue in the colourscape unfolding from the page.

"Blue & Green" is an experiment that takes its cue from the simple colour words *green* and *blue* only to spiral into variegated associations, thereby leading the reader through a fantastic colourscape. Though its form seems to mimic two paintings hanging on a wall, "Blue & Green" cannot be explained by means of the literary device of *ekphrasis*. The sketches themselves *are* the painting, they are not describing a painting that exists outside the text but they *write* the colours green and blue into being. As they "offer[…] an alter-

16 Gharib also establishes a "link between blue and death" and contrasts it to "green [which] evokes a picture of life" (184). In the same vein, Sim claims that "Woolf paints a picture of extinction, not by water, but by colour. Blue is linked to ideas of death, decay and transcendence" (76).

native language of colour that emphasizes its associative nature and emotional power" (Sim 78), the sketches "disrupt[…] practical and habitual responses" (77) and invite the reader to experience colour "imaginatively, associatively and emotionally" (75).

While "Blue & Green" mainly focuses on two colours, the colour palette is significantly extended in the short story "Kew Gardens". On the back cover of the Dover republication of *Monday or Tuesday* (1997), the short story is called "a brilliant and sensitive portrayal of nature in 'Kew Gardens'". I would agree with judging this story "brilliant and sensitive", yet, instead of calling it a "portrayal of nature" I think it is much better defined as a phenomenological observation of a park space, namely Kew Gardens, in which plants, animals and people coexist, and nature/culture dichotomies are subdued. Beginning with its title "Kew Gardens" and the first line pointing to the "oval shaped flower-bed" (68) in this park, it becomes clear that this is a space shaped by humans and nonhumans alike. The story continues in this line by zooming in on humans and nonhumans that pass by the flower-bed. Colours are predominantly employed in the beginning scene, which focuses on the flower-bed, and in the final scene, which presents a broader view of the park space.

The story evokes a *dynamic* painting with the flower-bed in Kew Gardens as its object of study. While in "Blue & Green" the colour words *green* and *blue* trigger associations that oscillate between observation and imagination, the focus in "Kew Gardens" is clearly on the observation of this one spot. This spot serves as a basis from which to unfold moments in time, filling the space with glimpses of people's conversations that happen next to the flower-bed as well as with a snail's struggle to move across the crumbly earth. The story creates the impression of small scenes in a painting being narrated, spreading out in time, eavesdropping on people's conversations and even thoughts, while always being anchored to the flower-bed. The short story could also be compared to a film with a static take as the dynamics of the storyline are reminiscent of a fixed camera that is placed in front of this flower-bed and catches the stories of people and animals advancing, passing by and disappearing again. It is not the camera that moves but the 'actors' in front of it; the camera merely zooms in and out to adapt to the size of its objects. It is only towards the ending that the camera pans and the collection of momentary flashes (that is, the single scenes) merges into a broader view of the park. Everything comes together in the final paragraphs: people, the snail, the colours and the park

become one sensuous image. With this narrative technique, Woolf achieves an effect that Flint also ascribes to the interludes in *The Waves*: "language can create the illusion of a perceiving eye and recording mind which can take in more than any individual" (Introduction xiii).

How, then, does this story evoke colour? Woolf's use of colour terms in this short story is interesting as she almost exclusively uses basic colour terms, namely red, blue, yellow, green, grey, brown, purple, pink, black and white. The terms "rosy" (73) and "crimson" (77) are exceptions; silver and gold are further added to her palette. Although this palette includes a wide range of different colours, it appears rather unnuanced at first glance. Basic colour terms are rarely substituted with shades of the possible colour range. Green, for example, is never emerald, olive or mint green. In this it is similar to the colour words used in "Blue & Green". On the one hand, such employment of basic colour words leaves space for the reader's imagination as they can imagine their very own shades, but, on the other hand, this restricted colour palette appears disappointingly poor for a skilled writer like Woolf. Many scholars, such as Lorraine Sim, Jane Goldman, Allen McLaurin or Jack Stewart point out Woolf's inspiration by impressionist or post-impressionist painters and their approach to painting. I want to draw another parallel that invites a suggestion to how we could probably read the restricted colour palette in "Kew Gardens", namely, in the context of *Pointillism*. Such a reading would then again suggest that Woolf brilliantly knew how to employ the basic colour words to create desired effects. Neo-Impressionists, such as Seurat and Signac, developed pointillist painting techniques inspired by scientific research results in the field of optics. Based on the insight that all colours can be mixed from the primary colours red, yellow and blue, and that colour perception emerges on the retina of the eye, they developed their pointillist style. Eugène Chevreul's colour theory on simultaneous contrast was a further important influence as it explains how complementary colours enhance each other when applied in close proximity. (Wetzel 398) This effect is also stressed by Ogden Rood, another major source of inspiration for the pointillist technique, who experimented with coloured paper slips put in relation to one another.[17] He explains the changes in colour that occur with "what is

17 In his famous hands-on colour book *Interaction of Color* (1963), Josef Albers recommends this method as well in order to engage with colour and colour relations in

called contrast, and [they] are partly due to actual effects generated in the eye itself and partly to fluctuations in the judgment of the observer" (Rood 236). Complementary colours placed next to each other "appear more brilliant and saturated" whereas "[c]olours which are identical […] appear duller and less saturated" (247). Based on such knowledge, Pointillists developed a technique in which small dots of complementary colours are applied to the canvas in a specific pattern or clearly defined form that only in the eye of the beholder merges into a vibrating colour effect (Wetzel 398-99). By the effective application of this technique – one dot next to another – they discarded the need to mix pigments and instead transferred the mixing of colour to the beholder. As we will see in the following, Woolf repeatedly uses exactly these three primary colours – red, yellow and blue – in her initial scene. While she does not strictly add the actual complementary colours (which would be green, violet and orange, respectively) to the scene, she uses her own complementing (colour) words: in combination with further basic colour terms and the surrounding words that additionally evoke "form, mass, space, texture, light and movement" (Sim 54), she writes her very own pointillist *text* by transferring the pointillist technique from painting to the art of writing. She thus uses the effects known from visual perception to evoke a similar experience in the reader: only in the reader, the pointillist colour dots (words) unfold their full effect and create the colourscapes that we experience in the reading process.

Anticipating the role of light in illuminating space in the interludes of *The Waves* and recalling the fascination and significance it had for Impressionists, light is the main catalyst for the moving colourscapes in "Kew Gardens", too. Beginning with a close description of the "red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour" (68), the scene becomes dynamic when the flowers are moved by "a summer breeze" and "the red [sic] blue and yellow lights passed one over the other, staining an inch of the brown earth beneath with a spot of the most intricate colour" (68). Note how the repeated use of the noun *spot* evokes dots of colour as used by pointillist artists. In these sentences, the colours seem to have freed themselves from their attachment to the petals and now move as "lights" across the earth. This movement of light continues: "The light fell either upon the smooth grey back of a pebble, or the shell of a snail with its brown circular veins, or, falling into a raindrop, it expanded

detail. We will hear more about Albers' method in chapter 5.

with such intensity of red, blue and yellow the thin walls of water that one expected them to burst and disappear" (68). The power of colour to "burst" the "thin walls of water" is only prevented by the light moving on and leaving the water drop "in a second silver grey once more, and the light now settled upon the flesh of a leaf" (68). This observation is an extremely close and detailed account of how the flower-bed is coloured by light moving across it. Only towards the very end of this flower-bed scene, the one colour which is usually immediately associated with a park space appears: green. Green serves as a vast background, or better ground, over which the other colours move: the light "moved on and spread its illumination in the vast green spaces beneath the dome of the heart shaped and tongue shaped leaves" (68). This evokes again parallels to a painting in which a green grounding serves as a background on which the other colours – red, blue, yellow, etc. – can be displayed.

From this colour scene, the narrator catapults the reader into a broader view of Kew Gardens with its visitors by following the movement of light as it is influenced by the wind: "Then the breeze stirred rather more briskly overhead and the colour was flashed into the air above, into the eyes of the men and women who walk in Kew Gardens in July" (68-69). Only now do human beings begin to figure in the short story. Strangely enough, the visitors do not seem to notice the colour although it "was flashed" into their eyes. From the very moment when human eyes get involved, colour seems to withdraw from the scene, only appearing very sparely like sprinkles in the visual field of human beings who are too much engaged with their own concerns to notice the colourful play taking place just in front of their eyes. Sim also points out this contrast: "The description of a garden-bed in the opening paragraph alerts our attention to the small details to which we are often blind. This opening description is significant as the gardens are the very thing many of the walkers fail to see because they are mentally preoccupied with other matters" (53-54).

Sharp-eyed and humorous scenes follow that zoom in and out of people's conversations as they pass by the flower-bed. As Simon, Eleanor and their children – the characters in the first 'human' scene – slowly disappear out of focus, light appears again and leads over to the next scene:

> They walked on past the flower-bed, now walking four abreast, and soon diminished in size among the trees and looked half transparent

> as the sunlight and shade swam over their backs in large trembling irregular patches. In the oval flower bed the snail, whose shell had been stained red, blue, and yellow for the space of two minutes or so, now appeared to be moving very slightly in its shell […]. (70-71)

The repetition of the colour triad red, blue and yellow connects this scene to the initial one, in which the shell of the snail was already mentioned. With human beings out of sight, colours enter the story again more frequently in the snail passage. It is very interesting how the duration of this encounter between light, colour and snail is described as lasting "for the space of two minutes or so". The exact time does not play any role, indicated by the "or so". Human measurement seems to be no longer relevant. Along this line, categories of time and space collapse into each other as a "space of two minutes" unfolds which contains the appearance of the snail. On its way through the flower-bed the snail meets a "singular high stepping angular green insect"; it has to overcome "[b]rown cliffs with deep green lakes in the hollows" and "round boulders of grey stone" (71). As the story moves on to other human scenes, the colours withdraw again, only surfacing time and again in the form of a "purple black" (73) dress, a "rosy cheeked" (73) woman, "greens" (74) (though as a noun this refers to vegetables which are part of the woman's list of groceries), a "brown roof" and "cool brown light" (75), "pink folds" (75) of a flower, "white tables" (76) or a "crimson crested bird" (77). Finally, the people passing by the flower-bed, whose stories have been told before, vanish in a green-blue colourscape that envelops and permeates Kew Gardens – colour takes over:

> Thus one couple after another with much the same irregular and aimless movement passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere. (77)

Colour becomes blurry, it envelops human beings in layers of "green blue va-

pour" and bodies lose their substance in the heat of the day. The exclamation "How hot it was!" (77) directly follows the description of this dissolution. With the heat, a tactile impression takes over for a short moment until colours enter the scene for a last time:

> Yellow and black, pink and snow white, shapes of all these colours, men, women, and children were spotted for a second upon the horizon, and then, seeing the breadth of yellow that lay upon the grass, they wavered and sought shade beneath the trees, dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue. (78)

Spots of colours, which on closer inspection take on the shapes of human beings, seem to wander aimlessly through the park, are repelled by the meadow's dry yellow and find a place to rest in the cool shade of trees. Human beings metamorphose into colour patches. The atmosphere takes on a liquid quality as the human colour spots are "dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue". People seem to dissolve in the air like watercolours blend with each other on a wet paper. This impression of disintegration is enhanced as the triad of red, blue and yellow – earlier only mentioned as a list – finally breaks apart in this last scene. That the colour of the atmosphere changes from "green-blue" (77) to "yellow and green" (78) could be read as an inconsistency; yet, it could also hint at the ever-changing quality of colour, even with just a few lines of story in between. Thinking of Chevreul's and Rood's colour theory of contrast again, the employment of colours that are close to each other on the chromatic circle, such as green and blue, or yellow and green, "appear duller and less saturated" (Rood 247). This would match the development in the text in which distinct colours slowly dissolve and blur the atmosphere towards the ending of the story. From the focus on the overwhelming heat, the story moves on to the soundscape enveloping the park. Human voices, "[w]ordless voices" ("Kew Gardens" 78) expressing all kinds of emotions, interweave with the murmur of the city "on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of myriads of flowers flashed their colours into the air" (78). Finally, colour again.

While the story has meandered between people, heat and sound, the flowers seemingly stubbornly and rather aggressively "flashed their colours into the air" – never minding whether there is someone to perceive them or not. This last scene is again very evocative of a pointillist technique. People are actually described as colour dots: "Yellow and black, pink and snow white, shapes of all these colours, men, women, and children were spotted for a second upon the horizon" (78). The verb *spotted* is ambiguous here: it could either allude to the pointillist technique of applying small dots of colour to the canvas and thus 'spotting' it with colour dots in the sense of "[t]o mark, stain, or soil (a physical object) with spots of something" (*OED*, "spot, v., I.2."); or, it could refer to visual perception in the sense of "[t]o catch sight of (something); to mark or note; to recognize or detect" ("spot, v., III.10."). Both interpretations make sense here and through this ambiguity the pointillist technique itself as well as the visual perception of the beholder/reader – which is a crucial element in Pointillism – are simultaneously evoked. One by one, heat and noise are added to the scene, thereby increasing the sensuous experience to the point where it culminates in what Wetzel describes as a typical effect of the pointillist technique: the impression of a vibrating atmosphere (398).

Sim calls "Kew Gardens" "[o]ne of Woolf's earliest explorations in epistemological perspectivism" as it "illustrates the many ways in which an ordinary activity can be experienced and familiar objects seen, thereby questioning their status as ordinary and known" (57). In doing so, the short story "invites the reader to reconsider their engagement with the object world and the nature of ordinary things" (57). Whereas Sim mainly focuses on the paragraphs involving human beings in her study, I have shown how this is also true for the more descriptive paragraphs of the flower-bed, the snail and the final park scene. Woolf truly writes as "a literary phenomenologist" (Mildenberg 105) here and through the varied employments of colour words and the focus on the moving light in these scenes, the reader's attentiveness becomes sharpened and we are invited to take a rather 'impressionist' view on Kew Gardens.

"Kew Gardens" was published ten years before *The Waves*, but the phenomenological approach as well as a focus on the colourful play of light is already anticipated in this short story, as the analysis above has shown. In *The Waves*, this becomes even more prominent and nuanced, especially in the interludes on which the following analysis will focus. Light moves over the pages, through the words, in wave-like motions and illuminates the shore, the

interior of a house, every piece of furniture, until it sweeps over the whole vast landscape of southern England. This movement, however, is neither smooth nor even. Parts are only gradually revealed while others stay in the shadows. This interplay of light and shadow makes the interludes dynamic, and light even has the power to change the very materiality of objects, turning, for example, tableware into amorphous liquid things (*The Waves* 20). With Marcussen's premise in mind to read the interludes as "*presentation*" (155, original emphasis) and following a phenomenological approach, I want to focus on *how* colour and light create these dynamics and *how* they thereby contribute to experience the world in the interludes as a flowing becoming rather than a static representation.

Marcussen is interested in how "Woolf creates a dynamic space when no characters are present" (155) and proposes to read space in the interludes in light of Jane Bennett's *vital materialism*: "As space vibrates and is changed by the touch of light, what Woolf here depicts comes close to Jane Bennett's thing-power and to her assemblage of debris" (Marcussen 165-66). While Marcussen focuses on space in her study, I want to extend her argument and emphasise instead the role of colour in this becoming of a *vibrant* space since I believe colours to be crucial actants in this process. Through its non-representational and non-symbolic function in the interludes, colour becomes an important actant influencing the dynamics of the text.[18]

The time span of the interludes covers one day – highlighting the cyclical movement of the sun rising and setting again. With the sun as "catalyst for change" (Marcussen 166), light and colour are likewise in the centre of events and mainly contribute to the dynamics of the interludes. At sunrise, darkness is pushed back by light which gradually illuminates the world and brings colours to life: "*flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky*" and "*the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering*

18 While I will analyse the three lyric essays in chapters 5, 6 and 7 with tools taken from new materialist theories, I will not employ these tools in the analysis of *The Waves* yet. The following exploration of the dynamics of light and colour in *The Waves* shall serve as a detection of first tendencies towards an agency of colour. For a new materialist reading of *The Waves*, see Marcussen's insightful study *Reading for Space: An Encounter between Narratology and New Materialism in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Georges Perec*.

*and flaming in red and yellow fibres*" (*The Waves* 3).[19] These scenes are narrated as an extremely detailed account of the environment observed by a "perceiving eye" (Flint, Introduction xiii). Yet, this account is not a dry and factual description of what can be observed but a very unique view on the world that is conveyed by means of rich metaphorical language. This metaphorical language in turn creates a vivid and dynamic atmosphere by addressing different senses such as the visual (by the coloured "*flat bars*" and "*surface*") and tactile (by the "*fibrous*" air and allusions to the heat of fire through "*flickering and flaming*") sense in the quotation above. This text passage produces what Theilen calls *literary synaesthesia*, that is, the textual mixing of the senses (13): air, usually perceived as something immaterial, becomes "*fibrous*" and these "*fibres*" are then also coloured "*red and yellow*".

The text is written to a rhythm that follows the journey of the sun, the breaking of the waves, the increasing and decreasing chirping of the birds, the change of seasons as well as the travel of light as it slowly illuminates and colours the world and gives over to shadow again as it withdraws. In the interludes, we can experience what Woolf describes as her writing method for *The Waves* as a whole: "I am writing The Waves [sic] to a rhythm not to a plot" (Woolf qtd. in Flint, Introduction xxi). This rhythm, Mildenberg suggests, "is that of perpetually folding and breaking waves of perception" (114). The perceptions we encounter in the interludes are often surprising and provide a fresh view on the world as they "suggest an openness to the world before opinions are fully formed" (Mildenberg 112). We can observe such a fresh view in the following passage in *The Waves*:

> *The sun fell in sharp wedges inside the room. Whatever the light touched became dowered with a fanatical existence. A plate was like a white lake. […] Tables and chairs rose to the surface as if they had been sunk under water and rose, filmed with red, orange, purple like the bloom on the skin of ripe fruit. […] Everything was without shadow. […] Then shape*

19 The interludes are italicised in the original. As this has an effect on the reading experience, separating it from the rest of the novel as well as visualising a certain flowing movement, I quote the interludes in italics as well but will not indicate this after every single quotation.

> *took on mass and edge. Here was the boss of a chair; here the bulk of a cupboard.* (82)

In this passage, light colours the objects of furniture inside the house and gives the scene a fluid character through the connection to water images as well as the evoked movement of rising and sinking. Everything seems to be somehow floating in a vast ocean of light in which single rays pick out a thing to soak it with colour. In this, it "vie[s] with impressionist painting" (Stewart 95) as the aim of impressionist artists was "[t]o break up the ray of light, to catch its vibrancy in the air, to follow it as it glides around objects enveloping them with color" (Pératé qtd. in Courthion 12). At the beginning of the text passage, the furniture is only distinguishable as different colour patches "*without shadow*" – a third dimension does not seem to exist. By putting colour first, the differentiation between shape and size as primary (objective) qualities and colour as a secondary (subjective) quality – in this order traditionally advocated by Democritus (Kunzmann et al. 33) and later by Descartes (107) and Locke (119) – is challenged. The categories of *objective* and *subjective* qualities are not helpful in the context of this passage, in which colour and matter merge into each other. However, a certain chronological sequence can be observed as "*shape [takes] on mass and edge*" (*The Waves* 82) only *after* colour qualified the things. This in turn challenges the sequence of our perception process: when looking at the world, we are usually trained to distinguish clearly shaped things. The shape of things is indeed chiefly discerned by contrast as gradations of hue or brightness stand out against a background. Yet, we still discriminate the visual field not in relation to colour patches but to things with definite boundaries. In the text passage, however, an unusual perception is evoked by highlighting colour while at the same time blurring and dissolving the boundaries of things as if we looked at the world without identifying distinct things but only coloured patches. In doing so, the text makes us aware of how conditioned the daily action of looking is and invites us to take a new perspective on the colours that always already surround us.

The play of colour and light does not only challenge perceptual processes but equally questions familiar causalities: when "*the rising sun came in at the window*", "*[t]he real flower on the window-sill was attended by a phantom*

*flower. Yet the phantom flower was part of the flower, for when a bud broke free the paler flower in the glass opened a bud too*" (55). No mentioning of the word *shadow* – only a second flower, a "*phantom flower*", joins the "*real flower*" as if it were a separate entity. Up to this point, no connection is established between the two. Only through movement, the opening of a bud, their relation is observed. Such an unusual perspective again invites the reader to challenge habitual perceptions and to take a fresh view of their surroundings.

Yet not only the visual sense is addressed in the interludes. What Mildenberg observes for *The Waves* as a whole, is especially true for the interludes: "we plunge into a strange, abstract universe of pure sensory perceptions" (112). The dynamics and vividness of the text are supported by a whole network of references to and evocations of the senses. The sound of rolling and crashing waves is interwoven with the movement of light flooding the scenes. The rolling of waves serves as a background sound to the travelling light. Yet, sound and vision are not the only sensuous experiences the interludes offer: "Each of the interludes (while part of a larger unit) is a synthesis of colour, shape, mass, texture, and relief, as well as sound, rhythm, temperature, and smell" (Stewart 91). The song of the birds is heard time and again, the sea has a cloth-like texture (*The Waves* 3), "*gusts of dead smells were wafted*" (55), emitted by rotten fruits and dead worms. While light is "the shaping force" (Stewart 101) and "the real subject of this plastic language" (95), colours play an especially significant and active role in this sensescape as they always "relate[…] to other sensory details of the spatial composition" (91). Through this rich sensescape, Woolf perhaps tries to transfer to language an experience she famously describes in "Modern Fiction":

> The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old […]. (106)

The rhythm of the interludes and the phenomenological approach with its evocation of sense experiences and challenge of habitual perceptions further-

more contributes to a unique perspective on materiality. Light plays an essential role in this perspective and as much as it has an impact on the dynamics of the text, it also affects the very materiality of the landscape and of things. Light continuously changes the solidity of things and colour takes a key part in this, which can be seen in many phrases, such as "*[a] plate was like a white lake*" (*The Waves* 82); sand upon midday is "*hard*" (111) and changes to "*pearl white, smoothed and shining*" (139) when the sun sinks; an "*iron black boot became a pool of deep blue*" and "*[t]he rocks lost their hardness*" (160) in the fading light. Solid things become fluid and the degree of hardness changes due to light conditions. It also works the other way around: as the sun slowly rises, light turns the sea "*to a million atoms of soft blue*" (3), thereby materialising it. Later also air is imbued with coloured atoms: "*Through atoms of grey-blue air the sun struck at English fields and lit up marshes and pools*" (112). The rhythm of the day with its increasing and decreasing light is a significant factor in these materialising processes because it directly affects the change in solidity of things during the day. Marcussen supports this judgement with her observation that "[t]he cycle is a plot of changing material" (168) and "[t]he sun, the things, and the room all achieve a new materiality" (167) in the course of the interludes. In the morning, when no light shines into the house, everything "*within was dim and unsubstantial*" (*The Waves* 4). When the sun rises higher, light gives substance to the interior of the house by illuminating it and bringing forth its colours: "*The light touched something green in the window corner and made it a lump of emerald, a cave of pure green like stoneless fruit*" (20). Colour becomes material, "*a lump of emerald*", and spatial, "*a cave of pure green*", and is thereby foregrounded. Flowers open their buds, "*quivering, as if the effort of opening them had set them rocking*" and "*[e]verything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid*" (20). Things, such as knife or plate, which we usually experience as solid, achieve their solidity only gradually. Out of the "*dim*" and "*unsubstantial*" (4) darkness, things become liquid and are held in an ambiguous in-between state, which Marcussen calls the "amorphous state of vibrant matter" (168). In the interludes, Marcussen further remarks, "things take on an agency of their own" as they "have achieved a power, an energetic vitality, which makes each thing stand out, and at the same time relate to one another" (166). As we have seen in the example earlier, flowers are "*quivering*" (*The Waves* 20) as they open their buds, plate and knife

are perceived as flowing and fluid. Things become active protagonists of the scene: "*Chairs and cupboards loomed behind so that though each was separate they seemed inextricably involved. The looking-glass whitened its pool upon the wall. The real flower on the window-sill was attended by a phantom flower*" (55). Marcussen draws on this scene as well to describe how "agency changes" (166):

> The sun is the catalyst for change in the room, but in this relational space, agency is also extended to the chairs; they achieve a power of their own and take over the active part in the passage. The sun does not make a materiality appear that it then passes on to the furniture; vibrant materiality is something immanently present in the chairs and cupboards themselves, which emerges in the encounter with the sun. (166-67)

When the sun has "*risen to its full height*", it *"burnt uncompromising, undeniable*" (*The Waves* 111). "*It gave to everything its exact measure of colour; to the sandhills their innumerable glitter, to the wild grasses their glancing green*" (111). Light thus sharpens the outlines of things – "*[t]he rocks which had been misty and soft hardened and were marked with red clefts*" (20) – and intensifies their colours as when "*[a] jar was so green that the eye seemed sucked up through a funnel by its intensity and stuck to it like a limpet*" (82). Colour holds the eye fast, one cannot avert to look at it. Here, the agency of colour becomes evident.

With the approaching darkness towards the end of the day, "the cyclic energy of light that differentiates objects into significant forms also splits and rediffuses forms into oneness once more" (Stewart 99). The hills lose their substance in the fading light: "*The substance had gone from the solidity of the hills*" (*The Waves* 181). Stones lose their forms: "*The hard stone of the day was cracked and light poured through its splinters*" (159). And things become soft: "*the evening sun, whose heat had gone out of it and whose burning spot of intensity had been diffused, made chairs and tables mellower and inlaid them with lozenges of brown and yellow*" (160). In this in-between time of dawn, "*[a]ll for a moment wavered and bent in uncertainty and ambiguity, as if a great moth*

*sailing through the room had shadowed the immense solidity of chairs and tables with floating wings*" (140). As soon as the sun has sunk, colours dissolve again: "*All the colours in the room had overflown their banks. The precise brush stroke was swollen and lop-sided; cupboards and chairs melted their brown masses into one huge obscurity*" (181). Towards the ending, in the ninth interlude, images of light conditions and water fall together: "*As if there were waves of darkness in the air, darkness moved on, covering houses, hills, trees, as waves of water wash round the sides of some sunken ship*" (181). Waves of darkness roll on and on, covering everything, enveloping everything, until finally everything is dark. The light is out, again. This cyclical movement of light "is the rhythm of form and matter, being and nonbeing – the endless rhythm of the waves" (Stewart 99). And thus it is no surprise that still, "*[t]he waves broke on the shore*" (*The Waves* 228).

While reading the interludes one after the other, the reader follows the light as it moves over the land, "pierces, penetrates, transfuses, and triumphs over objects" (Stewart 92). The interplay of light, colour and matter creates shifting atmospheres through an everchanging and dynamic movement. This evokes a reading experience of moving through one day in quick motion while at the same time the close observations slow time down. In the end, it is the experience of one flow "where images coalesce, overlap, and are transfused with light in a […] flux of impressions" (Stewart 96). The interludes unfold between times of darkness in which nothing can be perceived and the display of the world in full light in which things are sharply outlined and radiate in intense colours. Between these extremes, things are suspended in amorphous processes. "Colour can take on a very powerful aspect and assume narrative significance […] in the interludes of *The Waves*" (Sim 59) and thus turns into a vibrant actant. Mildenberg observes that "[n]ot only is *The Waves* the most phenomenological of Woolf's longer works, it is also the most poetic in terms of its language" (109). Through this poetic language, the interludes come as close as possible to what seems impossible for the character Bernard: "But how describe the world seen without a self? There are no words. Blue, red – even they distract, even they hide with thickness instead of letting the light through" (*The Waves* 221). Colour words in the interludes let the light through. In conjunction with words that directly address the other senses – touch, hearing, smell –, they bring the experience of a dynamic, shifting space to life and create a unique perspective on reality.

In her essay "Walter Sickert", Woolf remarks that "[a]ll great writers are great colourists" (241). In the three above presented works, she has definitely proven that she belongs to this group of great writers. Woolf develops her very own take on colour and employs it as a tool to sharpen the perception of the world as a dynamic, ever-changing space. With the outlined development from associative colourscapes in "Blue & Green" to phenomenological descriptions of the play of light and colour in "Kew Gardens", colour becomes even more dynamic, vibrant and also more material in *The Waves*. Colour can be experienced as an intense and dynamic presence in these early examples of colour writings. By highlighting a vibrant matter in the interludes, *The Waves* anticipates a colour writing in which colour is not employed for descriptive or symbolic purposes but exhibits an agency of its own and contributes to the experience of a world that is far from static and in which solidity is more a matter of degree rather than kind. The peculiarity of these colour writings is that they *produce* material-discursive colour by entangling the reader within their colourscapes.

## 3.2 ENCOUNTERING THE MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE DIMENSION OF COLOUR

Currently, we witness another turn to colour in two fields: in different research disciplines as well as in English literature itself. Beginning in the 1990s, publications on colour abound and academic interest in the topic increases until today. Especially literary and cultural studies are fascinated by the topic. In the field of literary, cultural and media studies, the following works are exemplary for this development: Conquer's *Reading Colour*, Kastan and Farthing's *On Color*, Ribeyrol's (ed.) *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, Wyler's *The Colour Structure in Shakespeare's Plays*, Eßlinger et al.'s (eds.) *Die Farben der Prosa*, Hamilton's *Colour in English*, Pape's (ed.) *Die Farben der Romantik*, Schausten's (ed.) *Die Farben Imaginierter Welten*, Biggam's *The Semantics of Colour*, Le Rider's *Farben und Wörter*, Marschall's *Farbe im Kino*, Doran's *The Culture of Yellow*, Kerttula's *English Colour Terms*, Batchelor's *Chromophobia*, Gage's *Colour and Meaning* as well as *Colour and Culture*, Bruns' *Das Rätsel Farbe* and Finlay's *Colour*. Broadening the disciplinary fields, we find a wealth of publications in further disciplines of the humanities and sciences:

Coles' *Chromatopia*, Paul's *Chromaphilia*, Scheurmann and Karliczek's (eds.) *Gesprächsstoff Farbe*, Silva's (ed.) *How Colours Matter to Philosophy*, Cohen and Matthen's (eds.) *Color Ontology and Color Science*, Chirimuuta's *Outside Color*, Schwarte's *Denken in Farbe*, Baty's *The Anatomy of Colour*, Baty et al.'s *Nature's Palette*, Binder's *Physik der Farbe*, St Clair's *The Secret Lives of Colour*, Biggam et al.'s (eds.) *New Directions in Colour Studies*, Zollinger's *Color Chemistry*, Heller's *Wie Farben auf Gefühle und Verstand Wirken*, Riley's *Colour Codes* and the series about individual colours by Pastoureau, which began with *Blue* and continued with studies on black, green, red and yellow.

While most of these publications focus on colours and colour writings 'of the past', they miss an interesting development in contemporary literature. Colour has recently gained centre stage in contemporary lyric essays. These texts draw on the eclectic history of colour writing and thinking and show similarities to their predecessors in fin-de-siècle and modernist colour writings. Yet, what makes these lyric essays special and innovative is that colour appears as something very tangible and material in these texts. These lyric essays bring the reader close to a materiality of colour. Colour and matter form unique entanglements in the texts and this colour-matter further exhibits a certain agency that affects both narrator and reader in various ways. I want to explore these entanglements of colour and matter by means of three selected lyric essays: Derek Jarman's *Chroma*, Han Kang's *The White Book* and Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*. While I will dedicate separate chapters to each lyric essay in chapters 5, 6 and 7, I want to outline two key points of these contemporary colour writings already here: their entanglements of colour and matter as well as the agency of this colour-matter that we encounter in the reading process.

Each lyric essay creates its very specific entanglements of colour and matter – inspired by the narrator's own interests, associations, experiences, emotions and memories. *Chroma* dedicates several chapters to different colours – to white, red, grey, green, brown, yellow, orange, blue, purple, black, silver and gold. In most of these chapters, we encounter descriptions of pigments in the respective colour. Jarman is fascinated by mineral colours and the process of their mining. The material history of these colourful powders – from mining them deep underground to processing them in always new ways throughout history in order to turn them into painting materials – is of high interest to him. Further, colour and matter come together in form of combinations of colour and flowers, gems, fabric, medicine, food or a treasured childhood

blanket, to name but a few. In *Bluets*, the narrator is obsessed with every blue item she encounters in daily life. Here, we encounter the blue of the ocean, the blue of jacaranda trees in bloom, blue rubbish bags, a blue paper scrap or an instrument with which to measure the blue of the sky. The narrator collects all these blues – either the blue things themselves or transformed into memories and anecdotes. These blues are personal treasures to the narrator and *Bluets* can be understood as a collection that keeps them together. *The White Book* assembles yet another collection – one of white things. These white things are sometimes loosely, sometimes closely connected with associations to the narrator's dead baby sister who died before the narrator's own birth. White becomes entangled with the materialities of swaddling bands, newborn gown, the moon, waves, rice, salt, sugar cubes, ice, rime or paper, to mention some examples. These are various instances of colour's materiality as we encounter it in the three selected lyric essays. Very importantly, there is something special about these instances of colour-matter: they are not merely descriptions of differently coloured forms of matter but these entanglements of colour and matter are vibrant and agential.

We already encountered a certain dynamism and vibrancy of colour-matter in Woolf's *The Waves*. The ever-changing character of colour inspired artists and writers in many cases to conceptualise colour as "active" and "alive" (74), as Batchelor points out.[20] He even claims that this activity of colour is

20 Batchelor observes such activity, for instance, in the sparkling gems of Huysmans' Decadent novel *Against Nature* in which

> colour is active; it is alive. Colour projects; it is not a passive coating of an inert object; light appears to shine from within; colour seems to have its own power source. Perhaps this is why gems often stand for colour-in-general. They represent the point at which colour becomes independent and assertive – or disruptive and excessive. (74)

He lists further examples:

> For the tripping Aldous Huxley, colours became so intense that "they seemed to be on the point of leaving the shelves to thrust themselves more insistently" on his attention. For Le Corbusier, colour was explosive. For Barthes, colour could be "like a pinprick in the corner of the eye"; it had the power to "lacerate". For Baudelaire, colour had the capacity to think, speak and dream. [...] In each case, colour moved forward; it advanced; it was a disturbance, a danger, a threat. It could explode in your face or lacerate your eye. More than that: it was as if *colour was looking at you*. (74, original emphasis)

responsible for a Western fear of colour (22). I believe that various examples of positive engagements with colour can be found which refute Batchelor's thesis of a Western "chromophobia" (22). Already the colour writings by Symonds, Sharp and Woolf show a love for vibrant colourscapes and fear does not play a role at all.[21] Nevertheless, the nonhuman agency of colour can indeed have strong effects which also feature in my selected lyric essays. Nelson describes such an intense encounter with the agential capabilities of colour-matter in *Bluets*:

> Standing in front of these blue paintings [by Yves Klein], or propositions, at the Tate, feeling their blue radiate out so hotly that it seemed to be touching, perhaps even hurting, my eyeballs, I wrote but one phrase in my notebook: *too much*. I had come all this way, and I could barely look. (30, original emphasis)

The blue of Klein's paintings radiates out in such an intensity that the narrator is only capable of describing this experience in tactile terms. The blue is "hot[…]", it is "touching" her and "hurting" her eyes. This colour-matter prevents looking, the usual way of colour perception. It directly pierces through the air and makes itself felt on the perceiver's body. Yet, such an agency of colour can also be experienced in very positive ways. *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* offer many examples of how to respond affirmatively to an agency of colour. Agential colour-matter can elicit desire or curiosity in the narrator, it can caress or establish a tactile communication with them. At another point in *Bluets*, the narrator is overwhelmed by the affective power of blue pigment. This experience leaves her startled: "Admit that you have stood in front of a little pile of powdered ultramarine pigment in a glass cup at a museum and felt a stinging desire. But to do what? Liberate it? Purchase it? Ingest it?" (3). A more subtle effect of an agential colour-matter can be found in Han's *The*

21 See Schausten ("Die Farben Imaginierter Welten" 17) and Macho (43) who also argue against and refute Batchelor's thesis of a Western chromophobia. Further see Ribeyrol and Blaszczyk, who rather attest with their studies a "chromophilia" (Ribeyrol, "Introduction" 6) in the Victorian era or a "color revolution" (Blaszczyk 1) at the beginning of the 20th century.

*White Book*: "There are times when the crisp white of freshly laundered bed linen can seem to speak. When that pure-cotton fabric grazes her bare flesh, just there, it seems to tell her something" (77). This colour-matter, the combination of "crisp white" and "pure-cotton fabric", makes itself felt by touch as well. Yet, in contrast to the hurting blue in *Bluets*, this touching is pleasant and establishes a communication channel between this colour-matter and the character's body. The white linen is anthropomorphised and seems to "speak" or "tell her something". But this communication does not happen through words; it is touch that makes it happen on a non-semantic level when the white "pure-cotton fabric grazes her bare flesh". For the narrator in Jarman's *Chroma*, colour also gets into contact with the perceiver by touch and "slips through the fingers" (23). In doing so, colour defies his attempt to hold it fast, to collect and store it. He observes:

> Emerald, Ruby, Jacinth, Chalcedony, Jasper. Colour, like these jewels, is precious. Even more precious, as unlike the sparklers, it cannot be possessed. Colour slips through the fingers and escapes. You can't lock it in a jewel box as it vanishes in the dark. (23)

Colour cannot be controlled – and its agency is what can possibly make colour a "threat" (Batchelor 74). More often, however, the agency of colour contributes to a fascination and interest in colour that results – especially for the narrators of the three lyric essays – in the urgent desire to engage more closely with it.

Talking about the *materiality* of colour in the examples listed above, one may critically comment that this materiality of, for example, the white bed linen is not something we can touch with our hands, smell with our nose or see with our eyes. This colour-matter is made of words. It is not the same materiality as the one we would experience with our senses if we held such white bed linen in our hands. This is true of course. We encounter colour's materiality via a text. However, materiality is *there* when we read these texts and the reader can as it were see the glistening, powdery blue pigment that triggers desire in *Bluets*' narrator or sense the touch of white bed linen on their skin. I would like to suggest that what we encounter here is a *material-discur-*

*sive* dimension of colour. As already mentioned in the Introduction, I borrow the term *material-discursive* from Karen Barad, who introduces it in order to express the entanglement between matter and meaning (*MtUH* 146-53). My use of the term has its grounding in this definition but I want to further specify it in the context of colour writings: the term *material-discursive colour* describes colour which is generated through the specific entanglement of matter, colour, text and reader in the moment in which all these components of this specific entanglement meet, namely in the reading process. I would argue that the reading of these colour writings is a *material-discursive practice*[22] which produces unique experiences of colour through the intra-action of text and reader. This material-discursive practice is a doing in which matter and discourse become inextricably entangled and the reader becomes deeply involved in the text's colourscapes. Colour produced in the process of this intra-action is always *material-discursive* colour. The materiality of colour as we encounter it in the reading of these lyric essays is always entangled with words. This material-discursive colour can create effects by affecting, entangling, piercing, caressing, etc. not only the narrator *in* the text but it also affects the reader because this colour only ever comes into being through the very intra-action of text and reader.

The further purpose of this study is to explore this material-discursive dimension of colour in order to find answers to three questions: how can we pay better attention to how text and reader intra-actively produce material-discursive colour? How can we describe the entanglements between colour, matter, text and reader in a way that does justice to the complex relationalities that are at play? How can we better notice how colour draws us into its colourscapes in these texts? To arrive at answers to these questions, I suggest that we need to rethink the reading of colour and, therefore, I propose a specific methodology which I will develop in the next chapter.

22 This is also a term inspired by Barad; see the Introduction of this study or Barad, *MtUH*, p. 141.

# 4 RETHINKING THE READING OF COLOUR

In the first section of this chapter, I will introduce the theoretical field of the New Materialisms which provides inspiring ideas and tools for an understanding of the doings of material-discursive colour in colour writings. Since the 1990s, the interdisciplinary field of the New Materialisms has yielded many diverse concepts.[1] Despite their diversity, these different concepts share some fundamental assumptions which I will outline before I will discuss two new materialist theories in more detail: Karen Barad's *agential realism* and Jane Bennett's *vital materialism*. We will encounter the vibrant materiality of Geertgen tot Sint Jans' painting *Nativity at Night*, as described by Jarman in *Chroma*, and see how this literary text passage can bring the reader close to the experience of an agential and vibrant matter.

In the second section, I will develop a new reading strategy that I call *attentive reading* and which consists of two modes, namely *openness* and *attentiveness*.[2] Such an attentive reading will assist us in noticing the doings

1 In this study, I prefer the plural form *New Materialisms* over the singular *New Materialism* to indicate the diversity of theories emerging under this name. A selection of new materialist research can be found in the Appendix. I would further like to clarify that I understand the New Materialisms as a field distinct from other developments – such as Speculative Realism, Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), Thing Theory, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) or Ecocriticism – that may also be part of a larger *material turn* which has been unfolding for some years now (cf. Moslund et al., "Introduction" 3).

2 Interestingly, many scholars who are concerned with the nonhuman in one way or another also call for a rethinking of how we can pay better attention to the nonhuman forces with which we are entangled. I have already quoted Jane Bennett in the Introduction as she argues that we need "a better discernment of [...] the active powers issuing from nonsubjects" (*VM* ix) and who asks: "How can humans become more attentive to the public activities, affects, and effects of nonhumans?" (111). Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing develops "Arts of Noticing" (17) to pay appropriate attention to the multispecies complexities of the global matsutake mushroom trade. In a similar vein, Thom van Dooren et al. want to "explore[...] the cultivation of 'arts of attentiveness': modes of both paying attention to others and crafting meaningful response" (1) for research in the field of multispecies studies. In an interview with Martin Savransky, Isabelle Stengers advocates to "Relearn[...] the Art of Paying Attention" (135). In *In Catastrophic Times*, Stengers points out why it is necessary to understand paying attention as an art: "What we have been ordered to forget is not the capacity to pay attention, but the *art* of paying attention. If there is an art, and not just a capacity, this is because it is a matter of learning and cultivating,

of material-discursive colour during the reading of colour writings. Its two purposes are to appreciate the performativity of colour writings and to pay tribute to the various experiential qualities that can emerge during the reading process. I will develop this reading strategy with the Scottish author Nan Shepherd as my guide while also following a postcritical perspective on reading as developed by Rita Felski, among others.

The last section of this chapter will take a closer look at the genre of the lyric essay. I will present main characteristics of this literary form in order to discuss how this genre assists or complicates the undertaking of an attentive reading and can thus influence the experience of material-discursive colour in the reading process.

## 4.1 THINKING WITH THE NEW MATERIALISMS

In the late 1990s, the transdisciplinary field of the New Materialisms emerged and since then a "plethora of contemporary scholars from heterogeneous backgrounds" have been working on the "actualization" of new materialist theories (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 13). These theories share the agenda to bring matter and materiality back into focus of academic thinking and make matter matter again. The New Materialisms are a genuinely transdisciplinary field as they "traverse[…] both the sciences and the humanities" (113n1):

> the immanent gesture of new materialism is transversal rather than dualist as it intersects academic (neo-)disciplines (for instance feminist theory, science and technology studies, and media and cultural studies), paradigms (for instance the Saussurian/Lacanian linguisticism that is still prevalent in cultural theory today, or the dualistic take on the natural sciences and the humanities), and the linear spatiotemporalities conventionally assigned to epistemic trends (for instance "new" materialism versus Marxist historical materialism […]).

that is to say, making ourselves pay attention'' (62, original emphasis). All of these scholars notice the necessity to change their attitude towards the nonhuman and towards human-nonhuman entanglements which they study and of which they are always already a part.

> Our proposition is that new materialism is itself a distinctive trend, both in feminist theory and in cultural theory more broadly, and a device or tool for opening up theory formation. (100)

My project on colour writings adds to this transversal character of the New Materialisms by bringing this theory formation into contact with English literature, literary theory and colour studies.

Coole and Frost understand the emergence of the New Materialisms as a "response to a sense that the radicalism of the dominant discourses which have flourished under the cultural turn is now more or less exhausted" ("Introducing the New Materialisms" 6). They claim that "the dominant constructivist orientation to social analysis is inadequate for thinking matter, materiality, and politics in ways that do justice to the contemporary context of biopolitics and global political economy" (6). Karen Barad supports this view and criticises that

> [l]anguage has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every "thing" – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. […] Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter. ("Posthumanist Performativity"[3] 120)

After decades of focusing, especially in the humanities, on language as the constitutive part of meaning-making, the New Materialisms call for a change in academic thinking that considers matter to be an integral and active part in the production of meaning. While matter and meaning have traditionally been perceived as separate, even oppositional, in the most influential traditions of Western thought, the New Materialisms seek to leave this assumption behind and engage in an exploration of the intra-active entanglements

3 "Posthumanist Performativity" will be abbreviated as "PP" in the following.

of matter and meaning. Moslund et al. point out that "New Materialists are particularly interested in how nonhuman objects and matter (including the matter-being of humans themselves) are not inert but actively entangled with sociocultural and anthropocentric productions of meaning" ("Introduction" 13-14). Moreover, "New Materialism is […] interested in what a thing *does* more than what it *is*, and what a thing does it always does in relation to something else" (15, original emphasis). Moslund et al. mention two key characteristics of the New Materialisms here: an interest in the doings, or the agency, of nonhumans as well as a deeply relational understanding of the world and of reality.

These two characteristics are framed by a profound critique of representationalism. With this critique, the New Materialisms incorporate and even supersede the *turns* which the academic world has witnessed throughout the 20th century and which we find listed in Barad's quotation above: "The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn and the cultural turn" ("PP" 120). These turns were and still are influential not only in literary studies but in many other disciplines as well. All these turns have in common that their core understanding is based on a representationalist world view. Be it language, discourse or pictures that create meaning – the meaningful world is always transmitted through a medium to us. It is always the tripartite structure of the world *out there*, an encoded message that serves as a mediator (language, pictures, artefacts, etc.) and human beings who produce or receive the message.[4] Thus, our access to the world is always indirect when we follow such a representationalist model. From the perspective of literary studies, such a literary and cultural communication model offers manifold options to creatively produce meaning, especially in the mid part of the encoded message.[5]

4 Barad mentions such a tripartite structure as the characteristic of representationalism:

> The system of representation is sometimes explicitly theorized in terms of a tripartite arrangement. For example, in addition to knowledge (i.e., representations), on the one hand, and the known (i.e., that which is purportedly represented), on the other, the existence of a knower (i.e., someone who does the representing) is sometimes made explicit. (*MtUH* 46-47)

5 Models in the humanities that consider this in different ways would be, for example, Roman Jakobson's six functions of language (see "Linguistics and Poetics"), Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic model of the *signifier* and the *signified* (see *Course in General Linguistics*), or Stuart Hall's representation model of the *Circuit of Culture* and

Despite the model's creative productiveness, New Materialists challenge such a representationalist concept in order to overcome this anthropocentric model of meaning production. In the field of the New Materialisms, Karen Barad is one of the main proponents against representationalism and she claims that "[t]he idea that beings exist as individuals with inherent attributes, anterior to their representation, is a metaphysical presupposition that underlies the belief in political, linguistic, and epistemological forms of representationalism" (*MtUH* 47).

Barad's new materialist concept of an agential realism challenges representationalism and aims at a rethinking of it in order to eventually supersede it. What Barad is most critical about is that through representationalism we separate our world into human beings as active and conscious creators and into nonhumans as passive and unconscious. This division reaches far back to the model of the Cartesian "inherent, fixed, unambiguous […] subject-object distinction" (125) and is connected to the Cartesian assumption that "we have a direct and privileged access to the contents of our thoughts which we lack towards the 'external' world" (Rouse qtd. in *MtUH* 49). Along with his famous mind-body problem in philosophy, Descartes established a distinction of the world into *internal* and *external* and thus into (active) subjects and (passive) objects.[6]

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his concept of *encoding* and *decoding* (see "Introduction" in *Representation* and "Encoding/decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language*, respectively). For a general "model of literary communication" that is based on a tripartite representationalist structure, see Nünning & Nünning, p. 13. Reinfandt identifies an overall development in the tradition of literary theory from theories concerned with objective to subjective to reflexive understandings of the relation between text and world ("Reading Texts After the Linguistic Turn" 37-38). While these developments place different emphases on either world or text, they remain in what Barad calls a representationalist framework as they usually divide text and world into two separate realms.

6 René Descartes wanted to prove that mind and body are distinct substances. His argument is derived from the "fact that he can doubt the existence of the material world, but cannot doubt the existence of himself as a thinking thing, to the conclusion that his thoughts belong to a nonspatial substance that is distinct from matter" (Hatfield 3.4). In Descartes' ontology, the world consists of three "substances" that each has a specific "essence" (3.3): "The first […] substance is God, whose essence is perfection. […] The other two substances, mind and matter, are created by God" (3.3). Matter's essence is "spatial extension" and the mind's essence is "thought" (3.3). Besides the perfection of God, there thus exist two completely separate realms of extended matter/body on the one side, and mind as

Descartes also highly influenced the 'Western' concept of matter, as Coole and Frost explain:

> Many of our ideas about materiality in fact remain indebted to Descartes, who defined matter in the seventeenth century as corporeal substance constituted of length, breadth, and thickness; as extended, uniform, and inert. This provided the basis for modern ideas of nature as quantifiable and measurable and hence for Euclidian geometry and Newtonian physics. According to this model, material objects are identifiably discrete; they move only upon an encounter with an external force or agent, and they do so according to a linear logic of cause and effect. It seems intuitively congruent with what common sense tells us is the "real" material world of solid, bounded objects that occupy space and whose movements or behaviors are predictable, controllable, and replicable because they obey fundamental and invariable laws of motion. ("Introducing the New Materialisms" 7-8)

Against this concept of matter, human beings are set as "rational, self-aware, free and self-moving agents" (8) who are ontologically different from matter. New Materialists offer an alternative to such a Cartesian conception of matter by ascribing agency not only to human beings but also to matter. They bring matter's agential abilities back into focus and aim at a radically new understanding of matter in ontological and epistemological terms. In doing so, the New Materialisms intent to supersede this century-long trained subject-object dualism and want to contribute to an "ontological turn" (St. Pierre et al. 101).

So, what are these alternative new materialist definitions of matter? For

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pure thought, on the other (Kunzmann et al. 107). This dualism between mind and body has vexed philosophers ever since because the question is: "if mind is unextended and matter is extended, how do they interact?" (Hatfield 3.4). Descartes' own suggestion to solve this problem can be found in a causal interactionist model according to which small spirits situated in the pineal gland ensure that the mind, despite its fundamental difference from the body, can influence the body and vice versa (Blume 66).

Barad, "[m]atter is not immutable or passive. Nor is it a fixed support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse. It does not require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity" (*MtUH* 151). In this line, Dolphijn and van der Tuin add that "[m]atter is a transformative force *in itself*, which, in its ongoing change, will not allow any representation to take root" (107, original emphasis). So, "matter becomes" rather than "is" (Coole & Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms" 10). Such a way of understanding matter builds on a long, even if minor tradition in the Western world that can be traced back to Lucretius (atomic swerve), Spinoza (immanence, conatus), Bergson (élan vital) and Deleuze and Guattari (plane of immanence/consistency, becoming, assemblage, rhizome).[7] Nowadays, Coole and Frost introduce a "new currency" (13) for a new materialist thinking that has developed out of quantum physics discoveries which prove that "'particles' are more like vibrating strands of energy, strings that oscillate in eleven dimensions, than like small versions of the sand grains suggested by their name" (12). Matter is no longer perceived as "substances"; rather, it is now seen as "forces, energies, and intensities" (13). We find matter not in "simple, predictable states" but in "complex, even random, processes" (13). With this, the concept of causality changes as well: as matter is no longer seen as an "inert substance subject to predictable causal forces" (9), a linear and mechanic procedure of cause and effect is put into question. Matter is always part of the process of materialisation which is seen as "a complex, pluralistic, relatively open process" (7) that cannot easily be predicted or calculated. This continuous *becoming* of matter "compel[s] us to think of causation in far more complex terms" and we need to "recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces" (9). Human beings are an "integral part" of these "active processes of materialization" and the New Materialisms no longer think in terms of "dead matter from which human subjects are apart" (8). In this sense, the New Materialisms are bound to a posthumanist thinking in which matter is itself "lively" and "exhibit[s] agency" (7). Agency is no longer an exclusively human characteristic. Human beings are permanently and "thoroughly

7 For a slightly more extensive list, see Hands, p. 133. In section 4.1 of this study, we will also encounter the theoretical tradition on which Bennett builds her vital materialism.

immersed within materiality's productive contingencies" (7) and cannot be thought apart from it. With this, the New Materialisms develop novel understandings of how we are situated in the world and how we are always already entangled with matter. For my purposes, Karen Barad's and Jane Bennett's new materialist theories are central and in order to put these New Materialisms to work in the chapters on colour writings to follow, we must first take a closer look at them.

With her proposed agential realism, Barad wants to rethink "the relationship between discursive practices and the material world" (*MtUH* 24) towards an "entanglement of matter and meaning", as it says in the subtitle of *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. To think this relationship anew, she introduces various new concepts such as *intra-activity* or *agential cuts* and rethinks already existing ones such as *phenomena* or *entanglement*. Her agential realism is

> an epistemological-ontological-ethical framework that provides an understanding of the role of human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices, thereby moving such considerations beyond the well-worn debates that pit constructivism against realism, agency against structure, and idealism against materialism. (26, original emphasis)

Consequently, an agential realism necessarily "entails a rethinking of fundamental concepts that support such binary thinking [as listed in the quotation above], including the notions of matter, discourse, causality, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space, and time" (26). Thus, Barad challenges long established concepts of Western thought to find a novel approach to the world in intertwined ontological, epistemological and ethical terms.[8]

8 Barad thinks ontology and epistemology always together – as entangled –, which she expresses by the hyphen that generates her neologism "*[o]nto-epistem-ology*" (*MtUH* 185, original emphasis). This new term is necessary, she argues, because the "separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and

What does her agential realism entail? I want to approach this question by taking a closer look at the terms *agential* and *realism*. By using the "adjectival form of 'agency' as the modifier" (44) for her realism, Barad extends the definition of agency beyond the human realm. Agency is not an attribute that humans have and nonhumans lack; nor is agency linked to intentionality or subjectivity (177). Barad frees the definition of agency from anthropocentric privilege and redefines it as "*'doing' or 'being' in its intra-activity*" (178, original emphasis). As "*a matter of intra-acting*" (178, original emphasis), agency permeates everything. In this way, "[a]gency never ends; it can never 'run out'" and "[t]he world's effervescence, its exuberant creativeness, can never be contained or suspended" (177). Agency is the inherent principle of the world in its becoming. We as human beings "are an agential part of the material becoming of the universe" (178) and "matter plays an agentive role in its [own] iterative materialization" (177). Furthermore, the adjective *agential* points to the fact that Barad shifts her focus "from the nature of representations […] to the nature of discursive practices" (45)[9] as her "agential realism rejects the notion of a correspondence relation between words and things and offers in its stead a causal explanation of how discursive practices are related to material phenomena" (44-45).[10] Her *realism* is different from any "traditional forms of realism and social constructivism" (45), which both cling to representationalism. According to Barad, both schools of thought believe in scientific knowledge as having a mediating function through which we can encounter the material world. They only differ in the "question of referent" (48): traditional realists believe in objects in the world *out there* as they really are and which can then be represented by (scientific) knowledge, whereas social constructivists believe in the world *out there* being produced by social activities (48). As

object, mind and body, matter and discourse" (185). What is required instead is an onto-epistem-ology, that is, "the study of practices of knowing in being" (185). In order to stress that "the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter", she develops this term even further by adding ethics to this entanglement, which then results in an "*ethico-onto-epistem-ology*" (185, original emphasis).

9 Note Barad's use of the word *nature* here. Although she wants to overcome a thinking in entities and fixed ontological meanings, she uses a term which assumes that there is something like an *essence* of the world to be found, howsoever entangled this might be.

10 We will see further below how Barad develops a causality that is based on her concept of intra-action and which enables her to causally link matter and meaning.

an alternative to such representationalist approaches, she proposes an agential realism that turns towards "the entangled material practices of knowing and becoming" (56) in which *phenomena* (i.e. "entangled material agencies" (56)) play a crucial role as we will see below. In true onto-epistem-ological fashion, Barad claims that "[p]ractices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are *of* the world" (185, original emphasis).

Agential realism describes the world as an ongoing process that is never brought to a halt. This constant becoming of the world is defined by what Barad calls *intra-action*. As I have already explained in the Introduction, intra-action

> *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies.* That is, in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action

whereby these "distinct agencies" are "*only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don't exist as individual elements*" (33, original emphasis). Thus, no inert and fixed identities appear in Barad's concept of the world. *Phenomena* are what 'constitute' reality: "Phenomena are not located in space and time; rather, *phenomena are material entanglements enfolded and threaded through the spacetimemattering of the universe*" ("Quantum Entanglements" 261, original emphasis). In Barad's agential realist concept, "*phenomena* are the *ontological* inseparability of agentially intra-acting components" (*MtUH* 33, original emphasis). She argues in analogy to the physicist Niels Bohr – from whom she takes the concept of phenomenon – that "the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with independently determinate boundaries and properties" (33) but phenomena.[11] Phenomena's components

11 Niels Bohr introduces his concept of phenomena to describe quantum phenomena. For Bohr, a phenomenon "exclusively refer[s] to the observations obtained under specified circumstances, including an account of the whole experimental arrangement" (Bohr qtd. in *MtUH* 119). With this definition of a phenomenon, he

only emerge and come into existence through the process of intra-action. Barad's agential realist notion of a phenomenon is different from a philosophical understanding of the term in a Kantian tradition, which is very important to clarify. Her notion does not refer to a Kantian understanding of phenomena as "the way things-in-themselves *appear*" and thus "as distinguished from noumena" (412n30, original emphasis). Phenomena, in Barad's sense, are "constitutive of reality" and from this follows that "[r]eality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena" (140).

In Barad's agential realism, *apparatuses* play a crucial role in the production of phenomena and thus are "formative of matter and meaning" (146). It is another important concept that Barad takes from Bohr and develops further. With the help of this concept, she explains how differences are created in the world and how "'entities'[12] within phenomena" (148) come into existence:

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presents a way to tackle the wave-particle duality paradox of quantum physics. The wave-particle duality describes the observation that matter can exhibit both particle and wave behaviour. From a classical physics point of view this runs totally counter to the belief in an ontology ''wherein each entity (e.g., the electron) is either a wave or a particle, independent of experimental circumstances'' (Barad, *MtUH* 106). It also runs counter to the ''epistemological assumption that experiments reveal the pre-existing determinate nature of the entity being measured'' (106). With quantum phenomena, this is different: depending on the experimental apparatus used to analyse the behaviour of matter (e.g. an electron) one gets different results (either particle or wave behaviour). Barad points out that

> [f]or Bohr, the crucial point is the fact that wave and particle behaviors are exhibited under *complementary* – that is, *mutually exclusive* – circumstances. According to Bohr, either we can find out which slit an electron goes through by using the which-path apparatus, in which case the resulting pattern will be that which characterizes particles, *or* we can forgo knowledge about which path the electron goes through (using the original unmodified two-slit apparatus) and obtain a wave pattern – we can't have it both ways at once. (106, original emphasis)

This observation entails that there is no predetermined entity (e.g. an electron) that enters into the experiment but the so-called 'entity' becomes what it is only in the experimental arrangement and not outside of it. For a detailed discussion of Bohr's physical theories and two-slit experiments, see *MtUH*, pp. 97-131.

12 The single quotation marks point to the fact that these are not entities in a traditional sense but that the entities within a phenomenon are intra-actively produced, which means that none of the components entangled in the phenomenon has an

> (1) apparatuses are specific material-discursive practices (they are not merely laboratory setups that embody human concepts and take measurements); (2) apparatuses produce differences that matter – they are boundary-making practices that are formative of matter and meaning, productive of, and part of, the phenomena produced; (3) apparatuses are material configurations/dynamic reconfigurings of the world; (4) apparatuses are themselves phenomena (constituted and dynamically reconstituted as part of the ongoing intra-activity of the world); (5) apparatuses have no intrinsic boundaries but are open-ended practices; and (6) apparatuses are not located in the world but are material configurations or reconfigurings of the world that re(con)figure spatiality and temporality as well as (the traditional notion of) dynamics (e.g., they do not exist as static structures, nor do they merely unfold or evolve in space and time). (146)

Apparatuses are difficult to grasp; the concept is highly complex. First, it is important to point out that apparatuses create and simultaneously are phenomena themselves. They are intra-actively entangled with the phenomena they produce. It is further important that "apparatuses *are* discursive practices, where the latter are understood as specific material reconfigurings through which 'objects' and 'subjects' are produced" (148, original emphasis) – thus, apparatuses are "material-discursive practices" (146). How do apparatuses produce phenomena, 'entities' within phenomena, or 'objects' and 'subjects'? They do so by enacting "agential cuts" (148). These agential cuts work according to the principle of exteriority and interiority in that they define what is excluded and included in every phenomenon; they define what matters and what does not matter, what becomes meaningful or not. Agential cuts are formative of reality. It is important to note that

> agential cuts are at once ontic and semantic. It is only through specif-

existence before and outside the entanglement. This also applies for cases in which Barad puts 'object' and 'subject' in quotation marks, or 'components' of phenomena (148) – 'objects' and 'subjects' only exist as part of phenomena.

> ic intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of "components" of phenomena become determinate and that particular articulations become meaningful. In the absence of specific agential intra-actions, these ontic-semantic boundaries are indeterminate. (148)

Barad deduces this claim from the two-slit experiment in which only the specific experimental arrangement determines how an electron behaves – as a wave or as a particle – and thus provides information about its onto-epistem-ological state. Before the electron enters the apparatus, its onto-epistem-ology is indeterminate.[13] Thus, agential cuts "produce determinate boundaries and properties of 'entities' within phenomena" (148). Here, it is important to keep in mind that "*[a]gential cuts – intra-actions* – don't produce (absolute) separation, they engage in *agential separability* – differentiating and entangling (that's one move, not successive processes)" ("Quantum Entanglements" 265, original emphasis). Separation is never final or absolute but an entangled process that becomes continuously re-formed in spacetime. In chapter 7, I will put Barad's apparatus to work in order to describe how reading *Bluets* creates specific blue interference patterns.

Another key concept in Barad's new materialist theory is *entanglement*. As one of the main divergences of quantum physics from classical physics, entanglement is also one of the main tenets that distinguishes new materialist world views from those in a Cartesian tradition. According to *A Dictionary of Physics*, entanglement is "[o]ne of the most mysterious features of quantum mechanics"[14] because it shows that

13 See also footnote 11 in this chapter for a more detailed explanation of the two-slit experiment and its implications.

14 The physicist Carlo Rovelli points out that even

> Richard Feynman, who more than anyone has known how to juggle with the theory, has written: ''I think I can state that nobody really understands quantum mechanics.'' The equations of the theory and their consequences are used daily in a wide variety of fields: by physicists, engineers, chemists, and biologists. But they remain mysterious: they do not describe physical systems, but only how physical systems interact with and affect one another. (139-40)

> if two particles interact at some point in time then the properties of these particles will remain connected at future times. A consequence of this is that determining the quantum state of one of the particles simultaneously determines the quantum state of the other particle, even if the two particles are a long way apart. ("quantum entanglement")[15]

Entanglement thus points to one of the cornerstones of how quantum mechanics describes reality, namely as relational.[16] Carlo Rovelli, a leading theoretical physicist in the field, explains that quantum mechanics "doesn't describe *where* there is a particle but how the particle *shows itself to others*. The world of existent things is reduced to a realm of possible interactions. Reality is reduced to interaction. Reality is reduced to relation" (135, original emphasis). Such a relationality of reality is also crucial to Barad's and Bennett's new materialist theories. Barad, too, defines relations as primary: they "do not follow relata, but the other way around" (*MtUH* 136-37). Entanglements substitute subject-object dualisms as for her "[t]o be entangled is not simply to be intertwined, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence" (ix).[17] From this follows that

15 Erwin Schrödinger called this specific ''connectedness between particles'' *entanglement* in a paper published in 1935 and ''he emphasized that it is a key feature of quantum mechanics that distinguishes it from classical physics'' (*A Dictionary of Physics*, ''quantum entanglement'').

16 According to Rovelli, the three cornerstones of quantum mechanics are granularity, indeterminacy and relationality:

> To summarize, quantum mechanics is the discovery of three features of the world: [i] *Granularity* [...]. The information in the state of a system is finite, and limited by Planck's constant. [ii] *Indeterminacy*. The future is not determined unequivocally by the past. Even the more rigid regularities we see are ultimately statistical. [iii] *Relationality*. The events of nature are always interactions. All events of a system occur in relation to another system. (136-37, original emphasis)

Note Rovelli's use of *nature* and *interactions* which points to a use of language that is not indebted to new materialist conventions of speech.

17 For a detailed explanation of quantum entanglement in Barad's work, see *MtUH*, chapter 7 ''Quantum Entanglements: Experimental Metaphysics and the Nature of Nature'' and her article ''Quantum Entanglements''.

"[e]ntanglements are not unities. They do not erase differences; on the contrary, entanglings entail differentiatings, differentiatings entail entanglings. One move – *cutting together-apart*" ("Diffracting Diffraction" 176, original emphasis). Intra-actions produce entanglements and thus, entanglements (or, in other words, phenomena) are the basic components in Barad's agential realist account which highlights relationality and explains difference not in terms of absolute separateness but as agential separability. Importantly, "[e]ntanglements are not a name for the interconnectedness of all being as one, but rather specific material relations of the ongoing differentiating of the world" ("Quantum Entanglements" 265).

With this, we have a first overview of Barad's agential realism and her contribution to the field of the New Materialisms. For my project, it is especially interesting to think with Barad in order to intertwine matter and meaning, and to explain the material-discursive entanglements in the reading process. In the Introduction, I have already provided a short insight into Barad's understanding of matter and meaning. I include a recapitulation here to again point out these two important conceptions. Her view on matter is radically different from a Cartesian one but in line with other new materialist thinkers:

> Matter is neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things. Mattering is differentiating, and which differences come to matter, matter in the iterative production of different differences. (*MtUH* 137)

With this definition, she theorises matter for a posthumanist realm and highlights that matter is always to be understood as "a process of materialization": "*Matter is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency*" (210, original emphasis). Hence, matter is never "an assumed, inherent, fixed property of abstract, independently existing objects" (210). What we encounter as matter is always in motion and engaged in becoming, it differentiates itself in every moment of spacetime: "*Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity*" (210, original emphasis). Another important point in this agential realist account of matter is

that "matter is enfolded into itself in its ongoing materialization" and thereby it "carries within itself the sedimented historialities[18] of the practices through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming – it is ingrained and enriched in its becoming" (180).[19] Thus, following Barad, we could say that the very colour writings (in their material manifestation as books) we hold in our hands while reading are far from being static and solid objects. We hold in our hands the "sedimented historialities of the practices through which [they are] produced as part of [their] ongoing becoming" (180). These sedimented historialities can include the logging of trees for the production of paper, the production of ink, the worker handling the printing machines, the publisher's decisions as well as thoughts, memories and feelings of the author and various people involved in the production process, etc. Yet, sedimented historialities do not stop at such socio-material practices but they are generated in an ongoing becoming. This means that a double movement in the spacetimemattering of reading is at work here: the above-mentioned practices of the book's production are enfolded in its materiality while becoming entangled with the ongoing creation of material-discursive colour in the reading process when text and reader meet. There is no end to sedimenting historialities.

Barad's definition of matter also has effects on the definition of meaning and the process of meaning-making. The production of meaning is far from being an issue solely attributed to the realms of language. Meaning-making

18 Barad borrows the term *historiality* from Derrida, as she explains: "Derrida's (1976) notion of 'historiality' may be a more appropriate term than the more usual 'historicity,' since it connotes the important idea that time is an operator, not a parameter" (*MtUH* 438n84). For a more detailed discussion of the term, see *MtUH* 438n84.

19 Barad compares this process to the kneading of dough:

> Imagine putting drops of colored dyes into a piece of bread dough. As you knead the dough, the dyes spread out in different patterns of entangled lines and surfaces. But this process is too tame as well, since the changes are all continuous and the dough maintains its topology. So break off some pieces and reattach them to different areas and continue kneading. Take a different kind of dough and make a different manifold with different lines, surfaces, and volumes of color. Intermingle the dough pieces: new entanglements form, new possibilities emerge. This metaphor still doesn't cut it; the motion seems to come from outside, the indeterminacies don't appear to be evident, the possibilities come across as less lively, fresh, and exuberant than they are. Instead of dough, consider ... other possibilities ... in an unending iterative process of enfolding. (*MtUH* 439n85)

is a very *material* process for Barad and she argues for a posthumanist understanding of meaning in which "meaning is not a human-based notion; rather, meaning is an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility" – it is the way in which the "world articulates itself differently" (335). Barad turns towards discursive practices as the "the material conditions for making meaning" (335). And again, "[d]iscourse is not a synonym for language" (335).[20] In Barad's understanding,

> discursive practices are specific material configurings of the world through which determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted. It is this enactment of ontic-semantic determinacy that is at the core of what discursivity entails. (335)

How are matter and meaning entangled then? According to Barad, this entanglement works through a "causality of intra-actions" (211). Such a causality is not a linear one of cause and effect nor is it determined by a predictable and necessary chain of causality. Usually, causality is "figured as a relation between distinct entities" (175) in which one of the entities has an effect on the other and is thus said to be this effect's cause. Yet, in an agential realist account of the world, there are no longer distinct entities and thus causality becomes a matter of agential intra-actions which again means that "causal relations necessarily entail a specification of the material apparatus that enacts an agential cut between determinately bounded and propertied entities within a phenomenon" (175-76). Such a causality is key to how matter and

20 Barad explains further:

> Discourse does not refer to linguistic or signifying systems, grammars, speech acts, or conversations. To think of discourse as mere spoken words forming descriptive statements is to enact the mistake of representationalist thinking. Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements. Statements are not the mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather, statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities. This field of possibilities is not static or singular but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity. (*MtUH* 146-47)

meaning are entangled in Barad's agential realist account. We cannot think matter and meaning separately from each other: "Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity" (184). The "primary semantic units" of an agential realism are thus not words but "material-discursive practices" (141). I understand the reading of colour writings along these lines: meaning is not created by words alone; it is rather generated through the intra-action of words/text, colour, matter and reader. All of these 'components' are involved in and constitutive of this material-discursive practice, that is, the reading of colour writings.

In the Introduction, I have already briefly elaborated what these understandings of meaning and material-discursive practices can hold for the study of literary texts. Here, I want to suggest another link to literary theory: Barad's concepts are also evocative of performative approaches to literature, for example of Derek Attridge's proposal to treat literature as an "event" (*The Singularity of Literature* 59). Attridge suggests that a literary work is

> an act, an event, of reading, never entirely separable from the act-event (or acts-events) of writing that brought it into being as a potentially readable text, never entirely insulated from the contingencies of the history into which it is projected and within which it is read. (59)

Attridge's act-event of writing is reminiscent of Barad's sedimented historialities and his claim that the literary work is never "insulated" from the times in which it is published and in which it is read points to the various entanglements in which the reader finds themselves (their environment, their disposition, etc.) during the reading process. Colour writings, for example, can entangle the reader with the words on the page, the world *out there*, the material-discursive colour as well as the feelings and affects that emerge while reading. And most importantly, Attridge's claim that "[t]he literary work comes into being only in the event of reading" (*The Work of Literature* 25) resonates extremely well with thinking reading in new materialist terms, that is, understanding reading as a material-discursive practice. In the reading of colour writings, such a material-discursive practice produces unique expe-

riences of colour through the intra-action of text and reader – it produces material-discursive colour.

Jane Bennett is another important thinker in the field of the New Materialisms. She develops a vital materialism that has at its core the idea of a vibrant matter which supersedes the conception of matter being an inert substance: "The aim is to articulate the elusive idea of a materiality that is *itself* heterogeneous, itself a differential of intensities, itself *a* life. In this strange, *vital* materialism, there is no point of pure stillness, no indivisible atom that is not itself aquiver with virtual force" (*VM* 57, original emphasis). Bennett uses different adjectives to describe matter in the conceptual realm of her vital materialism: "matter [is] vibrant, vital, energetic, lively, quivering, vibratory, evanescent, effluescent[21]" (112). She radically breaks with the established tradition of a human/nonhuman dichotomy and is aware of "how radical a project it is to think vital materiality" (119) – a materiality that deeply challenges anthropocentrism.

> Within this imaginary, humans are figured as themselves materialities inextricably enmeshed with nonhuman entities and forces, for humans can operate only if accompanied by a bevy of nonhumans (from foodstuffs to intestinal bacteria to the metal/plastic/silicon of tools). It might even be said that humans need nonhumans to function more than nonhumans need humans, for many nonhumans – from a can rusting at the bottom of a landfill to a colony of spores in the Arctic – fester or live beyond the proximity of humans. ("In Parliament with Things"[22] 137)

Such an understanding of materiality "tends to horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiota. It draws human attention sideways, away from an ontologically ranked Great Chain of Being and toward a greater ap-

21 The adjective *effluescent* seems to be an invention by Bennett that may be derived from *effluent*.

22 "In Parliament with Things" will be abbreviated as "IPwT" in the following.

preciation of the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans" (*VM* 112).

Bennett does not start this project from scratch but finds inspiration in Epicurean concepts and Lucretius' world view. Epicureans "rejected the idea of matter as inert […] and depicted the difference between humans and nonhuman […] as a matter of degree rather than kind" (*VM* 68). For Lucretius, the universe "consists not of dead matter and living beings but of swerving atoms forming turbulent and productive flows" (68). Other sources for her development of a vital materialism are "a non-Newtonian picture of nature as matter-flow, especially as it is developed in the thought of Gilles Deleuze; and the Spinozist idea that bodies have a propensity to form collectivities" ("The Force of Things"[23] 348-49). Bennett is further inspired by Spinoza's notion of affect – that is, in Bennett's words, "the capacity of any body for activity and responsiveness" (xii) – and she observes that Spinoza "ascribes to bodies a peculiar vitality" (*VM* 2).[24] With these references, Bennett writes her own concept of a vibrant matter into a long tradition of Western thought. To further build up her concept of vibrant matter she refers to early 20th-century theories by Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch, who both developed the idea of an inner directing principle of matter: Bergson calls it "élan vital" and Driesch "entelechy" (*VM* 63). They "both believed that nature, irreducible to matter as extension in space, also included a dynamic intensity or animating impetus" (80). This élan vital, or entelechy, works as an agent, has productive forces and exhibits generative power in organising and enlivening

23 "The Force of Things" will be abbreviated as "TFoT" in the following.

24 Nadler elaborates on Spinoza's notion of affect:

> All beings are naturally endowed with […] a power or striving. This *conatus*, a kind of existential inertia, constitutes the "essence" of any being. "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being." An affect just *is* any change in this power, for better or for worse. (2.4, original emphasis)

Bennett emphasises that this "[co]natus names a power present in *every* body" (*VM* 2, original emphasis). Yet, she acknowledges that Spinoza makes a difference between human bodies and other bodies, because human bodies "live by the guidance of reason" (Spinoza qtd. in Bennett, *VM* 2). What is more important for Bennett though is that "every nonhuman body shares with every human body a conative nature" (*VM* 2).

matter (80). Élan vital even goes so far as to ascribe "sparking and innovating capacities" (80) to matter. Yet, these concepts do not go far enough for Bennett since they are still bound to the belief of matter being inert and not its own agent. In Bergson's and Driesch's concepts, the generative and productive part of matter is taken over by the élan vital and entelechy. Even though élan vital or entelechy are inseparable parts of matter, it is not matter itself that is productive. For Bennett, this differentiation must be overcome so that matter becomes its own creative agent and does not depend on external sources to act. Her "philosophical project" is to rework "the idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert" (vii). Yet, although she believes that "the vitality of matter is real", she is also aware that

> it will be hard to discern it, and, once discerned, hard to keep focused on. It is too close and too fugitive, as much wind as thing, impetus as entity, a movement always on the way to becoming otherwise, an effluence that is vital and engaged in trajectories but not necessarily intentions. (119)

So, what is this vitality of matter exactly? Bennett gives a definition of what she means by *vitality*: "I mean the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (viii). In *Vibrant Matter*, she provides detailed examples of how, for example, edibles, commodities, storms and metals can be seen as vibrant matter that actively creates effects which influence human life. Such a rethinking of matter's vitality requires, in Bennett's view, a new "onto-story" (116):

> In lieu of an environment that surrounds human culture, […] picture an ontological field without any unequivocal demarcations between human, animal, vegetable, or mineral. *All* forces and flows (materialities) are or can become lively, affective, signalling. And so an affective, speaking human body is not *radically* different from the affective,

> signalling nonhumans with which it coexists, hosts, enjoys, serves, consumes, produces, and competes. (116-17, original emphasis)

This onto-story shifts from "a world of nature versus culture to a heterogenous monism of vibrant bodies" (121). But it is important to note that such a field "is not a uniform or flat topography" and neither humans nor nonhumans are consistently "the privileged site of agency" – "[t]he source of effects is, rather, always an ontologically diverse assemblage of energies and bodies, of simple and complex bodies, of the physical and the physiological" (117).

To explore such a world, Bennett proposes to use the method that she ascribes to a craftsperson, namely kindling the desire to see what a material can *do* (60). This approach assumes from the very beginning that a material offers multiple possibilities to deal with. It is an open and playful method which ensures the productive collaboration with a material. This contrasts with the for her less attractive method of a scientist who has the desire to know what a material *is* (60). Since from a vital materialist perspective matter is not an inert substance but is seen to be ever-changing, the craftsperson's method is much more promising and interesting to work with for Bennett. Such a method is also used by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick when she explores textile art and fabric in the "middle ranges of agency" ("Making Things, Practicing Emptiness" 79). We will also later see how a playful openness in the exploration of colour is, on the one hand, characteristic of the colour writings by Jarman, Han and Nelson, and, on the other hand, a prerequisite for an attentive reading of these texts. Though Sedgwick is not a new materialist scholar, her term *middle ranges of agency* is helpful to describe an encounter with matter from a new materialist perspective. In her engagement with textiles, Sedgwick experiences a pressing back of the material and she describes this experience as being suspended in the middle ranges of agency (83). For the techniques she uses to create her art, "the will of the artist is only one determinant of the art that emerges – and often not the most important determinant" (83). New questions appear when she is confronted with the material: "What will it let me do?", "What does it want to do?", "What is it that I want to do?" (83) or "How did it get that way?", "What could I do with it?" (84). These questions cannot be answered purely cognitively. They require the five senses to approach them. The sense of touch is prominent here: touch "makes nonsense

out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft […] and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of the textured object" (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 14).[25] These middle ranges of agency perfectly lend themselves to engage with matter in new materialist terms: they are "the field in which most of the consciousness, perception, and relationality really happen" ("Making Things, Practicing Emptiness" 79) and are not influenced by dichotomies of active and passive, subject and object, doer and done-to. Sedgwick enjoys being in this space: "It feels wonderful to exist and to be active in that space of suspended agency" (83). A full-body engagement with the material is required here rather than a purely cognitive preoccupation with matter. The matter of the human body has to get into contact with the nonhuman material that surrounds it and of which it is a part. In line with new materialist thought, it is thus not only the human being who exhibits agency and the human will is only one determinant in the process of engaging with a material in the middle ranges of agency. Human beings must cultivate a certain openness towards the agency of the material in order to work effectively in the middle ranges of agency and to enjoy being in them.

Coming back to Bennett, it is helpful to remember what she calls the "moral of [her] materialist tale": in order to get involved in such explorations of what matter can *do*, we should recall that "we are also nonhuman and that things too are vital players in the world" ("TFoT" 349). These vital players can "command[…] attention, exude[…] a kind of dignity, provoke[…] poetry, or inspire[…] fear" (350) as we have also seen in Sedgwick's account. We will later witness how in *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* vibrant colour-matter time and again stimulates the narrative voices to continue with their colour stories. Bennett is interested in "the curious ability of 'inanimate' things to animate humans, to surprise us, impinge upon us and propel us to engage in movements, moods or utterances that we otherwise would not" ("IPwT" 136-37). Such an affectivity or reaching out of matter is closely connected to the concept of *assemblage* in Bennett's vital materialism: "[t]he locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group" (*VM* xvii) – or, in other

25 This recalls Barad's notion of "sedimented historialities" (*MtUH* 180) as discussed earlier.

words, an assemblage. Bennett's description of an assemblage follows Deleuze and Guattari and she defines it as "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts" (*VM* 23) that can be human and nonhuman. Assemblages have "uneven topographies" (24) since their diverse elements are not equally distributed. Moreover, they are "not governed by any central head" (24) and are thus rhizomatic in their structure. In an assemblage, each member "has a certain vital force" (24) but at the same time the assemblage as a whole exhibits an agency of its own that is independent from the sum of its parts; an assemblage is never "a solid block but an open-ended collective" (24). So, a painting may be defined as an assemblage: it consists of diverse elements, which can also be called *actants*; it has an uneven topography, namely its texture; and all the diverse elements are intra-actively entangled in such a way that they produce a specific claim on the observer and exhibit a certain agency, that is, the agency of the assemblage, the painting in its material manifestation.

What exactly are these elements of an assemblage, called *actants*? According to Bennett, "*[a]ctant* […] is Bruno Latour's term for a source of action; an actant can be human or not, or […] a combination of both. […] An actant is neither an object nor a subject" (*VM* 9); in Latour's words it can also be called an "intervener" (*Politics of Nature* 75). The term *actant* is an alternative to *actor* in Latour's attempt "to rid [the latter term] of any trace of anthropomorphism" (75). Thus, he defines an actant as follows: an actant is "something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies *no* special motivation of *human individual* actors, nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action" ("On Actor-Network Theory" 373, original emphasis). For Bennett, an actant "makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalysing an event" (*VM* 9). She provides a good example of how actants are involved in everyday activities and are constituents of an assemblage:

> The sentences of this book [*Vibrant Matter*] also emerged from the confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants: from "my" memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particulates in the

> room, to name only a few of the participants. What is at work here on the page is an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power. What is at work here is what Deleuze and Guattari call an assemblage. (23)

Every actant plays a unique role in the overall effect. When we take such a "confederate agency" (23) of actants – which can be called an assemblage – to a painting, every tiny grain of colour pigment we see in a painting is an actant that makes a difference. The unique crystalline structure of each pigment defines the colour when used as paint and every pigment-actant plays a unique role in the overall effect of the painting. But a painting does not consist of only one pigment alone but of many. We can thus speak of a "confederate agency" (23) of pigments in a painting, in which each pigment in turn also acts together with the light conditions, the canvas, the brushes, the grounding, etc.

To experience the vibrancy of matter one does not necessarily have to go to an art gallery. Bennett experiences the vibrancy of a material assemblage when looking at a heap of so-called 'garbage' in the street: "I was struck […] by the way the glove, [dead] rat, cap oscillated: at one moment garbage, at the next stuff that made a claim on me" ("TFoT" 350).[26] Such an oscillation is characteristic of vibrant matter and its "thing-power" (350). Thing-power "*is the property of an assemblage*" (354, original emphasis) and Bennett further elaborates on her experience:

> I was struck by the singular materiality of the glove, the rat, the bottle cap – a singularity brought forth by the contingency of their co-presence, by the specific assemblage they formed. For had the sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I might not have noted the bottle cap, and so on. I caught a glimpse of an energetic substantiality possessed by each of these things. (350)

26 Bennett describes the encounter with this garbage assemblage also in *Vibrant Matter*, see pp. 4-6.

In this garbage assemblage, Bennett experiences the "relational effect" (354) of thing-power: "Here each thing is individuated, but also located within an assemblage – each is shown to be in a relationship with the others, and also with the sunlight and the street, and not simply with me, my vision, or my cultural frame. Here thing-power rises to the surface" (351).

Similar experiences can be made when reading *Chroma*. Jarman's very *material* description of Geertgen tot Sint Jans' painting *Nativity at Night* is a great example of this and it is worth quoting Jarman's description at full length:

> The shyest of brown paintings is a small Madonna, no bigger than this book, which is *framed in tortoiseshell* in a quiet corner of the National Gallery. It was painted in the 1480s by Geertgen Tot Sint Jans, and is easily overlooked. You will see very little if you do not *stop and peer into its twilight*. The *Nativity at Night* is a *miracle*, for the subject until that time had usually been painted in a *blaze of sunlit colour*. Geertgen uses *a buff-pink* for the flesh, and *a subtle bouquet of browns*. What light there is is a *spiritual light*, that comes in *barely discernible rays* from the child in the manger, at the head of which there is a host of pudgy little angels with Pre-Raphaelite hairstyles. At the foot of the manger the *Madonna's blue robe has turned the inky black of night*; the sky is the same colour seen through the door of the byre. On a distant hill, the shepherd's barely discernible shadows are minding a flock of *gun-metal grey sheep*. Above them, the angel Gabriel hovers in angelic and spectral white. While, down below, the ox and ass, *almost unnoticeable in the shadows*, worship the child. Geertgen conveys the colour of night with a *brilliance* I have not seen in any other painting – *this is not possible in a photo,* and might just be possible in film, though it would cost a fortune in lights to achieve the effect. *The night in Hampstead is this colour.* The trees turn inky. The moon glows white like the angel. The grasses are a spectral brown. The silver-birches chalky-white, and every form is dissolved in shadows. (*Chroma* 86-87, my emphasis)

It is remarkable how Jarman refuses to read the colours of the painting in symbolic or allegoric terms but instead presents a detailed description of its material components and of the effect this material assemblage has on him. This small painting does not 'cry out' to many people but it whispers quietly to Jarman. He is fascinated by its "brilliance" and describes it as a "miracle". It is a rather elusive painting since it is composed in "twilight" and avoids any "blaze of sunlit colour". Many parts of it are "barely discernible" or are "almost unnoticeable in the shadows". In this, its effect is quite similar to what Bennett experiences when she passes by the heap of garbage: you have to stop, not rush by, and take your time to experience the effect which this material assemblage has on you. It is not easy to acknowledge and realise the effect these things elicit: "Thing-power entails the ability to shift or vibrate between different states of being, to go from trash/inanimate/resting to treasure/animate/alert" (Bennett, "TFoT" 354). In the Introduction, I have already proposed that material-discursive colour also exhibits thing-power and is vibratory – here, in Jarman's description of this specific painting, we can find such thing-power. One has to "stop and peer into its twilight" to experience the thing-power of the material assemblage *Nativity at Night*. The painting is not only an image but it consists of singular materialities that create in their relational co-presence exactly this effect of a "miracle": the "tortoiseshell" frame, the "buff-pink" and "subtle bouquet of browns", the "spiritual light" or the "gun-metal grey sheep" – they all contribute to the thing-power which this painting exerts on Jarman. The blue pigment of the Madonna's robe is a vibrant actant as it has turned into "the inky black of night" and in doing so blocks the human attempt to transmit a specific meaning via colour, since blue is traditionally the colour attributed to the Virgin Mary.[27] The effect of the small painting highly depends on the material it is produced with: Jarman is convinced that a photo would never capture this effect and film would hardly do so neither. The thing-power of the painting does not stop in the National Gallery. It reaches out into the "night in Hampstead" of which Jar-

27 Pastoureau notes that in the twelfth century, blue became the colour of the Virgin Mary "and one of her principal attributes, present either on her cloak (the most frequent case), on her robe or, very rarely, as the color of all her clothing" (*Blue* 50). In this context, blue symbolises "sanctity and divinity" (49). Throughout the centuries, the colour attributed to Mary changed; for more information, see *Blue*, pp. 49-55.

man is reminded by looking at the small painting and suddenly the world *out there* is connected with the material assemblage of singular vibrant material parts that form the assemblage we call the *Nativity at Night* and in which we become involved when reading *Chroma*.[28]

Jarman's material description of the *Nativity at Night* brings the reader close to this painting's vibrant materiality. Coming back from this colour journey, I want to address the role of the text itself in the reader's experience of a vibrant matter or thing-power. What kind of literary text do we need to enable such an experience? I propose to treat *Chroma*, as well as *The White Book* and *Bluets*, as "onto-stor[ies]" (*VM* 116). An onto-story is basically a story that conveys a specific perspective on reality. In contrast to "traditional metaphysics", Bennett writes, these "onto-stories are […] presented as speculative and contestable, though also as a valuable and perhaps indispensable part of thinking" ("IPwT" 146n7). For her, as a political science scholar, "[d]emocratic theory today rests largely upon an implicit onto-story, wherein humans are radically distinguished from other entities, upon a scenography of subjects and objects, of active Mind and inert Matter" (135). This is an anthropocentric onto-story:

> In this world picture, human forms of communication, human modes of intelligence and creativity and human structures of order are given such pride of place that the centrality of humanity appears, not as a powerful tradition, but as an inevitability, as, say, an irrevocable fact of consciousness or perception. (135)

As an alternative, Bennett writes her very own onto-story as we have seen above – it is the onto-story of a vital materialism as it "pictures the world as

28 In *Modern Nature*, Jarman writes about nighttime cruising on Hampstead Heath and the following scene is reminiscent of the last sentences of Jarman's association, or memory, triggered by looking at the *Nativity at Night*: "After a week's absence I have visited the Heath several times recently, it is always exciting and joyous. The deep silence, the cool night air, the pools of moonlight and stars, the great oaks and beeches – all old friends" (*Modern Nature* 84).

a web of lively and mobile matter-forms of varying degrees of complexity. It posits multiple sites of agency" – it is a "materialist tale" (136).

When experiencing the *Nativity at Night*, the reader is drawn into a realm in which agency is distributed to all actants involved, including the painting and its colours as well as the human observer/reader. The reader finds themselves in the realm of an onto-story that unfolds in the reading of *Chroma*. Formerly established demarcation lines, such as *active* observer and *passive* painting, are suspended and the reader becomes entangled in material-discursive colourscapes. This onto-story reaches out to other texts and meaning-making procedures, thereby connecting – in a rhizomatic and entangling fashion – with other components of the world. An example of this would be Jarman's association with nights on Hampstead Heath and my own recollection of having read a similar scene in Jarman's *Modern Nature* in the past.[29] Ensuing from a text passage presenting a small, brown painting that made a claim on Jarman and which brought the reader close to this painting's materiality, the text connects with Jarman's cruising as well as with my own readings of Jarman's œuvre. And these are only some possible threads which this onto-story potentially casts. An onto-story is a story that, according to Yates, "is not even a story and continuously rewrites itself, multiplying its threads, most of which you are too limited to perceive" (43). In doing so, the onto-story *Chroma* creates flows of material-discursive colour in which we as readers become entangled: the tortoiseshell which frames the painting bears witness to the exploitation of endangered turtle species; the adjective *gun-metal grey*, which describes the colour of the flock of sheep, forms a disconcertingly strange contrast to the usually soft sheep's wool and presents us with a texture that can hardly be imagined, the combination of gun-metal and wool; and the agential capability of the pigment used to paint the Madonna's cloak – that is, its capacity to turn from blue to black – challenges any human intention to control this mineral actant. With *Chroma*, we can learn to become aware of such threads which an onto-story casts towards the world. We can even learn to perceive reality as an ontological field in which, as Bennett puts it, "*all* forces and flows (materialities) are or can become lively, affective, and signalling" (*VM* 117, original emphasis). When looking at my selected colour writings through a new materialist lense, colours and the

29 See footnote 28.

materials they are entangled with become actants in the text. These texts and their language do not only evoke affects in the reader but they actually install bits of colour-matter in the mindscape and sensory perception of their readers and thereby write their very own onto-story.

Literary texts are perfectly suited to encounter an agential and vibrant matter – even better than many theoretical new materialist texts which often create exactly the effect to which the New Materialisms are so opposed: the reader easily gets lost in language without *experiencing* the agency and vibrancy of matter. Such a hypothesis is also supported by Hotz-Davies who claims that

> "theory" may not be the most privileged vantage point from which to explore such a new materialism. In "theory", matter necessarily remains elusive in those tens of thousands of pages dedicated to it, an object of discourse, a set of hypotheses, a thing we make claims *about* while following linguistic conventions paradoxically most removed from the stickiness of affect and matter. It is here, that the arts have a more sophisticated set of techniques at their disposal […], even those arts in which materialism is also a matter of words, not molecules. (142, original emphasis)

This study of colour writings wants to add yet another facet to the increasing engagements of literary scholarship with the New Materialisms (see Appendix[30]) by exploring the entanglements between colour, matter, text and reader which are decisive for a reading of colour writings. Colour has so far not been a topic for the New Materialisms nor has English literary studies been concerned with the doings of colour and its entanglements with words, matter and reader. Hence, this study focuses on these specific relationalities which are forged in the reading of colour writings. Dolphijn and van der Tuin highlight that "New Materialism is something to be *put to work*" (103, original

30 A literature review of publications at the crossroads between the New Materialisms and studies of Anglo-American literature is included in the Appendix to outline how these fields have influenced each other so far.

emphasis) and this is exactly what I intend to do in the attentive readings in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

## 4.2 ATTENTIVE READING

The New Materialisms offer theoretical concepts and tools which support an understanding of how colour is a material-discursive actant in literary texts and how readers get intra-actively entangled with colour writings in the reading process. Yet, new materialist theories do not specify *how to read* these colour writings in which we encounter the agency of colour-matter. If we want to be open for how material-discursive colour exhibits thing-power and makes a claim on the reader, if we want to think reading these texts as an intra-active phenomenon in which both text and reader are decisive components, if we want to understand how colour writings write matter into colour, we also need a new reading strategy.

Colour writings render a traditional hermeneutic reading *inside* the hermeneutic circle and a close reading as developed by the New Critics impractical. Neither are these texts closed off entities with clearly defined boundaries in which the literary scholar can dig for meaning, nor can colour writings be read without also taking the reader's experience into account. These texts reach out towards the reader and involve them in their colourscapes – colour writings do not sit still. We need a deeply relational reading strategy that pays tribute to the intra-active co-creation of text and reader in the process of their encounter. Moreover, it does not suffice to read these texts for meaning alone; it is even more important to read them with an *attentiveness* to the various unfoldings of colour and to how these texts intra-actively entangle the reader with their colourscapes. Taking this agential side of colour writings into focus is necessary in order to get access to these texts, to develop an understanding of how they work and to grasp their potential to materially-discursively create colour in the encounter with the reader. I suggest that colour writings require an *attentive reading* which assists the unfolding of the texts' various doings and which further enables us to notice the doings of material-discursive colour.

In the following, I will specify the details of this reading strategy with the assistance of Nan Shepherd and her two texts *The Living Mountain* (1977)

and "The Colours of Deeside" (1938). I want to introduce Shepherd as a guide to explore the conditions for and premises of an attentive reading. The Scottish author has recently been rediscovered and is highly praised for her work. *The Living Mountain* is especially marketed as "[t]he finest book ever written on nature and landscape in Britain" (*Guardian* qtd. on the back cover of *The Living Mountain*[31]) and author and literary scholar Robert Macfarlane, who wrote the introduction to the 2011 Canongate edition, is one of her primary promoters.[32] All her novels – *The Quarry Wood* (1928), *The Weatherhouse* (1930) and *A Pass in the Grampians* (1933) – as well as her nature writing *The Living Mountain* and poetry collection *In the Cairngorms* (1934) have been republished in the last few years. Moreover, a new collection partly including formerly unpublished texts (*Wild Geese*, edited by Peacock, including "The Colours of Deeside"), a biography about the writer (Peacock, *Into the Mountain: A Life of Nan Shepherd*) as well as a photo essay inspired by her writings (Addy, *The Living Cairngorms*) came out. Since 2016, her portrait, accompanied by a quotation from *The Living Mountain*, even adorns the Scottish five-pound note and publishing house Canongate initiated "The Nan Shepherd Prize", which is "[a] new literary prize for underrepresented voices in nature writing". The increasing interest in Shepherd's œuvre, especially in *The Living Mountain*, during the last few years is certainly an effect of the recently growing trend in regard to the genre of nature writing in the Anglo-American book market. Yet, *The Living Mountain* is not only a "masterpiece of nature writing" (as it says on the book's back cover) – I propose that it is also a tribute to the art of attentiveness. In *The Living Mountain*, Shepherd[33] distils her experience of innumerable walks into the Cairngorm mountain plateau in Scotland into a highly intense and sensuous meditation on this "living mountain" (*TLM* 48). Shepherd is an expert in practising attentiveness to her surroundings and especially to her *relation* to the mountain plateau including its "rock", "air", "scree, soil and water, moss, grass, flower and tree, insect, bird, beast, wind, rain and snow" (105). All these elements together consti-

31 *The Living Mountain* will be abbreviated as *TLM* in the following.

32 See, for example, Macfarlane's articles "How Nan Shepherd Remade my Vision of the Cairngorms" and "I Walk Therefore I Am".

33 As *The Living Mountain* is a non-fictional text, I also refer to the narrator as Nan Shepherd.

tute the "total mountain" (105) for her – and "total" must be understood in a holistic sense here, not in terms of "'totalising' or 'totalitarian'" (Macfarlane, Introduction xxvi). Colours, too, are a key part of this mountain: "The air is part of the mountain, which does not come to an end with its rock and soil. It has its own air; and it is to the quality of its air that is due the endless diversity of its colourings" (*TLM* 41). Shepherd is an expert in attentive colour observations and various accounts of the play of colour in the hills are woven through the whole text. Colours are important to her because, like air, they are "part of the mountain" and they appear in an "endless diversity", which is one indicator for the ever-changing being of this living mountain. Shepherd highlights the relational character of colour as due to weather conditions the hills can change, for example, from brown to blue:

> Brown for the most part in themselves, as soon as we see them clothed in air the hills become blue. Every shade of blue, from opalescent milky-white to indigo, is there. They are most opulently blue when rain is in the air. Then the gullies are violet. Gentian and delphinium hues, with fire in them, lurk in the folds. (41)

This is just one example which illustrates the elaborateness with which Shepherd observes different shades of colour – in this case blue – that range "from opalescent milky-white to indigo" as well as "violet", "[g]entian and delphinium hues". While Shepherd uses colour to describe the hills as brown and blue in the beginning and the gullies as violet later on in the text passage, the last sentence shifts the focus to colour itself, to "[g]entian and delphinium hues, with fire in them, [which] lurk in the folds". With this, colour is no longer used to describe the landscape, the hills and gullies – it becomes strangely material as it fills the folds of the mountain slopes and appears to be a being in itself. The experience that colour has substance and is as it were alive is not uncommon in Shepherd's text. The passage quoted in the Introduction of this study shows another example of such an experience and I would like to take it up again:

> The intense frost, the cloudless sky, the white world, the setting sun and the rising moon, as we gazed on them from the slope of Morrone, melted into a prismatic radiation of blue, helio, mauve, and rose. The full moon floated up into green light; and as the rose and violet hues spread over snow and sky, the colour seemed to live its own life, to have body and resilience, as though we were not looking at it, but were inside its substance. (29-30)

Here, too, colour seems to have "body and resilience" as well as "substance" and even "seemed to live its own life". Shepherd experiences how colour envelops her, she is in direct contact with it and can perceive its "resilience". All of this indicates that the "substance" of colour is nothing solid and fixed, it is rather elastic and flexible. Colours fold around her and take her in – she is no longer "looking at it" from an outside perspective but is rather "inside" colour and deeply involved in it. This involvement is also characteristic of Shepherd's relation to the mountain at large: she perceives herself not as a being separate from the mountain but as an essential part of it. She is entangled with the mountain and recounts this experience: "Something moves between me and it. Place and mind may interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered" (8). It is a mutual becoming of her and the mountain which recalls Barad's new materialist concepts of intra-action and phenomena. Shepherd was not always able to perceive this entanglement with the mountain. When she began hill walking, she "made always for the summits" as she was "mad to recover the tang of height" (9). Only after some time did she recognise the pleasure of walking "into" (10) the mountain instead of up to its peaks. She becomes a "vagabond[…]" and a "peerer into corners" (xlii) who is interested in the hidden details the mountain only gives away when she spends time with it and attunes herself to its temporality. The mountain's temporality is so much slower than her own one since the mountain's existence reaches far beyond the existence of a human being, both ways into the past and into the future. This temporality challenges Shepherd's attempts to attune herself to the mountain: "So I looked slowly across the Coire Loch, and began to understand that haste can do nothing with these hills. I knew when I had looked for a long time that I had hardly begun to see" (11). Another time, she

walks into the hills to practise quiescence, which is one way to experience a becoming part of the mountain:

> A 4 am start leaves plenty of time for these hours of quiescence, and perhaps of sleep, on the summits. One's body is limber with the sustained rhythm of mounting, and relaxed in the ease that follows the eating of food. One is tranquil as the stones, rooted far down in their immobility. The soil is no more a part of the earth. If sleep comes at such a moment, its coming is a movement as natural as day. And after – ceasing to be a stone, to be the soil of the earth, opening eyes that have human cognisance behind them upon what one has been so profoundly a part of. That is all. One has been in. (92)

Shepherd becomes stone and soil; she melts herself into the mountain and becomes part of it by attuning both her body and mind to the temporalities of stone and earth as she lies immobile on the ground. This is a very material entanglement. It is important to note that it is not only "[p]lace and mind [which] interpenetrate" (8) each other; here, Shepherd's body plays a key role in this specific entanglement with the mountain.

Another material method of hers to achieve a *becoming mountain* is walking: "Walking thus, hour after hour, the senses keyed, one walks the flesh transparent" (106) and, finally, she "walk[s] out of the body and into the mountain" to become "a manifestation of its total life" (106). Demarcation lines between her and the mountain are erased, she is entangled with the mountain. To gain access to the mountain in such a way that she experiences an entanglement with it, is a process that "has taken many years, and it is not yet complete" (108). While "be[ing] with the mountain" (15), Shepherd develops her very own practice of attentiveness – including a special way of walking, perceiving, looking and even sleeping – that enables an intense encounter with the mountain and initiates a learning process that will last her entire life, because "knowing another is endless" (108). Through this attentiveness, Shepherd develops a relational understanding of the mountain that is arrestingly similar to basic premises of the New Materialisms as presented

in section 4.1. By walking attentively into the mountain and being with it, she as it were puts a new materialist world view into practice.

Shepherd's understanding of the mountain and of her relation to it serves as inspiration for my development of an attentive reading of colour writings. In her view, the mountain is not a passive agglomeration of rock but a "living mountain" (48) whose boundaries are blurry and which is built of various entanglements that constitute its being. In a similar vein, as already briefly indicated earlier, an attentive reading does not treat the text as a closed off entity inside whose boundaries the reader can find meaning as proposed in a New Critics' tradition.[34] Attentive reading is not about finding meaning only inside the text, inside the hermeneutic circle. On the contrary, it is a reading that also reaches decidedly beyond the boundaries of the hermeneutic circle and pays tribute to the openness and the affective reaching out of a text towards its readers. I want to treat the text in a postcritical tradition as, in Rita Felski's words, "a phenomenon to be engaged" (*The Limits of Critique*[35] 84). Even though Felski does not use the term *phenomenon* in a new materialist sense here, I want to understand it in new materialist terms as I will specify in the following. An attentive reading thus follows a performative understanding of the text and treats it as an "event" (Attridge, *The Work of Literature* 8). Meaning is to be found in the unfolding of this event; but not only meaning: if we experience a literary work "as an event rather than as an object", Derek Attridge claims, it "alters readers through affect as much as, if not more than, through intellect, through feelings as much as through meanings" (8).[36] This recalls Felski's conceptualisation of reading in a postcritical framework:

34 The New Critics "insisted on the intrinsic value of a work of art and focused attention on the individual work alone as an independent unit of meaning" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "New Criticism"). The reader does not figure in their reading approach, as Ransom clarifies in "Criticism, Inc.,":

> I should wish to exclude [from criticism]: [...] Personal registrations, which are declarations of the effect of the art-work upon the critic as reader. The first law to be prescribed to criticism, if we may assume such authority, is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object rather than its effects upon the subject. (597)

35 *The Limits of Critique* will be abbreviated as *TLoC* in the following.

36 See also Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (especially p. 59) in which he initially introduces his understanding of the literary work as an event. Further, see section 4.1 in which I also refer to Attridge in this regard.

> Reading […] is a matter of attaching, collating, negotiating, assembling – of forging links between things that were previously unconnected. It is not a question of plumbing depths or tracing surfaces […] but of creating something new in which the reader's role is as decisive as that of the text. *Interpretation becomes a coproduction between actors that brings new things to light rather than an endless rumination on a text's hidden meanings or representational failures*. (*TLoC* 173-74, original emphasis)[37]

If we read in such a way, we practise with the text what Shepherd demonstrates in her approach to the mountain, namely a co-creation between a perceiver and an 'object' that yields new insights into the constitutive entanglement of the world. A text only comes into being through the reading process and an attentive reading highlights the co-creation of the text by an intra-action of text and reader: "We are intertwined and entangled with texts" and reading "is a cocreation between actors that leaves neither party unchanged" (Felski, *TLoC* 84). Or in other words, reading is a mutual becoming of text and reader, a true phenomenon in a Baradian sense. Hence, an attentive reading needs to focus on which relationalities are forged and activated in the reading process as well as how they come about. Such relationalities can include the relation between text and reader, text and author, intratextual relations, relations on the content level between colour and history, colour and art, or colour and words as well as the relation between the text and its material shape, for example, in form of a book. Colour writings are truly relational *phenomena* – just like Shepherd's mountain which only exists in its relationalities of water, air, colour, plants, hill walkers and so on.[38]

37 Felski clearly distinguishes her postcritical reading from critical reading strategies like symptomatic reading (see e.g. Althusser & Balibar, or Jameson) or surface reading (see e.g. Best & Marcus) by pointing out that in her understanding reading "is neither a matter of digging below resistant ground nor an equanimous tracing of textual surfaces" (*TLoC* 84).

38 I would like to point out that the relationalities of Shepherd's mountain are of course transmitted to us via text as well. By means of words, we encounter a material-discursive mountain in the reading of *The Living Mountain*. It would be a worthwhile research project of its own to explore how the reader of *The Living Mountain* becomes entangled with Shepherd's mountain in the reading process and contrib-

If we want to find a way to explore these relational phenomena – that is, colour writings – it is worth taking a closer look at Shepherd's method of exploring the mountain. The attitude with which she approaches the Cairngorm plateau is characterised by two modes that can be described as *openness* and *attentiveness*. These two modes permeate *The Living Mountain* from beginning to end. Shepherd ventures into the mountain plateau "to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him" (*TLM* 15). She does not search for a "startling view" or "the horrid pinnacle", which usually are the aim of many hill walkers, but she has discovered that "often the mountain gives itself most completely when [she has] no destination in mind, when [she] reach[es] nowhere in particular" (15) – that is, when she ventures into the hills with an openness for possible experiences the mountain may grant her. Openness towards the mountain maximises the possibility to experience the mountain's agency, that is, the agency that arises from the intra-play of all the different parts that make the mountain a "living mountain": "the mountain is one and indivisible, and rock, soil, water and air are no more integral to it than what grows from the soil and breathes the air. All are aspects of one entity, the living mountain" (48). Openness is the basic attitude with which Shepherd explores her relation to the mountain and she couples this openness with an acute attentiveness while walking and being in the mountains. As "a peerer into corners" (xlii), she trains her senses to "teach [her] body many skills by which to learn the nature of the mountain" (90). Minute observations of water, frost, snow, animals, plants, weather conditions, etc. define entire chapters. Her body – more of this later – is foregrounded as the tool for these observations and plays a key role in her practice of attentiveness. She tries to go into the mountain without any preformed expectations – open-minded and *open-bodied*.

Underlying both modes is what we may call a phenomenological disposition. Shepherd's interest in the relation to and intra-action with the mountain as well as her open attitude show similarities to Felski's "phenomenology of reading" (*Uses of Literature*[39] 18). Felski distinguishes her phenomenological approach both from a phenomenology in the tradition of "Husserl or the Geneva school" as well as from "the phenomenological wing of reader-response

utes to this material-discursive mountain's creation.

39 *Uses of Literature* will be abbreviated as *UoL* in the following.

theory" (16).[40] What is most important for Felski is that "[a] phenomenology of reading calls for an undogmatic openness to a spectrum of literary responses" (18) and that we "honor our implication and involvement in the works we read" (20). The "act of reading", understood from such a phenomenological point, "fuses cognitive and affective impulses, […] it looks outward to the world as well as inward to the self" and thereby "allows for individualized, fine-tuned descriptions of aspects of reading" (132). An attentive reading takes such a double move – outward to the text *and* inward to the reader's experience – seriously and it is always important to remember that an attentive reading primarily focuses on the relationalities which are created when text and reader meet. In order to analyse these relationalities, no distanced or 'superior' interpretational stance is needed – description is the preferred method to capture and record the reader's entanglements with the doings of material-discursive colour. Felski's postcritical reading favours description over interpretation (*TLoC* 190), too, and we further see a similar approach by Shepherd when she says that she "cannot tell what this movement [between her and the mountain] is except by *recounting* it" (*TLM* 8, my emphasis). Moreover, Shepherd's inability to *explain* the movement indicates an acceptance that she will never know the mountain completely as she clarifies on the first page of *The Living Mountain*: "one never quite knows the mountain, nor oneself in relation to it. However often I walk on them, these hills hold astonishment for me. There is no getting accustomed to them" (1). To dwell in the realm of unknowingness is far from being an unpleasant state for Shepherd; on the contrary, it is an inexhaustible source for astonishment that entices her to visit the mountain again and again. Shepherd is immensely fascinated by illusions that are created by the intra-play of the mountain (with its weather

40 Felski elaborates on this:

> I refer to phenomenology with a degree of trepidation; as far as I can tell, my approach has very little in common with Husserl or the Geneva school. Nor have I found much guidance in the phenomenological wing of reader-response theory; while scholars like Wolfgang Iser and Roman Ingarden usefully highlight the interactive nature of reading, they assume a highly formalist model of aesthetic response as a universal template for talking about how readers respond to books. Their imagined readers are curiously bloodless and disembodied, stripped of all passions as well as of ethical or political commitments. (*UoL* 16)

and air) and her visual perception: "I could have sworn I saw a shape, distinct and blue, very clear and small, further off than any hill the chart recorded. The chart was against me, my companions were against me, I never saw it again" (2). Another time she sees the mountain move in the storm: "I watched […] the Cairngorm mass eddy and sink and rise (as it seemed) like a tossed wreck on a yellow sea" (36). Shepherd relishes such "unlooked-for revelation[s]" (Macfarlane, Introduction xxii) and also loves to playfully experiment with her own perceptive tools to bring forth illusions herself:

> A scatter of white flowers in grass looked at through half-closed eyes, blaze out with sharp clarity as though they had actually risen out of their background. Such illusions, depending on how the eye is placed and used, drive home the truth that our habitual vision of things is not necessarily right: it is only one of an infinite number, and to glimpse an unfamiliar one, even for a moment, unmakes us, but steadies us again. (*TLM* 101)

Moments of unsuspected astonishment "unmake[…]" her in that they offer insights into alternative ways of being and perceiving the world. These moments are essential parts of her "journey into Being" (108) – another way in which she describes her journey into the mountain – and she believes that "[t]o know Being, this is the final grace accorded from the mountain" (108). Ontology and epistemology fall together in Shepherd's approach, as much as they do in Barad's agential realism. Shepherd explores being by exploring her *relation* to the mountain because there is nothing but this relation when she is with the mountain. The mountain does not exist separately from her as much as she does not exist separately from the mountain. And she decidedly acknowledges that it is not only she who plays an active part in this relationship; it is equally the mountain which grants her insight into being – it is "the final grace *accorded from* the mountain" (108, my emphasis). This living mountain is an agential and vibrant mountain in new materialist terms and hence, Shepherd's approach is also a truly onto-epistemo-logical one in which "[k]nowing is a direct material engagement, a practice of intra-acting with the

world as part of the world in its dynamic material configuring, its ongoing articulation" (Barad, *MtUH* 379).

Coming back to the two modes that define Shepherd's practice of attentiveness, I would like to take a closer look at the first mode of openness and explore what Shepherd's practice yields as inspiration for an attentive reading method. First and foremost, Shepherd is an expert in "be[ing] with" (15) the mountain. This mountain is not shaped like, for example, Mount Everest for which the structuring principle is usually thought to be its summit. In *The Living Mountain*, we encounter a mountain whose structuring principle is horizontal. It consists of many summits that together build a "group" (18) which then again form a "plateau" (1).

> The plateau is the true summit of these mountains; they must be seen as a single mountain, and the individual tops, Ben MacDhui, Braeriach and the rest, though sundered from one another by fissures and deep descents, are no more than eddies on the plateau surface. (2)

In this way, the mountain is a place to go "into" (10) rather than up. It is a place to stroll around and "go[…] round […] in circles" (22); it is a place to be and stay for some time. As Shepherd walks into mountains, we read *into* texts – both ways result in a mutual becoming of walker-mountain and reader-text, respectively. Yet, reading *into* the text is not meant in the sense of interpreting or foreseeing something in the text but rather as a movement, as a direction. It is a reading *with* the text in that it assists the unfolding of its many doings. We have to be open for getting involved with the text as Shepherd is open to get involved with the mountain when staying with it. On the one hand, getting involved with the text is something that happens automatically as soon as one begins to read since the entanglement between reader and text and their intra-active co-creation is a basic premise of an attentive reading. Yet, on the other hand, getting involved is also a matter of trust in that it can also mean to let oneself in for something – in our case for reading colour writings. An attentive reading is thus an affirmative reading. It is not a critical reading that cultivates distance but again follows a postcritical

intuition in that it thrives on involvement and encourages us to let ourselves in for the experience the text may grant.

Such experiences accorded from the text may surprise us and hold astonishment for us if we are only open to get involved in these experiences. We have briefly seen above that even as Shepherd walks into the mountain for many years, her ability to be astonished at it never ceases. Being receptive for astonishment is another important attitude to cultivate when practising attentiveness in an open mode. Right at the beginning, Shepherd states that "[h]owever often I walk on them, these hills hold astonishment for me. There is no getting accustomed to them" (*TLM* 1). Being open for possible moments of astonishment is key to learning more about the relational being of the mountain. Shepherd is "astonished" at the clearness of the "streams that fall over the edges of the plateau" (3), "astonished" at the "surprising secrecy" (10) of the spot in which she finds Loch Coire an Lochain or "astounded" to find an "interior" (16) instead of a spacious view after a steep ascent. Many mysteries await her on strolls into the plateau: "water, that strong white stuff" is a "profound myster[y]" (23), "[t]he freezing of running water is another mystery" as it brings forth "strange and beautiful forms" (29), the shadows of a "feathery grass, brownish-pink and inconspicuous […] stand[..] out like an etching, distinct and black, a miracle of exact detail" (41). When she walks in the dark one night, she is "astonished […] that [her] memory was so much in the eye and so little in the feet": "it amazed me how unfamiliar I was with that path. I had followed it times without number, yet now, when my eyes were in my feet, I did not know its bumps and holes, nor where the trickles of water crossed it, nor where it rose and fell" (46). Encounters with plants and animals are full of surprises for her, too: "Once, striking thick loose snow from low juniper bushes before walking through them, I surprised myself by striking from them also a delectable fragrance, that floated on the wintry air" (53) and another time she saw "a bird so huge that I could only stare. […] Two enormous wings, with a span that I couldn't believe" which turns out to be "a duck and a drake, following one another in perfect formation" (69). Astonishment is an endless affair in the mountains for Shepherd and "[k]nowledge does not dispel mystery" – on the contrary, "[t]he more one learns of this intricate interplay of soil, altitude, weather, and the living tissues of plant and insect (an intricacy that has its astonishing moments, as when sundew and butterwort eat the insects), the more the mystery deepens" (59).

She is convinced that "[t]he thing to be known grows with the knowing" (108). Knowing each other is a continuous process and this is what makes every walk into the mountain unique and surprising again. The ability to be open in such a way to allow astonishment and surprise in the reading process is also a helpful skill for the reader of colour writings. Many astonishing things happen to colour in colour writings: colours move around, become dynamic, affect both narrator and reader, make a claim on the reader, make themselves felt through the text. There are many occasions for moments of astonishment in the encounter with these texts and it is important to cultivate an openness towards them in order to notice the agency of material-discursive colour while reading.

Having described the mode of openness, which illustrates the basic attitude with which Shepherd approaches the mountain, I would now like to take a closer look at the second mode and how she actually practises attentiveness in the mountain. A main premise of Shepherd's practice of attentiveness is that both body and mind have to be engaged in the exploration of the walker-mountain relation. Even though she writes that "place and a *mind* may interpenetrate" (8, my emphasis), she is also convinced that "[t]he mind cannot carry away all that [the mountain] has to give, nor does it always believe possible what it has carried away" (3). The mind is overwhelmed by the everchanging nature of the mountain which is "like a work of art […] perpetually new when one returns to it" (3). Her comparison to a work of art is interesting here as it points to the assumption that a work of art, too, is a mutual becoming. Usually, we may think that only the reader/beholder changes over time and the work of art stays the same. Yet, Shepherd conceives that the world is engaged in a continuous becoming and thus each time we look at a work of art or read a text, we enter into a new constellation in which both sides have changed compared to the last encounter. Shepherd returns to the mountain again and again in order to get in contact with the mountain and to learn more about what it "has to give": "Water so clear cannot be imagined, but must be seen. One must go back, and back again, to look at it, for in the interval memory refuses to re-create its brightness" (3). Here, the body is indispensable for experiencing the mountain: one has to walk into it and employ one's senses to approach it. Shepherd is convinced that "[e]ach of the senses is a way into what the mountain has to give" (97). And so, "[t]he palate can taste the wild berries, blueberry […] or cloudberry […]. The

juicy gold globe melts against the tongue, but who can describe a flavour? The tongue cannot give it back. One must find the berries, golden-ripe, to know their taste" (97). Knowing, for Shepherd, is a bodily activity here. It happens in the encounter between her body, her senses and the mountain. It is not a mental activity and words fall short in transmitting this experience. Plants are there "to be smelled" and she is "like a dog – smells excite [her]" (98). She writes further: "eye and touch have the greatest potency for me" (98) and she asks herself "[h]ow can I number the worlds to which the eye gives me entry? – the world of light, of colour, of shape, of shadow" (101). Then, "[t]ouch is the most intimate sense of all. The whole sensitive skin is played upon, the whole body, braced, resistant, poised, relaxed, answers to the thrust of forces incomparably stronger than itself" (102). The senses are her tools to "teach [her] body many skills by which to learn the nature of the mountain" (90). And as tools, "the senses must be trained and disciplined, the eye to look, the ear to listen, the body must be trained to move with the right harmonies" (90) in order to attune herself to the rhythm of the mountain. Shepherd experiments with different degrees of activity when being in the mountain, as already indicated earlier: on the one hand, she explores the mountain by walking into it until she "walks the flesh transparent" (106). Through such steady walking "[t]he body is not made negligible, but paramount. Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body" (106). By moving her body through the mountains, she also experiences becoming an indivisible part of the mountain: "I have walked out of the body and into the mountain. I am a manifestation of its total life, as is the starry saxifrage or the white-winged ptarmigan" (106). On the other hand, she is convinced that quiescence, too, is essential in the encounter with the mountain: "for attentive observation the body must be still" (13). This is why she also dedicates a whole chapter to "sleep" (90) in which she writes that

> [n]o one knows the mountain completely who has not slept on it. As one slips over into sleep, the mind grows limpid; the body melts; perception alone remains. One neither thinks, nor desires, nor remembers, but dwells in pure intimacy with the tangible world. (90)

Regardless of whether she practises attentiveness by tasting, smelling, looking, touching, walking or sleeping – it is always primarily a *bodily* practice; and on the plateau, she writes, "may be lived a life of the senses so pure, so untouched by any mode of apprehension but their own, that the body may be said to think" (105).

Colour writings, too, cannot be grasped with the mind alone. The texts demand that we open our senses and are attentive to how colour writings affect us, how we get entangled with them and their colours, how colour builds around us and becomes as it were tangible. We, too, have to attune ourselves to the rhythm of these texts and follow their movements. In the case of the colour writings by Jarman, Han and Nelson, we jump from association to association, circle around issues related to colour and interweave our own associations with the text (more of this later in section 4.3). The movement of reading these colour writings may be linear since we do not jump pages, but it is a reading in a rhizomatic fashion due to the fact that these texts accrete by fragments. The fragments spread into all directions in terms of colour: we encounter colour in various forms such as white things (e.g. in *The White Book*), different pigments (e.g. in *Chroma*) or blue music, blue feelings or memories connected to blue (e.g. in *Bluets*). Each text presents a carefully curated collection of colour-matter through which we move. While we read into these colour collections, we *perform* the rhizome by following the text's movement. We are invited to delve into these colour collections and to get involved with their associations. Hence, these colour writings call for a reading strategy that pays tribute to the affective entanglements in which the reader finds themselves and which considers "what [the text] sets alight in the reader – what kind of emotions it elicits, what changes of perception it prompts, what bonds and attachments it calls into being" (Felski, *TLoC* 179). To do so, both body and mind must be employed and Marielle Macé suggests a way to transfer this insight into a reading strategy:

> Let us […] consider reading less as an active task of deciphering than as a certain kind of conduct by a subject of experience, both body and consciousness. Reading thus represents an opportunity to test out ways of being, attitudes, rhythms through which books affect,

> affirm, or disorient readers along with their gestures and tendencies, their ways of perceiving and paying attention. (224)

Shepherd practises such a "conduct" by walking again and again into the mountains to employ her sensory faculties in order to get to know the mountain. Shepherd's focus on sensory perceptions is exemplary for an "embodied mode of attentiveness" (Felski, *TLoC* 176) with which we can also approach texts by using mind and body alike. "Reading", Felski writes in reference to Macé's work, "is not just a cognitive activity but an embodied mode of attentiveness that involves us in acts of sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering, and engaging" (176). Texts with their syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features do not only activate the mind in order to generate meaning but also the body as they encourage us to sense, perceive and feel the relations we enter into while reading. The involvement of both mind and body in the process of an attentive reading also justifies the choice of the term *attentive* to describe this reading method. The adjective *attentive* is defined as "[s]teadily applying one's mind, observant faculties, or energies; giving or evincing careful consideration; intent, heedful, observant" (*OED*, "attentive, adj., 1.a."). Thus, to be attentive entails a steady attentiveness to what is going on in the spacetimematter relationalities in which we are entangled. This attentiveness involves both mind and body alike since "mind, observant faculties, or energies" ("attentive, adj., 1.a.") are all part of this process. In reading, "the affective and analytical aspects of meaning are closely intertwined" (*TLoC* 178), as Felski remarks in reference to Yves Citton. She further elaborates on his "defense of an affective hermeneutics" (178):

> textual details vibrate and resonate with special force when they hook up with our passions and predilections, our affectively soaked histories and memories. It is an axiom of hermeneutics that we cannot help projecting our pre-existing beliefs onto the literary work, which are modified in the light of the words we encounter. This hermeneutic circle, however, includes not just beliefs but also moods, perception, sensibilities, attunements: not only do we bring feelings to a text, but we may in turn be brought to feel differently by a text. (178)

Colour writings, too, can change the way we perceive colour in the world *out there* and "[r]eorient[…] [o]ur [p]erceptions" (Macé 222). As reading texts in general "offers components for the formation and deformation of our attention and how we us it" (223), the specific achievement of reading colour writings is that they invite us to experience colours in new ways, for example as agential and vibrant components of the world. Finally, we take these experiences gained in reading with us and "all of [the] effects, which take place initially in reading, have lasting repercussions beyond the written page" (228).

Coming back to Shepherd again, I would like to delve deeper into her descriptions of colour perception. With her unique attitude, Shepherd illustrates how to encounter a living mountain and how to establish a "traffic of love" (*TLM* xliii) with it, as she calls it once. Coupling openness for possibly new perceptions with an acute sensory attentiveness allows Shepherd to see colours in a unique way. In the Introduction and earlier in this section, we have already seen how she experiences colour as having body and substance. Shepherd has always been fascinated by the play of colour and light as many passages in *The Living Mountain* show and it is not surprising that she dedicates a separate essay to this topic, namely "The Colours of Deeside", which was first published in *The Deeside Field* in 1938 (*Wild Geese* 143).[41] For Shepherd, light and colour largely contribute to Deeside space and she notes that "[t]he changing of colour values under changing lights is one of the loveliest elements in the beauty of our countryside" ("The Colours of Deeside" 41). In this essay, Shepherd again promotes an attentive looking so as to experience the rich colour palette of Deeside. To strangers, Nan knows, the country looks "grey" and she agrees with this – but, this "grey land [and the] grey skies, hold poised within them a thousand shades of colour" that can be seen with a special practice of looking since "for if grey is the universal solvent, melting all colours into itself, looking will resolve them back" (41).[42] The de-

41 Deeside is the area around the river Dee, which has its source in the Cairngorms and flows eastward towards the coast in Aberdeenshire where Shepherd was at home.

42 Shepherd's remark that grey contains all other colours and that these colours can be resolved back by looking is enabled by attentive observations of her environment. She practises an attentive looking that is closely involved in the specificities of the Deeside landscape. Interestingly, her observation recalls Goethe's theory of colours, which, however, has been controversially discussed since its publication (Wenzel 1086-87). Goethe bases his theory on the premise that colours are cre-

tailed accounts of various shades of colour and the description of their change due to different light and weather conditions establish Shepherd as an expert in being attentive to colour. As "the most characteristic blue of Deeside space and distance" she describes an

> azure thinned out till all its vivid intensity is gone, but not the purity of its colour: beaten to a transparency of itself, but still itself. At every time of year there are days when the distant hills have this clear thin blueness. On other days they are soft lavender; opal; edged with a hard line of china-blue that means rain to come. (42)

These Deeside blues, she writes further, "have a quality which I have never seen […] outside Scotland. The colour itself seems to have body; to be substance. It lies like the bloom on a plum, or the pile of plush. Sometimes in a hill hollow it would seem to have its own existence, apart from both earth and sky" (42). Again, she experiences colour as having a material existence of

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ated out of a mixture of light and darkness, that is, in half-shadow. In his *Theory of Colours*, he proposes the idea that "colours throughout are to be considered as half-lights, as half-shadows" and "if they are so mixed as reciprocally to destroy their specific hues, a shadowy tint, a grey, is produced" (xliii). Other observations of the relationship between grey and other colours, which are reminiscent of Shepherd's own observations, can be found in *Chroma* in which Jarman poetically writes:

> In grey days of spring
> The colours sing in my garden
> Grey days cool with mists. (54)

Similar to Shepherd, he also deduces his insight into the mutual influence of grey and other colours from attentive observations of his garden. However, in contrast to Shepherd, another passage rather suggests that colours, once 'fallen' into grey, cannot be resolved back:

> Grey is the sad world
> Into which the colours fall
> Like inspiration
> Sparkle and are overwhelmed
> Grey is the tomb, a fortress
> From which none return. (56)

its own. This perception is bound to precise surroundings; it mainly happens inside a hollow, or in a defined space, as another example shows: "Midnight in the open is rarely black; under spruce trees the blackness is solid, palpable" (51). Such a local colour perception highlights again the relational character of colour. This black is only "palpable" in this specific place. The perception of it is an intra-active encounter between Shepherd and this colour-matter-time-space entanglement. Light is another decisive actant in the encounter with colour, which is nothing new of course; but it is striking how precisely Shepherd pays attention to its influence: "sodden, leafless trees [may] appear [black] – it depends on how one stands in relation to the striking of light. If one faces the light, the trees are black; if one's back is to it, astonishing colours will glow from the sodden boughs, mahogany and rose" (51). Obviously, she moves around, circles around the tree in order to bring about different perspectives and entanglements. The precision with which she perceives colours brings about other surprising observations and she declares: "I dislike rainbows. Their smug regularity annoys me: though rainbow colouring in spray, on broken edges of cloud, in the broch around the moon, is beautiful" (46). It requires a trained attentiveness to relish these specific colours on "broken edges of cloud" or "in the broch around the moon".

These are only some examples of how Shepherd resolves colour back from the seemingly grey Scottish landscape by an attentive perception and it provides a glimpse of the diversity of colour experiences she collects. When we think of colour writings, it is the words that melt colour into themselves. The intention of the chapters to follow is to resolve colour back from the page by an attentive reading that fosters an open and attentive attitude with which we want to explore the diverse entanglements between colour, matter, text and reader.

One last remark is necessary here: in the end, of course, I (a single human attentive reader) articulate these entanglements and the agential materiality of colour in this study via words – colour-matter does not 'speak' for itself in this case. Jane Bennett is also aware of this situation and calls it a "performative contradiction" (*VM* 120). She acknowledges that "[i]t is not so easy to resist, deflect, or redirect [the following] criticism": "Is it not, after all, a self-conscious, language-wielding human who is articulating this philosophy of vibrant matter?" (120). Such problems cannot be circumvented since, in accordance with a phenomenological position, "the world is always the world

as it appears to us, as it is filtered through our consciousness, perception, and judgement" which consequently means that "we cannot vault outside our own vantage point, as the inescapable and insuperable condition for our being in the world" (Felski, *UoL* 17). However, this does not have to be a hindrance for insightful analyses of the doings of material-discursive colour; it rather calls for a focusing on our involvement in the unfolding colourscapes during the reading of colour writings. Shepherd teaches us how we can make use of our own being, including mind and body alike, by turning ourselves into a heuristic instrument in order to describe and gain insights into how we are always already entangled with colour and other agential components of the world.

## 4.3 SOME REMARKS ON THE LYRIC ESSAY

Before the attentive readings of *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* will finally come into focus, some preliminary remarks on the form of these texts are helpful in order to better understand the relations the reader enters into when in contact with the text. The text itself, with its specific textual techniques, is an important actant in the intra-active endeavour of reading colour writings. What kind of text do we encounter with *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets*? These texts are marketed on their respective book covers as autobiography (*Chroma*), fiction or meditation on colour (*The White Book*) and non-fiction (*Bluets*). While all these genre attributions are to a certain extent plausible, I would like to suggest another take: these colour writings are lyric essays as they share many textual techniques that are distinctive of this genre. In the following, I will introduce some textual techniques and characteristics of the lyric essay in order to understand in how far this genre assists or complicates an attentive reading.

The lyric essay was institutionalised as a proper genre of its own by D'Agata and Tall in the *Seneca Review* in 1997. Yet, D'Agata acknowledges that what we nowadays call the lyric essay can already be found in "antiquity, the middle ages, and contemporary Europe" ("We Might as Well Call It the Lyric Essay" 7). *Chroma*, published in 1994, confirms the existence of lyric essays already before 1997 and *The White Book*, written by a Korean author, demonstrates that this genre can also be detected beyond the boundaries of

the 'Western' world. As already indicated by its name, the lyric essay is a hybrid literary form that partakes in characteristics of the lyric and the essay alike. From the lyric it borrows "a poetic sensibility concerned more with language, imagery, sound, and rhythm over the more linear demands of narrative" (Miller & Paola 106) as well as "density[,] shapeliness [and] distillation of ideas" (D'Agata & Tall). From the essay it borrows its explorative prose style. Since Montaigne – "the inventor of the modern 'essay'" (*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, "Montaigne") – the essay is understood as "a test or a quest, an attempt at making sense" (D'Agata & Tall), as a form of exploration that dismisses "objective constructions of truth" and favours instead a subjective perspective and a "record of an individual exploring issues in a highly personal way" (*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, "Montaigne"). *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* perform such an "individual exploring" as they illustrate possible ways in which to explore colour by skilfully writing it into being. The many materials (e.g. ideas, memories, things, citations) out of which lyric essays accrete – more of this later –, suggest a further connection with the essay: "in its overt desire to engage with fact, melding its allegiance to the actual with its passion for imaginative form" (D'Agata & Tall) the lyric essay borrows again from the essay. In terms of length, the lyric essay aligns itself with both the lyric and the essay in that it is "generally […] short [and] concise" (D'Agata & Tall). In this regard, *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* certainly burst the boundaries of the genre in terms of length with a range between 95 (*Bluets*) and 161 (*The White Book*) pages. Yet, "there is no agreed-upon length for the lyric essay" (Dicinoski 3) and as these colour writings feature most of the genre's characteristics, I consider them as book-length lyric essays.

What else is characteristic of the lyric essay and how does this influence both a writing on colour as well as an attentive reading of these texts? First of all, the lyric essay's fragmentary style is striking: the text "accretes by fragments, taking shape mosaically" (D'Agata & Tall). The lyric essay is not only compared to a mosaic (D'Agata & Tall; Hetherington & Robertson "A Mosaic Patterning"), but also to a collage – because it carefully juxtaposes seemingly disparate ideas and brings them into dialogue (Miller & Paola 108-10) –, or to a braid – because it weaves strands of different ideas through the text (110-11). As a truly hybrid genre, it can also include images which interact with the text (Hetherington & Robertson, "Essaying Images" 371-74). *Chro-*

*ma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* are composed of short vignettes containing "idiosyncratic meditation[s]" (D'Agata & Tall) on colour; Nelson also likes to call these vignettes "propositions" in *Bluets* (28). These three colour writings are indeed hybrid in that they combine image and text (in *The White Book*), prose and poetry (in *Chroma*) or heavily "lean[…] […] against the thinking and writing of others" (Nelson, "A Sort of Leaning Against" 83) (in *Bluets* and *Chroma*). Moreover, the lyric essay deliberately makes use of "white space" (Bonnaffons). This white space can lurk between paragraphs – enhancing the fragmentary style – or spread over whole pages, shaping a space for silence and offering a rest from noisy words. White space plays a key role in the reading experience of these colour writings: in these *silences*, the words can resonate; they are like visual echo chambers in which the colours can "float and take flight in [the readers'] minds" (Jarman, *Chroma* 43).

In terms of content structure such a floating of colour is enhanced by another key feature of the lyric essay: it accretes by association. The lyric essay is associative rather than logical or determining; "[i]t might move by association, leaping from one path of thought to another by way of imagery or connotation, advancing by juxtaposition or sidewinding poetic logic" (D'Agata & Tall). This includes that the lyric essay also likes to employ "anecdotes, observations, or citations" (Dicinoski 2) to develop its ideas. For Nelson, this is an important element in her writing of lyric essays and she explains further: such a "leaning against […] takes place on a horizontal plane of action, not a vertical one. It brings one into the land of wild associations, rather than that of grim congenital lineage" ("A Sort of Leaning Against" 88). *Bluets*, as well as *Chroma*, indeed abound with citations. These citations are, however, not employed to show off knowledge or to support an argument. They are rather a tool to enrich the texture of the textual collage with a voice other than the narrator's. Infusing the text with multiple voices does not only "bring[…] one into the land of wild associations" (88) but also into colourscapes that rhizomatically spread through the text. The lyric essay meanders along associations which build relations and knot a network that finally culminates in a rhizomatic structure. Many anchor points to which the reader usually clings become instable in such a structure: "a straight narrative line" (Miller & Paola 106) is dismissed; meaning accretes by fragments, by associations, by relations, and thereby the lyric essay "recognise[s] that meanings are always multiple" (Hetherington & Robertson, "Essaying Images" 371) and never

fixed. The narrator's subjectivity is porous as it does not offer final truths but rather expresses a vulnerable subjectivity, which is even enhanced in *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* as all three texts deal with topics such as death, grief and loss. At the same time, the narrators open themselves up to the world – they are curious and driven by a love for exploration. All these 'instabilities' make the lyric essay especially suitable to engage with and attempt to grasp topics that are not easy to define (Bonnaffons) – and colour definitely is such a topic.

The lyric essay thus *wanders* and *wonders* at the same time (Tredinnick 63). We will see in chapters 5, 6 and 7 how *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* perform "an artful meander" (Tredinnick 63) through the complexities of colour; they "dance" (Hetherington & Robertson, "A Mosaic Patterning" 43) through colour backward, sideward and forward. This movement can be flowing and fluid, other times it is "digressive and sometimes halting" (Hetherington & Robertson, "Both Broken and Joined" 13). Despite its variability in pace, the lyric essay is always "a pursuit with no foreknown conclusion, an arrival that might still leave the writer questioning" (D'Agata & Tall). Thus, it is no "expert discourse" but "an open-minded attempt to come to some understanding of its topic", or in other words: "to essay is to wonder" (Tredinnick 63). Such a wondering also connects the reader with the text. Through a wondering attitude, the narrator invites the reader into the unknown and fosters moments of astonishment for them. An attentive reading, practised by the reader, can assist the noticing of such moments of astonishment and wonder.

With this, we arrive at the *effects* that lyric essays can have on the reader. While we have so far primarily focused on structural features of the lyric essay, I now want to take a closer look at their effects and different textual demands. The lyric essay "is ruminative, it leaves pieces of experience undigested and tacit, inviting the reader's participatory interpretation" (D'Agata & Tall). It plays with the tension between utterance and silence. Its suggestiveness and indeterminacy are well suited for entangling the reader with the text. Readers are invited to actively develop the associations arising from the text further and to add their own associations, thoughts, ideas, memories and feelings to it. This can be an empowering, flowing, creative and pleasurable experience. While reading, words sometimes flow over the page like the sun may illuminate a landscape on a cloudy and windy day and the reader's own associations

float along with them. There is no stopping and colour can fold around the reader. In *Chroma*, a multi-coloured space unfolds which is enriched with history and pigments among many other colour-related topics; in *The White Book*, a tranquil and saddening white envelops the reader; and in *Bluets*, an affective and passionate blue fills the reader's experiential space. As much as the text may turn in on itself, circling around an idea, it also spirals outwards – towards the reader, enveloping them in colour. Yet, establishing such an entanglement between text and reader is not always easy to achieve and lyric essays can be difficult to access as well. Their associative and fragmentary style can complicate the access to the text, block the reader's own associations and produce confusing or repulsing reactions in the reader that hinder them to read on. Writers draw on backgrounds or contexts to which readers may have no access and lyric essays usually do not expound them. If the writer's associations further unfold in a rhizomatic way, spreading in all directions, readers may get lost in this mesh. Likewise, through the lyric essay's characteristic leaping from one association to the next, the connection between text and reader is always in danger to break off and "[r]eading can be freefall", as Anne Carson puts it on the back cover of *Float*. In each case, either with a positive or negative, flowing or discouraging reading experience, affect gets in the way and builds connections between text and reader. Reading a lyric essay is always an encounter with intensities that affect the reader in one way or another. It is a constant alternation of distance and involvement and can thereby draw attention to our reading strategies. As much as *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets* practise a heightened attentiveness towards the complexities of colour themselves, they also require an *attentive reading*, as introduced in section 4.2. Such an attentive reading ensures that the reader is able to participate in the offered colour experience, to get involved in the text and the unfolding colourscapes, to float along with the text's associations, to knot their own associations into the text and accept that losing connection is also an affordance of these texts.

The form of the lyric essay contributes not only to the entanglement of colour, matter, text and reader but also facilitates what is usually notoriously difficult, namely to *get hold* of colour-matter by means of words. The lyric essay's fragmentary and associative style weaves or accretes a thick texture of different colour materials, may that be ideas, memories, things or citations. Thereby, the writer of a lyric essay practises a close relationship with the mate-

rial at hand. Often, "the lyric essay looks to what the author already possesses in their store of memory and lived experience" (Hetherington & Robertson, "Both Broken and Joined" 12). In the case of my selected colour writings, this shows itself especially in an interest in all kinds of colourful things, as I have already illustrated in section 3.2 when discussing the material-discursive dimension of colour in these texts. The form of the lyric essay adds another angle to the notion of materiality: Tredinnick claims that "[w]ords for a lyric writer are physical things, not just symbols" (65) and for Nelson, too, "ideas are things that can be arranged, synthesized, associated, and *felt*" ("A Sort of Leaning Against" 84, original emphasis). Writers of lyric essays thus practise "a physical engagement" (Tredinnick 65) with words. Both "[t]he writer's (and the reader's) relationship with language, in the lyric mode, is haptic: you touch the words, they touch you back" (65). This also brings the reader into a close relationship with the text and its "unruly material" that cannot be "subdued" (Hetherington & Robertson, "Both Broken and Joined" 5) due to the lyric essay's fragmentary structure and its tendency to ramify. Hetherington and Robertson suggest that it is the "material of subjectivity and memory" (5) which is unruly; in my selected colour writings, however, it is foremost agential and vibrant material-discursive colour that defies control. Thus, to say that lyric essays *get hold* of colour-matter must not be understood as a fierce gripping but rather as a circling around colour (sometimes by inviting the voice of others to be part of the text), as enabling the experience of a tactile quality of material-discursive colour or as floating through the unfolding colourscapes. The lyric essay's various textual techniques are important actants which make the reader an accomplice in the meaning-making and production of material-discursive colour in the reading of colour writings.

Equipped with knowledge about the lyric essay, an attentive reading strategy and new materialist tools, I will now explore the *doings of colour* in the following three chapters.

# 5 A JOURNEY INTO COLOUR: KALEIDOSCOPIC EXPLORATIONS IN DEREK JARMAN'S *CHROMA*[1]

Look left
Look down
Look up
Look right.

(*Chroma* 107)

What do you see? – C h r o m a. As soon as we open our eyes, colour surrounds us. It is everywhere. Very often we are not aware of it, but colour is always there in the world with us. When Derek Jarman[2] performed the movement described in the quotation above, he was in hospital for a retina test. His sight had been declining because of an AIDS-related illness. For him, the perception of colour was no longer taken for granted and it grew precious to him during his last years. The brilliance and intensity of colour we can perceive with healthy eyesight was no longer a given experience for Jarman. It is thus the more fascinating that he wrote a book about colour at the end of his life: *Chroma* (1994). He dedicated it to "Harlequin", whom he describes as a "[c]hameleon who takes on every colour. Aerial acrobat, jumping, dancing, turning somersaults. Child of chaos" (dedication). The energy and movement that are already transmitted in these few lines set the tone for the text and foreshadow the kaleidoscopic performativity of colour throughout *Chroma*. The dazzling effect of the dedication is created by words such as "Harlequin", "Tatterdemalion", "Mercurial trickster", "black-masked", "Chameleon", "Aerial acrobat", "turning somersaults", "Child of chaos", "Prince of thieves and cheats" and "breath of fresh air" (dedication). The dedication creates a colourful whirlwind that directly carries the reader off into Jarman's

1 Parts of this chapter are based on my unpublished Master's thesis "The Texture of Colour in Derek Jarman's *Chroma*".

2 As already mentioned in section 2.2.2, Derek Jarman is the author as well as the narrator in *Chroma*. Since it is an autobiographical text, I will always refer to the narrating voice as Jarman's own voice throughout this chapter.

universe of colour. The harlequin figure appears to be the embodiment of the colour words listed in the poem which Jarman places below the title on the page preceding the dedication:

Chroma
A Book of Colour – June '93

Brilliant, gorgeous, painted, gay,
Vivid, flaunting, tearaway,
Glowing, flaring, lurid, loud,
Screaming, shrieking, marching, proud,
Mellow, matching, deep and sombre,
Pastel, sober, dead and dull,
Constant, colourful, chromatic,
Party-coloured and prismatic,
Kaleidoscopic, variegated,
Tattooed, dyed, illuminated,
Daub and scumble, dip and dye,
High-keyed colour, colour lie.

These lines further set the tone for the main text of *Chroma* and they lead the reader right into the multilayered colourscape which *Chroma* will slowly open up in front of the reader's mind's eye. While reading this poem – set in tetrameter with pair rhymes (line five and six are the only exception) – colours begin to sparkle and move around like when you look through a rotating kaleidoscope. The adjectives are all related to colour effects and through their specific assemblage, the words function as a rotating kaleidoscope with its ever-changing sparkling colours. The poem brings to the fore the abundance of possibilities of colour experience: there can be found purely visual but still very differentiated perceptions such as "[b]rilliant", "[g]lowing", "sober", "colourful" or "variegated". A synaesthetic experience is created by using adjectives like "loud", "[s]creaming" and "shrieking", which usually allude to sound, for the description of colour. "Mellow" and "dull" can be used to describe sensuous experiences that are possible with different senses – may that

be vision, sound, touch, smell or taste – thereby adding a complex sensuous layer to the poem. Other adjectives cross over from further semantic fields, such as "tearaway", "marching", "dead" or "proud". A neologism can be found with "[p]arty-coloured" which could be a pun on *particoloured* while at the same time alluding to glittering party dresses. Very interestingly, a material engagement with colour is also already alluded to in this poem with adjectives like "painted", "[t]attooed", "dyed", "[d]aub" or "scumble", which all depict different techniques of how to work with colour pigments as a material. This poem creates a multilayered and complex effect that goes beyond the merely visual and shows a whole range of what colour 'is' and can do. The poem builds up a certain dynamic, grouping the adjectives together in a way so as to lead through different possible colour experiences: beginning with positive and happy expressions in the first three lines, then shifting to more aggressive notions in line three and four, to dull and more quiet observations in line five and six. From these, the poem soars towards colourful kaleidoscopic experiences in line seven to nine, to be then again grounded in the materiality of colouring techniques in the remaining lines. The last two words, "colour lie", could hint at the fact that colour is never fixed, always depends on context and can also be delusive. Colour is something to play with and something that also plays with the perceiver. The figure of the harlequin, to whom *Chroma* is dedicated, unites many of the aspects listed in this poem. The harlequin stands for an iridescent character with many different facets, sometimes good and sometimes evil but always showy and joking – and on a material side, already his dress is multi-coloured.

Many scholars read *Chroma* foremost in the context of Jarman's homosexuality and his life with AIDS. Such a reading is highly important, valuable and insightful as it sheds light on how Jarman deals with living with AIDS, how he mourns his dead friends who died of AIDS and how he comes to terms with his own approaching death. Ashton, for example, remarks that in his film *Blue* as well as in *Chroma*, "Jarman turns to the complexities of colour in an attempt [to] express, and to make sense of, the senseless loss and tumultuous emotions" caused by the "cultural 'blindness' surrounding the (desired) closeting of gay sexuality and the suffering of those caught up within the epidemic" (295). Parsons, too, understands *Chroma* as an "interdisciplinary autobiographical text[…] that explore[s] the limits of articulacy and create[s]

new queer […] genealogies of meaning" (375). In her paper, she argues that this "experimental project[…] communicate[s] embodied experiences, including the effects of loss and AIDS-related illnesses, by interrogating our understandings of perception and color" (375). She further observes that Jarman "places autobiographical fragments alongside quotations about color from artists and thinkers throughout history who had same-sex encounters. He combines them to construct a lineage of color knowledge: a queer history of color" (376). Such a new lineage of colour, Parsons writes, "denaturaliz[es] and complicat[es] our understandings of color" and thus, "Jarman creates [sic] unusual activist work that unmasks the structure of socially constituted knowledge, which has the potential to gather a community of queer readers around it" (376). In these studies, colour is seen as 'instrumentalised' by Jarman to talk about his life as a gay person with AIDS – colour fulfils a certain function. Yet, such readings often overlook what colour *itself* is doing in this extraordinary text. I want to offer a new reading of *Chroma* in which colour is in the focus and is not only understood as a means to deal with pain, grief and queer politics.

*Chroma* is, first of all, a book about colour. The title already tells the reader that the book is about colour: *chroma* is the Greek term for *colour*. But is the book only *about* colour? The subtitle includes a highly ambiguous preposition, "of": "A Book of Colour – June '93". This *of* can refer to different meanings. First, it can mean "concerning" or "showing" something (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, "of, 4."); in this case, it would mean that the text is *about* colour. Second, *of* is used to say what something "is, consists of, or contains" ("of, 5."). This can carry a double meaning in our context. It could mean that the content is of colour, referring to the content again but now in a more material sense, namely that it literally *contains* colour within its pages; or it could refer to the materiality of the book as being *made of* colour in the process of printing the text with ink. Taken together, this little *of* is ambiguous right from the beginning and anticipates what I call the *texture of colour* as well as colour-matter entanglements that are characteristic of *Chroma*. It further indicates that matter and discourse are entangled in this text and colour only comes into being materially-discursively. Moreover, the ambiguity can be read as a call for attentiveness: first, towards the polyvalences of Jarman's use of language and, second, towards the always multifaceted world of colour that surrounds us and which we can experience by paying attention to minute

details in our surroundings. Variety and mutability are central qualities of colour and to ground this contingency of colour phenomena Jarman adds the date "June '93". In doing so, he connects the book to this specific moment in time when his sight is already declining and he comes closer to death. The month of June also brings associations of summertime to my mind, when the world is in bloom. Later in *Chroma*, we can experience a variety of flowers in the brightest colours in Jarman's description of his maritime shingle garden in Dungeness (*Chroma* 68). This brings us to a meaning of the word *chroma* that reaches beyond its Greek origin. In English, *chroma* has a further, more specific meaning: it refers to "[p]urity or intensity as a colour quality" (*OED*, "chroma, n."). Does Jarman want to trace *pure* colours in his book? He asks: "What is pure colour" and "Where in red is the true red?" (*Chroma* 4). The question of pure colour is followed by a quotation by Wittgenstein and serves as a kind of answer: "If I say a piece of paper is pure white, and it's now placed next to snow, and it then appeared grey. I would still be calling it white and not light grey" (Wittgenstein qtd. in *Chroma* 4). With this quotation, Jarman shows that colour is always relational and depends on context – something like *pure* colour does not exist. His attempt goes rather into the opposite direction, away from pure colour and towards presenting varieties of colour and contingencies of colour phenomena. So, if we assume that the title *Chroma* does not only stand for the Greek term for colour but also means "[p]urity or intensity as a colour quality" (*OED*, "chroma, n."), the title can be read not only as a critical commentary on the notion of colour's purity but conversely also as a first hint that *Chroma* lets colours shine in a bright intensity through the use of language alone. If we follow the Greek etymology of the word *chroma* further, it is also interesting to consider what Schwarte points out: *chroma* is related to the noun *chros*, which means skin, body, skin colour, but also closeness. Both nouns are based on the verb *chrozein*, which means to touch, to dye or to coat (Schwarte 29).[3] This relationship of meaning between colour, touch and closeness is also relevant to the colour experience in *Chroma* and foreshadows the tactile dimension of colour which the reader can experience while reading this colour writing. Thus, the very title of this lyric

3 This is the original quotation: "Das griechische Wort Chroma bedeutet Farbe, auch Hautfarbe, Teint und Schminke. Es ist verwandt mit dem Wort Chros, das Haut, Leib, Körper, Hautfarbe, auch nächste Nähe bedeutet. Diese Substantive basieren auf dem Verb ‚chrozein' […]: berühren, bestreichen, färben" (Schwarte 29).

essay already unfolds the richness of possible colour experiences one can discover in the reading of *Chroma*. The last two words of the poem placed below the title in *Chroma* are "colour lie"; this indicates that colour is constantly in a state of flux, thereby pretending – or 'lying' – about its actual condition, always moving and displaying different shades. As we shall see, *Chroma* is a very affirmative text and colour is bright and vibrant in it. Jarman evokes a partially forgotten world of colour which he enriches with his associations, thereby giving colour the complexity it rightly deserves.

Reading *Chroma* recalls the experience of looking through a steadily rotating kaleidoscope. While in a kaleidoscope small, coloured glass shards are decisive components in the creation of the multicoloured patterns we see, *Chroma* presents us with always new aspects of colour in relation to (art) history, mythology, literature, philosophy, painting materials, quotations by other writers, emotions, memories, anecdotes, poetry, politics, to name but a few fields. Already from the outset, it "was crystal clear" to Jarman that *Chroma* should be a "non-scientific, non-academic amble through the colours" (Peake 501), as Peake puts it in reference to Jarman's own diary entry on 31 May 1992: "I dreamt all night of writing a book on colour, not scientific or in any way academic, free floating through the spectrum" (*Smiling in Slow Motion* 134). At the beginning of *Chroma*, we witness how Jarman curiously examines his books: "In the morning I looked through the indexes of my books – who had written on colour? There was colour in … philosophy … psychiatry … medicine … as well as art, and observations echoed across the centuries" (1). He seems to have been especially fascinated by Pliny the Elder's encyclopaedic *Natural History* as he refers to it again and again throughout *Chroma* (14, 23, 26-28, 84, 132, 134). Perhaps Jarman was inspired by this impressive work to write his very own encyclopaedia of colour in order to create a text that assembles a lifetime fascination with colour.[4] Yet, *Chroma* has nothing in common with a dry and fact-based encyclopaedia that painstakingly lists aspects related to colour. On the contrary, it is a highly literary

4 Benson observes that

> [c]olour is a consistent aesthetic concern of Jarman's, from the vivid colours of *Wittgenstein* (1993) and *Edward II* (1991), to the darkness of his tar paintings. His later work especially illuminates this. *Blue* (1993) and his posthumous publication, *Chroma* (1994), exemplify the importance of colour in any discussion of Jarman's work. (87)

text – a lyric essay that interweaves facts with stories, memories and associations. The text is structured into chapters with different foci: some are on a specific colour (e.g. "On Seeing Red" (31), "Grey Matter" (51), "Purple Passage" (127)), some deal with optical phenomena (e.g. "Iridescence" (145) or "Translucence" (147)) and others are concerned with a certain historical period (e.g. "The Romance of the Rose and the Sleep of Colour" (45)) or person (e.g. "Marsilio Ficino" (57) or "Leonardo" (97)). The chapters are, however, not assembled according to these foci, neither are they structured chronologically. The inclusion of chapters on achromatic colours such as white, black and grey, or metallic 'colours' such as silver and gold further shows that Jarman is not following any strict scientific colour scheme or theory – he follows a phenomenological understanding of colour and takes into consideration all the colour effects he can perceive and which are important to him personally.[5] Thereby, he broadens what we usually define as *spectrum* (namely, the range of colours produced when white light is split, e.g. by a prism, into its component wavelengths) and creates his personal spectrum of colours and colour related issues. In doing so, he performs a "free floating through the spectrum" (*Smiling in Slow Motion* 134) by writing colour into being in *Chroma*.

In true lyric essay style, the text accretes by associations and is written in paragraphs of varying lengths that are separated from each other by a blank line. Here is an example from the beginning of the chapter "Into the Blue" in which a whole universe of blue associations opens up:

> Blue light. A spectral light. Leni's full moon falling through a crystal grotto in the High Dolomites. The villagers draw their curtains against this blue. Blue brings night with it. Once in a blue moon …
>
> Tacitus tells us of a spectral tattooed army, the Pictish Britons nude in the colour of the Ethiopians, Caeruleus. Dark blue, not the sharp blue from the paint tube.

5 Jarman is of course aware that gold and silver are not colours in a traditional sense as they are not part of the spectrum: "Gold is not a colour, but it nestles up to the colours and shows them off" (*Chroma* 143) and silver "is far away from the spectrum" (144). Yet, he still includes them in his *Book of Colour* and values the effects they can have on a perceiver.

Blue spaces and places. The Blue Nile, and the Blue Grotto. […]

Black blue sadness in Geertgen's *Nativity at Night*. The virginal blue robe which mirrors the blue sky is swallowed by black.

Gun metal blue. The patina of copper. Verdigris on the edge of green. Egyptian blue, a clear astringent colour that is the blue of the mosque. This is the blue of glaze.

[…]

Blue blood is ruby.

Blue lies.

The blue-tail fly dances the blues in blue suede shoes.

The sky blue damselfly, iridescent, flits across the blue lagoon.

[…]

There are gold flecks in the lapis.

Blue and gold are eternally united.

They have affinity in eternity.

The Buddha sits on the blue lotus supported by two blue elephants.

The blues of Japan. The work clothes, the blue of the roofs of its houses.

(103-04)

What we experience here is a fluid and continuous movement through a space of blue associations, typical of the lyric essay. A movement that spans the whole world – spatially, temporally and culturally as well as in terms of ideas and of matter. The blue seems to 'fly' through this world and lightly attaches sometimes to a tattooed Pict, to Geertgen's painting, to a river or pigment, while constantly changing its hue and texture. This blue passage illustrates *Chroma's* wide range of lyric essay characteristics, many of which I have outlined in section 4.3. The passage shows "a poetic sensibility concerned […] with language, imagery, sound, and rhythm" (Miller & Paola 106) as well as a highly personal form of exploring the colour blue. With these blue associations, we can excellently see how this lyric essay accretes by fragments. I agree with Parsons that *Chroma* can be called a "collage" (382) because it carefully juxtaposes ideas and brings them into dialogue (cf. Miller & Paola 108-10). The blue passage quoted above brings into dialogue, for example, a tattooed army of Picts, the blue robe of Geertgen's Virgin Mary (now turned black), a variety of pigments – from verdigris to Egyptian blue –, the union of blue and gold and their connection to eternity, the Buddha and Japanese work clothes. This assemblage of material-discursive blues is a rich collage of blue associations that intra-actively unfolds around the reader in the process of reading. Since the pace with which we move through colour associations in *Chroma* resembles rather a fluid and continuous movement, it recalls the movement of weaving: the different paragraphs weave strands of different associations through the text. The text meanders along associations which build relations and knot a network that finally culminates in a rhizomatic structure.[6] Parsons observes that through *Chroma's* fragmentary style, Jarman "works to break down the concept of an essential meaning, to demonstrate how contextual and mutable meaning is" (382). In doing so, she further notes, he "seek[s] to create new genealogies of meaning and ways of being" (386). This contextuality and mutability of meaning echoes the ever-changing nature of colour very well and thus makes the lyric essay a perfect genre to explore the doings of colour. Just as "[t]he blue-tail fly dances the blues in blue suede shoes" (*Chroma* 103) – more about this sentence later – we as readers dance through colour backward, sideward and forward while reading *Chroma*. This move-

6 More on the rhizomatic character of *Chroma* will follow later in section 5.2.

ment can be flowing and fluid, other times it is digressive or halting because *Chroma* can be difficult to access as well. On the one hand, it is a challenge for the reader to link the separate associations to each other – sometimes they seem to be connected and other times not. On the other hand, Jarman draws on backgrounds and contexts to which readers may have no access and thus they may easily get lost in this unique colour mesh. One could suppose that *Chroma* demands a very educated reader, having knowledge of all the different fields Jarman refers to. In this understanding, *Chroma* would be quite an elite project that is further complicated by its associative style. Yet, I believe that everyone can approach this text and have a colourful experience if they are only attentive and open to what the text may grant. This text demands an *attentive reader*. It is possible for every reader to find a way into this book, gaining some new ideas and impressions on colour and even weaving their own associations into the text. The text's suggestiveness and indeterminacy are a benefit here: they assist the entanglement of reader and text as readers are invited to actively develop the associations arising from the text further and to add their own associations, thoughts, ideas and memories to it. Jarman even explicitly invites his reader to add their own associations: "If I have overlooked something you hold precious – write it in the margin" (*Chroma* 42). In doing so, *Chroma* makes the reader an accomplice in generating the text's unique colourscape. This invitation of the reader's own ideas demonstrates that *Chroma* should be understood as a wealth of possible colour associations offered by Jarman – not as a closed off and finished collection. It is also not the text's intention that the reader necessarily has to make sense of every single association offered in *Chroma* – the text rather leaves it up to the reader what to do with it. *Chroma* even invites the reader to extend the offered associations with their own one's and to turn it into their personal colour book, so to say.

I would like to give an example of possible associations a single sentence can trigger by describing my own reading experience of the sentence "The blue-tail fly dances the blues in blue suede shoes" (103). First, this sentence unfolds a unique acoustic quality. Reading this sentence is a flowing, forward-moving experience as my reading flows along with the vowel sound of *u*. I visualise a blue fly wearing blue suede shoes and dancing to a blues song. I wonder how Jarman came up with this image. This evoked image appears both absurd and rather funny to me. While reading this sentence, the dy-

namics of the sentence itself merge with the mentioned "blues" music in the sentence. Blues music is often rather slow but by linking this blues music to the quick flow of the sentence, a fast melody unfolds in the reading process. This sentence is not primarily about meaning but rather a language game – Jarman plays with the sound of words and we can experience how this creates a multi-sensory experience, a visual-acoustic experience of a dancing blue fly. With this sentence, Jarman illustrates what one can possibly do with the word *blue*. While attentively reading this sentence, I notice how the dynamics and sound of words affect me, how I become involved in the flow of this sentence and how this sentence makes me wonder about Jarman's unique associations with the colour blue. This is one possible way in which the material-discursive blue of this sentence unfolds. To a reader who knows that "Blue Tail Fly" (The Virginia Minstrels) is a 19th-century American folk song (also known as "Jim Crack Corn"; a song that has its origins in minstrel shows[7]) and that "Blue Suede Shoes" is a rock'n'roll song by Carl Perkins, later covered by Elvis Presley, this sentence can unfold quite different associations. This knowledge influences the acoustic quality of the sentence as described above. The fast flow of the sentence may now be rather the sound of a fast rock'n'roll song, perhaps of Elvis' version of "Blue Suede Shoes", and no longer a blues song. The blue-tail fly is no longer an insect wearing blue shoes but may evoke the fly biting the horse of the slave's master in the song "Blue Tail Fly". The fly in Jarman's sentence dances the blues in blue suede shoes and thus brings together three musical genres: the two indirectly referenced songs (folk/minstrelsy and rock'n'roll) enter into dialogue with blues music – a musical genre with its roots in African-American songs and spirituals. From here, one could further discuss how these genres relate to each other, but I stop here. I hope that this short analysis has already illustrated how associations could possibly unfold (further) from this one *blue note* – to close this analysis with a word play and another musical allusion. It is important to point out that both attentive readings – with or without the associations concerning these two song titles – invite the reader to add their own associations to the text: in the first case it is the visual-acoustic image of a dancing blue fly in blue

7 Minstrel shows were a form of racist entertainment in the United States in the 19th century. In his study on blackface minstrelsy, Eric Lott explains: "Blackface minstrelsy was an established nineteenth-century theatrical practice, principally of the urban North, in which white men caricatured blacks for sport and profit" (3).

shoes, in the second case it is the medley of three songs and their *sedimented historialities*, to use Barad's term here. In each case, the blue associations of the text invite the reader to add their own ideas and images to it. One may perhaps think that the second reading would be the more elaborate one as it is more complex and offers more layers of associations. Such an assumption is immediately undermined by *Chroma* as the next sentence offers the following scene: "The sky blue damselfly, iridescent, flits across the blue lagoon" (104). This brings us back to an observation of an insect's movement across water (simultaneously connecting the sentence to previously mentioned water spaces of the "Blue Nile" and "Blue Grotto" (103)). Reading the previous sentence with the dancing blue-tail fly in light of this sentence with the damselfly, the text may suggest that the blue-tail fly may indeed just be an insect dancing to blues music. Whatever it may be, *Chroma* is not interested in any final interpretation; what is important, however, is that in *Chroma*, colour is always generated in the intra-action of text and reader, it comes into being only relationally. Hence, *Chroma* demands not only an attentive reader but also one who likes to creatively engage with the text and take part in the intra-active production of colour by adding their own associations to the text.

## 5.1 SENSUOUS COLOUR POETICS OF *CHROMA*

Next to the reader, the text is of course a decisive component in this intra-active production of colour, because if we do not open the book in our hands and begin to read, no colours arise. Thus, in colour writings such as *Chroma* – especially as there are no visual colour illustrations –, colour unfolds from the words on the page. But how do these words intra-act with the reader in order to generate colour? With our eyes, we only ever see black letters on whitish paper. While being perceptually absent *on* the page, colour finds many ways to unfold and make itself felt in the reading of *Chroma*. By affecting our different senses and creating links with anecdotes, ideas and feelings, colour becomes as it were tangible in the reading process and is also imbued with a material agency, as we will see in detail in section 5.2. For now, I want to focus on how *Chroma* unfolds colour by its sensuous colour poetics as this is a decisive step towards the experience of material-discursive colour.

One way in which colour unfolds in *Chroma* is via the shape and sound of

words: "White lead" (14), "VERMILION" (36, original emphasis), "ALIZARIN CRIMSON" (36, original emphasis), "Arsenic green" (71), "Cobalt yellow" (93), "Ultramarine" (105), "purple" or "mauve" (127). Colour and language build unique relationalities here and the effect these words have on the reader is not necessarily generated by semantics. Of course, in the case that one knows what a hue exactly looks like it will appear in front of the mind's eye. It is a process of representation. Yet, many readers do not know what the exact hue of, for example, alizarin crimson looks like. And still, colour unfolds from the page: first, in the shape of the word we see on the page, second, in the sound we hear inside ourselves when reading the word silently (or even aloud), and third, in the stories and associations that Jarman attaches to the colour word. For a moment, colour remains fascinating sound: a l i z a r i n c r i m s o n.[8] The sound of these two words influences which colour we visualise. Is it a warm hue or a cold one? Is it bright or rather dull? Every reader will visualise a different hue. As alizarin crimson is mentioned in *Chroma's* chapter on red, it is probably a red hue – this is a first clue. I visualise a dark, warm and bright red, a red of queens' and kings' robes. Whether this is the red to which the term *alizarin crimson* refers does not matter here. What matters is that colour unfolds from the page in an entanglement of hue and sound. When reading on, we learn more details about the colour in question. This will influence the hue we have visualised so far:

> ALIZARIN CRIMSON, rose madder, is a natural dye from the root of the madder, *Rubia tinctorum*. It is the 'Rubia' of classical writers, the red of the Turkey carpet. It's one of the most stable of all natural dyestuffs. Rose madder was introduced from the East by the Crusaders to Italy and France, where it is known as La Garance; and gave its

8 Jarman is fascinated by colour names, as he recalls: "I collected the little pans of watercolour, sticky in their silver wrappings, but never opened them. Scarlet lake. Ivory black. Windsor blue. New gamboge" (*Chroma* 4). It is the sight of colour names that excites Jarman, not to actually see the colours themselves. Colour names tell stories and trigger associations in him: "Chemistry and romantic names – manganese violet, caerulean, ultramarine, and distant places, Naples yellow. The geography of colour, Antwerp blue, raw Sienna. Colour stretching to the distant planets – Mars violet; named after old masters – Van Dyke brown. Contradictory – Lampblack" (3).

> name to the guarantee, as its price was fixed – controlled by government. (36, original emphasis)

Now, we connect some facts, ideas and stories to this red. As it is an organic red, it may be less bright. We can think of a "Turkey carpet" (36) we may have once seen and compare it to the red we have visualised. Perhaps we now adjust the hue we connect with alizarin crimson to the carpet's red that we remember. A tactile dimension is added to this red, it becomes soft and the carpet's texture influences the hue.[9] With this, alizarin crimson is no longer an abstract term but it moves through our senses – we have gained an acoustic, visual and tactile notion of it. Further, alizarin crimson is imbued with its own sedimented historiality: now a pigment for painting, this dye has once been a plant, Rubia tinctorum. Once the root has been transformed into natural dye, it travels the world from the East to the West whereby it becomes enmeshed in specific culture and power structures, playing a decisive role in the etymology of the word *guarantee*. At this point, one may object to the complex unfolding of colour just described: perhaps there are also readers who do not visualise anything when reading *alizarin crimson*. Perhaps there are readers who only read on and do not pay attention to these two words, alizarin crimson – especially if they cannot 'make sense' of them. Passing by this colour word without paying much attention to it can happen very easily. Readers are trained to look for a certain sense or meaning in a text. But this is not how *Chroma* works. This colour writing offers unique colour experiences only if we take our time and open ourselves to other channels of meaning-making that exist besides semantics. Reading *Chroma* attentively is key here: we have to cultivate an openness for possible (colour) experiences the text, and even single words, may grant us; we have to practise an attentiveness to the text not only cognitively but also via our senses as each sense is a possible way *into* the text; and we have to focus on experiential qualities such as "sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering, engaging" (Felski, *TLoC* 176). In doing so, we can notice how we get entangled with colour in the reading process, how colour builds around us and becomes as it were tangible, and

9 Remember Merleau-Ponty's observation of the interdependence of hue and material in his examples of the *wooly red* and *wooly blue* of a carpet (see section 2.1).

how the text triggers colour associations in ourselves sometimes. As already mentioned earlier, Jarman directly addresses his reader and expresses the wish that they add their own associations to the text: "I wrote this book in an absence of time. If I have overlooked something you hold precious – write it in the margin. I write all over my books, as markers fall out" (*Chroma* 42). Jarman encourages us to get materially involved with the book and turn it into a sketch/scrap/notebook for ourselves.[10] In this way, we engage with how *Chroma* encourages us to sense, perceive and feel the relations we enter into while reading. This is an important way in which the text generates meaning. Words melt colour into themselves and we as readers can resolve them back by an attentive reading. Conquer suggests, with regard to the poetry of Else Lasker-Schüler, that "[a] colour word […] is not there to be unpacked, but rather to be experienced – even enjoyed" (38). This is also very true for the colour words we encounter in *Chroma*.

In *Chroma*, it is not only a single word or pair of words that set us adrift in colourscapes; we also encounter Jarman's very own colour 'theory' that suspends us in unique perspectives on colours and how they relate to each other. Here are some examples: "Archaic green colours time. Passing centuries are evergreen. To mauve belongs a decade. Red explodes and consumes itself. Blue is infinite. Green clothes the earth in tranquillity, ebbs and flows with the seasons" (67). "Brown is a slow colour. It takes its time" (82). "Where yellow dives into the red the ripples are orange" (95). "Blue stretches, yawns and is awake" (111). "Blue is hotter than yellow" (104). "Blue is cold" (104). "Pink begat mauve begat purple begat violet…" (127). "Purple is passionate, maybe violet becomes a little bolder and FUCKS pink into purple. Sweet lavender blushes and watches" (127, original emphasis). "Black is boundless, the imagination races in the dark" (139). "Gold is not a colour, but it nestles up to the colours and shows them off" (143). Silver "is far away from the spectrum" (144). These examples show how Jarman creatively engages with the multiple facets of experiencing colour. Sometimes they express his personal impression of a colour, sometimes he turns colours into characters of short narratives or he even places colour in the subject position of the

10 Jarman himself created fascinating sketchbooks throughout his career. They served as essential tools for his creative work. See *Derek Jarman's Sketchbooks*, edited by Farthing and Webb-Ingall.

sentence having it play an active part. The origin of these colour impressions is seemingly a minute observation of colour as well as an inward-oriented observation of his own reaction towards it – a practice that strikingly resonates with the practice of an attentive reading. By transforming these impressions into language, he transmits his experience to the reader and enables them to share it. The chapter "Orange Tip" (95) is a very telling example of this effect. It is only two pages long but one gets the impression of floating through an orange space together with Jarman, encountering his personal experiences by following him from paragraph to paragraph. He sharply observes that "[w]here yellow dives into the red the ripples are orange" (95). This poetic visual observation is followed by an emotional and sensuous one: "Orange is optimistic. Warm and friendly – it suffuses the saffron sunset" (95). To enable the reader to experience a similar perceptual effect, he suggests: "To experience the warmth of orange, look at it cupped in a purple crocus where the stamens glow bright" (96). With this advice, he encourages the reader to direct their view towards the environment and to search for a contact with this colour in the world *out there*. In this, Jarman follows Leonardo da Vinci's method to "[write] of nothing he had not observed" (97). Jarman is fascinated by Leonardo's "exquisite notebooks" (97) which "abandon the old method of received wisdom for direct observation on perspective, colour, light and shadow, the art of painting, architecture, fortification, flight, a host of subjects" (98). We have seen above how Jarman closely observes his own entanglement with the colour orange: first situating orange between yellow and red, he leads us to orange's effect on him and then on to a dreamlike observation, or excursion, some lines below: "Mary Magdalene brushes her orange hair. Jupiter watches in his orange robes. Orang-utans fly through the citrus groves chasing orange tip butterflies. Salamanders sink into sulphurous volcanoes somewhere beyond the Orange Free State" (95). In this passage, he widens his observations into the realm of imagination as he combines orange with associations that come to his mind. We have seen a similar assemblage of associations in the blue passage quoted earlier. Here, Jarman's orange associations reach from the Christian Mary Magdalene to Jupiter in Roman mythology to the animal world and then to colonial history by referring to the Orange Free State in Southern Africa. This whirlwind of associations does not assign a single meaning to the colour orange, it does not want to pin it down but rather opens up new possibilities to perceive, experience and think this

colour. Perceiving colour is always already a highly subjective endeavour – no one knows whether two people ever see the same hue – and on top of this, a certain colour also changes its hue due to the context it is perceived in. The artist and art educator Josef Albers knows that "[c]olors present themselves in continuous flux, constantly related to changing neighbors and changing conditions" (5). Jarman is aware of this, too, and reflects:

> I know that my colours are not yours. Two colours are never the same, even if they're from the same tube. Context changes the way we perceive them. I've usually used one word to describe a colour, so red remains red with lapses into vermilion or carmine. I've placed no colour photos in this book, as that would be a futile attempt to imprison them. How could I be certain that the shade I wanted could be reproduced by the printer? I prefer that the colours should float and take flight in your minds. (*Chroma* 42-43)

Engaging with these concerns, *Chroma* recalls Albers' work on colour in context. Albers was an artist, art theorist and educator at the Bauhaus in Germany and the Black Mountain College in the United States. His approach to colour is maybe best illustrated by his famous series *Homage to the Square*, in which he explores in a rather disciplined and logical way the chromatic interaction of differently coloured squares. He published his ideas in *Interaction of Color* (1963), which includes both theoretical thoughts and practical instructions that encourage the reader to experiment with coloured paper slips. Some exemplary combinations of differently coloured paper slips are depicted in *Interaction of Color* in order to visualise Albers' main concern, that is, as he puts it, "the interaction of color; that is, seeing what happens between colors" (5).[11] In paying attention to this interaction, one can "develop a sensitive and critical eye for color relatedness" (53). With this, Albers highlights the necessity of *experience* for gaining knowledge about colour: "The aim of

11 For examples of these paper slip arrangements, see Albers, p. 77 ff., or watch the video on *The Josef & Anni Albers Foundation* website: https://albersfoundation.org/resources/educators/#slide1.

such study is to develop – through experience – by trial and error – an eye for color. This means, specifically, seeing color action as well as feeling color relatedness" (1). Such an experience is a complex undertaking – it requires bodily activities like "seeing" and "feeling" and demands from the perceiver an attentiveness to "color action" and "color relatedness". When we perceive the same paper slip as two different colours as soon as it is placed in front of two differently coloured backgrounds, this experience teaches us that what we visually perceive can differ very much from what we know. Colours can *lie*, as Jarman would put it.

Approaching colour by means of words, that is, *writing* colour into being, enables Jarman to highlight this contingency of colour. By means of language, he offers each reader the opportunity for a unique and individual colour experience infused by his words. It is not important for Jarman that the reader has the exact similar red in front of their eyes as he has but rather that they begin to think about, consciously perceive and even feel colour at all. As much as colour *perception* depends on context, colour *words* depend on context, too. In *Chroma*, material-discursive colourscapes change their colour depending on the contexts in which colour gets entangled – and *context* is here not understood as something separate from colour but as something which emerges intra-actively in the contact with a certain colour. We encounter material-discursive colour in form of a poem, as painter's material, as filled with emotional values or charged with memories. One of *Chroma's* intentions is to redirect the reader's perception back to colours that surround them as well as to encourage them to lose themselves in the colourscapes that unfold from the text. To engage *actively* in the process of experiencing colour – may that be through direct observation of the surrounding world or by attentively reading *Chroma* – is definitely an aspect that *Chroma* teaches its reader. *Chroma*, similar to Woolf's texts as discussed in section 3.1.2, invites the reader to take a fresh look at colour. Characteristic of *Chroma* is further that it facilitates an enjoyment of being in the presence of the very colour experience. The cover picture of *Chroma* depicts perhaps exactly such a moment of experience for Jarman.[12] We see Jarman with his eyes closed and this recalls a passage in *Chroma*: "I shut my eyes. In the dark, I can remember the red, but I cannot see it" (33). Because of an AIDS-related illness, his sight is declining but via

12 I refer to the edition published by Vintage in 2000.

vision and memory he is still able to experience colour.[13] Ashton reminds us that "although we think of it in purely visual terms, colour remembrance is actually at the command of other sensory perceptions: of touch, taste, smell, voice" (305). For Jarman, Ashton continues, the loss of eyesight means that "[t]he visual eventually begins to fail [him], but this does not mean colour has failed him. The threat of blindness, of eternal darkness, serves to illuminate the significance of colour in the construction of his identity" (305). So, despite the loss of eyesight, Jarman finds different ways to experience colour and we can draw certain parallels to the experience of colour for the reader in the reading process: we also do not perceive colour visually but visualise and feel it via the text.

But how do we actually *feel* colour? How can we get a feel for it? And how do colours make themselves felt through the text? In *Chroma*, I propose, colour makes itself felt by evoking our senses – not only sight and hearing, but especially the sense of touch. While sight and hearing still allow the impression of a certain distance to the thing we see or hear, touch is only possible through intimate contact. If the visual sense is very important for human beings to orient themselves in the world, touch is the most intimate sense; it is the sense that brings us in most direct contact with the world. It is perhaps because of this immediacy of the tactile sense that colour makes itself felt as a tangible experience that presses through the text and appears nearly palpable for the reader. We can find instances in *Chroma* in which colours seem to reach out towards the reader and enable an as it were tactile experience. Here is an example from the chapter on brown, in which different sensuous impressions melt together to produce a tangible feeling of colour:

> Dinner is served on the shining mahogany table. Smelling of bee's wax and lavender. It is Christmas. My friend Güta sits at the head of the table dressed in ebony silk. Her silver hair shimmering in the

13 Jarman asks himself the very question: "If I lose half my sight will my vision be halved?" (*Chroma* 109). By writing *Chroma* and thus creating an extraordinary colourful text, he gives the answer to this question: despite the approaching sightlessness, his vision does not fail.

> light of the blazing candles on the tree. […] There is mystery in the glowing wood of the table in which your face is dimly reflected. (82)

The colour brown appears in the polished mahogany wood of the table that produces the effect of "shining" and "glowing". This perception is paralleled by two other colours' shimmering: one is the silver of Güta's hair and the other the insinuated ebony-coloured shimmer of silk. These two colours, silver and ebony, are highly contrasting but connected in their shimmering. The brown glow of the table seems to build the basis so that an encounter of these colours can take place. All three colours – brown, silver and ebony – are united in their shimmering effect. This is highlighted by the "blazing" candles on the Christmas tree, which seem to be the light source that causes this shimmering effect. Added to this visual description is a smell that comes from the mahogany table and has its origin in the polish with which it has been treated so as to achieve the shining effect. It smells of "bee's wax and lavender". These sensuous perceptions taken together result in the impression that "[t]here is mystery in the glowing wood of the table". Importantly, sight and smell are not the only senses involved in this passage – the sense of touch is also anticipated in the text. It is not referred to explicitly; yet, by the description of the table's and the silk dress's visual qualities, touch is involved. Immediately one thinks of touching and stroking the table, feeling its smooth, even and maybe warm or cold surface. A surface that will always remain surface and cannot be penetrated. It does not allow your fingers to explore any depth of the material, but the polish has sealed the surface of the wood. This anticipation of touch is what I have earlier described as the reaching out of colour towards the reader. One might think that it is not the colour brown that anticipates this touch but the material of mahogany wood. Yet, as matter and colour are closely entangled – this will be further elaborated in the next section – it is also the colour that anticipates this touch. The brown of the mahogany wood signals a natural product that has an elegant and exotic touch to it since it is harvested in the rainforest of South America – a sort of wood that brings its own sedimented historialities of economical, environmental and sociocultural issues with it.[14] Mahogany's typical characteristics are "a rich reddish brown" and

14 Mahogany is thick with sedimented historialities as it evokes associations of the

"being hard and fine-grained and taking a high polish" (*OED*, "mahogany, A., n., 1.a."). These two characteristics, the colour and the material qualities, go hand in hand and together they constitute the characteristics of mahogany wood. If this wood was painted blue, for instance, the whole effect it has on the observer would be a different one. Thus, the colour brown is an integral part of this effect of reaching out towards the reader, and both matter and colour define its texture. In "Outing Texture", Renu Bora points out that the perception of texture results from an "interplay between tactile and visual stimuli" (97) of a surface, just as described with the mahogany wood above. He distinguishes between "TEXTURE" (98, original emphasis) and "TEXXTURE" (99, original emphasis). Texture with one x, in Bora's sense, is "the surface resonance or quality of an object or material" (98). If one touched such a material, one would not be surprised by how it feels as one would have already anticipated the touch with the eyes by looking at the material (98). For another meaning of texture, Bora coins the term "TEXXTURE" (99, original emphasis) which refers to an "inner level […] of the stuffness of material structure". In *Touching Feeling,* Sedgwick deals extensively with Bora's concept of texture and she observes that especially texxture is loaded with information "about how, substantively, historically, materially, [something] came into being" (14) – in other words, it is loaded with sedimented historiality. In *Chroma*, we encounter such a texxture not only with mahogany but with other nuances of brown, too: "There is nostalgia in brown. The touch of my mother's soft beaver lamb coat in which we buried our tears. Brown simplified life" (81).[15] This fluffy texxture of his mother's beaver lamb coat is different from the surface of the mahogany table.[16] While the shining mahogany table

global trade of goods, of the pricing policy for rare wood, of the deforestation of the rainforest, of class-related issues regarding the affordability of mahogany furniture and so on.

15 Beaver lamb is "lambskin cut and dyed to resemble beaver fur" (*OED*, "beaver, n., C.2, beaver lamb, n.").

16 The distinction between different textures in combination with their colour is also observed by Wittgenstein in *Remarks on Colour*. He writes, among others, about the distinction of surface colours (which would be the mahogany brown of the table in our example from *Chroma*), substance colours (which would be the brown of the beaver lamb coat) and illuminating colours (which would be the shimmering light of the candles which produces a certain colour effect on the material it shines upon) (see Wittgenstein III 255).

creates a feeling of "mystery" (82) with the reflections on its sealed surface, the "soft beaver lamb coat" (81) provides a completely different experience, one of feeling safe and secure. Jarman knows that the coat feels "soft" and warm and he can dive deep into it with his hands. As a child, he "buried" his tears in it (note the idea of depth here, caused by the expression "buried") and for him it conveys a feeling of nostalgia. He has established a close emotional connection with the coat and has thereby enriched it with his personal story. With this beaver lamb coat, one can experience the "stuffness of material", "the inner level" (Bora 99) of it and its texxture tells, in a similar way as the mahogany wood, about how it came into being. The sedimented historialities of beaver lamb entail, for example, the preparation of lambskin to resemble beaver fur, the wearing of fur coats as a status symbol and the production of faux fur to make this clothing also affordable for less well-off people. These are associations the text may evoke in the reader, yet, these are not Jarman's associations. This sociocultural notion of beaver lamb coat is not mentioned by him; he connects this coat with a specific memory of a specific person at a specific time and with specific feelings and sense experiences. The unique achievement of *Chroma* is that it makes us aware of the various entanglements that each thing always already brings with it – including the entanglements with colour.

Both texture and texxture add complexity to experience as well as a tactile dimension to the otherwise very visual perception of colour. Hence, texture/texxture has the potential to establish new connections between different fields of perception. Already by looking at the texture/texxture of a material, for example lambskin, one can anticipate the impression of touching it. Reinfandt observes that "texture provides the interface between materiality and phenomenology" ("The Textures of Romanticism" 103).[17] We can investigate the subjective impression of this looking at or touching texture/texxture but it is already more than that: it is also the material itself that has something to 'say' in this process, as will be discussed in section 5.2. Thereby, texture/texxture brings the material back into the field of analysis and bridges the gap

17 Reinfandt refers to two passages in Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* in this regard: "Texture [...] comprises an array of perceptual data [...] whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure" (*Touching Feeling* 16) and "[i]f texture and affect, touching and feeling seem to belong together [...] [w]hat they have in common is that [...] both are irreducibly phenomenological" (21).

between the subject as the active observer/knower and the object as the one which is passively observed/known. Already here, as Sedgwick observes in a passage I have already quoted in section 4.1, texture and the

> sense of touch make[…] nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before, if only in the making of the textured object. (*Touching Feeling* 14)

With the examples described above, Jarman wants to bring the colour brown back to the reader's mind. He remarks that brown is often forgotten, especially in colour books (*Chroma* 79). At the same time, it is a colour that surrounds us in many situations and places, and Jarman focuses mainly on its positive associations, drawing connections between brown and soil (79), brown and wood (80) or brown and edibles (79-80). Taking myself again as a heuristic instrument in exploring the experience of colour emerging in my intra-action with the text, I must admit that Jarman's perception of brown has definitely changed my own way of seeing brown. First of all, he enriched my associations of brown – which have so far been closely connected to notions of mud, excrement or rot – with new and more positive associations linked to sweet and nourishing edibles, such as "caramel, toffee, almond, coffee, chocolate or curry" (79). Further, with Jarman's brown chapter in mind, my attentiveness towards this colour has been enhanced and I now perceive brown in my furniture, the trees outside my window and the coffee in front of me. As a result, I enjoy and appreciate this colour much more than before. It is the specific achievement of *Chroma* to inspire its readers to redirect their perception to what they can perceive around them and to observe colours in detail, questioning any preformed personal or cultural prejudices in order to fully "[c]onsider the world's diversity and worship it" (75), as Jarman appeals to his readers. With *Chroma*, he inspires the reader to actively use all of their senses to explore a very multifaceted world of colour inside and outside the text. As readers, we become involved in a sensuous experience of colour that

goes well beyond the merely visual perception of colour and which stimulates us to create our very own sensuous associations with colour.

## 5.2 COLOUR-MATTER ENTANGLEMENTS

As we have seen, colour unfolds in various ways from the words on the page and entangles us with its unique colourscapes. By its sensuous colour poetics, *Chroma* entangles the reader with colour via associations in their mind's eye or by addressing their senses. As we turn the pages of the book, we constantly train our attentiveness to the whirling colourscapes in *Chroma* and we can get a feel for colour and how it is generated in the intra-action between text and reader. Moreover, colour performs a double movement in *Chroma*, which can be illustrated by a blue passage:

> In the pandemonium of image
> I present you with the universal Blue
> Blue an open door to soul
> An infinite possibility
> Becoming tangible.
>
> (112)

This passage is taken from the chapter "Into the Blue" (103) and we can also listen to it in Jarman's last film *Blue* (1993), in which he presents the viewer with a "universal Blue" screen for the whole duration of the film. In the quotation above, blue performs a double movement of tending, on the one hand, to transcendence and infinity while, on the other hand, "[b]ecoming tangible".[18] Colour is suspended between immateriality and materiality. In the process of writing blue into being and expressing it via language, Jarman makes

18 Parsons also observes that in *Blue*, "Jarman employs the color blue to access complex emotions toward the end of his life, as he is going blind and dying from AIDS-related illnesses: he questions whether color can allow him to access the limitless, or the transcendent, yet he always returns to the body" (377).

this colour tangible and turns it into material-discursive colour. Jarman envisions "poets […] directing the excavations" (113) of colour buried deep down in the "mines of colour" (27). These mines of colour, Jarman tells us, are "the purpose" (27) of *Chroma*. As he writes *Chroma*, Jarman quarries colour so to say, he brings colour to the surface and thus constructs what Parsons calls "genealogies of meaning outside of mainstream discourse" (390). *Chroma* is indeed a "queer history of colour", yet, not only in terms of giving a voice to "artists and thinkers throughout history who had same-sex encounters" (Parsons 376) but also by 'queering' colour itself as the text floods the world of colour with the most diverse associations and pushes the boundaries of colour experience. A unique characteristic of *Chroma* in this is that it builds unique alliances between colour and matter and creates a material-discursive colour that even exhibits a certain agency and affects the reader in various ways. We encounter relationalities of colour and matter in form of pigments[19], medicine[20], clothes and fabrics[21], plants[22] and even stars[23]. While reading *Chroma*,

19 Jarman tells of the "silver mines" where the "pigments, yellow, ochre and blue, are quarried" (*Chroma* 28) and the lapis mines "where that most precious of colours, ultramarine, was mined" (48).

20 Jarman makes us aware that "[i]ndian blue, indigo, is employed in medicine, as is yellow ochre, an astringent" (*Chroma* 28).

21 Jarman lists, for example, some instances of blue in connection to clothing: "The blues of Japan. The work clothes, the blue of the roofs of its houses. The blue work clothes of France. The blue overalls here in England, and the blue Levis that conquered the world" (*Chroma* 104). In their specific shade, these blues slightly differ from country to country but they are also united by their blue colour. The blue Levis jeans has even "conquered the world" and went global. Japanese workman coats cannot boast with a comparable travel account but they have at least managed to be included in Jarman's wardrobe: "I am writing this wearing a Japanese workman's coat in tough linen of faded indigo" (105).

22 As a gardener, Jarman had a very sensitive eye for plants and their colours. In a poem about his seaside garden at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness, he writes of these colours. This is a short part of it:

> Purple iris, imperial sceptre;
> Green of the buds breaking on elder;
> Browns of the hummus, and ochre grasses;
> Yellows in August on *Helichrysum*,
> That turns in September to orange and brown;
> (*Chroma* 68, original emphasis)

23 The colours we find in our galaxy and beyond in the whole cosmos tell about the

we move from the colours hidden deep inside the earth to the colours of the universe, farthest away from us – a material range that is in its density only possible in a lyric essay like *Chroma*.

While the *mines of colour* from which Jarman wants to excavate colour could be understood as a mere metaphor for the extensive range of colour knowledge and associations he draws from, they can also refer to the material range of colour-matter relationalities and can even be understood rather literally, pointing to the very mining of minerals to produce pigments. Thus, these *mines of colour* allude to the questions of how colour is materially produced and where we can find pigments that will finally end up as paint to colour our world. Minerals deep down in the earth are colourless and only when they are brought to the surface and into the light do they sparkle in different colours. Their colour depends on the material constitution of the mineral (as well as on light conditions, of course). Lists of pigments, for example of red (36-37) or green (71-72) pigments, are spread throughout *Chroma* and we often find highly material information about the pigment in question: its history of production – sometimes including a recipe –, its place of origin, its use by painters, its quality when applied to the canvas and a comparison of prices. For white pigments we read, for example, the following:

> Zinc oxide, Chinese white, originates as a cold white smoke, it is not poisonous, and has been used as a pigment since the mid-nineteenth century. Zinc vapour from the molten metal is burned in an oxidising atmosphere at a temperature of 950° centigrade, producing fumes of white oxide. Zinc oxide is a pure cold white. (14-15)

Regarding flake white, we learn: "Thin sheets of lead oxidised in the dung-heap produced the heavy white impasto on which Rembrandt balanced the heads of his sitters" (14). Later in the text, Jarman refers to Pliny giving a recipe for how to produce the white that serves as "the ground on which we paint" (14).

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origin of stars; they conserve cosmic history and make it legible to us: "Beyond the galaxies lies that primordial dark from which the stars shine out. There are green stars and red giants. Betelgeuse is a red star, and there are blue stars like Rigel. Their colours tell us much: hydrogen is red, sodium is orange" (*Chroma* 137).

The unique crystalline structure of each produced pigment defines the colour when used as paint. Anita Albus makes us aware of the knowledge of earlier painters (such as, for example, Jan van Eyck), who were familiar with the laws of a multilayered buildup of a painting in order to achieve a depth effect of light in their work. They knew how light is bent and refracted depending on the size and shape of a grain of pigment and used it accordingly (Albus 291). The quality of a pigment, which is often also related to its cost (*Chroma* 15), highly influences the colour effect that will be produced by the paint later, and Jarman praises the effects of vermilion or ultramarine in early painting (49). Good quality often goes along with good permanence. Many paintings we look at today have changed their colour throughout time.[24] Jarman gives an example of the fading and fugitive copper greens and other pigments in contrast to the permanence of lapis lazuli:

> Some colours faded, like the death of the copper greens in Venetian paintings, the violets that turned to white. The soot-black reds. Now they seem to be the artist's intention. Other colours, like the lapis blue, with which the Venetian's painted distance, scream at you from the horizon as skies once painted in harmony almost fall out of the frame. (72)

Pigments defy human control when they change their colour over time and ridicule the originally intended effect or signification of a painting. We can also see this in Geertgen's *Nativity at Night*, in which "the Madonna's blue robe has turned the inky black of night" (87), as I have already discussed in section 4.1. When colours break out of their intended effect this does not happen unnoticed; Jarman observes that they "scream" (72) at you. These colours make a claim on you and Jarman is often fascinated by the minerals' glinting and sparkling of their colour, as he writes:

24 Two famous examples of such a changing of colour are Vincent van Gogh's paintings "Irises" (1890) and "The Bedroom" (1888) in which purple changed to blue over the years (Vergeest 65, 92-93).

> To understand the passion for gemlike colour, look at the illuminated manuscripts – the passing centuries rubbed the colour off old walls, but in the manuscripts hidden from the light that creates and destroys, you can see colour bright as the day it was laid down by the illuminator. (48)

Such brilliant and gemlike colour makes a claim on you. The colours of the illuminations hold your eyes fast so that you cannot avert your gaze. You have to look at these reds and blues. A reproduction in a catalogue can never bring about this effect. This gemlike colour is only achieved by using costly pigments of high quality, like for example vermilion or lapis blue, and by the painterly knowledge of how to achieve such a brilliance by using them effectively, for example by a multi-layering of paint, or by finding the right medium to suspend the pigment in. Jarman notices:

> In the chalky world of Dulux[25] and the colour chart, you remember colour was once bright and precious. There is not a drop of vermilion or ultramarine, congealing today in these rusty cans. If the Scarlet Whore of Babylon was painted with these house paints you would not notice her, but in a Book of Hours she would flame like the sunset. (49)

It is all about the material here. The pigments trigger the claim. Whether the colour can reach out to the observer or not highly depends on the material. The material triggers a response or a "resonance" (Hands 144) in the observer. Hands draws on Deleuze and Guattari when he notes that such resonance "is of great significance offering, as it does, a mode of connection, an *intensity*, that operates on a [sic] immanent plain [sic] beyond any form of representation, that is beyond language but which still communicates" (144, original emphasis). The material makes a claim on the observer and they respond to it.

25 Dulux is a brand for house paints.

This communication manifests itself in a realm beyond language and triggers affective reactions in the observer.

In another instance at Cornelissen, a traditional store for artist's materials in London, Jarman sees "jars of pigments glinting like jewels in the semi-dark" (5). The sparkling of gemstones, enhanced by cutting the stone so that it reflects even more light, fascinates Jarman. We have encountered the following passage already in section 3.2 and I want to come back to it to take a closer look at the thing-power at work here. Jarman observes:

> Emerald, Ruby, Jacinth, Chalcedony, Jasper. Colour, like these jewels, is precious. Even more precious, as unlike the sparklers, it cannot be possessed. Colour slips through the fingers and escapes. You can't lock it in a jewel box as it vanishes in the dark. (23)

This colour is fugitive, it cannot be touched and held fast, and hence it cannot be fully controlled by human beings. These sparklers exhibit *thing-power* as they "manifest traces of independence or aliveness" (Bennett, *VM* xvi). Colour, in the example above, becomes what Bennett describes as characteristic of vibrant matter: it becomes "lively, affective, and signalling" (117). Lively, because it "slips through the fingers and escapes" (*Chroma* 23) and Jarman cannot stop it from doing so. It becomes affective since when looking at the colour of a sparkling gem, he is fascinated by it and spellbound. And it becomes signalling in so far as, for Jarman, fugitive colour is more precious than the gem itself. Only the colour makes a gem precious and without it, it may be perceived as a mere cold piece of mineral (which then exhibits a different affective and signalling thing-power). So, when looking at these jewels, the human observer is drawn into a realm in which agency is distributed to all actants involved: the gems, colour and the human observer. Jarman's fascination with these sparklers and the fugitive colours shows another remarkable convergence with Bennett's notion of *thing-power*, since in order to experience colour-matter's thing-power, we have to "try to linger in those moments during which [we] find [ourselves] fascinated" (*VM* 17).

The agency of colour-matter can not only be experienced by observing colour-matter attentively with one's eyes – Jarman also practises a very hands-

on engagement with colour. He has worked with colour in its different materialisations throughout his lifetime – as a painter, set designer, film director, writer of sketchbooks and other texts, and as a gardener. The actress Tilda Swinton, a friend of Jarman who worked with him in many of his film projects, remembers that "Derek Jarman lived in his hands. They were his principal powerhouse. Green-fingered and black-inked, he moulded his every day with them. A painter, a gardener, a longhand writer, he held his materials dear: his workshop, his garden, his desk" (Swinton 18). He also "moulded" the sketchbooks for his projects in a specific way: "each project began with the blackening and the gilding and the opening of a new bound album" (19). This indicates that Jarman enjoyed being in very close, tactile contact with colour materials and that he used them to mould his daily life. As a painter and having studied painting at the Slade School of Fine Art from 1963 to 1967, Jarman gathered a lot of experience with painting materials such as pigments, brushes or canvases.[26] In *Chroma*, he describes how he produces etching ink: "Days, grinding etching ink at the Slade, sticky as treacle on the stone" (140). The ink is "sticky" on the grinding stone and seemingly resists being turned into a new material configuration. The purpose of grinding ink is to suspend pigments in a medium, for example, in linseed oil. In doing so, the produced etching ink (including the pigments) can dry later when used and sticks to the etching plate. This can be understood as an attempt to 'tame' the pigments and to bring them under control. But the material resists this transformation as it becomes sticky and Jarman can literally feel the material pressing back. As I have already elaborated in section 4.1, such a pressing back of the material is also experienced by Sedgwick in her engagement with textiles and she describes this as being suspended in the *middle ranges of agency*. In this range, we remember, "the will of the artist is only one determinant

26 According to Max Doerner, the author of the famous artist's manual *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting*, an understanding of the painting material is essential for any painter. Only when a painter knows how to work with the material, knows its characteristics and how it can be used, can they achieve an excellence in painting and create paintings that will persist for all time. He refers to famous painters such as Dürer, Leonardo, Rubens, or Reynolds, who engaged themselves thoroughly with their materials and thereby achieved a perfection in their art that is admired until today. Doerner's vital advice for artists is to produce their own painting material because only then can they get to know it intimately enough so as to work with it effectively. (Doerner VII-VIII)

of the art that emerges – and often not the most important determinant" ("Making Things, Practicing Emptiness" 83). In the process of grinding, as described by Jarman above, the etching ink is a decisive determinant, or *actant*, in defining how soon Jarman can apply the ink for further use in his work as an artist. With Sedgwick we have learned that it is further important to practise a certain openness towards the doings of the material one works with and to engage with it not only cognitively but especially with one's body. Using the senses is key when getting into contact with the material. Jarman describes such an engagement with colour in which he seems to understand colour and his painting material in a new way. Once he had "learnt colour but did not understand it" (*Chroma* 4). Now, he finds himself in a state that recalls the middle ranges of agency and it seems as if in this range, he achieves a better understanding of colour than by only learning about it cognitively: "All colour smells of turpentine and rich linseed oil pressed from the pale blue flax fields. Local colour from coloured fields. The cricket bat dipped with the brush. Death hangs around the brush – pigs' bristle, squirrel, sable, and the canvas prepared with rabbit skin glue" (4). In this passage, the material plays an essential role in so far as it unfolds its own sedimented historialities and affects different senses. The smell of linseed oil transmits the information of its origin, coming from the "coloured fields" of "blue flax". This smell opens up a totally new world, one of blue fields located in some place where linseed oil is produced. When Jarman finds himself in the situation of smelling this oil, he is in the midst of what Barad calls a *phenomenon*: "*phenomena* are the *ontological* inseparability of agentially intra-acting components" (*MtUH* 33, original emphasis). In the very moment in which Jarman smells the oil, it unfolds its historiality containing its origin, production, trade, etc. The intra-active components in this phenomenon are the different people involved (Jarman and all who came in contact with the oil before), the material itself (linseed oil), the space where Jarman is in while smelling the oil and the spaces unfolding by the oil's material historiality (blue flax fields). This list of components could go on and on, but I want to specifically add two other important components: while reading these lines, the reader of *Chroma* as well as the reader of this study also become a component of this phenomenon.

What else can we experience through the engagement with this painting material in the middle ranges of agency? In the quotation above, death makes itself felt in the materials of the brushes – "pig's bristle, squirrel, sable" – as

well as in the preparation of the canvas with "rabbit skin glue" (*Chroma* 4). This material was formerly part of an animal and thus obviously alive. One of Sedgwick's questions which arises in the middle ranges of agency is contained in it: "How did it get that way?" ("Making Things, Practicing Emptiness" 84). To work with this material means to be confronted with the transformation of life and death and in the bristle's and fur's new use as brushes the material asks the painter more of these questions to achieve an understanding of how to work with it. What does a brush made of pig's bristle allow me to do? What if it were made out of sable's or squirrel's hair? What can I do with the different brushes? What does the brush want to do? Does it want to be used for water colours or oil paintings to unfold its full potential? Although these questions are primarily important for the very moment in which one wants to use the brushes, the brushes' material sedimented historialities are at every moment contained in the material. Following a new materialist perspective, we know that "matter carries within itself the sedimented historialities of the practices through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming – it is ingrained and enriched in its becoming" (Barad, *MtUH* 180). Hence, every time a material changes or is transformed, it exhibits new characteristics. The warming fur of a squirrel becomes the painter's instrument to create art and thus changes its function completely; and as matter is "ongoing becoming" (180), the brush will probably not be the last material manifestation of the squirrel's hair.

Jarman's long and deep practical engagement with colour and paint highly contributes to his practice of colour writing. Experimenting with different styles of painting – from etchings to landscape paintings to monochromes (*Chroma* 5-6) – he got to know different techniques and experimented with various materials. As we have already seen, he is especially fascinated by pigments in terms of their production, application and effect on him. Through this practical engagement with painting materials, he experiences the middle ranges of agency first-hand and explores how the material 'presses back' on him. When transferring his experience into language in *Chroma*, colours often exhibit a certain agency. Here, for example, colour-matter becomes the active subject of the sentence: "Arsenic greens fought out the pinks until they in turn were swallowed and defeated by monochrome" (6). Other times, colour-matter seriously affects the human body: "Manganese blue and violet. Ultramarine blue and violet and the brightest permanent green. These colours

carried health warnings – a black and scarlet skull and crossbones, and the words DANGER – DO NOT INHALE" (5, original emphasis). Some of the pigments that Jarman uses are poisonous. They possess an agency that can be dangerous for human beings since they can seriously impair the body. This colour-matter can possibly kill you if you are not aware of how to use it correctly. Jarman observes that nature is poisoning human beings "not only with plants and animals, but also with colours" (23). As early as in Pliny's *Natural History*, he finds a remark that "painters wore bladder masks to protect themselves from the dust of vermilion" (23). Jarman also warns of the use of another pigment: "White lead is very poisonous, and if used unwisely leads to painters' sickness" (14). He probably knew how to use 'dangerous' pigments correctly and they fascinate him when they are "glinting like jewels in the semi-dark" (5), as we have learned earlier. Already here, Jarman is suspended in the middle ranges of agency: "glinting" pigments make a claim on him and define the possibilities of how he can use them. They first seduce him with their mystic shimmering in the "semi-dark" to use them creatively as he wishes. But then, they restrict their usage in the next step by turning out to be poisonous. This characteristic is only revealed on a second glance when reading the label on the jars. The pigments themselves 'hide' their toxins and you will only find out about them if it is either too late, if you know about the toxicity already or if you can read the warning on the jar. Thus, it turns out that you cannot use them as you wish but you have to follow specific rules if you want to keep up your health. These pigments only allow you to do certain things with them.

Colour in *Chroma* is never static or brought to a halt, it is always moving and transforming itself, building new alliances with its surroundings, with other colours, with matter, with feelings and also with the reader. In doing so, it performs a rhizomatic movement that generates unique colour-matter entanglements. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate the concept of the "rhizome" (5) in their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus*. A rhizome "is an acentered, nonhierarchical […] system […] defined solely by a circulation of states" (22). There is "no beginning or end" to it, but "it is always in the middle" (26), always in process and emerging, and from there, it builds alliances with its surroundings: "the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance [and] the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and…and…and…'" (26). This recalls characteristics of the lyric essay as *Chroma's* fragmentary style also accretes colour

topics in a style similar to "and…and…and" (26). Further, *Chroma* has no centre from which a logical buildup would take off, one can start reading in the middle, or wherever one wants – a rhizome "has multiple entryways" (Deleuze & Guattari 12). As we have seen, the text maps associations, ideas, matter, feelings and everything that comes to Jarman's mind in relation to colour. This rhizomatic structure is mirrored in Jarman's material writing practice of *Chroma*, as Peake knows:

> Writing in longhand on whatever sheets of paper [Jarman] had to hand, he jotted down ideas, anecdotes and autobiography in the order they came to him. His only focus was the colour under consideration, to which end he often wore an appropriately coloured article of clothing: a red T-Shirt for the chapter on red, yellow pyjamas for yellow, and so on. Finally, with the assistance of several helpers, the sheets of paper were typed up, ordered and shaped. (501-02)

This writing process is not structured and it does not seem to follow a specific logic. Jarman rather "free float[s] through the spectrum" (*Smiling in Slow Motion* 134) but still pays attention to connect his body with the colour he is writing about by wearing matching clothes. A certain ordering of his ideas is only undertaken later and is a collaborative activity involving different people. This sorting of his ideas, however, did not harm the rhizomatic structure or movement of *Chroma*. Further, the material-discursive colour which we experience in *Chroma* also exhibits rhizomatic characteristics. I want to quote Albers again who observes that "we almost never (that is, without special devices) see a single color unconnected and unrelated to other colors. Colors present themselves in continuous flux, constantly related to changing neighbors and changing conditions" (5). Thus, like a rhizome, agential colour-matter is always in motion in *Chroma*, always in process and emerging and it starts to shoot into all directions, thereby creating networks that connect it with its surroundings. As much as colour-matter connects different realms (art, philosophy, science, etc.), operating similar to a rhizome "by variation, expansion, […] offshoots" (Deleuze & Guattari 22), it also weaves similar elements into the text: the lists of pigments are one example here. They ex-

tend into nearly all chapters and provide information on the material configurations of different colours. These repetitive elements appear every time in slightly different form, sometimes telling the reader more about a pigment's history, other times more about its chemical composition. Yet, one always has the impression when encountering these passages that a colour rhizome, which permeates the text, underlies these listings and the text is thereby closely woven and intertwined into a unique texture. It is important to note that this colour rhizome does not stop to spread at the 'boundaries' of the text. It is not *contained* inside the text but also shoots off to the realm of colour outside the text and thereby continues to map colour in the reader's world *out there*. As the reader is explicitly encouraged by Jarman to "write […] in the margin" (42) whatever comes to their mind while reading, they continue to build the colour rhizome that spreads from *Chroma.* With this, connections are built between the text, Jarman writing the text and the reader reading and possibly also writing it, resulting in a complex entanglement of colour, matter and meaning that is *Chroma*.

It is the special achievement of *Chroma* to open new ways to experience colour by inviting the reader to delve into Jarman's very personal colour universe while at the same time allowing the reader to add their own colour associations to the text. This makes *Chroma* a generative text – always further exploring the world of colour – instead of merely a finished, completed and thus finally generated one. The reader intra-acts with colour in its different facets while reading and thereby fulfils Jarman's wish as he said he "prefer[s] that the colours should float and take flight in your minds" (43). He does not want to "imprison" (42) colour in his writing and allows colour to unfold its whole complexity by writing it into being in such a way that every reader can enjoy their very personal colour experience in the intra-action with *Chroma's* sensuous colour poetics. But colour does not only "take flight" in our minds; it also becomes as it were tangible and makes claims on us. This is another unique achievement of *Chroma*, namely to 'fix' colour on the page while at the same time enabling the reader to experience its agency which affects human beings and defies their control. This intra-play between tangible and elusive colour is characteristic of *Chroma*. The ambiguous character of colour is no disadvantage, on the contrary, it even enhances the impression of entering a dynamic colourscape in the reading process. Thus, we can conclude that *Chroma* is a

text that must not only be read but also experienced. In this experience, colour-matter becomes discursive beyond language and makes itself felt by addressing our senses as much as our mind's eye. The reader can lose themselves in colour and experience the multifaceted world of colour with mind and body alike. In *Chroma*, colours sparkle like when sun rays are cast through a cut crystal that swings in the wind and projects a multitude of small sparkling rainbow-spots onto the walls of your room. This cut crystal does not serve a Newtonian prism experiment. It is not used as an instrument to corroborate a hypothesis. It is not restricted to a certain purpose. Jarman's writing may be a kind of experiment, too, but it is one that rather has a kaleidoscope as its instrument. *Chroma* enables the reader to experience the ever-changing colours of the world in all their variety – it only wants you to lose yourself in colour:

> For what are you seeking?
> The fathomless blue of Bliss.
>
> (115)

# 6 "ONLY WHITE THINGS WILL I GIVE": MATERIAL COLOURSCAPES IN HAN KANG'S *THE WHITE BOOK*

White has long been regarded as a "noncolor" (Pastoureau, *Black* 11). Together with black it has been separated from the world of colour since Newton discovered the spectrum and deprived white of its status as an "authentic color" as which it had been conceived "until the late Middle Ages" (11) in the Western world. In Newton's colour system, white gains a special status as he discovered that white light actually consists of a mixture of all colours that can be found in the spectrum. With this, he proved that white is not a *pure* colour but contains all the existing colours of the spectrum. As a result of this discovery, white and black (that is, the absence of any spectral colour) seem "to form their own universe as opposed to the one of colors: 'in black and white' on one side, 'in color' on the other" (11). Yet, for human perception white is, and always has been, one colour of many. White surrounds us every day, may that be in the form of white walls, white paper or toothpaste. Moreover, white is a "basic color term[…]" (Berlin & Kay 2) and together with black, Berlin and Kay ascertain in their cross-cultural study, it even builds the pair of first colour terms that all languages contain if they encode any colour terms in their vocabulary (2). Consequently, it is not surprising that white is a colour of high symbolic value in many cultures. In a Christian context, "white [is] the color endowed with the greatest dignity", "the symbol of purity" and "[f]or early Christian theology white and black formed a pair of opposites and often represented the colored expression of Good and Evil. Such an opposition relied on Genesis (light/darkness), but also on sensibilities aligned with nature (day/night, for example)" (Pastoureau, *Black* 39). This short accumulation of some possible perspectives on white has not even touched on topics such as racial discrimination based on 'white' and 'black' skin colour, the signification of white in design or the fine arts, or the persistent presumption that Inuit have a wealth of words for the colour white.[1] Yet, already this short collection can show the complexity of scientific knowledge, associations and symbolic as

1 Actually, these words do not denote different shades of white but are connected to the consistency of snow and even this presumption has been heavily disputed. See, for example, Pullum's *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax*.

well as cultural meanings that all contribute to how white can be potentially conceptualised or perceived.

Every person further has their very own associations with white. As I want to take myself as a heuristic instrument in exploring the doings of white emerging in my intra-action with colour writings, I also envision my personal associations with this colour (and my reader is very welcome to do so, too, before they read on). I, for my part, lose myself in an endless and brightly light-flooded space when thinking of white. To me personally, white is, on the one hand, connected with emptiness and absence while, on the other hand, it exerts a certain power through its purity and perfection and thereby verges on craziness. Further, white is the most 'immaterial' colour to me because of its ethereal, otherworldly and thereby distanced character. With such impressions and thoughts in mind, reading *The White Book* (2017) by Han Kang creates a very surprising and contrasting experience as the above presented 'facts' and associations cannot explain the white we encounter in this colour writing. *The White Book* makes white palpable through a collection of white things. White is a complex sensuous experience in this colour writing; it is textured and thick, pressing through the page and making itself felt in the reading process. The association of white as a distant colour fades away as one gets densely involved in the text's white colourscapes. *The White Book* writes nuances of white into being in such a diversity of shade and texture that I as a reader am astounded and my associations and perception of white will be changed ever after reading this text. Through this specific practice of colour writing, white exceeds its symbolic semantics and builds relationalities with matter and feeling that become affective beyond the page.

Writing along a list of meditations on white things – for example, "Newborn gown", "Snow", "Rice", "White bird" or "Blank paper" (*The White Book* 5) – the narrator approaches the death of her older sister by giving her a life through the practice of writing. Her older sister died as a newborn shortly after birth (17), a few years before the narrator herself was born (137). By writing along white things, *The White Book* builds on two intentions that are gradually revealed in the text. In the very first sentence, the narrator presents the text's first purpose, namely, to write about white things: "In the spring, when I decided to write about white things, the first thing I did was to make a list" (5). Then follows a list of fifteen white items which will also occur again later in the text:

Swaddling bands
Newborn gown
Salt
Snow
Ice
Moon
Rice
Waves
Yulan
White bird
'Laughing whitely'
Blank paper
White dog
White hair
Shroud

(5)

Writing this list is a highly affective endeavour for the narrator and she tells us that

> [w]ith each item I wrote down, a ripple of agitation ran through me. I felt that yes, I needed to write this book, and that the process of writing it would be transformative, would itself transform, into something like white ointment applied to a swelling, like gauze laid over a wound. Something I needed. (5-6)

At this point, she seems to be astounded by this feeling of "agitation" and by the intuition that this writing is something she "needed". The reason for this reaction is still obscure and concealed to her, but she is driven by a strong urge to explore this reaction further. Hence, she "wonder[s] what meaning might lie in this task, in peering into the heart of these words" (6). These words of white items, as it turns out, function like tokens or hooks that trigger certain

associations and memories in the narrator: "If I sift those words through myself, sentences will shiver out, like the strange, sad shriek the bow draws from a metal string" (6). This process is guided by whatever associations or memories may surface and, thereby, it seemingly escapes the narrator's control. In true lyric essay style, association follows on association and as readers we follow the text's movement through the white vignettes – as we may call the passages on the white things (more of this later) – which time and again also circle back to earlier vignettes, thereby building cross-connections throughout the text.

The list of white items we encounter at the very beginning comprises the trajectory of a life, beginning with "Swaddling bands" and ending with "Shroud" (5). Here, we find a first hint at the second purpose of this writing on white, that is, to give a life to the narrator's dead sister. Her older sister lived only "two hours" (17) before she died and this death causes ambiguous feelings in the narrator. While mourning her sister's death, she also believes that if her sister had lived, she herself would not exist: "This life needed only one of us to live it. If you had lived beyond those first few hours, I would not be living now" (137). In the next vignette, she expresses this belief in a slightly different tone: "If only you hadn't stopped breathing. And had therefore been granted all this life in my stead, I who would then never have been born" (139). Here, the ambiguity becomes apparent as the narrator wishes that her sister "hadn't stopped breathing" while being aware that her own life would perhaps not have been possible if she had lived. Her sister was always part of her life because her death, she remarks, "was a story which I had grown up inside" (19). *The White Book* is then about loss, pain and grief while at the same time it is an attempt at healing. Throughout her childhood, the narrator has experienced her mother mourning the death of her sister: "If only we'd been living in a city back then, I heard my mother say several times during my childhood. If only an ambulance could have taken me to hospital" (139). The narrator takes over these reiterations and goes on: "If only you hadn't stopped breathing" (139), feeling somehow guilty for living in place of her sister. Throughout the text, *The White Book* confronts its readers with a complexity of feelings. Next to pain, grief and guilt, compassion and empathy are defining feelings, too. Midway through the text, the narrator decides to give her sister a life through writing and to thereby heal the wounds the story of her sister's death has also created in her:

Now I will give you white things,
What is white, though may yet be sullied;
Only white things will I give.
No longer will I question
Whether I should give this life to you.

(40)

Many reviews focus on this storyline when commenting on *The White Book*. Deborah Levy points out that "[t]he dominant theme is of transience, of fleeting life and the acceptance of human fragility". She writes further: "At its most engaging, the writing edges close to becoming a brilliant psychogeography of grief, moving as it does between place, history and memory". In this synopsis of the *The White Book's* main topics, the colour white is not even mentioned. The white things are merely acknowledged for their function, as a means to convey other topics: "The book is structured around the white things that become part of the rituals of mourning and remembering" (Levy). Another critic points to the symbolic quality of white and observes that "[w]hite is an expansive symbol in this book, standing for both mourning and death, purity and renewal" (Wuertz). Yet, while these reviews point to important issues of the text, I want to focus on what is to me the most remarkable achievement of this text, namely, the unique ways in which *The White Book* writes white into existence so that we as readers get entangled with its palpable presence. This text imbues white with materiality so that it can make itself felt through the text. White is no mere metaphor that conveys mental concepts; it is rather a material presence which we encounter in many different forms, which we experience with our senses (especially with the visual and tactile sense) and through affect, and which conveys meaning by addressing the mind as well as the body. White things in *The White Book* create what Marschall calls "Empfindungsräume" ("Fließende Farben" 209)[2] (spaces of sensation) as they connect colour, matter and feeling.

2 Marschall develops this term in the context of film studies and defines it as follows: "Empfindungsräume im Kino, also Rauminszenierungen mit komplexer Wirkung in sensorischer, emotionaler und kognitiver Hinsicht, entstehen in der Regel durch ein Zusammenspiel von Materialien, Farben und Licht" ("Fließende Farben" 209).

As we will see in the following, *The White Book* often indicates a Korean cultural context, but the text can also unfold its meanings and doings for a Western reader who is not familiar with Korean culture.[3] As already pointed out in the Introduction, *The White Book* is an author-translator hybrid originally published in Korean and translated into English by Deborah Smith. I want to treat this text therefore as a collaboration of two persons, the author and the translator – a collaboration that is obviously very prolific: Han and Smith had already joined forces for two other projects, namely the English translation of Han's *The Vegetarian* (2015) and *Human Acts* (2016). Before Han won the Nobel Prize in Literature 2024, Han and Smith had jointly won the Man Booker International Prize 2016 for their collaboration on *The Vegetarian*. It was the first time that a translator received the prize together with the author and, as in the case of the Nobel Prize, the first time for a South Korean author to win the prize.[4] *The White Book* was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2018. In her translational practice, Smith

3 Even though Han is a South Korean author, I refer to a Korean cultural background in the following since South Korea and North Korea look back on a shared Korean history before they were divided into two sovereign states in 1948.

4 Despite the praise which Smith's translation of *The Vegetarian* received by the jury of the *Man Booker International Prize*, many Korean critics raised their voices pointing to mistakes (see Kim for a list of references) and judged the translation even "inept" (Kim 78). However, these critical voices were barely heard in international circles. In the Western world, praise for the translation overshadowed all criticism, as Kim notes:

> In the West, [...] reviewers lavishly praised the translation as "masterful" and "exquisite." According to a media release by the publisher, Chloe Aridjis, author of *Book of Clouds*, even went on to say, "Poetic and beguiling, and translated with tremendous elegance, *The Vegetarian* exhilarates and disturbs." Daniel Hahn, writing for *The Guardian*, stated that "[t]his is Han Kang's first novel to appear in English, and it's a bracing, visceral, system-shocking addition to the Anglophone reader's diet." (65)

On its website, the Booker Prize Foundation points out that "Han [...] and Smith [...] treated the translation as an imaginative rather than literal word-for-word exercise". This statement undermines the significance of Kim's attempt to "identify the errors that Smith made in translating Han's novel and classify the errors in detail" (65) and challenges his conclusive judgement that "Smith's translation of *The Vegetarian* is quite flawed and thus inept" (78). *Correctness* is not the issue with this translation. The same applies to the English version of *The White Book*, which is a work in its own right, an author-translator hybrid.

is careful to consider cultural implications and she understands translation as generating the opportunity for many different interpretations to appear:

> The translation doesn't, or at least shouldn't, produce *an* interpretation; rather, it needs to ensure that the multiple possibilities of the original are there for its new readers to find, while still leaving these readers space for their own interpretations, which will be shaped by cultural and political frameworks, but equally by individual experiences of both life and literature. (D. Smith, original emphasis)

And thus, in *The White Book*, white makes itself felt in one way or another to every reader regardless of where they are from. However, the white we encounter in this text cannot be sufficiently approached by a Western understanding of this colour as it has been shortly presented at the beginning of this chapter. It eludes us to a certain degree if we attempt to approach it from only this perspective. Being originally published in Korean, the doings of white should also be illuminated in the context of an East Asian understanding of white and I want to present some key aspects in this regard in the following.

In his essay on Japanese aesthetics, *In Praise of Shadows*, Tanizaki provides a very 'palpable' example of a difference in the aesthetic preferences of Western and East Asian cultures in regards to white by drawing on the texture of paper:

> Paper, I understand, was invented by the Chinese; but Western paper is to us no more than something to be used, while the texture of Chinese paper and Japanese paper gives us a certain feeling of warmth, of calm and repose. Even the same white could as well be one color for Western paper and another for our own. Western paper turns away the light, while our paper seems to take it in, to envelop it gently, like the soft surface of a first snowfall. It gives off no sound when it is crumpled or folded, it is quiet and pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree. (9-10)

As this example shows, the whiteness of paper, for Tanizaki, is not a matter of reflection (as Newton might tell us) but a matter of enveloping, of taking in the light instead of reflecting it back. It is never a shiny white but it is always textured, nuanced, sensuously perceived and very differentiated. Tanizaki instantly approaches this white of Japanese paper sensuously by taking in the feelings it elicits ("warm", "calm and repose"), by looking at it and recognising how it "envelop[s]" the light "like the soft surface of a first snowfall", by listening to the absence of sound "when it is crumpled or folded" and by paying attention to the tactile experience as it is "pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree". In *The White Book*, we can experience whiteness in similar ways as we will see later. What other conceptualisations of white and engagements with this colour can we find in an East Asian cultural context? In many Asian countries, white is the colour of mourning as it is connected to the religious belief in reincarnation according to which death is not understood to be an ultimate parting from the world (Heller 166). Mourning clothes are always made of matt white fabric, never of a shiny or glossy white, and are thereby meant to express the mourner's renunciation of self-display (166). In Korea, for example, the bereaved traditionally wore white mourning clothes called "sangbok" that "consist of garments made of coarse hemp cloth, a hemp hat on the head, a hair band of rough hemp, a belt, and a cane"; some of these "elements of sangbok have been passed on" until today (*Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture*, "Mourning Garment"). Korean people further seem to have a special connection to the colour white that exceeds the symbolic realm of mourning: "from ancient times and into the modern era", Korean people have been called "'Baeguiminjok (the white-clad people)" by foreigners due to their daily attire (National Folk Museum of Korea, "The Colors in Korean Life and Culture"). In Korea, white also symbolises "[i]nnocence" and "[r]ectitude" and "has since long ago signified purity and temperance, that is, a 'clean state of mind without greed'" ("The Colors in Korean Life and Culture"). Here, we find similarities with Western meanings of white. However, these similarities begin to cease when engaging with the question whether white is understood as an absence or a presence. Generally speaking, white in a Western context tends to be connected to ideas of nothingness, absence or lack of something (Heller 172) while in East Asian contexts white tends to be

rather connected with the concept of emptiness,[5] as Japanese designer Kenya Hara points out:

> In some cases, white denotes "emptiness." White as a noncolor transforms into a symbol of nonbeing. Yet, emptiness doesn't mean "nothingness" or "energy-less"; rather, in many cases, it indicates a condition […] which will likely be filled with content in the future. On the basis of this assumption, the application of white is able to create a forceful energy for communication. (*White* 36)

Hara, like Pastoureau, also points out that white can be understood as a "noncolor"; yet, to him this *non* is not defined by an absence. On the contrary, it is connected to emptiness and thus closely linked to the idea of potential.[6] This understanding of emptiness recalls Buddhist teachings in which emptiness is a central and "extremely intellectually engaging" (Burton 134) concept that "has numerous meanings" (111). In his introduction to "[t]he varieties of emptiness" (111), Burton claims that "[p]erhaps the best-known teachings about emptiness come from the Mādhyamika school of Mahāyāna Buddhism" (112), for which

> [e]mptiness means that entities exist without intrinsic existence but not that they do not exist at all. Emptiness is the ontological mid-

5 In Japanese, there even exists a linguistic connection between white and emptiness as "the character for 'white' (白 – *shiro*) occurs within the Japanese compound for 'emptiness' (空白 – *kuhaku*)" (Hara, *White* iii).

6 Without going into detail, I want to point out that Karan Barad engages with a similar understanding of emptiness in her new materialist theory. Barad points out that quantum field theory develops a new understanding of *emptiness,* or *nothingness*: "According to quantum field theory, the vacuum is far from empty; indeed, it's teeming with the full set of possibilities of what may come to be" (*MtUH* 354). And in *What Is the Measure of Nothingness?*, she notes that "[n]othingness is not absence, but the infinite plentitude of openness" (16). For more details, see *What Is the Measure of Nothingness?*.

> dle way between non-existence and intrinsic existence. Mādhyamikas claim that it is emptiness properly understood which explains and makes possible the existence of all things. (117)

It is further important to note that following this understanding, "[t]he manifold entities that make up the world are related to one another in complex patterns of interdependence", "because they are reliant on causes to bring them into and sustain their existence" (112).[7] "In other words, emptiness means that all things lack, or are empty of, autonomous existence because they depend on other entities as their causes and sustainers. No thing is an island unto itself" (112) – an idea which resonates strikingly with a new materialist world view. Emptiness is also a central concept in Daoism, next to Buddhism and Confucianism another one of the *three teachings* of Chinese philosophy which have been influential in East Asia for centuries (Stalling 23). In contrast to Buddhist theories of emptiness, "Daoist ontology emphasizes the absolute autonomy of things (*ziran*), which cannot be objectively cognized but must be related to through *housing* their mysterious unfolding within the emptied chamber of the fasted mind" (23, original emphasis). Stalling further explains that

> "fasting the mind" refers to the attempt to empty it of thoughts, for instance. This notion of emptiness is coupled with another specif-

7 The interplay between form and emptiness is also part of a central Buddhis text, the Heart Sūtra, and Park explains it as follows:

> In the Heart Sūtra, one of the most often quoted sūtras, it is stated, "Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form." The word *form* may be understood to include all phenomena, including our own thoughts and feelings. To say that they are all "empty" is not to say that they don't exist, but rather that they have no identity of their own. Instead, they are participants in an all-inclusive, interdependent universe. They do have existence, but we need not experience them as painful if we are able to see that they all belong within this vast, unending realm of interconnection. Furthermore, according to the Buddha's teachings, these states and forms are not only interdependent but impermanent as well; thus, they can and will change. (105, original emphasis)

> ically Daoist notion. As noted in the cosmogonic narrative, where the universe of existents arises from the womb of empty/nothingness, things that find value in their "emptiness" are prized for being more in accord with the Dao. For instance, the emptiness within bowls or cups, between spokes of a wheel, inside the enclosed space of caves, and so on, is accorded a special status in Daoist discourses. But perhaps the most important "empty" place is imagined within the human body/mind. (21-22)[8]

These are only very basic introductions to the concept of emptiness from Buddhist and Daoist perspectives, yet they should be sufficient at this point to enable a better understanding of the importance of empty and white space as we can find it in many East Asian works of art. We may think here of classical Chinese painting in which "the white space defines what forms emerge" (Barnstone 70): "according to the Daoist aesthetics of Chinese painting, each stroke of the brush is *yin* (blackness, woman) upon *yang* (light, whiteness, man). All the empty space reacts to one brushstroke upon the page. Each additional stroke makes the space adjust itself into a new composition" (70-71, original emphasis).

Hasegawa Tohaku's famous *Pine Trees* (16th century), a national treasure of Japan, is one example of how white space takes on an active role in a painting: "'Pine Trees' inherited the legacy of the Southern Sung ink painting tradition, the quintessence of Chinese fine art", for which "[t]he technique of using emptiness to set the image free on paper was the crowning achievement" (Hara, *White* 37). This ink painting "seems to emphasize the empty

8 Referring to the sinologist Schipper and his book *The Taoist Body*, Stalling elaborates on the Daoist understanding of the body:

> the body is figured as a vast geography inhabited by numerous deities and energies, but is ultimately viewed as a grotto or a chamber in which adepts undergo a pregnancy to give birth to the One, the nameless, ultimate Dao incarnated as infinite potential no longer subject to time or decay – an immortal. (22)

Stalling further notes that "this emptying and/or self-cultivation of body-mind-heart as chambers, vessels, or caverns are clearly different than the nexus of Buddhist notions of emptiness" (22).

space [that is, the white space] between the trees rather than the trees themselves" (38). Hara describes the effect achieved by white space in this painting as follows:

> The pine trees are painted in ink with rough brush strokes. Yet one gets the impression that it is the open, unpainted portions that have the most vitality, and that this is the underlying motif of this and other ink paintings. The areas of opaque white are empty, yet they have atmospheric weight, like a mist or haze. The unpainted space does not depict nothingness or the mere absence of pine trees; it is a terrifying blankness – in Japanese, an "empty whiteness" – that our imagination strives to fill. (*100 Whites* 106)

Hara points out that "the 'space' hidden in Japanese aesthetics, the state of emptiness, functions as a receptacle that can be filled with an infinite variety of meanings" (*100 Whites* iii). *Pine Trees* thus shows that

> an unpainted space should not be seen as an information-free area: the foundation of Japanese aesthetics lies in that empty space and a host of meanings have been built upon it. An important level of communication thus exists within the dimension we call "white." (Hara, *White* 39)

While white space defines what forms emerge in a painting, such an understanding of white can also underly literary works of art. Barnstone, for example, discusses the translation of the Chinese poem "River Snow" by Liu Zongyuan, translated into English by Chou Ping and himself. He encourages the reader to read the poem out aloud: "let's take a moment to read it out loud, slowly. Empty your minds. Visualize each word" (68). And then follows the poem in English:

A thousand mountains. Flying birds vanish.
Ten thousand paths. Human traces erased.
One boat, bamboo hat, bark cape – an old man.
Alone with his hook. Cold river. Snow.

(68)

Barnstone points out that this poem "is considered a prime example of minimum words/maximum message" (68) and that the "first two lines sketch a painterly scene: the vast emptiness of the sky above and the snowy solitude of the landscape below hit the reader like a glance at a Chinese landscape painting" (69). To translate this poem into English was a difficult task, he remarks, since "[t]o make a Chinese poem in English we must allow silence to seep in around the edges, to define the words the way the sky's negative space in a painting defines the mountain" (71). For this poem to also work in English it is thus important to consider the unfolding of its imagery – especially as it is shaped by snow –, the silence around the words and the white space that emanates from these lines.

As we will see in the following, Han's *The White Book* vibrantly resonates with the above presented conceptions of white and the examples of Japanese painting and Chinese poetry. Considering that Han is Korean and a Buddhist (D. Smith) – and thus shares an East Asian background – it may be helpful to keep the above presented understandings of white in mind when reading *The White Book*. This short introduction of an East Asian understanding of white will assist us in illuminating the various ways in which white makes itself felt as a presence rather than an absence in *The White Book* and, furthermore, how white space is a defining element also in this work of literary art. At this point, I want to quote Hara again, who remarks that "[t]here is no such thing as 'white.' Rather, 'white' exists solely in our perception. Therefore, we must not attempt to search for 'white.' Instead, we must search for a way to feel the whiteness" (*White* 2). While I understand the white we encounter in the reading of *The White Book* not as merely existing in our perception but as an intra-active phenomenon, I agree with Hara in so far as I am convinced that to "search for a way to feel the whiteness" is also the task of the attentive reading that is to follow.

## 6.1 THE TEXTURE OF WHITE

Already when picking up *The White Book*, we encounter a book defined by black-and-white aesthetics. We immediately find ourselves in what Sedgwick calls the *middle ranges of agency* in which agency is distributed between the material in our hands and ourselves.[9] Such an engagement requires from us to approach the book not only cognitively but with all our senses and, furthermore, with an open attitude towards receiving possible effects the book may create on us as well as for questions this engagement may trigger. In doing so, already the photograph on *The White Book's* cover[10] evokes curiosity: why do these hands hold a piece of white fabric into the camera? And is it actually white or is this an effect of black-and-white photography? Leaving these questions open, we turn to what we can actually perceive, that is, white as connected to cloth whose soft texture we can sense by only looking at it. White becomes already palpable on the cover. When opening the book, we are surprisingly confronted with a completely black page building a stark visual contrast to the white of both the cover and the title. Yet, it is only one page on which we delve into blackness and after this short encounter with black we meet whiteness – the white of paper that will remain with us through the whole book until we reach black again at the very end of the book. Coming back to the beginning and the title page, the typeface immediately draws my attention to the hybridity of the text in front of me: below the title in English, there is a character indecipherable to readers who are unfamiliar with Korean. It is the Korean character for the adjective white, 흰, as I will only later find out by research. If we then continue to file through the book, attention may be drawn to the special layout of the text: unusual for a work of fiction, as the book is called on its cover, white blank space dominates the visual impression. In this, it rather recalls the layout of poetry collections and thereby already points to the lyric quality of the text as we will see later. The lines are set into this whiteness like into a frame. The text passages are often short, filling only half a page and thus leaving room for even more whiteness as each vignette begins on an odd page and the even one is often left blank. Some text passages are longer but never exceed three pages in total. The vignettes are preceded

9 See section 4.1 for a more detailed discussion of Sedgwick's concept.

10 I refer to the hardcover publication by Portobello Books in 2017.

by headings in italics that convey the impression of titles of short pieces of text, each a work of art in itself.[11] The text is interspersed with black-and-white photographs that depict a woman in different postures and hands that show different things to us. Stillness and calmness emanate from these photographs. All in all, holding the book in my hands and flipping through it before actually beginning to read, already establishes a communication channel between this text and me, captivating me by its palpable whiteness.

This visual and tactile perception of white in terms of layout is one component of our experience of the texture of white in *The White Book*. In the following, I will describe – by means of an attentive reading – other components contributing to this texture. My attentive reading will focus on the white things which we encounter in the intra-action with the text and on the entanglements between colour, matter, words and affects in which we get involved while reading.

The first vignette of *The White Book* is entitled "*Door*" (9)[12] and as it may come as no surprise, since the narrator has announced "to write about white things" (5), this door is, or better was, a white one: the flat's

> metal door had once been white, but that brightness had faded over time. It was a mess when I saw it, paint flaking off in patches to reveal the rust beneath. And if that had been all, I would have remembered it as nothing more than a scruffy old door. But there was also the way its number, 301, had been inscribed. (9)

11 To me, this layout is evocative of Woolf's ''Blue & Green'' in which the blue and green sketches are also positioned on the page in a way that is reminiscent of two paintings hanging on a wall and in which the two literary sketches are also headed by titles. However, while in ''Blue & Green'' the titles mention the respective colour, blue and green, in *The White Book,* it is things somehow connected to white that serve as titles for each vignette. See section 3.1.2 for a more detailed discussion of ''Blue & Green''.

12 The vignettes' headings are all italicised in *The White Book*. This emphasis will no longer be pointed out in the quotations used hereafter.

This number captures the narrator's attention. Yet not because it would numerically signify something to her; it is rather the, in Barad's words, *sedimented historiality* of its production process she is drawn to and she painstakingly describes it:

> Someone – perhaps another in a long line of temporary occupants – had used some sharp implement, maybe a drill bit, to scratch the number into the door's surface. I could make out each individual stroke. 3, itself three hand spans high. 0, smaller, yet gone over several times, a fierce scrawl that attracted attention. Finally, 1, a long, deep-gouged line, taut with the effort of its making. Along this collection of straight and curved wounds rust had spread, a vestige of violence, like long-dried bloodstains, hardened, reddish black. (9-10)

In this passage, it is not the door itself, the white thing, that is in the foreground, it is rather the flaky texture of white paint and the rusty scars that dominate the observation. The detailed description of how the numbers are carved into the door produces a feeling of fierceness, brutality and also pain, even before the narrator uses words like "wounds", "violence" or "bloodstains" to describe it further. This attentive observation of the door and the accompanying impression of pain affects the narrator and she admits: "*I hold nothing dear. Not the place where I live, not the door I pass through every day, not even, damn it, my life.* Those numbers were glaring at me, clenching their teeth tight shut" (10, original emphasis). Somehow, these rusty numbers exhibit thing-power due to their very materiality and the narrator decides: "That was the flat I wanted that winter, the flat where I'd chosen to spin out my days" (10). When moving in, she immediately paints that front door and "[w]ith each swish of the brush over the scar-laced surface, its imperfections were erased. Those deep-gouged numbers disappeared, those rusted bloodstains vanished" (10-11). But it is a futile attempt of hiding these wounds as she must realise when coming back from a break inside that "the paint had run" (11). Was this perhaps a first attempt to lay "gauze […] over a wound" (6) which she cannot yet identify?

From this first vignette on, we find ourselves involved in an entanglement of colour (white, rust, blood) and matter (door, flaky paint, carvings) that affects both the narrator through its thing-power and the reader by transmitting an impression of pain. This impression, however, does not last long because towards the ending of this vignette the atmosphere changes and we move from an atmosphere of unrest and pain to a calm, peaceful and beautiful scene. When stepping out of her flat again to see if the paint sticks to the door now, snow begins to fall: "Snow had begun to scatter down. Outside, the alley had darkened; the street lights were not yet on. Paint tin in one hand, brush in the other, I stood unmoving, a dumb witness to the snowflakes' slow descent, like hundreds of feathers feathering down" (11). This passage contains many motifs that we will encounter throughout the whole text: the covering effect of snow, the descent of white snow in darkness, the muffling effect of snow and the resulting silence, the attentive observation of landscape and colour and, finally, the contrast of beauty and brutality, here evoked by the softness of presumably white feathers in contrast to the sharp, bloody scars in the door. The descending snow slowly covers the world in white and is thus evocative of the narrator's attempt to cover the "scar-laced surface" (10) of the door. Yet, as much as her attempt to paint the door in an even white finish has been futile, so is the snow cover only a temporary coating, too. For the narrator, "hiding would be impossible" (6) – as she has already remarked before – and memories begin to surface from the next vignette on.

While all vignettes (except two)[13] visually appear in a similar way including an italicised heading and a prose text corpus that tends into the direction of "prose poems" (Wuertz), the vignettes are structured in three parts. We move from part one "I" (3) to part two "She" (43) and finally to "All Whiteness" (135). In part one, the narrator sets the scene and introduces us to her story. We get to know that the narrator is in a city unfamiliar to her, she "came abroad in August, to this country [she had] never visited before, got a short-term lease on a flat in its capital, and learned to draw out [her] days in these strange environs" (6). This flat is the one with the stained white door. In this strange city, she wants to write about "white things" (5) and in the second vignette, entitled "*Swaddling bands*" (15), we delve right into the story. We witness how her mother is giving birth to a girl who dies shortly after she came

13 The introductory pages to part one (5) and three (137) have no heading.

into the world. This intimate scene unfolds over the length of two vignettes and pulls the reader deep into an atmosphere in which they can sense the mother's suffering. Again, the colours white and red build the colour palette in this scene, this time in form of swaddling bands, newborn gown and blood whereas before it was the white door, snow and rusty scratches. In true lyric essay style, *The White Book* accretes by association. More and more memories rise up in the narrator and she asks herself: "Why do old memories constantly drift to the surface, here in this unfamiliar city?" (21). Towards the end of part one, the narrator imagines how it would be if her sister had survived these first hours and this thought triggers another idea: "And I think of her coming here instead of me. To this curiously familiar city, whose death and life resemble her own" (37). The association she draws between the city and her sister turns the city from a strange into a familiar one, even if she never got to know her sister in person. The narrator decides to give her sister white things and thus, a "life" (40). In part two, "She" (43), the narrator writes her sister into being along a collection of white things. Each thing unfolds a certain experience, observation or memory – imagined by the narrator for her dead sister. By means of these white things, the narrator finds a way to establish a communication channel with her dead sister. The vignettes are a place where they can meet. It is striking that while in part one the vignettes are predominantly longer than one page, the length is now mainly reduced to one page. This highlights the impression of these white things actually functioning as tokens from which short bits of association, observation or memory can unfold. In this part, the narrator's and her sister's lives merge and we can no longer be sure what memories and experiences actually are the narrator's own and which are imagined for her sister alone. It seems as if she gives not only *a* life to her sister but her own. The narrative situation also changes in part two to third person narration – with one exception: "*Clouds*" (111) is narrated in first person plural, bringing sister and narrator together by grammatical means. In part three, the two persons disentangle again, the narrative situation shifts back to first person narration and as if the title of part three, "All Whiteness" (135), had material effects on the page, the text length stays reduced to one page per vignette, allowing more whiteness to surround the text. With this, the vignettes' content becomes again primarily concerned with the death of the narrator's sister, embracing the "shattered memories" (137) of her mother, which are a consequence of this death, and the perspective of her

father on burying her sister. The narrator imagines how it would have been to actually have an older sister, an "*Onni*" (145), and returns to thoughts about her living relatives, that is, to her brother (149) and her son (157). In the very final vignette, she then parts from her sister whom she had given a life in these pages. This parting is, however, a compassionate and hopeful one, as she states: "Within that white, all of those white things, I will breathe in the final breath you released" (161), thereby as it were incorporating the life she has given to her sister through writing and enabling her sister to live on as a part of herself. As the reader turns the page after this line, they encounter a couple of blank white pages. Whether these pages are intentionally added after the end of the text or whether they are the result of pragmatic conventions due to the printing process, we cannot know. Yet, these white blank pages fulfil an important function here as the "breath" (161) which the narrator takes in can be as it were sensed in the following whiteness of the paper. The text ends on the narrator taking in the breath, she is not releasing it. At some point though, she may continue breathing and perhaps this breath wafts through these pages then.

While part one and part three are mainly engaged in conveying the story of *The White Book* revolving around the birth and death of the narrator's sister, part two is the section in which white becomes most palpable and can be experienced as a constitutive actant in the process of meaning-making. At the beginning of part two, vignettes concerned with white weather phenomena accumulate. While "*Fog*" (21) is the only vignette concerned with weather in part one, we now delve into a whole climate that is in the grip of "*Rime*" (45), "*Frost*" (47), "*Snow*" (53), "*Snowflakes*" (55), "*Perpetual snow*" (57), "*Sleet*" (61) and "*Blizzard*" (69). Such an attention to gradations of change in weather phenomena recalls the traditional differentiating of the four seasons into twenty-four micro seasons, or "solar terms" (Schulz 93), in Korea.[14] These

14 A heightened awareness for fine nuances of weather conditions has a long tradition in Korea due to the use of the "lunar calendar" over "thousands of years": "While the Gregorian calendar is the official calendar in Korea today, the lunar calendar [...] has greatly influenced almost every aspect of traditional Korean life" and it "is closely tied to agriculture, fishery, and the daily (civil) life of most of [sic] Koreans, as well as to religious and cultural observances and geomancy" (Schulz 87). This system "was adopted from China" (94) and the

> lunar calendar was divided into four seasons corresponding to the four sea-

include, for example, seasons called "White Dew" or "Frost's Descent" in autumn while winter solar terms include "Slight Snow" or "Great Cold" (94). In *The White Book*, the weather vignettes, as I call them, build up their own unique microclimate and it is a very challenging undertaking to describe the atmosphere we get enveloped by in the intra-action with the text, since my own words will always fall short in conveying the actual reading experience. By picking out some scenes, the atmosphere can hardly be grasped and I highly recommend to my reader to delve into this cold whiteness themselves. For the time being, I will try to describe in the best way possible the whiteness that unfolds from these pages. Already the first vignette in part two develops complex dynamics and layers of associations emerging from white rime:

> *Rime*
> The window not quite flush in its frame, allowing rime to form on its glass. Midwinter. That pattern of frozen white recalled the snow ice that forms on a stream's surface. The writer Park T'ae-won said that just such a window had drawn his gaze when his first daughter was born, hence the name he coined for her: Seol-yeong. Snow flower.
> She'd once seen the sea itself frozen over. An unusually shallow stretch of water, compounded by a cold current, had formed serried ranks of frozen waves, like layer upon layer of dazzling white flowers captured in the moment of unfurling. She saw frozen fish strewn over the sandy shore, the hard glint of their scales. On such days, the people of that region say 'the sea is rimed over'. (*The White Book* 45)

This meditation on rime, which immediately brings white to my mind and lets me sense the cold, moves from an observation of a rime pattern on a win-

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> sons of the Western calendar, and was further subdivided into twenty-four periods called "solar terms." Each of the four seasons comprises six solar terms, representing the progression of the season, which regulated the work of farming and fishing. (93)

According to Schulz, "many calendars used in Korea today continue to indicate lunar dates and Solar Terms alongside the corresponding Gregorian date" (87).

dow to the "snow ice […] on a stream's surface" to a Korean writer who, on a similar observation, names his daughter "Snow flower". This first paragraph is told from a kind of disembodied figural perspective probably conveying the narrator's voice. With the second paragraph comes a cut in perspective and we begin to see the world through the eyes of "[s]he". We can assume that *she* is the narrator's sister whom the narrator now gives her own memories, sense experiences, observations and thoughts. The sister remembers a situation when "the sea itself was frozen over" and after describing this scene in detail, the vignette turns in on itself, ending on rime again; this time, however, by a saying of the people living in a certain "region". The location of this region is not clarified and thus I am asking myself a question, the answer to which I can only guess: is it a region in Korea or in this strange city where the narrator dwells? This vignette performs a double movement: by turning in on itself, concluding with a variation of the beginning (rime at the beginning was part of an observation, in the end, it is part of a saying), it finds a certain closure; yet, by accreting associations and by triggering questions in the reader through ambiguous aspects, the text is also permeable. The description of the frozen sea in the second paragraph indirectly draws connections to other vignettes that can be activated by the reader as like "layer upon layer" the ice laid itself over the sea; it is a covering and coating that recalls the gauze and the falling snow from the very beginning of *The White Book*. This time, the layers are made of "dazzling white flowers captured in the moment of unfurling". It depicts the very moment of "unfurling" – an in-between state, no longer closed but also not yet open. These flowers are ice flowers on the frozen current, reminiscent of the name "Snow flower" which the writer has given to his daughter, the narrator's sister. At the same time, it is reminiscent of the sister herself who, as we know from part one, died shortly after coming into the world, in a state of unfurling, so to say. This is a rather cruel association to me, connecting the suffering and pain of this experience with the beauty of these "white flowers". This contrast is further enhanced in the lines that follow: "She saw frozen fish strewn over the sandy shore, the hard glint of their scales". Here, then, death and beauty also fall together. The sentence only describes what "[s]he" sees, in a calm voice – no interpreting, no mentioning of death. But while the image perceptually may evoke a quite beautiful scene with the glint of scales shining and glittering on the sand, "frozen fish" on the shore are dead fish and this insight is emphasised by describing the glint

of their scales as "hard". Observation, perception, memory, associations, idiom – all these aspects are permeated by white in this scene. Through their complex entanglements these aspects build a unique sensuous space in which also the reader becomes entangled: we can as it were feel the icy coldness that enables rime to build and even the sea to freeze, and can add our own associations to this white scene.

Similar to Nan Shepherd, the narrator of *The White Book* is an expert in attentive observation of her surroundings, including the play of colour, as an example from part one illustrates:

> *Certain objects in the darkness*
> Certain objects appear white in the darkness.
> When darkness is imbued with even the faintest light, even things which would not otherwise be white glow with a hazy pallor.
> At night, I make up the sofa bed in the corner of the living room and lie down in that wan light. Instead of trying to sleep, I wait, feel my senses attune to the passage of time. The trees outside the window cast silhouettes onto the white plaster wall. I think about the person who resembles this city, pondering the cast of their face. Waiting for its contours to coalesce, to be able to read the expression it holds. (29)

We are back with the narrator here. In a similar movement as in the rime vignette, the text unfolds from an attentive observation to the surfacing of her dead sister. It requires a patient way of observing to recognise this subtle white effect of "a hazy pallor" of things illuminated by "wan light". She "attune[s]" her senses in this dim light "to the passage of time" and while observing the shades of trees on the room's "white plaster wall" she waits for the thing to appear in the dark for which she is actually looking: her sister's face.

On the one hand, the narrator thus practises attentiveness through quiescence while other times she describes how her sister wanders through the city and encounters white things that trigger further thoughts. This is also reminiscent of Shepherd's twofold practice of attentiveness and it attests the merit and effectivity of this method in detecting the entanglement between colour,

matter and observer. We are back in part two, following the sister through the streets of the city:

> *Wings*
> It was on the outskirts of this city that she saw the butterfly. A single white butterfly, wings folded on a reed bed, one November morning. No butterflies had been seen since summer; where could this one have been hiding? The air temperature had plummeted in the previous week, and it was perhaps on account of its wings frequently freezing that the white colour had leached from them, leaving certain parts close to transparent. So clear, they shimmer with the black earth's reflection. Only a little time is needed now, and the whiteness will leave those wings completely. They will become something other, no longer wings, and the butterfly will be something that is no longer butterfly. (49)

This vignette beautifully confronts us with the transience of life. This butterfly is suspended between life and death. It has folded its wings and is no longer fluttering through the air. Miraculously, it has survived some days of cold but has already suffered from it as its wings' "white colour had leached from them, leaving certain parts close to transparent". It is a neutral and attentive observation with no sense of pity for this small creature. The leaving of white, of this opaque colour, indicates the coming death. The wings are already "[s]o clear, they shimmer with the black earth's reflection". When the whiteness will be gone, the wings "will become something other, no longer wings, and the butterfly will be something that is no longer butterfly". This vignette transmits a perspective on death which is not frightening at all as death is conceived not as a final end but the beginning of something new. Is this a conception the narrator also wants to envision for her dead sister? Like the butterfly, her dead sister may also have "become something other". Perhaps, we encounter one possibility of what her sister became in the very text we read, since the narrator gives her a life in *The White Book*.

While white in the examples discussed so far has mainly evoked a rather

cold and wan atmosphere, it makes itself strongly felt in other ways, too. One of the most affective scenes in *The White Book* may be "*Breast Milk*":

> The twenty-two-year-old woman lies alone in the house. Saturday morning, with the first frost still clinging to the grass, her twenty-five-year-old husband goes up the mountain with a spade to bury the baby who was born yesterday. The woman's puffy eyes will not open properly. The various hinges of her body ache, swollen knuckles smart. And then, for the first time, she feels warmth flood into her chest. She sits up, clumsily squeezes her breast. First a watery, yellowish trickle, then smooth white milk. (35)

At the end of this vignette, the image of warm and "smooth white milk" stays with me while the horror of the just read vignette slowly settles. Here, the warm whiteness, evolving out of a "yellowish trickle", is not stylised into a symbol of life. In a descriptive mode, the scene calmly narrates the day after birth when the narrator's mother is alone and her body is still sore from giving birth. This rather calm, descriptive and distanced narrative situation together with the palpable "smooth white milk" enhances the horror of this situation and transmits feelings of astonishment on milk flooding "into her chest" as well as agony when I realise that this happens the very moment the father buries the child. An association coming to my mind is Paul Celan's "Schwarze Milch" (63) (black milk) in his famous poem "Todesfuge". But Han manages to produce the horrors of this image in which life and death fall together without the help of oxymoronic rhetoric and by staying in the realm of white shades alone. Through the detailed observation that slowly unfolds in the vignette, first by feeling the warmth of milk and then by seeing a "watery, yellowish trickle" before "smooth white milk" follows, she imbues white with a sensuous quality that has, to use Macé's words, "lasting repercussions beyond the written page" (228).

Another white thing, a "*White pebble*" (*The White Book* 101), has similar strong effects, this time for the sister. When finding it "on a beach", "[s]he brushed off the sand and placed it in her pocket, then put it away in a drawer at home" (101). She does not seem to be very interested in it, yet something

must have caused her to pick it up and take it with her. The reason for this does not seem to be clear to her from the beginning on. Somehow this white pebble exerted a certain thing-power that caused this reaction. As the text continues it becomes clear that it has something to do with the pebble's colour:

> A pebble worn smooth and round by the waves' long caress. To her, its whiteness seemed almost transparent, but when she tried to peer inside it she found she'd been mistaken. (In fact, it was a perfectly ordinary white pebble.) Now and then she got it out and sat it on her palm. If silence could be condensed into the smallest, most solid object, this is how it would feel, she thought. (101)

Its whiteness, which strangely oscillates between opaqueness and transparency, fascinates her and moves her to "[sit] it on her palm" in order to watch it closely. She is not really interested in the fact that to others this might be just an "ordinary white pebble" as the remark in brackets shows. Finally, she seems to gain an understanding of this strange fascination that emanates from this pebble: it transmits a feeling of materialised silence to her. A silence she can carry with her. Perhaps this pebble establishes a communication channel based on silence through which narrator and sister can meet. Such a communication channel would work in two directions: while it is actually the narrator who writes her sister's experience of this white pebble and silence into being (the narrator creates this experience for her), this silence now *speaks back* to the narrator – and also to the reader. Silence, as substantial whiteness, is not an absence but a way of communication.

In part three of *The White Book*, we are back with the narrator's voice in first person narration and she reflects on what has just happened in part two when she gave a life to her sister by means of white things:

> I saw differently when I looked with your eyes. I walked differently when I walked with your body. I wanted to show you clean things. Before brutality, sadness, despair, filth, pain, clean things that were

> only for you, clean things above all. But it didn't come off as I intended. (139)

In the end, the narrator has to realise what we as readers have experienced all the time while reading: there is no pure or sterile whiteness; white is always already textured by different shades, tactile qualities or feelings.

The texture of white in *The White Book* is not only created by layout and language but also by interspersed black-and-white photographs that establish an intermedial dialogue with the text and which are thus another actant in the process of meaning-making. The pictures comprise photographs and film stills "taken by Choi Jinhyuk of performance art Han made for the book's Korean launch" (Wuertz). Both textual vignettes and photographs are key in *The White Book's* meaning-making. It is not unlikely for a lyric essay to "include visual images […] further complicating the lyric essay's often allusive and suggestive reading experience" (Hetherington & Robertson, "Essaying Images" 371). In contrast to Walsh, who expresses her doubts about the role of "the inclusion of seven black-and-white photographs" because she thinks that they "hint at a misjudged lack of confidence in the words" (42), I believe that these photographs play an essential role in experiencing *The White Book* by enriching the texture of white we encounter in the text even further. In fact, the photographs assist in "opening the text to new, sometimes unresolvable interpretations and foregrounding the forms and in-between spaces in which image and text interact" (Hetherington & Robertson, "Essaying Images" 380).

As Walsh observes, the woman depicted in the photographs is "presumably Han" (42) and we can see various elements in these pictures that also appear in the text. Walsh lists them as "a white pebble, swaddling bands, a newborn's gown" (42). While Walsh clearly identifies the objects in the photographs, to me they are far from being unambiguous. The object Walsh identifies as a white pebble could also be a "bright white shape[…] of rice dough" (*The White Book* 19) as the narrator remembers her mother describing her sister's face. In the photograph on page forty-one, we can see something round and smooth lying in the palm of a hand. This round thing appears to be sprinkled with small crystals of salt or sugar. Looking at this photograph is

a very tactile experience. The smoothness palpably presses through the page and I feel the desire to touch it in order to find out how it feels, soft or hard; but for sure, it appears cold to me, probably due to its smooth surface. I even wish to taste the small crystals to find out whether they taste salty or sweet. Like the other photographs, too, this one adds another layer of visual-tactile complexity to the text; and in this instance also the sense of taste is addressed. The visual sense alone is not enough to resolve the ambiguity of what we actually see (pebble or rice dough / salt or sugar crystals), it would need the tactile and gustatory sense to make sure. However, we will never be able to touch or taste this thing and thus, ambiguity remains.

As the photographs interrupt the text by being interspersed throughout the whole book, we repeatedly try to draw connections between text and images. In the case of the white pebble/rice dough photograph, the link seems to be obvious: on the page before, the narrator proposes "[n]ow I will give you white things" (40) and then we see this white thing held into the camera, a thing the narrator may give to her sister, presented to the reader. Other photographs cannot be interpreted this easily. Later in the book, inserted between the vignettes "*White pebble*" (101) and "*White bone*" (105), we encounter a photograph printed over two pages (102-03). As we have seen in the very first photograph (13) a woman leaning over white fabric in her lap in a posture which assumes that she is trying to thread a needle, and as we have read a vignette on "*Newborn gown*" (17) before, we can interpret the piece of clothing we see in the photograph on pages 102-03 as the newborn gown, which two hands hold into the camera. Small threads on the person's lap indicate the cutting and sewing process that appears to have just been completed. The gown seems to be made of white gauze, perhaps another link to the beginning ("gauze laid over a wound" (6)). But why is this photograph inserted in this position? It interrupts the flow of reading and we cannot make sense of it in light of the immediately surrounding passages "*White pebble*" and "*White bone*". It seems as if the series of photographs establishes an independent plot, while it is still possible for the reader "to discern – or construct – a relationship between the essay's text and its accompanying […] visual imagery" (Hetherington & Robertson, "Essaying Images" 372). The photographs burst the three-part structure of *The White Book* and thus function in a manner similar to the one which Hetherington and Robertson identify as a characteristic of lyric essays:

> many lyric essays […] do not use images as simple 'illustrations'. Rather, these images are often incorporated within lyric essays as part of their perambulating and discursive forms. They speak back to the written text that they accompany, or which accompanies them, but they do so in sometimes puzzling, unsettling and provocative ways, allowing images to prompt new thoughts and conceptual frameworks for the reader. ("Essaying Images" 372)

In doing so, such intermediality especially requires the involvement of the reader in the process of meaning-making and they can draw connections which otherwise would not have come into existence: "The reader is called upon to become active in interpreting [the] shifting interplay of text and image, often engaging in multiple and competing readings of the material presented" (379).

So far, we have tried to discern *what* we can see and how this affects us, and what the photographs may *signify* on their own or in connection to the text. Yet, these photographs can also be explored by focusing on the extremely nuanced shades of grey. While the typeface of the text in black creates a stark contrast to the white page, the photos add layers of grey to the material colourscape of the book. Throughout my reading, I have become more and more aware of these nuances of grey in the photographs as my attentiveness, and with this also my senses, have probably attuned to the facets of colour by reading the meditations on white. Asking myself what the watering of this white pebble/rice dough thing in the photograph on page sixty-seven (which we have already encountered in the photograph before on page forty-one) may signify, I become aware of the orchestration of light and shadow in this picture. Unable to draw a connection to the text that just dealt with a "*White dog*" (63), I begin to turn to the photograph's visual qualities. We can see hands coming out of the darkness on the upper margin and pouring water over the white round thing held over a small bowl with water inside. The bowl is placed on a table seemingly covered by a piece of white cloth. The bowl itself is white, too, and casts thin shadows where it stands on the table. While the person's forearms, appearing out of the darkness in which the rest of the person is concealed, are half cast in grey shadow and half in light, the bowl stands fully in the light. The hands also cast shadows on the water's surface

and this reminds me of Tanizaki's words on East Asian aesthetics that "find[s] beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates" (30). A close up of the photograph just discussed can be found on page 155 and there, the shadows created by hands and bowl even increase and thus enhance a visual-tactile experience of water trickling down, evoking associations of smoothness, wetness, cleanness and coldness. The grey shades, as spaces in-between white and black, may hint to the in-between spaces that are also characteristic of *The White Book* in total. They point to the in-between spaces which "neither text nor image alone fully inhabit" (Hetherington & Robertson, "Essaying Images" 373) and "convey a sense of the frequently unresolvable complexities of experience" (371), especially in the reading of *The White Book*.

## 6.2 WHITESCAPES

Slowly reading into *The White Book*, we get enveloped by whiteness. While we find ourselves in white colourscapes already when engaging with the layout or the photographs in *The White Book*, there are also *whitescapes*, as I want to call them, materially-discursively emerging in the intra-action between text and reader. In the section above on the texture of white, we saw how such whitescapes can affect the reader and entangle them in complex relationalities of matter, colour and feeling. While all whitescapes take their 'origin' in this intra-action, the *way* we encounter these whitescapes differs and we gain access via different senses. In the following, I want to focus on *how* these whitescapes involve us. Three 'types' of whitescapes can be discovered: visual, acoustic and tactile ones. Of course, one cannot approach each whitescape with one sense alone, we always experience the world with all our senses. But, as we are able to use primarily one sense in certain encounters with the world *out there*, we can do so, too, in the encounter with different whitescapes. In the reading process, though, it is not the reader who decides which sense to use but the text activates a specific sense in the reader.

We have already encountered visual whitescapes in the vignettes "*Rime*" (45), "*Certain objects in the darkness*" (29) or "*Wings*" (49). In these vignettes, looking is the dominant activity through which white is conveyed to the reader. The sister recounts observations in which white has the potential to also

unfold visually in the reader's imagination and makes itself felt in the diverse ways presented earlier. We further encounter acoustic whitescapes in which emptiness and silence play a dominant role. One example can be found in the vignette "*Snowflakes*" and the passage I want to discuss is preceded by a disturbing encounter between the sister and "a man lying at the foot of a telegraph pole" (55). First, she wonders whether he is "drunk" and she should call an "ambulance", but when the "man heaved himself half up and focused his blank gaze on her" she "walked on with hurried steps" (55). The following lines are then narrated from the man's perspective:

> thinking of what his life has been,
> of the loneliness that waits for him at home,
> thinking what is this, what the hell is this
> damned dirty white
> falling snow.
>
> (55)

In the face of this wretchedness, the text is interrupted by a small asterix and then, on the next page, follow the lines I would like to discuss:

> Sparse flakes fly in all directions.
> In the black air where the street lights do not touch.
> Whirled above the black branches of wordless trees.
> Brushing against the bowed heads trudging through the night.
>
> (56)

The effect of these lines is strongly reminiscent of Barnstone's discussion of the poem "River Snow" by Liu Zongyuan, which I have introduced earlier. Han's lines also unfold a strong imagery that is, however, reverse to the one in "River Snow" because here, "[s]parse snowflakes" whirl around in "black air".

Yet, it is the white, too, that is paradoxically in the foreground when reading the lines, as snowflakes take over the active role. The scenery already evokes a quiet atmosphere in which snowflakes dynamically but silently whirl around at night. Yet, there is also another silence we encounter in these lines. Like in Liu Zongyuan's poem, "silence […] seep[s] in around the edges" (Barnstone 71) and its emptiness defines the meaning we read into these very words. White, in Han's lines, may not stand in for emptiness in terms of the evoked visual scene (emptiness may rather be black here), yet emptiness can be experienced in the very silence between and around the lines. Every sentence is a short meditation on its own that can be contemplated in this stillness. While reading these lines slowly, sentence by sentence, I attune myself, both body and mind, to the silence in-between the lines and settle into a calm and tranquil mood. As Barnstone points out for "River Snow", "[w]e walk into this poem as if walking into a building, and the spaces that open up around us and the forms that revise themselves at each step unfold" (68). Again, we encounter a movement *into* – an important feature of an attentive reading and part of Shepherd's practice of attentiveness. The silence building around the sentences allows the reader to experience and perhaps also evaluate the passage in light of the preceding passage about the disturbing encounter with the man on the street. Diverse associations can resonate in the echo chamber of the empty silence coming with these poetic word sketches. As whiteness visually builds around these words like whirling snowflakes and shapes their form on the page, silence (which this whiteness produces by surrounding the semantically meaningful words) also shapes these words' semantics. Hence, the lines become only fully meaningful as they are entangled with this silent whitescape. And here, we can draw a link to Hara's remark quoted earlier, namely that "the application of white is able to create a forceful energy for communication" (*White* 36). The acoustic whitescape of this vignette, understood as an *empty silence*, communicates with the reader and bears the potential for diverse associations to arise, some of which I have just offered in my attentive reading above.

Other whitescapes evoke primarily the sense of touch as it is the case in "*Lace curtain*" (77) or "*Sugar cubes*" (93). The latter make a strong claim on the sister:

> Those squares wrapped in white paper possessed an almost unerring perfection, surely too perfect for her. She peeled the paper carefully off and brushed a finger over that granular surface. She crumbled a corner, touched it to her tongue, nibbled at that dizzying sweetness, then eventually placed it in a cup of water and sighed as she watched it melt away. (93)

To her, such perfect whiteness is connected to "something precious" (93), which may also explain why she nearly caresses this piece of food. It is not enough to only look at this piece of sugar, she has to take it into her hands, feel the paper as well as the granular surface of the sugar cube. She then "touche[s]" it to her tongue – note the word choice here – and only tastes a tiny bit of its sweetness, not swallowing it but letting it dissolve in water, taking pleasure in watching this perfect white "melt away". It is a very sensuous passage which narrates, step by step, the tactile encounter with this white thing, thereby letting the reader relish this experience, too, and share it with her. Another example in which a "pristine" (77) white captures her is in the encounter with a piece of fabric and she asks herself: "Is it because of some billowing whiteness within us, unsullied, inviolate, that our encounters with objects so pristine never fail to leave us moved?" (77). When she sees, on her strolls through the city, a "flimsy lace curtain" hanging in a building, it immediately unfolds an association:

> There are times when the crisp white of freshly laundered bed linen can seem to speak. When that pure-cotton fabric grazes her bare flesh, just there, it seems to tell her something. You are a noble person. Your sleep is clean, and the fact of your living is nothing to be ashamed of. Such is the strange comfort she receives, at that in-between time when sleep borders wakefulness, when that crisp cotton bedsheet brushes her skin. (77)

The white linen is anthropomorphised and seems to "speak" or "tell her something". But this communication does not happen through words; it is touch

that makes it happen on a non-semantic level when the "pure-cotton fabric grazes her bare flesh". This touching is pleasant and establishes a communication channel between the "crisp white" and the sister's body.

What all whitescapes have in common is that the experience of whiteness is far from a total whiteout experience in which the surroundings of oneself are completely obliterated by white and nothing except a white space can be visually perceived.[15] The whiteness surrounding the reader in the reading of *The White Book* is rather textured, nuanced and complex. While we have seen how some vignettes address primarily one sense, there are also examples in which our senses are addressed in their complexity. I want to illustrate this effect by means of a vignette in which the narrator describes an experience that might evoke a whiteout:

> The early hours of morning, and the city is cloaked in fog. The border between sky and earth has been scrubbed out. The only view my window offers is the blurred suggestion of two poplars, ink-wash contours wavering four or five metres up from where the street lies hidden; all else is white. (21-22)

Interestingly, the narrator does not recall a total whiteout here but she can

15 A whiteout is "[a] disorienting meteorological condition of a continuous white cloud layer over open snow or ice-covered ground, in which neither shadows nor the horizon can be seen and physical features are lost in the background" (*OED*, "whiteout, n."). For human beings caught in whiteouts, the situation is often a dangerous and sometimes even life-threatening experience due to the loss of orientation or failure to see hidden obstacles. Nan Shepherd describes such a situation in *The Living Mountain* when she walks "inside of a cloud" in the Cairngorms with two companions:

> alone in that whiteness [...] we climbed an endless way. Nothing altered. Once, our ghostly mentor held us each firmly by an arm and said, 'That's Loch Etchachan down there.' Nothing. The whiteness was perhaps thicker. It was horrible to stand and stare into that pot of whiteness. The path went on. And now to the side of us there was a ghastlier white, spreading and swallowing even the grey-brown earth our minds had stood on. We had come to the snow. A white as of non-life. (17)

still see the outline of trees, whose blurry, "ink-wash contours" even enhance the impression that "all else is white". This image strongly recalls Tohaku's ink painting *Pine Trees*, which has already been shortly introduced earlier, in which pine trees emerge out of the white space of the canvas. This white space, created by the blank canvas, evokes the impression of fog lapping around the trees and partially obliterating their outlines. The intra-play of white space (which is actually the absence of black pigment, the absence of form) and the brush strokes in different gradations of ink creates a dynamic atmosphere that is at the same time permeated by stillness. In this regard, *Pine Trees* is highly reminiscent of the scene evoked by the narrator of *The White Book* and the following description of the painting supports this comparison:

> the pines comprise four main groups and are arranged in a way that suggests the wind blowing through them. Different intensities of light are expressed through ink gradations, giving life to this misty pine grove. Various techniques and visual devices were used to portray this grove, where a gentle light shines through the gaps in the mist, snowy mountains appear in the distance, and cold, moist air pervades the scene. Together with the effect of the glossy ink, it is as though the viewer can feel the breeze and perceive a refreshing scent from the pines. (*Tokyo National Museum*, "National Treasure Gallery: Pine Trees")

Reading the scene in *The White Book* creates similar impressions: the poplars are also "wavering" (21) in the foggy air outside the window and "[t]he early hours of the morning" (21) suggest a cool and refreshing air outside that makes itself felt by only looking at it, since the narrator is actually inside her room. These impressions are also transferred to the reader. While the viewer of *Pine Trees* can seemingly "feel the breeze and perceive a refreshing scent from the pines" (*Tokyo National Museum*, "National Treasure Gallery: Pine Trees"), so does the reader of this fog scene in *The White Book* seemingly *feel* the moist air, *hear* the muffled soundscape created by the fog and *see* the whitescape of fog outside the window. Different senses become activated in this experience and we are completely enveloped in whiteness.

In *The White Book*, language is not the only decisive actant in the process of meaning-making and the creation of white colour-matter. The material book itself with the white space around the vignettes and the photographs are decisive actants in this process, too, and contribute to an involved reading that activates experiential qualities. *The White Book* does not split white into its spectral colours but into shades and textured shapes of white things – entangling the reader with the materiality of white and its material-discursive meaning-making. We have explored various ways in which white makes itself felt on the content level, on the page and also in the entanglement with the reader. By means of an attentive reading, we have practised attentiveness towards the material-discursive doings of white colour-matter and its contribution to the production of complex meanings. At the same time, we have been open for getting involved in the text, creating our own associations and dwelling in the generated colourscapes. White as a presence is produced in the intra-action of text and reader and it slowly enfolds the reader into its whitescape. In the last vignette, "*All whiteness*", the narrator states:

> With your eyes, I will see the deepest, most dazzling place within a white cabbage, the precious young petals concealed at its heart.
> With your eyes, I will see the chill of the half-moon risen in the day.
> At some point those eyes will see a glacier. They will look up at that enormous mass of ice and see something sacred, unsullied by life.
> They will see inside the silence of the white birch forest. Inside the stillness of the window, where the winter sun seeps in. Inside those shining grains of dust, swaying along the shafts of light which slant onto the ceiling.
> Within that white, all of those white things, I will breathe in the final breath you released. (161)

As the narrator's perception has obviously sharpened by looking with her sister's eyes, the reader's perception of white has also been sharpened through the entanglement with the text's uniquely textured whitescapes and the active involvement in the text's different ways of meaning-making. By being attentive to *The White Book's* various doings, the reader becomes enveloped

in whiteness, suspended between a complex intra-play of form and emptiness: while on a visual level it is the *black* words that give *form* to the text's semantics on a blank white page, it is *white* that is a *presence* and *form* on the semantic and material-discursive level. At a second glance, as we have seen above, this 'blank' white space of the page is, however, not an absence, but, in line with conceptions of emptiness, it is rather a presence. Similar to the potential of "an empty vessel, not [understood] as a negative state, but in terms of its capability to be filled with something" (Hara, *White* 39), the white space surrounding the words on the page also allows the reader to create their own associations, to knot connections with and between the vignettes, and to become entangled with the texture of white.

# 7 DESIRING BLUE: MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE INTERFERENCES IN MAGGIE NELSON'S *BLUETS*

In his *Theory of Colours*, Goethe observes that "[a]s the upper sky and distant mountains appear blue, so a blue surface seems to retire from us" and further that "we love to contemplate blue, not because it advances us, but because it draws us after it" (311). Blue, in the West, is usually associated with distance; it is detached, calm, peaceful; no excitement can be found in blue – it is the colour of the sky and the ocean, of vast expanses.[1] Michel Pastoureau, an expert in the history and symbolism of colour, confirms that blue's "semantic field evokes the sky, the sea, repose" but also "love, travel, vacations, the infinite" (*Blue* 180). It is "one of blue's essential characteristics in Western color symbolism" that "it doesn't make waves, but is calm, pacified, distant, almost neutral. It invites revery" (180). Further, "[i]t does not shock, offend, or disgust", it is "not aggressive", "neither violent nor transgressive" – on the contrary, "it reassures and draws together" (180). Many writers and artists draw on such associations. Rebecca Solnit, for example, writes about "the blue of distance" and how blue light is "light that does not touch us" (29).[2] For Derek Jarman, "[b]lue is infinite" (*Chroma* 67) and he presents the audience of his film *Blue* with an unchanging blue screen, with "the universal Blue" drawing the spectator into a space of "infinite possibil-

1 For more examples of associations, symbolic meaning, psychological effect and the sociocultural history of blue, see Heller (23-53) and Pastoureau (*Blue: The History of a Color*).

2 Solnit writes at length about the relation between blue and distance in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* and poetically provides a scientific explanation for this link:

> The world is blue at its edges and in its depths. This blue is the light that got lost. Light at the blue end of the spectrum does not travel the whole distance from the sun to us. It disperses among the molecules of the air, it scatters in water. Water is colorless, shallow water appears to be the color of whatever lies underneath it, but deep water is full of this scattered light, the purer the water the deeper the blue. The sky is blue for the same reason, but the blue at the horizon, the blue of land that seems to be dissolving into the sky, is a deeper, dreamier, melancholy blue, the blue at the farthest reaches of the places where you see for miles, the blue of distance. This light does not touch us, does not travel the whole distance, the light that gets lost, gives us the beauty of the world, so much of which is in the color blue. (29)

ity" (*Chroma* 112).[3] Wassily Kandinsky observes: "The deeper the blue the more it beckons man into the infinite, arousing a longing for purity and the supersensuous" and further that "[w]hen very dark, blue develops an element of repose" (64).

Far from repose, calmness, purity, infinity or distance is the blue we encounter in Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* (2009). In this colour writing, blue is full of excitement, of affective force, it is "blinding" (*Bluets* 3), "beating" (9), "touching" and "hurting" (30), it "*radiates*" (65, original emphasis) and above all, it sparks "desire" (e.g. 3, 27) in the narrator.[4] Blue is neither calm nor detached; on the contrary, it is moving close and putting the narrator "under a spell" (1). While Solnit tells us that "[f]or many years, [she has] been moved by the blue at the far edge of what can be seen, that color of horizons, of remote mountain ranges, of anything far away" (29), Nelson is fascinated by blues close by: "a little pile of powdered ultramarine pigment in a glass cup" arouses "a stinging desire" (*Bluets* 3) in her; when she sees photos of the satin bowerbird's "blue bowers", she says "I feel so much desire that I wonder if I might have been born into the wrong species" (27); and when she reads about the "Festival of Blue Horses" in Sei Shōnagon's *The Pillow Book* (11th century), in which "twenty-one glorious gray-blue horses from the Imperial stables are paraded in front of the Emperor" (49), she "feel[s] at once the need to die and be reborn one thousand years ago, so as to see this parade for [her]self" (49-50). Nelson does not want to contemplate a rather diffuse atmospheric blue, she does not want to keep a distance to blue, she rather wants

3 In *Chroma,* blue is not only associated with transcendence and infinity but also becomes "tangible" (112); this is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

4 Maggie Nelson is the author as well as the narrator in *Bluets*. I will refer to the narrating voice as Nelson's own voice throughout this chapter since "the author's circumstances certainly correspond with those of the speaker" (Parr 101). Yet, Nelson in *Bluets* is of course a construct of the text; whenever I explicitly refer to Nelson as the author, I will indicate this in brackets. Further, while the narrator is termed a *speaker* in other scholarly texts on *Bluets* (e.g. in Parr) – probably to point out the lyric quality of the text – and in some instances even by Nelson herself ("True Blue"), I will stick with the term *narrator* since Nelson also points out that she understands *Bluets* as a piece of prose rather than poetry: "BLUETS thinks in prose; it is written in prose" ("The Fragment" 161, original emphasis). She further remarks that "BLUETS always had [...] a sort of narrative arc" and is placed "in the realm of the novelistic" (160, original emphasis).

to get in close contact with different *materialities* of blue. Even as she says that her "love's primal scene" is the "half-circle of blinding turquoise ocean" (3) – which is the ocean seen at Muir Beach north of San Francisco (Nelson, "True Blue") – it is not a vast expanse of ocean she is describing but a confined, specific "half-circle" form which as it were densifies the blue.

*Bluets* is a lyric essay built of 240 "propositions" (*Bluets* 28) or 'bluets', as we learn from the title.[5] In an interview, Nelson (the author) explains that the text's form is inspired by Wittgenstein's and Goethe's writing:

> I basically took half of the book's locutions from Wittgenstein, and the other half from Goethe: the anecdotal locutions about perception come from [Goethe's] *Theory of Colours*, and the relentless form of self-questioning, of pulling the rug out from under the speaker each time she has come to perch, comes from [Wittgenstein's] *Philosophical Investigations*. (Nelson, "True Blue")

This influence already points to the mixture of personal and intellectual considerations of blue that we encounter in the text. *Bluets* interweaves different bits of "fact", that is, "those bits of world and word that derive from research, observation, and/or sensory perception" (Nelson, "All That Is the Case" 155). These "blue facts" ("True Blue") create the text's unique texture consisting of

5 Nelson (the author) elaborates on the choice of the word *bluets* for the title of her book and how this relates to the text's form:

> While it was in progress, I always called BLUETS "The Blue Book." But I knew I always wanted an eventual title that referred, however obliquely, to the book's form. In this case, the form is notably PLURAL, as is BLUETS, which seemed right. [...] I also liked the fact that the word means a kind of flower, as it allowed each proposition, or whatever you might call each numbered section, to be thought of as a single flower in a bouquet. ("The Fragment" 159, original emphasis)

In a talk, Nelson (the author) further explains that the plural *Bluets* stands for the sum of propositions we find in the book, in which each proposition is one bluet ("Nonfiction Dialogues" 00:22:25-00:22:33). Just like in the quotation above in which each bluet is part of a larger bouquet.

anecdotes of different blue things, the narrator's perception of blue and her desire for blue, other people's thoughts on blue, her feelings for her ex-lover, called the "prince of blue" (*Bluets* 6), and her empathy for a paralysed friend. Thus, the text revolves around the narrator's desire for the colour blue, around her 'feeling blue' as well as around feelings of pain, suffering, longing, desire, pleasure and the intricacies of their intra-play.[6] Nelson collects blue facts related to these topics and she (the author) elaborates on this: "I don't want to 'do' anything to facts, save apprehend, collect, articulate, arrange, and rearrange them" ("All That Is the Case" 157). This doing is infused by a "relentless form of self-questioning" ("True Blue") and enables her to explore the possibilities of what she can do to blue and what blue can do to her.

As we have already seen with *Chroma* and *The White Book*, critics understand the role of colour in these texts primarily as a means to convey other topics. In regard to *Bluets*, the situation is similar. Parsons observes that "*Bluets* is a mediation on color" – yet, in her understanding, colour is "used as a tool to help [Nelson] to untangle the intensity of her feelings resulting from loss" (376). The focus is not on colour itself, it is only a "tool", or a "medium" (379), through which to investigate other topics, or "a means by which to explore her grief and […] loneliness" (384). According to Parr, who focuses on the topic of shame in her analysis of *Bluets*, topics of *Bluets* entail "[e]cstasy and dullness; blindness and the gaze; the prevailing pains of the body, heart and spirit; and what-does-anything-ever-mean-anyway" (94) – colour is not part of this list. Later, Parr takes the colour blue into account and remarks that blue "seems to have journeyed quite far [in *Bluets*] – from love object to commodity to an embodiment of all things holy to a fading emblem of former obsessions" (113). Here, blue is understood as always pointing to or standing in for something else. While the topics listed above are all important in *Bluets*, I suggest that the central concern of this text, after all, is blue itself. I understand the colour blue as key in *Bluets*. Already the title prominently includes blue in its name. Yet, I do not think of blue in line with Parr, namely as "the metaphorical centre of the book" (108). This would fall too short.

6 Intended as a book about her love to blue, *Bluets* turns out to also be about pain, as Nelson (the author) explains: "I actively wanted to spend time writing and thinking about something I loved […]. So it began as a pillow book of sorts, a book devoted to pleasure. Because I am who I am, or because pleasure is what it is, the book slid pretty quickly into dealing with pain too" ("True Blue").

I would rather suggest that blue is an affective colour-actant which forges relationalities throughout the text with the narrator and also with the reader, as we will see in this chapter. Thus, blue deserves our full attention and a thorough analysis by means of an attentive reading with which we can detect the doings of blue and the relationalities in which the narrator as well as the reader become entangled.

Nelson (the author) herself foremost intended *Bluets* to be a "book devoted to pleasure" ("True Blue"). On the very first page, the narrator informs her readers that she "fell in love with a color – in this case, the color blue" (*Bluets* 1). This love for blue is not characterised by "sublimity" (3), as she tells us; on the contrary, it is a very corporeal love. We have seen in the examples earlier how the perception of blue, and even reading about it, sparks desire in her. Her reactions to blue are always urgent: it is a "stinging desire" (3), she experiences "so much desire" (27) that it even leads her to question her own existence by wondering whether she might not have better been born a bowerbird, and she feels "at once the need" (49) to travel back in time to see Shōnagon's blues herself. Her affection for, or even addiction to blue does not distinguish between beautiful, mundane or 'ugly' blue things. About the ocean's blue she writes: "That this blue exists makes my life a remarkable one, just to have seen it. To have seen such beautiful things. To find oneself placed in their midst. Choiceless. I returned there yesterday and stood again upon the mountain" (3). Blue pulls her towards it (far from Goethe's observation, cited at the beginning of this chapter, that blue does not advance us but draws us after it); she has to physically go there and have a look again, to visually delve into this turquoise, to be in its "midst"; it is a "[c]hoiceless" happening. But then, the book – as we get told shortly after – will actually not be about beautiful things, "[i]t will not say, *Isn't X beautiful?* Such demands are murderous to beauty" (5, original emphasis). And it is true: not only blue things we would usually label 'beautiful' (such as gemstones or flowers) affect her but also "shreds of blue garbage bags stuck in brambles, or the bright blue tarps flapping over every shanty and fish stand in the world" (2). She has "amassed countless blue stones, blue shards of glass, blue marbles, trampled blue photographs peeled off sidewalks, pieces of blue rubble from broken buildings" and she admits: "though I can't remember where most of them came from, I love them nonetheless" (69). Her collection of blue things seems to be rather randomly put together – the only important selection criterion is the blue

colour. Yet, she discloses two exceptions: "not all blues thrill me. I am not overly interested in the matte [sic] stone of turquoise, for example, and a tepid, faded indigo usually leaves me cold" (14). From this example we can see that it is not necessarily the hue that decides whether a colour thrills her or not – she definitely loves the turquoise of the ocean. Hence, her affective reaction to blue is defined by the specific connection between colour and matter.

Blue colour-matter moves Nelson, it affects her and puts her under a spell. Affect is at work here and defines her relation to blue. While affect studies often focus on the affective capabilities of the human body, Jane Bennett opens the field of inquiry up to include also nonhumans and their affective capabilities.[7] Bennett points out that "[o]rganic and inorganic bodies, natural and cultural objects (these distinctions are not particularly salient here) *all* are affective" (*VM* xii, original emphasis). In her theory of a vital materialism, "material vibrancy" is equated with the idea of an "impersonal affect" (xiii). According to Bennett, affect is neither "transpersonal" nor "intersubjective" but "impersonal" as it is "intrinsic to forms that cannot be imagined (even ideally) as persons" (xii). The affective capabilities of nonhumans are no "spiritual supplement or 'life force' added to the matter said to house it", affect is no "separate force that can enter and animate a physical body" but she "equate[s] affect with materiality" (xiii). This equation stresses "the agency of the things that *produce* (helpful, harmful) effects in human and other bodies" (xii, original emphasis) and expands the capability to generate affects to the nonhuman realm. To say that affect is intrinsic to materiality, or even that it actually *is* materiality, is thus helpful for her concept to clarify that vibrant matter is not 'animated' from outside but is vibrant in and out of itself. In this view, affect is no longer defined as the force or intensity that moves *between* bodies, but it is intrinsic to bodies. For my attentive reading of the affective capabilities of blue colour-matter in *Bluets*, I want to think materiality also as vibrant and agential in a new materialist sense. Yet, I will still follow an understanding of affect that stresses its relational, in-between and dynamic character. In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth argue that "there is no pure or somehow originary state for affect" (1). Affect is highly relational and "found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances

7 See Gregg and Seigworth, pp. 6-9, for a list of main orientations in affect studies.

that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves" (1, original emphasis). Thus, affects are on the move, they are dynamic and transmitted from body to body. We have seen above that Gregg and Seigworth also use an inclusive understanding of bodies as they can be "human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise" (1). In their understanding, bodies are not "defined […] by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passage of affect" (2). In this co-participation in the transmission of affect, bodies become entangled and intra-act with each other. Affect is an integral part of this entanglement and thus it also is "integral to a body's perpetual *becoming* […], pulled beyond its seeming surface boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter" (3, original emphasis). This relational definition of affect by Gregg and Seigworth strongly recalls Karen Barad's agential realism and its concomitant understanding of reality: "The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization in the enactment of determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies" (*MtUH* 140). Affect is one component, or force, in this new materialist world view and by building various entanglements – for example, between the narrator and blue or between the reader and the text – affect contributes to the intra-active becoming of blue in the process of reading *Bluets*.[8]

As affects work through encounters, they "arise[…] in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (Gregg & Seigworth 1, original emphasis). In *Bluets*, both blue colour-matter and Nelson are capable of acting and being acted upon. Blue, for example, acts upon Nelson

8 An interest in affect has a long tradition in new materialist theories. New Materialists shift their interest away from "representation, signification and disciplinarity" and are instead "fascinated by affect, force, and movement as it travels in all directions" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 113). Hands also identifies key connective themes such as "vitality and autonomy, and immanence of matter and the foregrounding of affect. All are elements in the field that have come to underpin a 'post-human' ontology and ethics" (137). Gregg and Seigworth, too, draw connections between affect and materiality when they locate their work in "the affective bloom-space of an ever-processual materiality" (9). They further point out that while New Materialists may "not always explicitly invok[e] affect or theories of affect [they] draw[…] from them nonetheless" (9).

when it pulls her towards it in the case of the ocean's blue (*Bluets* 3). She illustrates blue's affective forces upon her in other instances, too. Here, for example, she explicitly turns to a narratee and the reader feels immediately invited to compare this assumption to their own experience: "Admit that you have stood in front of a little pile of powdered ultramarine pigment in a glass cup at a museum and felt a stinging desire" (3). Despite my knowledge that this *you* does not address me as a flesh-and-blood reader, I immediately ask myself: did I ever stand in front of pigment powder and felt desire? Whatever the answer may be, this sentence assumes that the blue powder can affect the body, trigger desire and the wish to act. The narrator wonders: "But to do what? Liberate it? Purchase it? Ingest it?" (3). The affect created by blue does not result in a predefined reaction, but the narrator strongly assumes that it sets free the wish to do at least *something* with it, may that be to get in closer contact by touching it, releasing, possessing or even ingesting it. This recalls how Gregg and Seigworth describe the workings of affect, namely as "those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension" (1). Nelson is driven toward doing something with the pigment and she thinks about possible options of engaging with it: "You might want to reach out and disturb the pile of pigment, for example, first staining your fingers with it, then staining the world. You might want to dilute it and swim in it, you might want to rouge your nipples with it, you might want to paint a virgin's robe with it" (4). Some sentences earlier, the impression that Nelson addresses a narratee was predominant when she says, "Admit that you have stood […]" (3). This impression changes here. While the personal pronoun *you* could still point to a narratee, or even be an impersonal *you* that can be replaced by the word *one*, the considerations are so specific that the impression grows stronger that the *you* equally serves as a rhetoric device for Nelson to actually talk about her own desires, it is a "'you' that's actually 'me'" ("A Sort of Leaning Against" 101).[9]

9 Nelson's (the author's) discussion of her use of *you* in propositions 1-4 and 8 addresses this multitude of *yous* in *Bluets*:

> You'll note that in this section, there are a lot of "you's" – the "you" that's actually "me," the you that's "you, the reader," the "you" that's a particular other (a beloved in absentia), the "you" that's rhetorical, as in "one". In short, the form of address doesn't have to be the same throughout – the

In this passage, her desire to establish a bodily, even sexually connoted contact with the ultramarine becomes apparent as she brings up the option "to rouge your nipples with it". Further, staining her body and then the world in blue, or alternatively diluting the colour and swimming in it, expresses her wish to immerse herself in blue. But no matter how much she corporeally engages with blue, it always withdraws from a final grasp as she observes right away: "But still you wouldn't be accessing the blue of it. Not exactly" (*Bluets* 4). An additional effect of this *you* is that it triggers the reader's thoughts about their own possible desires in such a situation. The reader easily falls prey to the illusion that it is them who is addressed by the text. Parr observes as well that "the reader is included in the ecstatic desires evoked by a powdered blue and […] the incantatory anaphora […] makes our inclusion in the text as a sort of interlocutor all the more powerful" (103). I, as a reader, immediately ask myself *Would I really want to swim in this blue or paint my body with it?* These considerations of what to do with the pigment hold the potential to trigger affective reactions of, for example, interest, surprise or disgust in the reader.

In *Bluets*, Nelson is not interested in the question *What is blue?* but rather in exploring her deeply affective engagement with this colour. Her concern seems to be to access the topic from many different angles in order to pay tribute to the various possibilities of affective, intellectual and artistic engagement with the colour blue. Therefore, she approaches the colour through bodily contact as seen above, or by references to philosophy, science or literature. She notes that "no one really knows what color is, where it is, even whether it is" (15) and this "confusion […] persists despite thousands of years of prodding at the phenomenon" (19). This observation is true for blue as for any other colour. Colour cannot be fixed and, as we have already seen in chapters 2 and 3, it is a highly relational phenomenon. Colour shares this lack of a fixed originary state with affect. As much as colour happens in-between two bodies, so does affect. As much as "affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms" (Gregg & Seigworth 1), so is colour. Thus, colour and affect share certain similarities which support the doings of the text that is *Bluets*: the

> "you" of the piece […] can be a multitude of different "you's" […]. ("A Sort of Leaning Against" 101)

See also Parr, pp. 103-04, for a detailed discussion of Nelson's use of the pronoun *you*.

"material vibrancy" of blue colour-matter circulates as "impersonal affect" (Bennett, *VM* xiii) through the text. Thereby, blue builds relationalities between things, words and human beings. We can even say, in Parsons' words, that "blue is an affect grounded in our bodies" (378). Or, in Nelson's (the author's) own words: "For it is a mistake to think of blue as separate from us. It is the bulge of the carotid against the bracket of your skin. It is the matrix of veins that enlaces your heart" ("The Fragment" 164). Blue is always already materially entangled and highly affective.

In *Bluets*, Nelson embarks on a blue journey in order to "try[…] to talk about what blue means, or what it means, to [her], apart from meaning" (*Bluets* 16). Affect plays a key role in this endeavour because meaning, in *Bluets*, is not only established by linguistic content and structure of words but also to a great extent by affect. Blue is rather felt via affect than perceived via the senses or thought of in symbolic terms – and this is true for both narrator and reader. On the narrator's side, it seems as if she even relies on these affective intra-actions with blue in order to feel alive: "Sometimes I worry that if I am not moved by a blue thing, I may be completely despaired, or dead. At times I fake my enthusiasm. At others, I fear I am incapable of communicating the depth of it" (14). She experiences the full range of affective stimulation – from none at all to the extent at which her experience exceeds the possibility to communicate it via language. Such an experience is typical for an affective response, as Gregg and Seigworth observe: affects "can leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability" (1). As affects are "immanent to experience", they "are not to do with knowledge or meaning" but rather "occur on a different, *asignifying* register" (O'Sullivan 126, original emphasis). On the reader's side, this is why an attentive reading is again a promising way to approach *Bluets* in that it focuses on the experiential qualities of the reader-text intra-action. Compared to the other colour writings I analyse in this study, *Bluets* rather focuses on the doings of affect in relation to colour than on a sensory experience of it. This makes it a special approach to the material-discursive experience of colour for the reader.

In the following, we will further see how blue makes itself felt in *Bluets*. We experience the agency of blue in the intensities and flows of desire and pain which are always already entangled with blue and circulate through the text. By interrelating colour, matter, words and affect, Nelson creates what Barad calls an "entanglement of matters of being, knowing, and doing"

(*MtUH* 3). Yet, in the case of *Bluets*, it is rather an issue of an entanglement between *becoming* (instead of being), *not knowing* (instead of knowing) and *collecting* (as a special way of doing). I want to explore the doings of blue in *Bluets* along this triad of entangled concerns.

## 7.1 COLLECTING BLUETS: A MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE DOING

Preceding as well as accompanying the *writing* of blue into being is Nelson's practice of *collecting* 'blue facts', as she likes to call the blue items of her collection. Nelson does not only collect blue things but also anecdotes, memories, experiences, information, scientific explanations and inventions, quotations from arts, literature, philosophy and film – all related to blue in some way or another. To ensure a steady supply of blue facts she relies on her "blue correspondents, whose job it is to send [her] blue reports from the field" (*Bluets* 6), that is, from all over the world. Her "collection of blue amulets" (11) thus gathered consists of blue things as well as of "stories or leads or gifts" (6), of "blue observations, thoughts and facts" (91) – all of which she keeps in order to "play" (6) with them:

> 14. I have enjoyed telling people that I am writing a book about blue without actually doing it. Mostly what happens in such cases is that people give you stories or leads or gifts, and then you can play with these things instead of with words. Over the past decade I have been given blue inks, paintings, postcards, dyes, bracelets, rocks, precious stones, watercolors, pigments, paperweights, goblets, and candies. (6)

Some of these blue items involve very personal memories as in the case of a treasured scrap of paper:

> 205. One of the most vulnerable items is a scrap of paper that reads: *you said you think of blue*, written to me by a lover from long ago. Onto this note he pasted a square of ripped blue paper, which he

> then meticulously stitched back together. The whole apparatus is now falling apart – the stitches peeling off, the words fading. (83, original emphasis)

Other propositions deal with bits of information variously related to blue. One example is Horace Bénédict de Saussure's invention of the cyanometer in 1789 "with which he hoped to measure the blue of the sky" (40). Next to describing what the cyanometer is, the narrator embeds these facts in her own experience with it and thus turns the blue fact into a bluet, or proposition, that becomes part of her curated blue collection in *Bluets*:

> 106. When I first heard of the cyanometer, I imagined a complicated machine with dials, cranks, and knobs. But what de Saussure actually "invented" was a cardboard chart with 53 cut-out squares sitting alongside 53 numbered swatches, or "nuances," as he called them, of blue: you simply hold the sheet up to the sky and match its color, to the best of your ability, to a swatch. (40)

The very process of collecting is described as a rather passive one on the narrator's side; the blue items actually happen upon her, as she assures:

> 63. Generally speaking I do not hunt blue things down, nor do I pay for them. The blue things I treasure are gifts, or surprises in the landscape. The rocks I dug up this summer in the north country, for example, each one mysteriously painted round its belly with a bright blue band. The little square junk of navy blue dye you brought me long ago, when we barely knew each other, folded neatly into a paper wrapper. (25)

Either she finds blue things "in the landscape" (25) or she receives them from

her "blue correspondents" (6).[10] She relishes this material process of collecting and playing with her blue treasures before turning any of her experiences related to blue into words.

It is thus the more surprising that we rarely encounter any of these blue things in the text in more detail – except for their appearance in lists such as the ones presented above. Nelson seems to be hesitant to include her treasured blue items in her writing and to explore them further. She makes this transparent and reflects: "Perhaps this is why I am avoiding writing about too many specific blue things – I don't want to displace my memories of them, nor embalm them, nor exalt them" (77). Here, Nelson interestingly assumes that writing about her blue things would transform her memories of them as soon as she would fix them in words ("embalm") or highlight them too much ("exalt"). Further, she fears that writing about her blue things would "displace [her] memories of them". A complex entanglement of matter and meaning is at play here, in which writing has the potential to transform her material blue collection that is always already entangled with her memories and experiences.[11] Nevertheless, Nelson clarifies that she is interested in both the blue things of her collection as well as in writing about them: "I will not choose between the blue things of the world and the words that say them" (25). She is interested in both and acknowledges their mutual interdependence: on the one hand, playing with blue things serves as inspiration for her writing, while on the other hand, writing potentially influences the blue things she engages with and to which she relates, for example, in her memory. Thus, the blue things we encounter *inside* the text are always already entan-

10 This process of waiting for blue items to come to her differs from Nelson's work as an author and shows the discrepancy between Nelson as author versus Nelson as narrator. In an interview, Nelson (the author) describes her method of hunting for blue items for *Bluets*:

> I collected blue factoids, as you say, for years, just naturally – one exerts a magnetic effect (hopefully!) on what one loves. But once I started the project [of *Bluets*], I definitely hunted. Michel Pastoreau, William Gass, John Gage, David Batchelor, Victoria Finlay, and other writers provided leads, which I followed according to whim and intuition. (''True Blue'')

11 Later in *Bluets*, we encounter a proposition that further relates to this idea: ''The question between Socrates and Phaedrus is whether the written word kills memory or aids it – whether it cripples the mind's power, or whether it cures it of its forgetfulness'' (73).

gled with the entanglements of matter and meaning of the blue things in the world *out there*. The blues we encounter in *Bluets* via words carry with them traces of their existence *outside* the text. The items of Nelson's blue collection are always already entangled with feelings, memories, anecdotes and insights, and thus the same mechanism of entanglement takes hold which Barad describes for the entanglement of matter and meaning more generally, namely that "matter and meaning […] come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action" (*MtUH* ix). Writing about blue – based on the various entanglements of matter and meaning of Nelson's blue collection – is thus just another instance of what Barad calls "the ongoing materializing of different spacetime topologies" (141).

While Nelson's blue collection encompasses basically anything that fulfils the criteria of either being blue or being somehow related to blue, we would expect to be confronted with an abundance of blue in *Bluets*. Nelson herself admits "that if blue is anything on this earth, it is *abundant*" (*Bluets* 61, original emphasis). The lists of blue items she includes (6, 69)[12] implicate the very incompleteness of the practice of collecting. Nelson could potentially continue these lists forever as long as she finds new blue things or receives them from her blue correspondents. In contrast to this stands an observation that seemingly takes the narrator by surprise, namely that her collection seems to show the opposite of abundance:

> 226. As I collected blues for this project – in folders, in boxes, in notebooks, in memory – I imagined creating a blue tome, an encyclopedic compendium of blue observations, thoughts, and facts. But as I lay out my collection now, what strikes me most is its *anemia* – an anemia that seems to stand in direct proportion to my zeal. I thought I had collected enough blue to build a mountain, albeit one of detritus. But it seems to me now as if I have stumbled upon a pile of thin blue gels scattered on the stage long after the show has come and gone; the set, striked [sic]. (91, original emphasis)

12 Please see p. 243 and 249 in this chapter for quotations of these lists at full length.

Why is this so? Where may this anemia come from? I suppose that due to the abundance and infinite appearance of blue in the world, any collection of this colour must evidently seem insufficient and poor. The number of blue items one can possibly collect during a lifetime will never even approximate the countless blue items existing in the world. A way to tackle both this abundance and feeling of anemia is to give a focus to one's collection, to frame it in a certain context.[13] And this is exactly what Nelson does. While the selection of blue facts included in *Bluets* may appear random at first sight, they are the result of a certain systematisation. Nelson (the author) explains that all propositions "had to fall into one [sic] the book's major categories, which included love, language, sex, divinity, alcohol, pain, death, and problems of veracity/perception" ("The Fragment" 160). Most central topics belonging to these categories are introduced in the first ten pages, setting the tone for the text, and they will reappear again and again throughout the text. The reader encounters the topic of love in the very first sentence: "1. Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a color" (*Bluets* 1). The divine makes its entrance on the next page in the phrase "the fingerprints of God" (2). This is followed by an admission of loneliness and accompanying pain: "4. I admit that I may have been lonely. I know that loneliness can produce bolts of hot pain" (2). This loneliness, the reader is soon compelled to guess, is somehow related to a narratee whose apparent absence in the narrator's life results in her missing him and her wish to change this, as she expresses: "Above all, I want to stop missing you" (4). Soon, we get another glimpse at this relationship introducing the category of sex: "18. A warm afternoon in early spring, New York City. We went to the Chelsea Hotel to fuck" (7). The topic of sex leads to the topic of language: "*Fucking leaves everything as it is. Fucking may in no way interfere with the actual use of language. For it cannot*

13 Nelson (the author) talks about this concern in an interview and highlights the necessity of "distillation":

> I have a quotation pinned on my wall, from a Chinese poet named Mo Fei, that says: "Poetry has to do with a satisfaction with limited things, a paring down. It is the acceptance of a certain form of poverty. It is not endless construction." I like this asceticism, this surrender to the *condensery*, as Lorine Niedecker once called it. *Bluets* is about that distillation, as performed in the face of something as all-encompassing and endlessly beautiful as the color blue. ("True Blue", original emphasis)

*give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is*" (8, original emphasis).[14] And on page nine, we learn about a friend's accident which brings the topic of death into play: "A friend had been in an accident. Perhaps she would not live. She had very little face, and her spine was broken in two places" (9). Blue is what connects all of these "categories" (Nelson, "The Fragment" 160) since the quotations I have just presented above are interwoven with notes on blue. Take the example of divinity: "How could all the shreds of blue garbage bags stuck in brambles, or the bright blue flapping over every shanty and fish stand in the world, be, in essence, the fingerprints of God?" (*Bluets* 2). The sentence about missing her ex-lover is preceded by a sentence concerned with (not) yearning for blue: "I don't want to yearn for blue things, and God forbid for any 'blueness.' Above all, I want to stop missing you" (4). The passage on sexual intercourse is followed by the narrator looking out of the window: "Afterward, from the window of our room, I watched a blue tarp on a roof across the way flap in the wind" (7). And after being informed about her friend's accident, she walks "around Brooklyn" noticing blue bits and pieces here and there, for example at the gym: "In the baby-shit yellow showers at my gym […], I noticed that the yellow paint was peeling in spots, and a decent, industrial blue was trying to creep in" (9). Throughout *Bluets*, we also encounter questions about the perception of blue: for example, "Does the world look bluer from blue eyes?" (14) or "what is the color of a jacaranda tree in bloom?" (50). In an attempt to bring more clarity to the question "what color is, where it is, even whether it is" (15), the narrator even consults an encyclopaedia. Yet, she has to admit that "[t]he Encyclopedia does not help" (15). Nevertheless, she cites the following entry: "'If normally our perception of color involves "false consciousness," what is the right way to think of colors?' [the encyclopaedia] asks. 'In the case of color, unlike other cases,' it concludes, 'false consciousness should be a cause for celebration'" (15).

The above presented categories, which are woven through *Bluets*, show parallels to the rich semantic scope of the word *blue*. Despite her announcement to talk about blue "apart from meaning" (16), Nelson throws light on

14 These sentences are probably italicised because they draw on Wittgenstein without explicitly referring to him. The original quotation can be found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*: "124. Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe itself. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is" (49).

the whole spectrum of the semantics of *blue*. *Blue* does not only designate a colour but is also rich with figurative meanings. Of prime concern in *Bluets* is, of course, the use of *blue* as an adjective designating the specific colour (*OED*, "blue, adj. and n., A.adj.I."). But then, she is further concerned with extended and figurative uses of *blue* such as "to feel blue" ("blue, adj. and n., A.adj. II.4.a.") with its link to depression, melancholy and sadness which also finds its expression in blues music ("blue, adj. and n., A.adj.II.4.d.").[15] *Blue* in the sense of *feeling blue* is related to "a person, the heart, etc." and refers to a state that can be described as "depressed, low-spirited, sad, sorrowful; dismayed, downcast; (of a state or feeling) miserable, melancholy, dejected" ("blue, adj. and n., A.adj.II.4.a."). Most of these feelings are reported or indicated by the narrator in *Bluets* and contribute to the text's *blue mood*. Nelson combines the colour quality of blue with death, *having the blues* and blues music: "134. It calms me to think of blue as the color of death. I have long imagined death's approach as the swell of a wave – a towering wall of blue" (*Bluets* 52). The next proposition continues:

> 135. Of course, one can have "the blues" and stay alive, at least for a time. […] See, for example, "Lady Sings the Blues": "She's got them bad / She feels so sad / Wants the world to know / Just what her blues is all about." Nonetheless, as Billie Holiday knew, it remains the case that to see blue in deeper and deeper saturation is eventually to move toward darkness. (52)

From depression or melancholy, she passes through association to the topic of alcohol. Nelson draws this link by quoting a passage from a self-help book: "136. 'Drinking when you are depressed is like throwing kerosene on a fire,' I read in another self-help book at the bookstore. *What depression ever felt like fire?* I think, shoving the book back on the shelf" (52-53, original emphasis). Some pages later, she spins this connection between depression and drinking

15 The etymological origin of this extended use of *blue* is unclear, but the *OED* assumes that this figurative use "probably" ("blue, adj. and n., A.adj.II.4.") goes back to the blue "[o]f the skin: having a bluish or leaden colour, esp. as a result of reduced circulation or oxygenation of the blood" ("blue, adj. and n., A.adj.I.2.").

further and adds blue to the picture: "In German, to be blue – *blau sein* – means to be drunk. *Delirium tremens* used to be called the 'blue devils,' as in 'my bitter hours of blue-devilism' (Burns, 1787). In England 'the blue hour' is happy hour at the pub" (56, original emphasis).[16] Another semantic field of blue which Nelson attends to is the connection between blue and pornography or obscenity: blue movies, "having sexual content, pornographic" ("blue, adj. and n., A.adj.II.10.a.") are an example of this and *blue* in connection to language can also refer to a language that is "characterized by obscenities" and is "coarse or offensive" ("blue, adj. and n., A.adj.II.10.b."). We find *blue passages* in this sense in *Bluets* as well. Proposition 62 gives us an example: "For my part I have no interest in catching a glimpse of or offering you an unblemished ass or an airbrushed cunt. I am interested in having three orifices stuffed full of thick, veiny cock in the most unforgiving of poses and light" (24-25). Concerning such passages, Parr remarks that Nelson's "diction […] refuses all the subtle euphemism that whispers about sex and, instead, adopts a raucous, shameless attitude" (114). Turning to *blue* as a noun, the colour quality of the adjective *blue* is imbued with materiality as the noun *blue* can refer to a "pigment of a blue colour, or a dye, paint, etc., made from this" such as "cobalt blue" or "ultramarine blue" (*OED*, "blue, adj. and n., B.n.1.b."). We have already seen an example of this in *Bluets* with the jar of blue pigment that evokes desire in the narrator. In a literary and poetic sense, *blue* can also refer to "[b]lue colour, or a blue item, garment, etc., symbolizing faithfulness or constancy" ("blue, adj. and n., B.n.3."). The expression *true blue* is connected to this sense of *blue* as it refers to qualities of faithfulness, constancy

16 Heller provides an explanation for the German expressions *blau sein* and *blau machen* that is closely bound to the material practice of dyeing: both terms have their origin in the practice of dyeing with woad in the Middle Ages to produce blue fabric. In order to produce blue, the woad plant had to be soaked in urine. Adding alcohol to the mixture supported the extraction of blue dye from the plant. It was common not to add the alcohol directly but to add it by first drinking it and using the urine of these drunken men, the dyers. Hence, apart from the stench, it was probably a quite pleasant activity with a lot of alcohol involved. And when the dyers lay drunken in the sun (sunlight being another prerequisite for the dyeing with woad), it was said that they *made blue*. And whoever made blue, *was blue*, too. (Heller 41) The connection between blue and drunkenness is not common in English, but the *OED* points out that blue and drunkenness have been connected in American English in some instances: "*slang* (originally *U.S.*). Of a person: intoxicated, drunk. Now *rare*" ("blue, adj. and n., A.adj.II.4.c.", original emphasis).

and loyalty: "A person who is true blue (in various senses); a loyal supporter of a particular person, party, group, or cause" ("true blue, adj. and n., B.n."). [17] A special blue item, namely a blue flower, "became the emblem of German Romanticism" and even "the symbol of Romanticism in general" (Pastoureau, *Blue* 140). The "text for the adoration of blue was the unfinished novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* [1802] by Novalis […]. This novel recounts the legend of a medieval troubadour in search of a little blue flower he has seen in a dream, which represent pure poetry and the ideal life" (138, 140). With this, it became "the color of love, melancholy, and dreams" (140). While Nelson also talks about love and depression in *Bluets*, and even includes strange dreams (*Bluets* 7-9), her blues have nothing to do with faithfulness and constancy. She takes the semantic scope of blue as a scaffold and writes her very own story of desire, of being abandoned and missing her ex-lover:

> 116. One of the last times you came to see me, you were wearing a pale blue button-down shirt, short-sleeved. *I wore this for you*, you said. We fucked for six hours straight that afternoon, which does not seem precisely possible but that is what the clock said. We killed the time. You were on your way to a seaside town, a town of much blue, where you would be spending a week with the other woman you were in love with, the woman you are with now. *I'm in love with you both in completely different ways*, you said. It seemed unwise to contemplate this statement any further. (46, original emphasis)

With this glimpse into Nelson's practice of collecting blue things and facts we get a first sense of how matter and meaning converge and get entangled in *Bluets*. By transfusing her material collection from the world *out there* onto the page, Nelson entangles her collection with the semantic scope of *blue*. *Bluets* exemplifies that matter and meaning – blue things/facts and the semantics of blue – can never be thought of separately. Accumulating material-discursive

17 One can also think of the British wedding tradition based on a rhyme that requires a bride to wear *something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue* on her wedding day. Blue stands for fidelity here (Heller 27). In *Chroma*, Jarman includes this traditional wedding idiom, too, in his chapter "Into the Blue" (see p. 106).

blues in her text, Nelson wonders: "Am I trying, with these 'propositions,' to build some kind of bower?" (28). Although she immediately negates this thought by adding "[b]ut surely this would be a mistake. For starters, *words do not* look like *the things they designate* (Maurice Merleau-Ponty)" (28, original emphasis), we cannot shake off the impression that both her practices of collecting and writing are true material-discursive doings which entangle matter and meaning and thus create a collection of *bluets*, that is, the material-discursive fusion of blue on the page, with which eventually also the reader becomes entangled.

## 7.2 BECOMING WITH BLUE: INTERFERENCES OF READING

Nelson is indeed building a kind of blue bower, namely a text that materially-discursively "holds words" (153), to borrow Ursula K. Le Guin's famous image from her "Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction".[18] But the words in *Bluets* are not held tight, they are vibrant and agential. We may not actually see them move on the page, but their material-discursive agency transfuses from the page into the reader to generate a unique experience of blue in the reading process. I want to think this creation of colour in *Bluets* with a blue butterfly residing in the rainforests of Latin America. The male butterfly of the genus *Morpho* is famous for its brilliantly oscillating blue wings. This blue has fascinated researchers for a long time – studies on the origin of Morpho's brilliant blue were already published at the beginning of the 20th century (e.g. Süffert, Mason, or Anderson & Richards) – and the interest in it has not ceased until today.[19] The secret of these wings' brilliant blue lies in the wings' special

18 In "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction", Ursula K. Le Guin proposes that the "natural, proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel is a medicine bundle, holding things in a particular, powerful relation to one another and to us" (152-53).

19 Nowadays, the blue of this butterfly serves, for example, as inspiration for coloured photovoltaic modules: scientists at the Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE, Germany, developed a specific technology called "MorphoColor" (Bläsi et al. 1305) based on the surface structure of the butterfly's wings. Other scientists see potential inspiration in the wings for research on "nanophotonics and bio-chemical sensing devices" (Ahmed et al. 27117), for "fabricating smart photonic structures" (Ding et al. 074702-1) or for the production of "structural

surface structure consisting of highly ordered microscopic scales: the blue colour of Morpho butterflies is not created by a blue pigment but by so called *structural colours*.[20] While pigment colour is created by light absorption and reflection, structural colours are created by refraction and scattering of light at the flake structure of the butterfly's wings. In the case of the Morpho, "the wavelengths that represent the blue component of daylight are preferentially scattered by this structure" (G. Smith 1010) and thus, "[t]he scale appears blue because there is constructive interference for the scattered light from the array of lamellae […] at these wavelengths" (1018).[21] Structural colours are further responsible for another effect of the wings: they "display iridescence – a change in hue with a change in the direction of viewing" (1010). Depending on the viewing angle, the observer sees different shades of blue, resulting in the wing's iridescent effect.[22]

In how far is this physical process underlying the blue of these butterfly wings relevant for my reading of *Bluets*? I suggest that we think the creation of material-discursive blue in the reading process with the help of this butterfly's blue. What I am specifically interested in is the fact that this blue is the effect of interfering light waves. Just as the structure of the wings creates an interference pattern resulting in the butterfly's brilliant blue, so does *Bluets* create a specific 'interference pattern' that enables an intense material-discursive experience of blue for the reader. The actants involved in creating this

color films with superhydrophobic and superhydrophilic surfaces [which] can find applications as pigments with self-cleaning properties'' (Sato et al. 9).

20 In fact, this phenomenon is not uncommon in the world of flora and fauna, as a study shows: many ''[n]atural species including birds, beetles, flowers, fishes, and seashells show photonic nanostructures that enable bright structural colors'' (Ahmed et al. 27111). For the colour blue, structural colours are especially significant: when we perceive an animal as blue, the colour is most likely caused by structural colours. In only less than one percent of the animals that we perceive as blue is the blue caused by pigment (''Animals Cannot Be Blue'' 00:02:47-00:02:58).

21 Hence, this physical process of interference generates the especially brilliant blue of the wings. Interference patterns are created by waves (in this case light waves) that overlap and thus either cancel each other out or enhance each other. Physics calls this, respectively, either destructive or constructive interference, where only constructive interference results in the colour we see (Tipler & Mosca 1286); in the case of the Morpho this is blue.

22 Ahmed et al. observe that ''[a]s the viewing angle increased from 0 to 80°, the reflected colour shifted from blue to violet'' (27116).

interference pattern while reading *Bluets* were partly introduced in the section above on collecting bluets. The bluets which the text 'holds' by means of words and sentences are one decisive component in this process – the reader, with their past experiences, their mood and expectations, is the other one. Just as for the blue of Morpho butterflies light waves interfere, so do *Bluets*' propositions interfere with the reader in the reading of *Bluets*. It is crucial to note that the reader is an essential component *of* the interference pattern that is created in the reading. The reader is not an external observer, but they are deeply entangled in this intra-active process. I want to propose that text and reader intra-actively come into being only *with* each other, on a very ontological level; they are a phenomenon in Barad's sense. Both text and reader are constitutive and agential components in the intra-active phenomenon we call *reading*. For the reader this means that they have to pick up the book and begin to read so that the text can actualise its potential. Yet, also the book must be there, in the reader's hands, offering its words to them. Without the text's existence there is no possibility for material-discursive colour to unfold and to be intra-actively created in the reading process, resulting in a mutual becoming of text and reader, in a becoming with blue. Rita Felski develops a similar relational aesthetics in *Hooked*: "What an artwork affords is exceptionally hard to disentangle from our response; its qualities disclose themselves only as we attend to them. We make the artwork even as it makes us" (7). On the side of the artwork, she claims that "[w]orks of art invite and enlist us; they draw us down certain perceptual or interpretive paths. They have their own distinctiveness and dignity, can affect us in ways we did not imagine or anticipate" (6-7). At the same time, Felski explains, "[a]rtworks must be *activated* to exist" (7, original emphasis). Thus, "works of art also need our devotion. Their existence depends on being taken up by readers or viewers or listeners, as figures through whom they must pass" (7). I would even go one step further and argue that works of art do not merely "pass" through the reader/viewer/listener – which postulates two different 'entities', namely the work of art and the reader/viewer/listener – but I rather propose that the work of art and the reader/viewer/listener intra-actively come into being only *with* each other, on a very ontological level. And this is where Barad's concept of "apparatuses" (*MtUH* 146) becomes a helpful tool in order to describe how reading *Bluets* creates specific blue interference patterns. I suggest that the practice of 'reading *Bluets*' functions as an apparatus that entangles the text's

matter, meaning, colour and affect with the reader who becomes involved in this intra-active game of *becoming with blue*.[23]

What precisely are apparatuses in Barad's sense? I have provided a detailed definition of this concept in section 4.1 and would like to briefly recapitulate its most important aspects here. In her agential realism, apparatuses play a crucial role in the production of phenomena and thus are "formative of matter and meaning" (*MtUH* 146). I want to highlight three aspects in Barad's definition of this concept that are especially important for understanding 'reading *Bluets*' as an apparatus: firstly, an apparatus is a material-discursive practice that, secondly, produces differences formative of both matter and meaning in, thirdly, an open-ended manner (146). It is essential to think of an apparatus not as a tool located *in* the world but it is *of* the world as it dynamically reconfigures worldly entanglements in spacetime. In doing so, apparatuses both *are* phenomena and they *create* them. Thus, translating these characteristics of an apparatus onto 'reading *Bluets*', I want to define the reading of *Bluets* as a material-discursive practice that produces a becoming with blue. This becoming with blue is achieved by the apparatus' boundary-making practice of creating the specific interference pattern that results in the reader's unique experience of blue in the reading process. This is an open-ended process in so far as the reading of *Bluets* has the potential to unfold new experiences of blue each time a reader opens the book and begins to read.[24]

As readers, we follow *Bluets*' propositions with their 'blue' impulses, forces, questions and facts through the text. The agential force of blue here does not so much lie in an agential colour-matter but is rather performed as the dynamic unfolding of material-discursive bluets that evoke certain affective reactions both in the narrator and the reader. This dynamic unfolding creates its very own interference pattern and we can witness interference at different levels: inside each proposition, between propositions, and between the propo-

23 With the term *becoming with* I want to highlight the relational and intra-active process by which blue is created in the reading process. Deleuze and Guattari (e.g. in *A Thousand Plateaus*) and Haraway (e.g. in *When Species Meet*) also work with similar terminology, yet I do not specifically refer to their terminology here.

24 I am aware that conceptualising the *reading* of *Bluets* as the apparatus entails the risk to think the human being, the reader, as the only active part in the reading process. However, both text and reader are agential components in this intra-active phenomenon we call reading.

sitions and the reader's disposition. These different levels are treated separately only for the purpose of analysis. It is important to note that they also interfere *with each other* in the reading process. This complex process eventually creates a specific interference pattern which is the unique experience of each single reading.

If we think of interference patterns on the level of individual propositions, bluet 126, for example, is a very dense proposition in which we can observe an interference between blue, desire and suffering:

> 126. One of Shōnagon's first entries describes her delight in the Festival of Blue Horses, a day on which twenty-one glorious gray-blue horses from the Imperial stables are paraded in front of the Emperor. Reading her account, I feel at once the need to die and be reborn one thousand years ago, so as to see this parade for myself. But here we are in great danger of being jealous of the blues of others, or of blues of times past. For while one may repeatedly insist that all one wants is to be satisfied and happy, the truth is that one can often find oneself clinging to samsara with a vengeance. This is especially so when one starts to get the sense – however dim – that there might in fact be a way to unloose oneself from the wheel. "Nostalgia for samsara," some Buddhists call this affliction, the talons of which seem to grow but sharper as soon as one begins to understand the importance of escaping them. (*Bluets* 49-50)

We have encountered Nelson's desire to see Shōnagon's blue horses already earlier and this is the context in which the passage is positioned. Which aspects interfere with each other in this example? Firstly, the proposition begins with the narrator's observation of Shōnagon's "delight in the Festival of Blue Horses". This delight transfuses from Shōnagon's account through the reading into the narrator. Thus, secondly, we witness the narrator's relation to blue here, which seems to be a rather existential one in this case: not to be able to see the blue horses of the festival for herself triggers profound affective reactions in the narrator. The desire for being in contact with blue is even a matter of life and death as she urgently experiences "the need to die and be reborn

one thousand years ago". The reader may get the feeling that this is not meant metaphorically. This wish's urgency also affects the reader and we can sense the narrator's desire here. Desire is transfused from Shōnagon to the narrator of *Bluets* and may finally also affect the reader. While the reader, however, may feel no desire themselves, they may at least sense the urgency of the narrator's wish and be affected by it this way. The experience of such urgent desire makes the narrator wary and she issues a warning: "But here we are in great danger of being jealous of the blues of others, or of blues of times past". This brings her to another notion which is important to her in this context: the notion of suffering. She states: "For while one may repeatedly insist that all one wants is to be satisfied and happy, the truth is that one can often find oneself clinging to samsara with a vengeance". Referring to samsāra (i.e. the Buddhist term for the cycle of rebirth with its accompanying implications of suffering)[25] and the "clinging" to it brings into focus another aspect of her relation to blue. She goes on: "'Nostalgia for samsara,' some Buddhists call this affliction, the talons of which seem to grow but sharper as soon as one begins to understand the importance of escaping them". We have witnessed her suffering from the impossibility to see the blues at the Festival of Blue Horses – but her lengthy pondering on the workings of suffering seem to refer not only to this instance here; there seems to be more to it. This impression is created by the smooth change of personal pronouns from "I", speaking about her own experience in the second sentence, to an inclusive "we" in her warning of jealousy (as if jealousy may affect the reader as well), to a more indefinite and generalised "one" in the last sentences on the notions of suffering. This move towards the indefinite "one" creates the impression that the narrator is dealing with an issue here, namely suffering, to which she wants to keep a certain distance. On the other hand, the detailed insights into the workings of suffering appear not impersonal at all. On the contrary, they create the impression that the narrator has experienced the workings of suffering very thoroughly herself and that she spent enough time to study them closely. When reading proposition 126,

25 The Buddhist term *samsāra* refers to the "cycle of rebirth" (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, "samsāra"). Buddhism assumes that there exist different "realms of existence" and the realm of human beings is the only one in which "both suffering and happiness can be readily experienced" ("samsāra"). Further, "[s]amsāra is said to have no beginning and to come to end only for those individuals who achieve liberation from rebirth through the practice of the path [...] to nirvana" ("samsāra").

we already know that the narrator also suffers from heartbreak resulting from the end of her relationship with her ex-lover.[26] We get the sense that suffering, in this proposition, does not only refer to her inability to see the blue horses but also to her inability to forget her ex-lover. These two sufferings are entangled here: while she is unable to free herself from the suffering in relation to blue, she is also unable to free herself from her suffering in relation to her ex-lover. And as suffering is closely connected to desire in this proposition – both for blue and, as we know from earlier propositions, also for her ex-lover – it brings with it an unwillingness to really free herself from this emotionally draining state of suffering. Her desire makes her "cling[…] to samsara with a vengeance". Desire and suffering, blue and ex-lover interfere in this example – these notions oscillate, shifting from here to there, keeping this proposition ambiguous. In this, they recall the blue wings of the Morpho: they, too, display iridescence and keep the blue moving.

We have by now got a first impression of how becoming with blue is a highly entangled endeavour even within one proposition. Throughout *Bluets*, we become involved in this intra-active process by getting in contact with experiences of desire, joy and happiness as much as with dissatisfaction, longing, loss and pain. In the propositions that follow proposition 126, we move through an affective texture of hope and despair that again entangles the narrator's relation to blue with the one to her ex-lover:

> 127. Ask yourself: what is the color of a jacaranda tree in bloom? You once described it to me as "a type of blue." I did not know then if I agreed, for I had not yet seen the tree.
> 128. When you first told me about the jacarandas I felt hopeful. Then, the first time I saw them myself, I felt despair. The next season, I felt despair again. And so we arrive at one instance, and then anoth-

26 This knowledge accretes slowly over many propositions in which the reader learns about the end of their relationship. Proposition 42 may be the most explicit in this regard: "Sitting in my office before teaching a class on prosody, trying not to think about you, about my having lost you. *But how can it be? How can it be? Was I too blue for you. Was I too blue.* I look down at my lecture notes: Heárt-bréak *is a spondee.* Then I lay my head down on the desk and start to weep. – *Why doesn't this help?*" (*Bluets* 16, original emphasis).

> er, upon which blue delivered a measure of despair. But truth be told: I saw them as purple.
> 129. I don't know how the jacarandas will make me feel next year. I don't know if I will be alive to see them, or if I will be here to see them, or if I will ever be able to see them as blue, even as a type of blue.
> 130. We cannot read the darkness. We cannot read it. It is a form of madness, albeit a common one, that we try. (50-51)

In propositions 128 and 129 affect makes itself felt again. Hearing from her former lover ("you") about the jacaranda tree in blue bloom elicits a joyful anticipation in the narrator of getting in contact with a blue she has not seen yet. This anticipation makes her feel "hopeful". We can imagine how much hope she kindled when in turn we witness her despair as the tree turns out to have a purple colour in her view: "Then, the first time I saw them myself, I felt despair. The next season, I felt despair again. And so we arrive at one instance, and then another, upon which blue delivered a measure of despair". The notions of hope and despair in relation to blue recall an earlier proposition:

> 30. If a color could deliver hope, does it follow that it could also bring despair? I can think of many occasions on which a blue has made me feel suddenly hopeful […], but for the moment, I can't think of any times that blue has caused me to despair. (12-13)

The *lack* of blue, however, definitely causes despair in her. Despair is piling up when her expectations are again disappointed in the other year in which she hopes to see the blue of the jacarandas and she painfully acknowledges: "I don't know how the jacarandas will make me feel next year. I don't know if I will be alive to see them, or if I will be here to see them, or if I will ever be able to see them as blue, even as a type of blue". This repetitive sentence structure and the recurring phrases "I don't know" and "if I will" intensify the urgency of the narrator's affective reaction. As readers, we may be astonished at such an outburst of utter despair caused by her inability to see this blue.

But is this inability the only reason that causes her to despair? We remember that this inability also results from a discordance with her former lover who actually sees the jacaranda bloom in blue. Hence, there may be more to the narrator's reaction than a disagreement over a certain hue (though such a disagreement would probably be sufficient to trigger despair in the narrator due to her affection for, or even addiction to this colour). The suspicion that her relationship to her former lover plays a role in her despair here is kindled by propositions 126 and 130, which frame the jacaranda propositions. We have seen already above how the notion of suffering entails a certain ambiguity in regard to what this suffering refers to. Proposition 130 plays with similarly ambiguous implications with the following quite ominous statement: "We cannot read the darkness. We cannot read it. It is a form of madness, albeit a common one, that we try". What exactly is this "darkness" which "[w]e cannot read"? We are literally kept in the dark about this and it is precisely this unresolved state which lets the word "darkness" vibrate, or oscillate, on different levels: it can be read metaphorically as the narrator's suffering of heartbreak or her inability to see the jacarandas' blue. In more general terms, it could refer to any state of emotional or mental 'darkness', for example, to depression. At the same time, it plays with quite literal associations of the absence of light and thus of any colour, which would certainly be a source of suffering for the narrator as she would fail to see blue any longer.

Reading propositions 126-130 is, furthermore, not isolated from the rest of *Bluets*. Just as light waves interfere with each other to create the blue of the Morpho's wings, so do bluets interfere with each other in the reading process to enable a unique experience of the flows and intensities of material-discursive blue. Reading is a seemingly linear process: we turn page after page, the text we read unfolds in time and we accumulate more knowledge about the text with every page we read. *Bluets* challenges and plays with this linearity as it rhizomatically connects different propositions with each other. Bluets reach out to other bluets and link up with them. This is a process in which both text and reader play their part. While the text makes references between different bluets, either explicitly or implicitly, it is the task of the reader to notice these connections and bring them together in the reading process. Propositions 126-130, for example, forge possible links to propositions 13, 26 and 144. In proposition 13, the narrator mentions that other people often ask her "*Why blue?*" (5, original emphasis) and she remarks: "I never know how to respond.

We don't get to choose what or whom we love, I want to say. We just don't get to choose" (5). Why does she include the pronoun "whom" here? This is not necessary in order to answer the question why she has fallen in love with blue. This is already a hint to a person she may have fallen in love with and supports the reading of her suffering in proposition 126 later. Another link is forged to proposition 26 containing the following sentence: "I've heard that a diminishment of color vision often accompanies depression […]" (11). Already here does she bring together the inability to see colour with depression. This connection shows certain similarities to the one between her inability to see the jacarandas' blue and the darkness she mentions in proposition 130. Propositions 126-130 further forge a connection with proposition 144, which the reader has not yet read when reading 126-130. Nevertheless, the propositions forge links between each other that will potentially be actualised when reading proposition 144:

> 144. Then again, perhaps it does feel like fire – the blue core of it, not the theatrical orange crackling. I have spent a lot of time staring at this core in my own "dark chamber," and I can testify that it provides an excellent example of how blue gives way to darkness – and then how, without warning, the darkness grows up into a cone of light. (56)

First, we have to clarify that the first sentence refers to proposition 136 some pages before, in which the narrator asks: "*What depression ever felt like a fire?*" (53, original emphasis).[27] This is a good example to illustrate the complexity of the pattern that is created by interfering propositions. In my example here, propositions 73, 130, 136 and 144 interfere with each other as we will see in the following. From linking proposition 136 and 144, we know that proposition 144 addresses the issue of depression. The second sentence of proposition 144 ("I have spent a lot of time staring at this core [of fire/depression] in my own 'dark chamber,' and I can testify that it provides an excellent example of how blue gives way to darkness") connects back to proposition 130

27 Please see p. 255 in this chapter for the quotation of proposition 136 at full length.

("We cannot read the darkness. We cannot read it. It is a form of madness, albeit a common one, that we try" (51)). In proposition 144, we find blue directly connected to darkness and indirectly to depression. The narrator tells us that she has stared at the blue core of fire, that is, depression for a long time herself. She describes this as a kind of experiment by mentioning the "dark chamber" that implicitly refers us back to proposition 73 in which we read about Newton's experimental setup in his "dark chamber" to reveal the spectrum.[28] The narrator, however, does not experiment with the spectrum in proposition 144, but she can empirically "testify" that by staring long enough at the blue core of depression, "blue gives way to darkness" and transforms again "into a cone of light".

In the examples above, we have seen how – despite a linear movement in the reading process – interferences are generated during the reading which rhizomatically connect bluets throughout the text. Only through these connections can some propositions be understood at all. Meaningful connections are distributed throughout the whole of *Bluets*.[29] Yet, reading *Bluets* should not be understood as a challenge in which the aim of the reader would be to find as many connections as possible. The creation of connections is not always a smooth process, there are many obstacles to face. Some connections the text makes may be too fragile and vague. Others may not be noticed by the reader because they cannot remember passages they have read before. Sometimes the reader may only have a vague feeling that a proposition connects to one they have read before, but they cannot make a direct link. All these possible 'obstacles' are not problematic though. In section 4.3, we have seen that such obstacles are a textual technique of lyric essays and can be part of the reading experience. By practising an attentive reading and noticing these obstacles, we can learn that reading *Bluets* should rather be understood as an actualising

28 This is proposition 73 at full length: "In his *Opticks*, Newton periodically refers to an invaluable 'assistant' who helps him refract the shaft of sunlight streaming in through the aperture Newton had drilled into the wall of his 'dark chamber' – an assistant to Newton's discovery, or revelation, of the spectrum" (28).

29 This is how Nelson (the author) describes these rhizomatic connections:

> Some of the propositions are very much in dialogue with the ones that have come before it, acting as rebuffs, or conclusions, or swerves. To detect their motion, one has to already be in the car. Often they are [...] short [...] [and] don't make much sense outside of their context. ("The Fragment" 159).

of certain connections that can be potentially drawn. What always applies, however, is that material-discursive bluets will only unfold in an *intra-active reading* of *Bluets*, in which both text and reader are essential actants.

So far, we have focused on interferences that are created inside one proposition and between several propositions while the reader has already been part of these processes. Now, I want to especially focus on interferences between bluets and the reader's disposition as well as their own associations. I want to attentively read another proposition from *Bluets* in order to explore how we become involved with blue – or, in this case, rather with colour in general – in the reading process and "what bonds and attachments" (Felski, *TLoC* 179) we enter into. Following Felski, "to be attached is to be affected or moved and also to be linked or tied. It denotes passion and compassion – but also an array of ethical, political, intellectual, or other bonds" (*Hooked* 1). At the beginning of proposition 127 we find the imperative "Ask yourself: what is the color of a jacaranda tree in bloom?" (*Bluets* 50). Such a direct address frequently appears in *Bluets* and is one way in which the reader becomes directly involved in the experience of blue that the text offers: it invites them to add their own associations, ideas and thoughts on blue. This direct address thus contributes to a becoming with blue. How can this mutual becoming be described then? First of all, I want to introduce the actants that will play a part in the process I am going to describe. We have already encountered them: various blue material-discursive facts and things, affects, feelings, the word *you*, question marks and me as a proxy reader, so to say.[30] These actants interfere (in the sense of producing an interference pattern) in the reading process, generating a relational becoming with blue. We encounter all of these actants in the reading of proposition 52:

30 Two remarks should be included here: firstly, the list of actants could be further extended but for the purpose of this study they should suffice; they build the apparatus I call 'reading *Bluets*' in this case study of an attentive reading. Secondly, positioning myself as the reader in this reading enables *one* possible way for a becoming with blue, which is of course not the only one possible. Taking myself as a heuristic instrument to describe this specific becoming with blue produces a range of possible insights into the mechanisms at work in this apparatus.

> 52. Try, if you can, not to talk as if colors emanated from a single physical phenomenon. Keep in mind the effects of all the various surfaces, volumes, light-sources, films, expanses, degrees of solidity, solubility, temperature, elasticity, on color. Think of an object's capacity to emit, reflect, absorb, transmit, or scatter light; think of "the operation of light on a feather." Ask yourself, what is the color of a puddle? Is your blue sofa still blue when you stumble past it on your way to the kitchen for water in the middle of the night; is it still blue if you don't get up, and no one enters the room to see it? Fifteen days after we are born, we begin to discriminate between colors. For the rest of our lives, barring blunted or blinded sight, we find ourselves face-to-face with all these phenomena at once, and we call the whole shimmering mess "color." You might even say that it is the business of the eye to make colored forms out of what is essentially shimmering. This is how we "get around" in the world. Some might also call it the source of suffering. (20)

At the beginning of this proposition, the narrator draws the reader's attention to the very relationality of colour phenomena. Nelson (the author) mentions in regard to the "multitude of different 'you's'" which we encounter throughout *Bluets* also the option that *you* can mean "you, the reader" ("A Sort of Leaning Against" 101) – and in proposition 52 this is most likely the case. Already in the first sentence, the narrator directly addresses the reader and requests of them to rethink colour relationality. The short insertion "if you can" assumes that this may not be an easy task and that not everyone is able to do so. She helps the reader along by offering a list of possible components of this relationality which finally define what colour we can see. This list begins with rather usual considerations on "surfaces, volumes, light-sources" but soon takes off to consider, in my view, more unusual aspects such as "films, expanses, degrees of solidity, solubility, temperature, elasticity". The proposition continues with physical processes of how objects respond to light waves that hit them and then poses philosophical questions about colour by asking about the colour of "your blue sofa" at night or without "you" being there to look at it. Following these questions are thoughts on the evolution of human sight from birth until adulthood. The narrator draws on the way human be-

ings make sense of their surrounding world by means of visual perception. The last sentence, "[s]ome might also call it the source of suffering", appears to interrupt this line of thought and leaves the reader on their own with this sentence reverberating. It is another proposition in which suffering appears as an ominous notion that is not contextualised and remains interpretively open.

Let us take a closer look at how this proposition establishes bonds with the reader. First of all, the imperatives ("Try", "Keep in mind", "Think" (two times), "Ask yourself") and questions function like little igniters, nagging at me, the reader, and engaging me in new thought processes. I have never thought about the colour of a puddle. But I immediately think about the optical play of oil in a puddle and the iridescence pattern it creates. I ask myself: is this the same physical effect as the one of the Morpho wings? And "light on a feather" also points to the creation of an interference pattern. The repetitive use of the second-person pronouns "you" and "your" in the question "Is your blue sofa still blue when you stumble past it on your way to the kitchen for water in the middle of the night; is it still blue if you don't get up, and no one enters the room to see it?" directly appeals to me and I begin to consider this question further. I have indeed thought about my sofa's colour at night before, and the question here in *Bluets* again encourages thoughts on the relationality of colour phenomena. This question also reminds me of Bertrand Russell's and Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical considerations on colour and brings them back to my mind.[31] The imperatives and questions involve

31 In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell famously asks: "Is there any knowledge in the world which is so certain that no reasonable man could doubt it?" (9). He introduces the example of a brown table:

> It is evident from what we have found, that there is no colour which pre-eminently appears to be *the* colour of the table, or even of any one particular part of the table – it appears to be of different colours from different points of view, and there is no reason for regarding some of these as more really its colour than others. And we know that even from a given point of view the colour will seem different by artificial light, or to a colour-blind man, or to a man wearing blue spectacles, while in the dark there will be no colour at all, though to touch and hearing the table will be unchanged. Thus colour is not something which is inherent in the table, but something depending upon the table and the spectator and the way the light falls on the table. (13, original emphasis)

me in such a way in new thought processes that this lets me see colours in my surroundings differently – I am now even more aware of the relationalities that are involved in me seeing colour. This training of attentiveness to the relationality of colour phenomena thus affects both mind and body alike. This attentiveness does not only have implications for me on a conceptual level, but it also directly involves my body as I realise how much my seeing of colour depends on my eyes, nerves, brain, etc. To me, this insight immediately recalls an experience I had when visiting James Turrell's exhibition *The Substance of Light* at the Frieder Burda Museum in Baden-Baden, Germany, in 2018. Turrell is an American artist who is famous for his light installations. His work opens up questions and enables experiences that are closely connected to the relationality of light, colour, matter and perception – topics in which Nelson is interested, too, as we have seen in the proposition above. When participating in Turrell's artworks, one gets affected by light colour[32]: light moulds and forms the air with colour; light colour can be experienced as a powerful presence, it can generate strong affective reactions.[33] Even if the installations generate only small changes in mood or thinking, the experience one undergoes is always unique and non-reproducible. It is a true intra-play between us as perceivers and light colour. The affects/effects that Turrell's work can create are due to the involvement of one's own body in experiencing the *substance of light*, as the title of the exhibition calls it. In his famous Ganzfeld installation *Apani*, for example, one walks into a boundless space of monochromatic light.[34] My body became involved in coloured light – it flowed around me, it

Wittgenstein refers to similar concerns in *Remarks on Color*. This is one example: "This paper is lighter in some places than in others; but can I say that it is white only in certain places and gray in others??" (24e).

32 See section 2.1 for more details on the different 'categories' of colour; especially Kuepper's distinction between coloured light and object colour (173).

33 It is even reported that his installations tempt people to have sex inside the installations or that they move them to tears (Turrell, "Licht ist wie eine Droge" 49).

34 I soon found out that this boundlessness was an illusion as I bumped into the wall on my left which I did not see. The illusion of boundless space was perfect in this Ganzfeld. Turrell talks about this illusion of boundless space in an interview:

> Es ist so, wie wenn man als Pilot in die Wolken fliegt oder beim Tauchen plötzlich nicht mehr weiß, wo oben und unten ist. Mich interessiert die Landschaft ohne Horizont, denn die Menschheit bewegt sich zunehmend in eine solche Landschaft hinein. Ich bin ein Architekt des visuellen Raums und lasse sie

enveloped me, I moved through it and I had the feeling that I can *touch* the light as it danced in tiniest granular particles around me. The space appeared to be filled with coloured mist and I felt the urge to reach out to touch it and to feel the substance of light. I expected to experience a cool feeling on my skin like when tiny waterdrops touch it, but my skin did not react, the mist was only visually there – my sight deceived me. This mist consisted of colour alone.[35] While being inside the *Apani* Ganzfeld, space itself changed as time passed: different contours appeared and the boundless space became structured by a differently coloured rectangular field that appeared at one side. The installation found its end when suddenly aggressive, extremely fast and multichromatic flashes hit my eyes and the rectangular field, which had been in front of me and offered some spatial orientation, dissolved completely. At the same time, I experienced a kind of dissolution myself – for a moment, I lost the feeling for my body, there was no longer an inside or outside, and *I* was pure vision. It was an experience of pure visual perception – for some seconds, everything there was was colour, flashing violently. This was, I think, an extreme experience of what Nelson calls a "shimmering mess" (that is, colour) in proposition 52. We remember that she further writes: "You might even say that it is the business of the eye to make colored forms out of what is essentially shimmering. This is how we 'get around' in the world". The experience I underwent in Turrell's Ganzfeld showed me how deeply we depend on colour *and* form to "'get around' in the world" and that everything we visually perceive is the "business of the eye" – and we heavily rely on it.[36] It further reminded me that "the eye is simply a recorder, with or without our will" (43), as Nelson writes in another proposition. The Ganzfeld experience brought to the fore how much the world I experience actually depends on my visual perception. At every moment, I am always already entangled with colour as soon as I open my eyes, or as Nelson writes: "For the rest of our lives,

diese Landschaft erfahren. Manche Menschen verlieren dabei die Balance, aber nur kurz, denn ich bringe sie wieder zurück. ("Licht ist wie eine Droge" 49)

35 Later I was told by a staff member of the museum that the misty effect was produced by a special kind of light.

36 This is only applicable for persons with healthy eyesight. There are of course ways to get around in the world without sight.

barring blunted or blinded sight, we find ourselves face-to-face with all these phenomena at once, and we call the whole shimmering mess 'color'".

This excursus on the bonds that are created in the very apparatus of me reading proposition 52 exemplarily shows how *Bluets* involves the reader in a becoming with blue – or in this case more generally with colour – by inviting them to think and experience colour in new ways and by activating the reader's own associations, memories and experiences. The three levels of interference I have analysed above interfere with each other in the reading process, that is, interferences are created within one proposition, between several propositions and with our own associations all at the same time. In order to describe this becoming with blue, a close reading of the text does not suffice – the reading experience generated by the apparatus 'reading *Bluets*' requires an attentive reading in order to enable the complex interference pattern to unfold and to result in a becoming with blue for the reader. We have to pay attention to the various bonds the text forges. In doing so, we can experience a becoming with blue that is as fascinating as the Morpho's iridescent blue wings.

## 7.3 DWELLING IN UNCERTAINTIES: THE ART OF NOT KNOWING

Thinking again of the interference pattern created by the wings of the blue Morpho butterfly brings a further characteristic of *Bluets* into focus. In order to create the brilliant blue of the wings, the structure of the wings has to offer *space* in which the light waves can interfere with each other. In the case of the butterfly, this space is found between the lamellae that constitute the wing's structure.[37] In *Bluets*, we also find space in which interferences can occur. On the one hand, the form of *Bluets* with its numbered propositions creates space in-between each proposition. There is blank space on the very page. This space separates each bluet from the other. At the same time, this visual arrangement on the page facilitates the forging of bonds between bluets that are further apart: the visual segmentation makes the bluets easier to 'digest' (one

37 Glenn Smith explains this in more detail: "The scale appears blue because there is constructive interference for the scattered light from the array of lamellae [...] at these wavelengths" (1018).

bluet at a time, so to speak) and their consecutive numbering helps the reader to find them again so that this eventually aids the reader in building connections from one bluet to another. Yet, this is not the only space that enables an interference of bluets in the reading process. In true lyric essay style, Nelson relishes the activity of asking questions, of dwelling in uncertainties and in the realm of not knowing, rather than trying to always present the reader with well-wrought ideas and information on blue. This space of *not knowing* constitutes the very condition of possibility for being attentive to a becoming with blue. In the space of not knowing, the text can interfere with the reader – bonds can be forged, connections can be drawn and the reader can follow their own associations that have been ignited by the reading of *Bluets*. Dwelling in uncertainties and relishing this state is not a new paradigm in literary studies. Think, for example, of John Keats' famous "*Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Keats 193, original emphasis). In section 4.2, we have also seen how unknowingness is a pleasant state for Nan Shepherd in *The Living Mountain*. Inspired by her, I have identified this being in a state of uncertainty with its potential and openness for new experiences as a mode that is also helpful, or even essential, for an attentive reading. It ensures that we as readers stay open for and curious about the possible entanglements we get involved in while reading. Nelson is also fascinated by staying in this realm of uncertainty and for her, too, not knowing is not at all an uncomfortable condition. Her writing "from 'fact'" ("All That Is the Case" 156) allows her to deal confidently with this state. Nelson (the author) elaborates on this:

> What do you do when you want to know something, or articulate something, that you simply cannot know? My rule to date […] has been that when I hit a place like this, I have to make the not-knowing part of the fabric. I mean, if it's that important to the piece and you can't figure it out, then you should probably just incorporate the confusion, and trust that the universe is retaining this navel of not-knowing for a reason. (158)

This self-confidence in dealing with not knowing also stems from Nelson's (the author's) understanding of *fact* which follows Ludwig Wittgenstein, who declares in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "1. The world is all that is the case. 1.1. The world is the totality of facts, not of things. 2. What is the case – a fact – is the existence of states of affairs" (qtd. in Nelson, "All That Is the Case" 155). For Nelson (the author), then, "[w]riting from 'fact' means becoming a better vessel to apprehend these states of affairs in all their complexity, and learning how to get that down" ("All That Is The Case" 156). This approach allows her to rather *describe* what appeals to her as worth writing about in regard to blue and to include even facts she does not know much about. One example of this can be found in proposition 156:

> "Why is the sky blue?" – A fair enough question, and one I have learned the answer to several times. Yet every time I try to explain it to someone or remember it to myself, it eludes me. Now I like to remember the question alone, as it reminds me that my mind is essentially a sieve, that I am mortal. (*Bluets* 62)

Telling me, the reader, that she does not know the answer to this question triggers in me the thought whether I may know the answer. First, I think I have a similar problem as Nelson. I remember only fragments of a possible explanation, but slowly it forms into a reasonable answer: the blue colour has something to do with the way sunlight is scattered when it reaches the earth's atmosphere and preferably blue light is scattered. I want to double check and find this neat explanation by the NASA: "Sunlight reaches Earth's atmosphere and is scattered in all directions by all the gases and particles in the air. Blue light is scattered more than the other colors because it travels as shorter, smaller waves. This is why we see a blue sky most of the time" (NASA Space Place). Nelson's seeming reluctance to look for an answer herself spurred me into thinking and double checking. Apparently, I am not yet as good as Nelson in dwelling in the realm of not knowing. Nelson, on the other hand, seems to find a certain pleasure in just being aware of this question and her unknowingness in this regard reminds her "that [her] mind is essentially a sieve, that [she is] mortal" (*Bluets* 62). Yet, I am highly aware of how the text has

involved me in a becoming with blue that results in the interference pattern of (a) the question of why the sky is blue, (b) the narrator's inability to answer it and (c) my coming up with an answer.

There are other instances in which Nelson favours pleasure over knowledge. In proposition 106 she writes about an 18th-century invention, "the 'cyanometer,' with which [Horace Bénédict de Saussure] hoped to measure the blue of the sky" (40). She cites a passage from "*Humboldt's Travels* (Ross, 1852): 'We beheld with admiration the azure colour of the sky. Its intensity at the zenith appeared to correspond to 41° of the cyanometer'" (40). In the next sentence she comments: "This latter sentence brings me great pleasure, but really it takes us no further – either into knowledge, or into beauty" (40). A question that comes to my mind here is, why does this sentence bring her pleasure? Where does she find pleasure here? Perhaps in the seeming absurdity of tagging the colour of the sky by assigning different degrees to it? What is certain, however, is that Nelson celebrates the pleasure she experiences here and shares it with the reader. She lets us know that this pleasure in reading about blue – lacking any added value of insight "either into knowledge, or into beauty" – is a value of its own to her.

In *Bluets*, the reader is time and again lured to alternative ways of knowledge. Reading *Bluets* invites us to learn how we, too, can find pleasure in states of not knowing. Embedded in proposition 112, a central question on what counts as colour comes up and the narrator tackles it in her own way: "The question of whether gold counts as a color may here arise, but I am not equipped to tackle it. I will relay only this: 'What is on the other side of gold is the same as what is on this side' (John Berger); I'm tempted to think this disqualifies it" (44-45). Where does this answer leave us now? It is a response that creates more questions than it answers. It illustrates the narrator's disinterest in traditional categorisations of colour, she is even "not equipped to tackle it". Instead of looking it up and providing a long list of possible answers, she prefers to engage creatively with the question. On my side as the reader, the quotation by John Berger does not take me any further nor does the narrator's subsequent comment help. I read Berger's statement over and over and it appears as a rather beautiful idea to me, somehow reminding me of the mythological pot of gold to be found at the end of the rainbow. This image interferes with John Berger's quotation I have just read and I begin to

dwell in a realm of not knowing, finding my own pleasure in pondering on the bluet of gold that has just unfolded in the reading process.

With this, the pleasure Nelson conveys to the reader in her engagement with blue in *Bluets* eventually affects also me. Throughout my attentive reading of *Bluets* in this chapter, I have become involved in the agency of blue as it flowed in intensities of desire and suffering through the text. *Bluet's* practice of *collecting – becoming – not knowing* is an entangled concern in which also the reader necessarily becomes involved. Above, I have offered my own reading experience to serve as a heuristic device. I want to stress that every reading creates a unique interference pattern resulting in different intensities of blue. Blue becomes affective and forceful in different intensities for different readers, but also for the same reader at different times. 'Reading *Bluets*' is a process that actualises the virtual potential of becoming with blue in repeatedly new nuances. For Nelson, too, her love for blue is an endless affair and she tells us: "my love for blue has never felt to me like a maturing, or a refinement, or a *settling*. For the fact is that one can maintain a chromophilic recklessness well into adulthood" (61, original emphasis).

# 8 CONCLUSION: BRINGING THE COLOUR WHEEL TO A HALT

In this study, I set out to explore the doings of colour in English colour writings. My exploration has been led by the question of how it is possible to come close to colour by means of words. How is it possible that texts create vivid colourscapes unfolding from the page and involving the reader in such a way that they can experience colour as a dynamic and as it were tangible presence? To answer these questions, I have spun the colour wheel and explored many different facets of colour as well as the various ways in which the reader becomes entangled with colour. Colour is a difficult and far from self-evident phenomenon. The natural sciences, philosophy, colour theory or the fine arts – all these disciplines offer possible entryways into the universe of colour. Colour itself seems to defy any ultimate definition and escapes our attempt at putting it into well-defined boxes. What is most astounding about colour is that it even infiltrates realms in which it does not visually appear at all, that is, the realms of language and literature. Strictly speaking, colour is not there in literary texts. We do not visually perceive the colours we encounter in literary texts on the page. This study, however, has demonstrated that colour is very much *there* in language and literature, it can even be an affective, agential and vibrant actant.

At this point of the study, we have indeed encountered a wide range of colours: we have become involved in the most different colourscapes ranging from sensuous evocations of colour in fin-de-siècle poetry to fluid colour-matter entanglements in Woolf's modernist texts to kaleidoscopic colour experiences in *Chroma*, a muffled and highly nuanced whitescape in *The White Book*, and an affective and urgent encounter with blue in *Bluets*. All these texts, while encompassing different genres and literary periods, have a specific take on colour in common as they highlight and bring to the fore colour's performative side, the doings of colour. On the reader's side, the experience of being affected by colours emerging from the words on the page and intra-actively becoming involved in unfolding colourscapes is most significant in the reading of these texts that I call *colour writings*.

Now, I want to spin the colour wheel one more time and recapitulate the various facets of colour I have explored in this study. At the heart of my undertakings has been the exploration of a *materiality* of colour as we can find

and experience it in English literary texts. My assumption at the outset was that, by taking a closer look at the relationalities of colour and matter as we encounter them in colour writings, we may arrive at a better understanding of how colour makes itself felt and acts upon the reader. By attentively describing the entanglements between colour, matter, text and reader, this study has traced and gained insight into the complex relationalities that are at play when reading colour writings.

Introducing a selection of existing discourses and practices with regard to colour, the study opened with the question *What is Colour?* – a question to which no single answer can be found. The examples presented comprised physical, physiological and philosophical perspectives on colour as well as selected colour theories and the fine arts' approach of Leonardo da Vinci. These insights into a range of engagements with colour served a twofold aim: first, they provided an overview of the plethora of existing colour topics. Second, they showed already at this early stage how colour and matter can possibly be thought together by a variety of disciplines other than literary studies. The colours we perceive in our daily lives are created, roughly outlined, through the interplay of light, matter and the human body. Physics tells us that the specific material which light hits upon defines with its specific absorption, transmittance and reflection rate which colour we see. Described physiologically, the process of human colour perception is initiated by electromagnetic radiation (light) which hits upon the eye and, finally, the brain transfers these incoming impulses into colour. From a philosophical perspective, three main tendencies to answer the question *Where is colour?* became apparent: theories either assume colour to be a quality inherent in objects, a purely subjective quality, or a relational one created in-between subject and object. Colour theories are also affected by material issues: systematisations of colour schemes depend on which 'kind' of colour we refer to, object colour or coloured light, resulting in the difference between subtractive or additive mixtures of colour, respectively. The fine arts probably practise the most hands-on approach to colour in working with pigments and dye. Here, knowledge about how the colour of certain materials changes according to its use and throughout time is essential. All these examples refer to the visual process of colour perception and how it is entangled with matter. This raised the question of how we can actually speak about entanglements between colour and matter in literary texts in which the experience of colour is not a matter of visual perception.

Before investigating further into the direction of a materiality of colour, it was helpful to take a closer look at the engagements with colour that already exist in the field of literary studies. Hence, the topic of colour and its semantics came into focus. I presented the development of colour words throughout different periods as well as possible figurative uses of colour in literary texts. A wealth of research exists in these two fields and colour's function as descriptive element or its figurative use is certainly something that immediately comes to mind when thinking about colour in regard to literature. The studies and considerations drawn on made apparent that the semantics of colour are subject to constant change. While colour words during the Middle Ages had mainly been concerned with brightness or light-dark contrast, the colour word palette of Early Modern texts began to include more words relating to hues and this increase continued during English Romanticism and was also accompanied by a broadening of the semantic fields in which colour words were used. The use of colour words during these literary periods was often also influenced by a broader cultural context: the use of colour words related to brightness and luminosity during the Middle Ages, for example, was linked to the value of brilliant pigments which were a sign of wealth. Romantic poets were interested in colour words in relation to nature as a means to convey sense experience and to poetically investigate the relation between self and world. The increase of new colour terms since the second half of the 19th century was influenced by the invention of new synthetic dyes. Already at the level of single colour words, we can see how the appearance of colour in literary texts is interwoven with material and cultural developments of the respective time.

Figurative uses of colour words are another common function of colour in literary texts. Colour metaphors, metonyms and symbols fulfil important functions for a hermeneutic reading which focuses on the meaning of colour in the text. Colours are often culturally coded and texts play with these established codes, adopt them, break them up or develop new symbolisms. With the red-light district example by Jarman with its creative figurative use of *red*, we saw how colour words are perfectly suited to convey complex meanings. These semantic analyses have demonstrated that the meanings of colours are not necessarily static but can change according to their use. Such a versatility is one way in which colour is 'on the move' in literary texts. And the various

possibilities to use colour figuratively show how by means of colour complex constructions of meaning can be created in literary texts.

This study's exploration of colour in literary texts points into a different direction, however. It has primarily been interested in another, in my view, very significant and so far hardly noticed appearance of colour: colour can be an affective, agential and vibrant actant in literary texts. I have identified literary texts in which colour plays a prominent role and in which we can experience the agency of material-discursive colour. These texts produce literary colourscapes in which the reader becomes involved. Material-discursive colour is intra-actively created in the reading process and goes well beyond descriptive and figurative uses of colour. The study located early colour writings in the fin de siècle, detected others in modernist texts and identified key texts in the genre of contemporary lyric essays.

Symonds' and Sharp's fin-de-siècle texts foreground colour itself and instead of being interested in representational functions of colour words, they highlight and experiment with experiential qualities of colour: textured colour impressions and vibrant chromatic atmospheres invite the reader to delve into the evoked colourscapes. Symonds' poetic studies on shades of blue in "In the Key of Blue" create a very nuanced colourscape. His main concern is how to write different shades of blue into being by means of words alone. We encountered the most different shades of blue – especially in relation to other colours and to different materials. With Symonds we learned that the word *blue* itself does not even have to appear often in the text in order to create a blue colourscape. Instead, Symonds employs blue tints which derive their names from different blue materials, such as larkspur or lapis-lazuli. We experienced blue hues in the folds of clothes and shimmer of different fabrics, which added a tactile component to the colour experience. The process of composing the text is highlighted in this colour study: what we read are, Symonds wants to make his readers believe, recordings of the impressions which he perceives in the process of observing his surroundings and the facchino. Drawing on Pater, we saw that *experience* is a key concern in fin-de-siècle poetry. By transfusing colour impressions into words that can then in turn be picked up by the reader, Symonds indeed creates a unique colour experience for the reader.

While the sense of touch plays a prominent role in Symonds' text, even more senses are addressed in the colourscape created by Sharp's poem "The

White Peacock". The poem builds up a Mediterranean sensescape of colour, heat and fragrance into which a white peacock enters towards the very end of the poem. The play of light and shadow as well as floating movements created by sea metaphors add to the stimulation of the reader's mind and senses. The evoked colourscape generates a complex sensuous experience and the white peacock becomes entangled with the surrounding garden until it eventually unites all colours in itself – just as white light contains every colour of the spectrum. With these two texts, we encountered two early examples of colour writings in which the complexity of colour can be experienced in the reading. I want to emphasise that this is a central characteristic of colour writings in general: they must be read, of course, but then they must be experienced.

In my exploration of colour writings, I moved on to three texts by Virginia Woolf in which prismatic colourscapes unfold from the page in the reader's imagination and in which we also come closer to a materiality of colour. The study investigated how "Blue & Green", "Kew Gardens" and the interludes in *The Waves* present different possibilities of how to engage with a *doing* of colour and how these texts highlight colour's performativity. The three texts invite the reader to experience colour as a dynamic and affective actant that draws us into its prismatic colourscapes. I explored the doings of colour in these three texts in dialogue with insights of both impressionism and phenomenology – two influential developments of Woolf's time that, each in its own way, highlights the importance of experience and focuses on the interplay of subject and object. In these aspects, as we have seen, they resonate well with Woolf's own approach to writing.

I introduced "Blue & Green" as two chromatic sketches that lead the reader into an imaginative space in which, amongst other creatures, green parakeets and a blue sea monster appear. Taking its cue from the colour words *blue* and *green*, this short text opens up variegated colour associations and creates a strange and fantastic colourscape. Colour is presented as a phenomenon unfolding from an initial interplay of light and glass and the sketch thus highlights colour's relational character. Moreover, colour is also thick, viscous and fluid in this text. It drops down, forms pools of colour and is hence enriched with a tactile and acoustic quality. In the blue sketch, the colour blue is the connecting link between a sea monster and a wrecked rowing boat and lets the boundaries between the two oscillate. While the layout of these two sketches seemingly mimics a painting hanging on a wall, the text cannot be

interpreted in terms of ekphrasis. These sketches are 'word-paintings' themselves and write blue and green into being.

In "Kew Gardens", Woolf's phenomenological approach becomes more prominent. I proposed that the story evokes a dynamic portrayal of the eponymous park space in which plants, animals and people coexist – all connected through the play of colour and light. Woolf's almost exclusive use of basic colour terms is striking in "Kew Gardens" and I suggested that we understand this as a variation of a pointillist technique: only in the reader do the colour dots (in this case in form of words) unfold their full effect, create their unique colourscape and produce a vibrating atmosphere. Light is the main catalyst for the moving colourscapes in "Kew Gardens" and in the final scene, human beings metamorphose into colour patches, vanishing into a blue-green colourscape that permeates the park. Colour takes over towards the end of this text and the park becomes one sensuous space. Interestingly, in the parts of the short story in which human beings are involved, colour seems to withdraw from the scene. While human characters miss the colourful play of light around them, the reader encounters a more holistic impression of Kew Gardens and is made aware that this is a park space shaped by humans and nonhumans alike.

In *The Waves*' interludes, colour and light become more active and even have an impact on the materiality of the landscape and of things. Light sweeps in wave-like motions through the interludes and illuminates the landscape as well as the interior of a house with its different pieces of furniture. The interplay of light and shadow adds its own dynamics to the text and contributes to the unique rhythm of the interludes that creates the experience of the world as a flowing becoming. By means of light and colour, perceptual processes and familiar causalities are challenged as we have seen in many examples, one of them was the phantom flower. Together with a whole network of references to and evocations of different senses – such as vision, sound, touch or smell – a unique perspective on materiality is developed. When the sun rises, light gives substance to the interior of a house by illuminating it and bringing forth its colours. Colour plays a significant role in the interludes' dynamics through its non-representational and non-symbolic function. Throughout the interludes, the interplay of light, colour and matter create everchanging atmospheres through their continuous dynamics. Solid things, such as tableware, turn into amorphous liquid things. Solidity changes in degrees depending on

light conditions: a plate becomes a white lake or rocks lose their hardness. On the other hand, sea and air are imbued with coloured atoms and materialise. Colour becomes material (e.g. "*a lump of emerald*" (*The Waves* 20)) and spatial (e.g. "*a cave of pure green*" (20)).

Like in Sharp's "The White Peacock", no human characters are present in Woolf's "Blue & Green" and in the interludes of *The Waves*. Colour and light are defining actants of these texts. Even in "Kew Gardens", in which human beings appear time and again, agency is equally distributed between nonhuman (including colour) and human beings. With Woolf, we have moved closer to experiencing colour as an intense, dynamic and affective presence that is often already entangled with matter. Hence, these texts continue the turn to colour that began in the fin de siècle. A peculiarity of these colour writings is that they produce their specific material-discursive colours by entangling the reader within their colourscapes.

I have identified a resurfacing interest in colour since the 1990s – in different research disciplines and, more important for this study, in the genre of the lyric essay. In the course of the attentive readings of *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets*, we have seen how colour is not only an intense and dynamic presence in these lyric essays but that colour-matter's agency also affects the narrator as well as the reader in various ways. The colour we encounter here is always intra-actively produced when text and reader meet. In these texts, colour, matter, text and reader forge unique relationalities and I want to stress again that the colour we experience here is always already *material-discursive* colour. While this is also true for the colour writings by Symonds, Sharp and Woolf, the book-length lyric essays are even more decidedly dedicated to colour and the reader becomes even more affected by colour's agency and gets involved in unfolding colourscapes. My further research has thus been led by three questions: how can we pay better attention to how text and reader intra-actively produce material-discursive colour? How can we describe the entanglements between colour, matter, text and reader in a way that does justice to the complex relationalities that are at play? How can we better notice how colour draws us into its colourscapes in these texts? I have argued that a close reading is no longer sufficient to create answers to these questions because these colour writings are neither closed off entities in which the reader can only dig for meaning nor can the reader's experience be ignored in the analysis. A new method for analysing such colour writings is required. Thus,

I have developed a reading method that combines tools from new materialist theories with an *attentive reading* which I designed in close dialogue with Nan Shepherd and which follows a postcritical understanding of the text and reading process.

While the New Materialisms are only slowly picked up in the field of literary studies, they have so far not been brought into relation with studies of colour writings and the topic of colour in literature. Yet, especially for the study of colour writings, new materialist theories offer helpful conceptions in two ways: firstly, their redefinitions of received notions of matter and agency can assist an understanding of the doings of colour-matter in the text and how this colour-matter can exhibit a certain thing-power. Secondly, they are crucial in understanding the relationalities between colour, matter, text and reader through concepts of entanglement, intra-action and phenomenon. The colour we experience in the reading process is always material-discursive colour, an entanglement of matter and meaning. With this conception of colour, we arrived at the possibility to describe how matter is written into colour and how colour-matter possibly affects the narrator as well as the reader. Every meeting of colour, matter, text and reader is a unique phenomenon which produces the material-discursive colour we encounter in the reading process.

While new materialist concepts provided the tools to think colour with, they were not instructive in *how* we can experience such a vibrant colour-matter and the reader's entanglements with it in colour writings. We saw that attentiveness towards the material forces flowing around and through human beings is indeed an issue addressed by New Materialists; the topic of how we can be attentive towards the doings of colour in literary texts has, however, not yet been considered. Thus, I added a second important component to my methodology, which is a reading method I call *attentive reading*. I located this reading method in a postcritical tradition that stresses relationalities and experiential qualities. Felski's *phenomenology of reading*, Attridge's understanding of the text as an *event*, and Macé's conceptualisation of reading as a certain *conduct* were mainly instructive here. The principal guide for the development of an attentive reading, however, has been Nan Shepherd. The author is an expert in encountering nonhuman beings attentively and hence I took her way of approaching the Cairngorm Mountains as an example to develop my own method for encountering colour writings. I began this study with a quotation from Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* in which her unique

view on a substance of colour was introduced. Such an experience of colour, as much as other observations she recounts, is enabled through a twofold approach that I identified as a combination of *openness* and *attentiveness*. While the mode of openness is closely connected with the capacity to be astonished and ensures a certain receptivity towards the doings of colour in my selected colour writings, the mode of attentiveness encourages us to be attentive with both mind and body when we venture *into* the text, as Shepherd ventures into the mountain plateau.

In a next section, a short interlude on the form of the lyric essay and its peculiarities led over to a key part of my study. Equipped with the developed methodology and familiarised with typical characteristics of lyric essays, the study ventured into the three attentive readings of *Chroma*, *The White Book* and *Bluets*. It is striking that all three colour writings combine colour with topics of death, grief or suffering. In all three texts, colour may be said to be a means to deal with these topics and feelings. One may think that colour fulfils a therapeutic purpose here as it often builds a soothing, positive and optimistic contrast to such negatively connoted feelings. Yet, I am convinced that these colour writings are much more than that: they are a tribute to colour itself and prove the three writers' fascination with this multifaceted phenomenon. In my view, topics of death, grief and suffering may feature in these lyric essays, but actually these texts are colour writings – texts with, of and about colour. I took myself as a heuristic instrument to detect what colour is potentially able to do in these colour writings. Hence, how exactly has material-discursive colour made itself felt in these texts?

In the first of three long attentive readings of colour writings, I engaged myself in kaleidoscopic explorations of Derek Jarman's *Chroma*. I compared the reading of this text to the experience of looking through a steadily rotating kaleidoscope. Fragments of various aspects of colour in relation to art history, literature, philosophy, painting materials, quotations by other writers, emotions, memories, politics – to name just a few examples – are responsible for the whirlwind of colour that we experience in this text. In true lyric essay style, the text accretes by associations and the reader is invited to actively develop the associations arising from the text further and to add their own associations and perceptions to it. *Chroma* makes the reader an accomplice in creating the text's unique colourscape and this in turn makes *Chroma* a generative text – an open-ended exploration of colour as soon as the reader

encounters the text's sensuous colour poetics. We are invited into a universe of blue or into an orange space unfolding from the page; we can sense colour by means of the shape and sound of words; we can feel colour in its various material-discursive forms such as with the texture/texxture of the brown and shiny mahogany table or with the furry beaver lamb coat. Material-discursive colour addresses the narrator's as well as the reader's senses of seeing, touching, hearing or smelling.

I want to highlight again *Chroma's* ability to forge unique relationalities between colour and matter and to create a colour-matter that exhibits a certain agency and can affect the reader in the various ways I have described in this study. We encountered entanglements of colour and matter in form of pigments, medicine, clothes and fabrics, plants or stars. I discussed how colours are imbued with their unique *sedimented historialities* and how they affect the experience of colour in *Chroma*. Lists of pigments rhizomatically spread throughout *Chroma* and we came across quickly fading, screaming or poisonous colours – colours which defy human intentions of symbolic use and which can have serious effects on human well-being. Sparkling pigments in glass jars exhibit thing-power, sticky ink resists human intentions and blue flax fields materially-discursively arise from the smell of linseed oil. Jarman pays close attention to these nonhuman forces when dwelling in the *middle ranges of agency*, as I described in detail.

Words, in *Chroma*, melt colour into themselves and we as readers can resolve them back by an attentive reading in which we cultivate an openness for possible colour experiences the text, single sentences and even single words may grant us. We saw that it is important to practise an attentiveness to the text not only cognitively but also via the senses as each sense is a possible way *into* the text. Moreover, while reading, we move along with the rhizomatic movements of colour as it shoots into all directions and forges entanglements with matter, affect, feelings, the narrator, the reader and the world *out there*. With *Chroma*, the reader can journey into colour, experience its kaleidoscopic agency and become part of the continuous intra-play of tangible and elusive material-discursive colour.

In the attentive reading of Han Kang's *The White Book*, the texture of white as well as unfolding whitescapes were in the focus. In this colour writing, white exceeds any symbolic semantics and builds relationalities with matter and feeling. White is always already textured by different shades, tactile

qualities and a complexity of feelings – and while reading, these material-discursive entanglements of white become affective beyond the page. From the very moment we hold the book in our hands and flip through its pages, the layout as well as the interspersed photographs establish a communication channel between this colour writing and the reader, captivating us by its palpable whiteness. But white is of course not only visually there. When beginning to read, we encounter a range of white things that add a material-discursive dimension to the visual experience and create dense whitescapes through which the reader moves. I pointed out how the doings of white can be experienced in three interconnected modes in *The White Book*, namely, at the level of the material book in form of layout, as material-discursive white things and by the intermedial link between text and photographs.

The blank white space of paper surrounding the vignettes and filling the space in between them does not only bring the colour white visually close to the reader; even more so, in line with East Asian conceptions of emptiness, this empty white space must not be understood as an absence of form but as holding the potential for material-discursive whitescapes to unfold. Throughout the chapter, I have brought *The White Book* into dialogue with several examples of East Asian conceptions of white. The examples discussed comprised perspectives of design, religion, poetry and painting, and illustrated, next to other facets of white, how this colour can be understood as a *presence* in this cultural context.

The material-discursive white things we encountered in *The White Book* create a rich texture of white. Here, white is a material presence that takes on many different forms ranging from swaddling bands to a door to rime, snow and the wings of a butterfly or to a white pebble and breast milk, to name just a few examples. Each vignette creates its own sensuous white texture that addresses different senses and which we can experience through affect. The description of the door with its flaky texture of white paint and rusty scars produces a feeling of brutality and pain and entangles the reader with colour and matter in such a way that it affects both narrator and reader through its thing-power. The covering and muffling effect of white snow falling down to the earth creates an impression of silence and softness. Smooth, warm, white breast milk – usually a sign of new life – unfolds a unique horror as it begins to flow from the mother's breast in the very moment the father buries the

baby outside in the frosty earth. These different white things affect the reader and entangle them in complex relationalities of matter, colour and feeling.

The interspersed photographs add complexity to this experience of whiteness. The texture of white is not only created by layout and language but also by black-and-white images that establish an intermedial dialogue with the text and add another visual component to it. These photographs add shades of grey to the otherwise black (in terms of font) and white (in terms of paper) aesthetics of the book and looking at these photos can trigger an as it were tactile experience. With this, we saw how language is not the only decisive actant in the process of meaning-making in this colour writing. The material book itself with the white space surrounding the vignettes as well as the photographs are decisive actants in this process, too. The intra-play of all these actants eventually contributes to an involved reading that activates experiential qualities.

We saw how the narrator practises attentiveness towards whiteness both through quiet contemplation of things as well as through walking around a city in winter. By means of an attentive reading, I as a reader have been a co-explorer in this undertaking. Being both attentive and open towards the doings of white, I trained my own attentiveness towards the material-discursive practice of white colour-matter and its production of complex meanings. By cultivating a certain openness, I got involved with the text in such a way that I created my own sensuous associations and dwelled in unfolding visual, acoustic and tactile whitescapes.

With *Bluets*, we came in contact with another aspect of material-discursive colour: in this colour writing, blue is full of excitement and affective force. It sparks desire while at the same time it can also be a cause for suffering. We encountered ultramarine pigment or a report of a parade of blue horses that cause a stinging desire in the narrator to see or do something with these blues. Similar to colours in *Chroma* and *The White Book*, blue is always already materially entangled; yet, in *Bluets*, colour is not so much experienced via the senses but rather felt via affect. In the process of reading *Bluets*, affect plays an important role in the intra-active becoming with blue, both for the narrator and the reader, and it is a decisive actant in the meaning-making process. Therefore, I have argued, an *attentive reading* is again a promising way to approach this colour writing since such a reading focuses on the experiential qualities of the reader-text intra-action. This time, my attentive reading was

structured along a triad of three entangled concerns which are *collecting*, *becoming* and *not knowing*.

In the first section, I conceptualised Nelson's practice of collecting as a material-discursive *doing*. Nelson relishes the material process of collecting blue things and facts, such as a paper scrap with a sentence about blue, the invention of the cyanometer, blue stones or blue dye. Nelson's collection of blues is large as we saw with the lists she includes in the text. Similar to *Chroma* and *The White Book*, the colours (in this case different blues) we encounter in *Bluets* via words always carry with them traces of their existence *outside* the text and the items of Nelson's blue collection are always already entangled with feelings, memories and ideas. Nelson is clearly interested in both blue things and words and acknowledges their mutual interdependence. It further became evident that the propositions, or bluets, follow a certain systematisation: they fit into certain categories which are all interwoven with blue in some way or another. At the same time, Nelson throws light on the whole spectrum of the semantics of the word *blue*. Her practice of collecting transfuses her material collection from the world *out there* onto the page, entangles it with the semantic scope of blue and thus creates the material-discursive bluets we encounter in the text.

In the second section, the analysis of the creation of material-discursive blue in the reading was inspired by the Morpho butterfly's wings. The brilliant blue of the Morpho is produced by structural colours created by interference. I suggested that the reading of *Bluets*, too, creates a specific 'interference pattern' which is responsible for an intense material-discursive experience of blue. I observed interference at different levels which also interfere with each other: inside a proposition, between propositions, and between the propositions and the reader's disposition. Inside one exemplarily selected proposition, we saw how blue, desire, suffering and the narrator's ex-partner interfere with each other and how affects are transfused from Shōnagon to Nelson and eventually to the reader. Between different bluets, I traced an interference pattern of an affective texture of hope and despair, jacaranda trees in bloom, the narrator's ex-partner, depression, darkness and Isaac Newton. When the reader's disposition figures on the last level of interference, my own reaction to the text came into focus: I described how the text triggered questions and processes of remembering in me and how I connected my own experiences –

sometimes similar ones, sometimes new impressions – with the text such as in the case of my experience with Turrell's Ganzfeld installation.

In the third section, I explored the art of not knowing and dwelling in uncertainties as we encounter it in *Bluets*. Nelson likes to ask questions and to dwell in the realm of not knowing. Such a space of not knowing enables an attentiveness to a becoming with blue on the side of the reader, too, and thus generates an openness for new experiences with blue.

I want to stress again that material-discursive blue only unfolds in intra-action between several actants – all of which we have met in the examples presented. I conceptualised the practice of 'reading *Bluets*' as an *apparatus* that entangles the text's matter, meaning, colour and affect with the reader. We became involved in an intra-active game of *becoming with blue*. We followed *Bluets'* propositions with their 'blue' impulses, questions and facts through the text and we experienced blue's agency in intensities and flows of desire and suffering. It is a unique characteristic of *Bluets* that the agency of blue makes itself less felt via an agential colour-matter in this colour writing but rather as an affective force of unfolding material-discursive blue circulating through the text.

In these attentive readings of three selected lyric essays, I have presented the multifaceted possibilities of how colour can be experienced in a way besides colour's representational or figurative function in literary texts. In all three lyric essays, my attentive readings of the doings of colour and the reader's entanglement with the unfolding colourscapes have made visible the need for a performative understanding of colour in literature. Exactly such a performative side of colour has been the focus of this study which has explored how colour is always already an entangled concern – most importantly not only in terms of visual perception but especially in the reading of colour writings. Material-discursive colour is never something separate from the reader but its creation is always a matter of intra-action, it is a relational phenomenon. These colour writings particularly bring to the fore the specific relationalities in which colour is always already entangled, may that be with matter, words, the reader or feelings and affect.

One of this study's initial research questions was how we can possibly come close to colour by means of words. First of all, it is important to remember and understand that exact representation of certain colour hues is not the aim of colour writings. Colour semantics play only one part in the creation

of colourscapes. It is rather the case that colours free themselves from strict references and unfold their very own, vibrant and vivid colourscapes, which we as readers can experience. While it is true that some visual colour experience is indeed helpful to experience colour also via words, the colours we have encountered in the colour writings discussed do not completely rely on linguistic mediation. The rhythm with which we move through colour writings, the colourscapes which address our senses and affect us as well as the reader's disposition are key in how we experience colour via words in colour writings.

Moreover, we may even say that colour writings want to educate an attentive reader, they want to train the reader in attentiveness to colour and its various doings. Hence, they challenge an academic standard question, namely what colour *means* in these texts, and invite the reader to open their sensory channels. Colour writings thus demand an attentive reading that involves both mind and body in the experience of colour. Only in this way can we also trace and describe the entanglements between colour and matter that we find in these texts and come closer to understand what a materiality of colour entails. I have used the New Materialisms' conceptual vocabulary in order to describe such a materiality that is agential and vibrant. A new materialist conception of a materiality of colour is key in understanding the agency of colour-matter in these texts. I want to emphasise again that the materiality of colour discovered in the literary texts discussed is always produced through an intra-play of colour, matter, text and reader. Such material-discursive colour is never colour we can look *at* but we are always already deeply involved with the colour-matter we encounter in colour writings. In this way, these texts establish a connection with materiality, a connection in which words are key actants and bring us close to matter. It is further important to keep in mind that such colour-matter is never dead matter but can affect us and create reactions in us. These affective, agential and vibrant colour-matter entanglements are decisive actants in the production of the intense colourscapes we become involved in during the reading. If we as readers are then practising an attentive reading in which both mind and body are involved, we can experience colour as intensely as if we looked at it with our eyes – or even more intensely as material-discursive colour often makes itself felt via the intensities of affect.

While the discovery and exploration of a materiality of colour in literary texts has been one key concern of this study, another main concern has been the development of a new reading method. While reader-text interactions

are also in the focus of reader-response or postcritical theory, the relational reading methodology developed in this study – that is, a combination of an *attentive reading* with new materialist tools – can allow literary scholars to train their attentiveness towards the nonhuman forces that always already flow around and through us and of which we are always already a part. Colour is certainly one such nonhuman force but the developed reading strategy also holds the potential to detect activities of other nonhuman actants in literary texts. Yet, this is a task another research project may attend to. This study and its exploration of the doings of colour has offered one possible attentive reading in order to investigate how we can describe the agency of colour-matter more appropriately and how we can understand the relation between text and reader as an intra-action rather than as mere interaction.

The various literary texts discussed in this study – including diverse colour writings as well as Shepherd's texts – suggest that *literature* is certainly an important place where a vibrant and agential matter can be explored and even experienced. Such an experience can bring the reader closer to what new materialist concepts theoretically describe. I believe that colour writings – many of which had been published before new materialist theory was even invented – can offer one specific way in which we can experience how we are always already entangled with other nonhuman actants.

This study has explored the doings of colour, the ways in which we become entangled with it and involved in colourscapes. My hope is that my reading for the doings of colour can serve as inspiration to read colour in literary texts in innovative ways. If we let ourselves in for the experiences that material-discursive colour may grant us, I am convinced that many more colour writings from different time periods and places around the world can be discovered. It is a task of future research to add more examples to the colour writings this study has identified so far. I suggest that we should think of colour writings as a genre – a genre that is characterised by the specific take on colour which has been in the focus of this study: in colour writings, colour itself is in the foreground, it makes itself felt as a dynamic, agential and as it were tangible colour-matter and involves the reader in its colourscapes. Such a genre of *colour writing* can inspire us to experience colour in new ways – in a realm in which colour does not appear visually but in which we become entangled with colour by means of words.

# APPENDIX

## THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY FIELD OF NEW MATERIALIST SCHOLARSHIP

This appendix will provide a short overview of the main proponents of the New Materialisms and of important contributions to this transdisciplinary field. It will further discuss how literary studies have been interested in materialist concerns so far and point out some recent publications engaging with the New Materialisms from a literary studies perspective.

Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (editors of *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*) as well as Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (*New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*) provide helpful orientations and overviews on the New Materialisms as a transdisciplinary field of studies. Dolphijn and van der Tuin observe that "Manuel DeLanda and Rosi Braidotti – independently of one another – first started using 'neo-materialism' or 'new materialism' in the second half of the 1990s" (93). Manuel DeLanda's most important work in a new materialist context to date is *Assemblage Theory* in which he takes up Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *assemblage* and modifies it in order to formulate "a materialist social ontology in which communities and organisations, cities and countries, are shown to be amenable to a treatment in terms of assemblages" (3). Rosi Braidotti develops a theory of "nomadology that instills movement and mobility at the heart of thinking" (*Nomadic Theory* 1) and posits thinking as an "affirmative activity that aims at the production of concepts, precepts, and affects in the relational motion of approaching multiple others" (2). In her concept of an "enfleshed or embodied materialism", she stresses the importance to "think through the body" in order to rethink concepts such as "embodiment, immanence" and "the body" (*Metamorphoses* 5).

Among the most prominent scholars of the New Materialisms today is Karen Barad who from a standpoint of physics, philosophy, science studies and feminist theory argues for an *agential realism* (e.g. in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*; see also "Posthumanist Performativity", "Quantum Entanglements", *What is the Measure of Nothingness?*, "On Touching" and "Diffracting Diffrac-

tion"). Jane Bennett is another important new materialist scholar who focuses on ecological, political and philosophical aspects of a *vibrant matter* and coins the concept of a *vital materialism* (e.g. in *Vibrant Matter*; see also "The Force of Things", "In Parliament with Things" and *Influx and Efflux*). Though more correctly situated in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), Donna Haraway inspired the New Materialisms with her theories in which she rethinks species encounters in terms of a *becoming-with*, *making-with* and *thinking-with* in a sphere beyond dichotomies that she calls *natureculture* (e.g. in *Staying with the Trouble* and *When Species Meet*). Haraway is interested in practices of "material-semiotic actor[s]" with which she intends to "portray the object of knowledge as an active, meaning-generating part of apparatus of bodily production" ("Situated Knowledges" 595).

In the creative arts, the New Materialisms are welcomed as a way of theorising artistic practice by connecting art in novel ways to environmental and political issues. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt published the essay collection *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' Through the Arts* that engages with the emergence of the New Materialisms in the creative arts covering contributions on film, writing, music, photography and fashion, among others. In the field of theology, Catherine Keller and Mary-Jane Rubenstein contribute an edited volume on *Entangled Worlds: Religion, Science, and New Materialisms* that builds genuine links between the three fields mentioned in the volume's title. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing is an important new materialist thinker in the field of anthropology. Tsing focuses on human-nonhuman relationalities exemplified in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* by tracing the commodity chains of matsutake mushrooms. Furthermore, she calls for relearning "arts of noticing" (37) and rebuilding curiosity in order to encounter such multispecies assemblages. Viki Kirby, professor of sociology, draws our attention to the need to deconstruct deconstruction itself by challenging the nature/culture dichotomy and "reading Derrida's 'no outside of text' and the sense of systemic involvement to which it attests, as 'no outside of Nature'" (*Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* x; see also "Natural Convers(at)ions", "Matter Out of Place" and Kirby's edited volume *What If Culture Was Nature All Along?*). In *Critical Theory and New Materialisms*, the editors Hartmut Rosa et al. bring Critical Theory and the New Materialisms into dialogue with each other in order to explore existing differences and potential connections between the two fields. Stacy

Alaimo and Susan Hekman ground the New Materialisms in feminist studies in their edited volume *Material Feminisms*. Many new materialist thinkers are also feminist scholars, such as Barad, Haraway and Kirby whose essays are part of this volume. In their introduction, Alaimo and Hekman observe that "there has been a tremendous outpouring of scholarship on 'the body' in the last twenty years", which is a seemingly material topic; yet, "nearly all of the work in this area has been confined to the analysis of discourses *about* the body" (3, original emphasis). They assign such a focus on discourse to an especially postmodern engagement with the topic:

> Whereas the epistemology of modernism is grounded in objective access to a real/natural world, postmodernists argue that the real/material is entirely constituted by language; what we call the real is a product of language and has its reality only in language. (2)

The very materiality of the body and of reality got lost. With their agenda, they set out to bring matter back to scholarly work concerned with the body and attempt to accomplish "a deconstruction of the material/discursive dichotomy that retains both elements without privileging either" (6). In 2014, the European project COST Action *IS1307: New Materialism: Networking European Scholarship on 'How Matter Comes to Matter'* was installed with a typically new materialist transversality in mind. The project consortium combined scholarship from the humanities, the natural and social sciences to establish an inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue on the New Materialisms. Contributing disciplines situated in the humanities were the creative arts, gender studies, cultural studies and media studies. In 2020, after the project came to an end in 2018, a part of this project's research group launched *Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research* to maintain and further expand the network created in this EU project.

The lists of disciplinary contributions in the above presented volumes and project consortia show that literary studies are not explicitly part of these new materialist endeavours. Consequently, an important contribution to a new materialist debate is missing here since literary studies yield their own interesting insights concerning materiality and can contribute important per-

spectives to such (new) materialist concerns. A closer look at 20th-century developments in the humanities reveals that attention to materiality is nothing new in literary studies.[1] With Marxist literary criticism, for example, the attention to socio-material contexts of the production and reception of texts comes into focus (Barry 152-53). Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism follows these lines and turns its attention towards the material environment's influence on meaning-making procedures. Cultural Materialists interpret cultural products (e.g. literature, television, music) not only in the historical context of their first publication but "the times (including our own) in which [a text/song/play, etc.] is produced and reproduced" is in the focus as well as "the functioning of the institutions through which [a text/song/play, etc.] is brought to us" (Barry 177), may that be through publishers, record producers or theatres. A focus on space is more intently practised by scholarship that is framed by the spatial turn. This turn no longer treats space as a purely discursive issue but as a socio-material construct that is constituted by relations between human and nonhuman entities (Bachmann-Medick 285). The performative turn also contributes to a revival of material issues in the humanities in general and in gender studies in particular. Barad observes that "performativity is linked not only to the formation of the subject but also to the production of the matter of bodies, as Butler's account of 'materialization' and Haraway's notion of 'materialized refiguration' suggest" ("PP" 126). Thus, the performative turn focuses on how meaning is produced through the body and how the body is produced by discourse; speech is seen as a kind of embodied and performative behaviour. During the first decade of the 21st century, Noys observes a renewed interest in a range of material topics in regard to literature, that is, a "concern with the materiality of books as objects, including the materiality of printed page […], covers, and the physical nature of reading [or a] concern with the appearance of objects within texts, such as in 'it-narratives'" (82). Such material concerns can be subsumed under the heading *Thing Theory* (a term coined by Bill Brown), which is especially interested in the relations between human subjects and inanimate objects.[2] This

1 See also Frédéric Neyrat who shares this view in *Literature and Materialisms*. In his monograph, he provides a broad overview and investigation of the various relations between literature and different materialisms.

2 See Brown's edited volume *Things,* especially his chapter "Thing Theory", as well as his monographs *A Sense of Things* and *Other Things*.

renewed interest in matter already indicates a tendency towards a material turn in literary studies.

While New Materialists bemoan the hegemony of language and discourse caused by "*the* cultural turn" (Barad, "PP" 120, my emphasis) in academia, it was exactly this turn which brought a renewed interest in matter to literary studies.[3] While Barad writes about the cultural turn in the singular, Bachmann-Medick is critical about such a simplification and rather suggests a differentiation into several cultural turns.[4] As we have already seen above, these cultural turns "führen tendenziell weg von der Sprach- und Textlastigkeit der Kulturanalyse, weg von der Vorherrschaft der Repräsentation, der bloßen Selbstreferenzialität und der 'Grammatik' des Verhaltens" (8). With these turns, matter, corporeality and performativity come into focus of research:

> Selbstauslegung und Inszenierung, Körperlichkeit und Handlungsmacht, aber auch die Politik sozialer und interkultureller Differenzen mit ihren Übersetzungs- und Aushandlungspraktiken rücken in den Vordergrund, darüber hinaus visuelle Einsichten, Bildwahrnehmungen und Kulturen des Blicks sowie Räumlichkeiten und Raumbezüge sozialen Handelns, schließlich gar die unhintergehbare Materialität von Erfahrung und Geschichte. (9)

Although in all above-mentioned developments a turn towards matter can be identified, these cultural turns do not yet reach the perspective of the New

3 For a discussion of how the cultural turn influenced literary studies, see, for example, Nünning & Sommer's edited volume *Kulturwissenschaftliche Literaturwissenschaft*.

4 Bachmann-Medick addresses the following turns in her monograph *Cultural Turns*: the interpretive turn, the performative turn, the reflexive/literary turn, the postcolonial turn, the translational turn, the spatial turn and the iconic turn. Nünning and Sommer support Bachman-Medick's assessment of a plurality of cultural turns: "[die] kulturwissenschaftliche[…] Wende […] hat nicht etwa *eine* neue Methode oder gar eine neue 'Superdisziplin' hervorgebracht, sondern einen neuen Diskurs, in dem eine Vielzahl unterschiedlicher Ansätze und Stimmen eine Vielfalt heterogener Positionen vertritt" ("Kulturwissenschaftliche Literaturwissenschaft" 10, original emphasis).

Materialisms, which will depart from an anthropocentric tradition and reach out to also appreciate nonhuman matter's own agency as a decisive component in meaning-making procedures. In his article published in 2016, Noys observes a tendency in literary studies that points into such a direction of the New Materialisms by "the emerging tendency to donate to objects a set of qualities that were usually associated with 'traditional' models of literary subjectivity and character: depth of feelings, complexity, fluidity, and a sense of the 'living'" (82). For this tendency to lead the way to the New Materialisms, I believe it is important that such a "depth of feelings" or "sense of the 'living'" does not remain a mere metaphor or a mirroring of human desires, affects and emotions in material objects.

Today, we find a range of studies and publications in literary studies that are deeply invested in the New Materialisms and their number increases year by year. In the introduction to their edited volume *How Literature Comes to Matter: Post-Anthropocentric Approaches to Fiction*, Moslund et al. observe that literary studies' engagement with the New Materialisms is "at the point of opening up":

> Although the renewed theoretical interest in material and nonhuman realities has been an emerging and growing field of study since the turn of the millennium, and although literature is often valued by post-anthropocentric theorists as a particular space of reflection, it is still only at the point of opening up to and being further opened up by the literary field of research. ("Introduction" 16)

Moslund et al. mention a two-way influence here: on the one hand, new materialist scholars are interested in literature "as a mode of encountering nonhuman realities and objects" (5)[5] and, on the other hand, literary scholars are

5 In the Introduction, I have illustrated how Jane Bennett refers to Kafka in order to exemplify a vibrant matter. For more examples by Bennett see "Systems and Things", pp. 234-35, and *Influx and Efflux: Writing Up with Walt Whitman*. Further examples of an engagement of new materialist scholars with literature can be found in Moslund et al., "Introduction", pp. 17-19; Rudrum et al., p. 175; Skiveren, "Fictionality in New Materialism".

interested in new materialist theories as a way to analyse and interpret nonhuman dimensions in literary texts in innovative ways. I will focus on the second part in this literary review and offer a broad, yet not exhaustive, overview of publications at the crossroads between studies of Anglo-American literature and the New Materialisms. Moslund et al.'s edited volume *How Matter Comes to Literature* is a major contribution to this transversal field of study. The volume is subdivided into the four sections "I. Matter-Oriented Perspectives on Literary Techniques, Language and Representation", "II. Object Intrusions in Subject-Centric Texts", "III. Carnal Realities: Lively Flesh in Feminist and Queer Readings" and "IV. Capitalism, Crisis and the Anthropocene". These four sections are indicative for the wide range of post-anthropocentric topics that are often explored in literary texts: matter, objects and things, the body, and (environmental/financial) crisis. Rudrum et al. edited the volume *New Directions in Philosophy and Literature* in which they introduce new developments in philosophy, including the New Materialisms, and bring them into dialogue with close readings of literary texts. Some chapters are interested in "Post- and Nonhuman Literary Criticism" (97) that can be used to "reconceptualise what it means to be human while at the same time eradicating all and any anthropocentrism" (Askin, "Editor's Introduction" to Part II 99). These chapters aim to discuss ways "to rethink and to go beyond the human subject" (99). Other chapters

> explore alternatives to the object side of the traditional subject-object dyad, whether in terms of actors and networks, objects all the way down, or meaning-imbued and vibrant matter; and they all scrutinise how these alternatives play out in, as, or in tandem with the many forms of literature. (Askin, "Editor's Introduction" to Part III 178)

A special concern with nonhuman matter and the experience of space is in the focus of Caracciolo et al.'s edited volume *Narrating Nonhuman Spaces: Form, Story, and Experience Beyond Anthropocentrism*. This collection focuses on "[t]he efficacy of nonhuman spaces, when experienced through narrative form" ("Introduction" 1) and is subdivided into three sections: "the first deals with quotidian objects and situations imagined through descriptive strategies

that interrupt the human-centered progression of narrative" (3) – we find a concern with (agential/vibrant/lively) objects here again. "[T]he second part explores locations affected by disaster and catastrophe, events whose narrativization severely undermines the illusion of human control over space" (3) – again the topic of crisis is explored and how human beings are affected by it. The third part adds a novel topic as it "addresses the epistemological limits of narrative form and how the spatial imagination can attempt to pierce through such limits through various scalar shifts" (3). A more methodologically inclined publication is *Diffractive Reading: New Materialism, Theory, Critique*, edited by Kai Merten, with its aim "to both discuss and practice a new methodology of *reading*, inspired by recent discussions of how matter (and matter beyond culture in particular) could be integrated more strongly into theories and methods within the Humanities and the Social Sciences" (Merten, "Introduction" 1, original emphasis). This collection puts Barad's method of a *diffractive reading* to work in the reading of literary texts and other media, such as music, visual and digital media.

Next to these edited volumes, we find an increasing number of papers and monographs engaging with the New Materialisms in literary studies. I want to exemplarily point out some contributions in order to present the variety of new materialist engagements in diverse areas of literary studies. Natalie Dederichs explores the agency of literature itself in "Creatures of Story, Stories of Creatures: Transformative Reading and the Agency of Literature". More theoretically inclined are Neil Vallelly by bringing affect theory and New Materialism together in "(Non-)Belief in Things: Affect Theory and a New Literary Materialism"; Joss Hands in comparing Cultural Materialism to New Materialism in "From Cultural to New Materialism and Back: The Enduring Legacy of Raymond Williams"; Marlene Marcussen in combining narratology with New Materialism in *Reading for Space: An Encounter between Narratology and New Materialism in the Works of Virginia Woolf and Georges Perec*; Tobias Skiveren by discussing the crossroads between feminist literary criticism, New Materialism and Postcritique in "Feminist New Materialism and Literary Studies: Methodological Meditations on the Tradition of Feminist Literary Criticism and (Post)Critique"; and Ingrid Hotz-Davies by arguing for a material turn in gender studies in "When Theory Is Not Enough: A Material Turn in Gender Studies". Case studies of how the New Materialisms can be fruitfully put to work in the analysis and interpretation of literature

of different genres are offered, for example, by Katharina Luther's "Stream Worlding: Diffractive River Poetics in Alice Oswald's *Dart*", Kevin Trumpeter's "The Language of the Stones: The Agency of the Inanimate in Literary Naturalism and the New Materialism" and Susan Yi Sencindiver's "'It's Alive!' New Materialism and Literary Horror". All these studies demonstrate that literature is an excellent place to explore new materialist concerns and that new materialist theories can serve as inspiration for the study of literary texts. I hope that this study of colour writings can add yet another facet to the increasing engagements of literary scholarship with the New Materialisms by exploring the entanglements between colour, matter, text and reader.

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The topic of colour in literature is usually addressed in terms of semantics and figurative uses of colour. *Entangled with Colour: New Materialist Explorations in English Colour Writing* presents another take on colour in literary texts. It introduces the practice of colour writing, which stresses the relationality between colour, matter, words and affects. With precursors in fin-de-siècle and modernist literature, a genre of colour writing has evolved since the end of the 20th century with Derek Jarman's *Chroma*, Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* and Han Kang's *The White Book*. This study demonstrates how these texts create a material-discursive dimension of colour which in turn requires a rethinking of how to read colour. To examine the complex materialisations of colour-matter in these texts, the study engages with a new materialist understanding of matter and agency. It further introduces a new reading strategy, an attentive reading, that aims to unfold the various shades of colour's material-discursive doings in colour writings. Such an attentive reading follows a postcritical tradition and is developed in close dialogue with texts by Nan Shepherd. By attentively describing the entanglements between colour, matter, text and reader, this study explores how colour-matter makes itself felt in the reading process and how colour writings entangle the reader with their unique colourscapes.

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