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The development of the soul as colour spectrum – consequences for art therapy. Art therapy and the management of rage and anger in young people

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## **Introduction**

Helping young people to deal with anger and rage in school requires that the adults have insight into the development and situation, both of the soul and the body, of the pupil. It is important that the adults are aware of the difference between healthy and unhealthy anger in young people, in order to be able to better meet and support their development.

In this presentation I compare the development of the soul of the pupil with the transition from an image colour spectrum to a lustre colour spectrum, a transition from a latent to a manifest existence, as described by Rudolf Steiner (1921) in his colour circle. The purpose of describing the development of the pupil in terms of a colour spectrum transition is to deepen understanding of the process that dominates the teenage years, namely the birth of the astral body. This is a development from the latent to the manifest. By describing the development of the teenager in this way, as a process of change that occurs principally in the astral body, I intend to explain the way in which art therapy can help young people to manage emotional tempests.

1. I describe the development from child to teenager, and the development towards becoming an independent person.
2. I present two transitions: from image colour to lustre colour, and from etheric body to astral body.
3. I describe astral activity on two levels.

4. I focus on the borderland between latent and manifest existence.
5. I use a case description to demonstrate how artistic activity becomes pedagogic support.
6. I discuss the role that the upper and lower layers of the astral body play in anger attacks.
7. I conclude with a summary and some final comments.

### **1. The development from child to teenager, to become an independent person**

I would characterise the period between childhood and the teenage years as a period in which the life powers flourish. The development becomes apparent in expressions in both the body and the soul. The anthroposophical study of man uses the concepts of “etheric body” and “astral body” to describe this development.<sup>1</sup> A part of the etheric body is released from the physical body during the process of maturation in the school years (Figure 1). These free etheric powers are beneficial to the development of the child as *pupil*. What characterises a teaching relationship, the triad of teacher-subject-pupil, requires free etheric powers in order to function productively.

The pupil’s astral body develops gradually during the school years and becomes free from the etheric body. These free astral powers contribute to the development of the young person to becoming an *independent person*. I believe that the free astral body is required to achieve the distance that is required for the personal development and self-image of the pupil. The free astral powers make possible the unique pedagogic situation in which

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<sup>1</sup> Steiner, Rudolf: Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss, 1910.

something new and unexpected can arise between the pupil, the teacher and the subject (van Wright 2014)<sup>2</sup>. The organisation of the ego develops in the meeting with others into a free spiritual part of the personality. The birth of the astral body is an important and comprehensive process. Unmanageable anger, rage and anxiety, however, risk disturbing this development.

## **2. Two transitions: from image to lustre, and from etheric to astral**

I now compare the relationship between the etheric body and the astral body in teenagers to the relationship between two colour spectra: the image colour spectrum and the lustre colour spectrum, as shown in Steiner's colour circle<sup>3</sup>. Steiner (1921) distinguishes between image colours and lustre colours<sup>4</sup>. The four image colours are white, the colour of incarnation (human skin, or peach blossom), green and black (Figure 2). These image colours are described as subdued and less saturated than the lustre colours yellow, blue and red. I experience image colours as latent. Image colours show themselves as shadows of their nature, while lustre colours show their nature without reservation. In the image colour spectrum, green is the dead image of life, the colour of incarnation is the living image of the soul, white the soul-inhabited image of the spirit, and black the spiritual image of death. In the lustre colour spectrum, red is the lustre of life, blue is the lustre of the soul, and yellow the lustre of the spirit (Figure 2). I regard the transition from the image colour spectrum to the lustre colour spectrum as a transition from a latent to a manifest existence.

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<sup>2</sup> von Wright, Moira. On the possibility of novelty: subjectivity and intersubjectivity in teaching. *Research on Steiner Education*, Vol. 5, pp. 29-36, 2014. Available at [www.rosejourn.com](http://www.rosejourn.com).

<sup>3</sup> Steiner, Rudolf: "Bildwesen und Glanzwesen der Farben". Lecture held in Dornach on 7 May 1921, in the collection "Das Wesen der Farben", Bibliography no. 291.

<sup>4</sup> Steiner, Rudolf: Das Farbenerlebnis – die vier Bildfarben. Lecture held in Dornach on 6 May 1921. Bibliography no.

I will now show a sketch (Figure 1) of human development with time, in order to emphasise the transition from the latent existence of the astral body during childhood to its manifest existence during the teenage years. In addition, I show a circular sketch of the four levels of self in order to emphasise the relationship between the astral body and the etheric body. Steiner presented a circular depiction of the soul in the Psychosophie collection<sup>5</sup> (Figure 3). This shows the conflict between two currents of time: an etheric current from the present to the past (shown in the figure as a current from left to right), and an astral flow from the future towards the present (shown in the figure as a flow from right to left). These two currents meet in the present, and it is in this instant that the consciousness of the self can be ignited. An autobiographical memory arises in the consciousness and forms the basis for the self-image of the pupil.

I would like to emphasise one feature of the etheric body: its ability to lift the building blocks of the organism from the material level, to *nourish* the organism and to promote a receptive attitude in the pupil in the school. In contrast, I would like to emphasise in the astral body the ability to act in a countercurrent manner in the organism, to secrete the excess of the organism, to be *a drain on resources* rather than providing nourishment. The astral body promotes the development of the pupil from a dominantly receptive attitude to a more independent and critical attitude to the teacher and the subjects.

### **3. Astral activity on two levels**

A complex process of development takes place during the teenage years that is difficult to capture. It can be said that the soul develops on two levels: the addition of a new way of expressing life when the etheric body releases a part of the astral body. This is a case of the transformation of

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<sup>5</sup> Steiner, Rudolf: Psychosophie, Berlin, 4 November 1910, Bibliography no. 115.

physical to etheric. The development is seen in the form of the pupil's body, patterns of movement and habits during puberty. The development deals also with a higher level of the self, the astral body, and its transition from a latent to a manifest existence of the soul. Many personality traits that have been sleeping now appear, and completely new sides of the pupil become manifest. Personal experiences and an autobiographical memory form the basis of a new self-image. It is possible that the concept of "dual nature" will be useful in making the difference clear between the two levels at which this teenage development takes place. The expressions of the astral body as emotions in the vital part of the astral body and the soul-based experiences of the astral body as feelings in the part of the astral body that bears consciousness<sup>6</sup>.

The distinction between feelings and emotions can be compared to the difference between the upper and lower astral body in the following way: The upper astral body is that part that is accessible by the person's consciousness as thoughts, feelings and values. It cannot be observed by others, and thus the feelings are, in this way, private. The lower astral body is anchored in life processes, and is thus not immediately accessible by the consciousness. It can, however, be directly observed by others in emotions, gestures and behaviour, and is thus public.

Since we can neither directly see nor interpret the feelings of others, whether they be love or anger, we are compelled to communicate with each other and ask: "How are you feeling?". A facial expression is not a simple reflection of a feeling.

#### **4. The borderland between latent and manifest existence**

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<sup>6</sup> I follow Antonio Damasio (2003, p13) when I distinguish between the mental processes that are sometimes called emotions and sometimes feelings. He says that emotions primarily follow the body, and are thus "corporeal", whereas feelings primarily follow consciousness. Damasio, Antonio. *Looking for Spinoza. Joy, sorrow and the Feeling Brain*, Harcourt, 2003

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The correspondence between processes of the soul and the colour spectrum processes is central to my argument. Just as the astral body is born of the etheric body, the primary source of life, so also blue and yellow shine forth from the primary colour green. In order to study the release of the astral body from the etheric in more detail, I have chosen to study the colour separation and use it as a comparison. Green is a primary colour in the image colour spectrum: it is the dead image of life. The primary colour green is separated into the primary colours blue and yellow. In the lustre colour spectrum, blue is the lustre of the soul, and yellow the lustre of the spirit. Red in the lustre colour spectrum is the lustre of life (Figure 4). In this way, the lustre colour red stands in opposition to the image colour green, this being a complementary relationship. This situation is unique in the relationships between image colours and lustre colours: the colour of incarnation is the image of the soul, blue is the lustre of the soul; white is the image of the spirit, yellow is the lustre of the spirit. There is no complementarity in these relationships. We have gained a glimpse of the borderland between life processes and processes of the soul, between the etheric body and the astral body (Figure 4).

The etheric body exists in the borderland at the same time as image and lustre. And the astral body appears in the borderland sometimes as vital emotions, sometimes as conscious feelings. Only when the borderland has been passed and the dead image of life, green, has developed into the lustre of life, red, is the way clear for the living image of the soul, the colour of incarnation, to manifest itself for the lustre of the soul, blue. Darkness becomes a part of the soul in the blue lustre of the soul. We here see the situation in which current and countercurrent meet. The majority green meets the opposition red; the green colour on its way towards yellow and blue is met by its complementary colour red, as can be seen on diagram (Figure 4). In the red lustre of life, warmth becomes a part of the vitality, the warmth in which the ego can have its being. It is here a matter of offering support in a pedagogic meeting, through an artistic activity. Here, we can prepare a place for the ego-organisation in the warmth.

## **5. A case description showing how artistic activity becomes pedagogic support**

A pedagogic support team at a Waldorf school was consulted about a nine-year-old pupil who had developed some weeks ago an increasingly irritated and threatening attitude, with rage attacks that were difficult to manage and an inability to deal with apparently minor problems. Many of the classmates stated that they were scared of the pupil. In this case it was a boy, whom I will call "Peter", but it could just as well have been a girl. Among other infringements, he had pushed some classmates, pulled their hair, and threatened to kill them. The parents complained to the school management about Peter's behaviour. Peter was called for an interview with the head teacher. He claimed that he had been teased by the other pupils and promised to try to remain calm. However, despite interviews with the pupil, warnings about heavy penalties imposed by the adults, and earnest promises from Peter that he would change, the rage attacks tended to return.

The support team met to discuss what to do, and agreed to offer Peter painting therapy. He was given private painting lessons with a painting therapist, Maija, and it became apparent that he loved to paint with her. During these sessions, Peter found peace and was able to relax within himself, and was able to deal with problems without irritation. It became possible to reach him as a person. The painting sessions have become true meetings in which something completely new has arisen for Peter, and meetings in which he has been able to reach other sides of himself. This has gradually contributed to Peter regaining control of his feelings and emotions.

This story with a happy ending leads to an important question that I want to discuss in greater depth: What were the considerations that formed the basis of the team's assessment that it was painting that would be useful therapy for Peter?

## **6. The upper and lower layers of the astral body in anger attacks**

On the conscious level, anger can be a positive force. Healthy anger is characterised by consideration of others and communication. Positive anger may involve fighting for justice, for freedom of expression, aspiring to an ideal. Healthy anger is carried by the consciousness, the green-blue zone in the upper layer of the astral body, where vitality strives to achieve enthusiasm in the life of the feelings (Figure 4).

Unhealthy anger is self-centred, uncompromising, and has a low threshold for frustration. Unhealthy anger magnifies problems, subjects other people to prejudicial judgement, and is monologic due to deficiencies in communication. Unhealthy anger risks leading to insufficient prudence and blind violence. Unhealthy anger appears in the red-green region of conflict in which vitality and emotions mix in the lower level of the astral body (Figure 4).

When meeting unhealthy anger, it is not a case of demanding obedience and compliance, appealing to morality, or requiring a change of inner attitude, avoiding stress in the life of the feelings. Emotions thrive in vitality; emotions appear in visible activities, in behaviour. It is for this reason a case of renegotiating the activity, not requirements for conformity. We must remember here that the lustre of the soul is blue. Allow teenagers to experience the transformation of vitality, in the separation of green into yellow and blue. The experience of weight in the body and light in the spirit frees the soul. It is then possible for the living image of the soul, the colour of incarnation, to manifest itself and appear in the lustre of blue.

## **7. Summary and final comments**

In this lecture I have examined whether artistic activity, in particular painting therapy, can reinforce young people who display antisocial and extrovert behaviour. I have suggested that we use the relationship between image colours and lustre colours as a metaphor, in order to obtain understanding in depth of how the soul develops from life forces.



Development of the soul during the teenage years involves the release of the astral body from the etheric body. I have described the two levels on which the astral body acts. One level is the lower level, which is anchored in the life processes and cannot be directly accessed by the consciousness, but can be observed in emotions, gestures and behaviour. The other level is the upper level that carries consciousness. This level cannot be observed directly by other people and is thus a private level. I have pointed out that it is here that the similarity between development of the soul and the separation of colours is particularly apposite. The essence of the colour green has its image character in the image colour green, but appears in the lustre colour red. A requirement for this is, however, the separation of the colour green into blue and yellow (Figure 4).

I have emphasised that the emotion of rage has its origin in vitality. It is difficult to appeal to reason while the pupil is blazing with anger. The emotion has its roots in vitality, and it can be difficult to raise intense emotions into the consciousness. The therapeutic consequence for pedagogic support is to exploit the life forces in artistic activity, in words and deeds and to release the soul. Do not moralise; do not blame.

The birth of the astral body is the dominating process between childhood and the teenage years with expression in both the body and the soul. Examining the borderland between, on the one hand, the etheric body and, on the other hand, the two layers of the astral body may shed light onto the mystery of how a nice, compliant child can be filled with rage after a single glance or the laughter of a classmate. Insults and scuffles are not unusual in such situations. Despite warnings about heavy penalties and earnest promises of improvement from the pupil, explosions of anger tend to return. It is our experience that well-defined routines during the day's activities and intense artistic work in school can contribute to separating the excess vitality from feelings. The free astral powers make possible the unique pedagogic situation of support in which something new and unexpected can arise. Artistic activity calms the situation, discharges emotions and reinforces the experience of feelings. The triad pupil-artistic

activity-therapist allows the warmth to be created in which the ego can exist and something new can arise.

What were the considerations that formed the basis of the team's assessment that it was painting that would be useful therapy for Peter?

When Peter arrived to meet the support team, Maija had brought out paintings that Peter had done in Year 1, when he was receiving support for concentration difficulties, waiting for his turn, and following the routines of the classroom. What was remarkable was that Peter remembered these painting sessions accurately and in great detail when he saw these old paintings. He remembered what he had thought, what Maija had said, and how the painting developed. He remembered all these details very accurately. In contrast, he remembered nothing of the ongoing problems in the class, only that he was being teased by the other pupils. For Peter, his promise to not become angry and the interviews he had with adults had nothing to do with his episodes of anger. It was clear that he was listening carefully and he understood exactly what the adults meant, but he could not retain control when the other pupils teased him.

The members of the support team decided that it was not possible to help Peter by increasing his self-awareness or by appealing to his conscience, even though he was 9 years old. Instead, attention was to be paid to the pent up vitality that was behind his emotional outbursts. The thought behind this was that artistic experiences during painting correspond to a level of experience that is pre- concept-based, i.e. experiences before they become abstract, more structured by perception than logic. Experiences of colour that are enchanting, that touch us deeply, that are unpredictable with both hard contrast and soft transitions with many nuances, i.e. a level of experiences in which Peter had the opportunity to recognise himself and deal with himself. It was intended that individual support in the form of painting would provide Peter with the opportunity to free himself from his previous life, and to figuratively cross the Rubicon to reach a new landscape of the soul.

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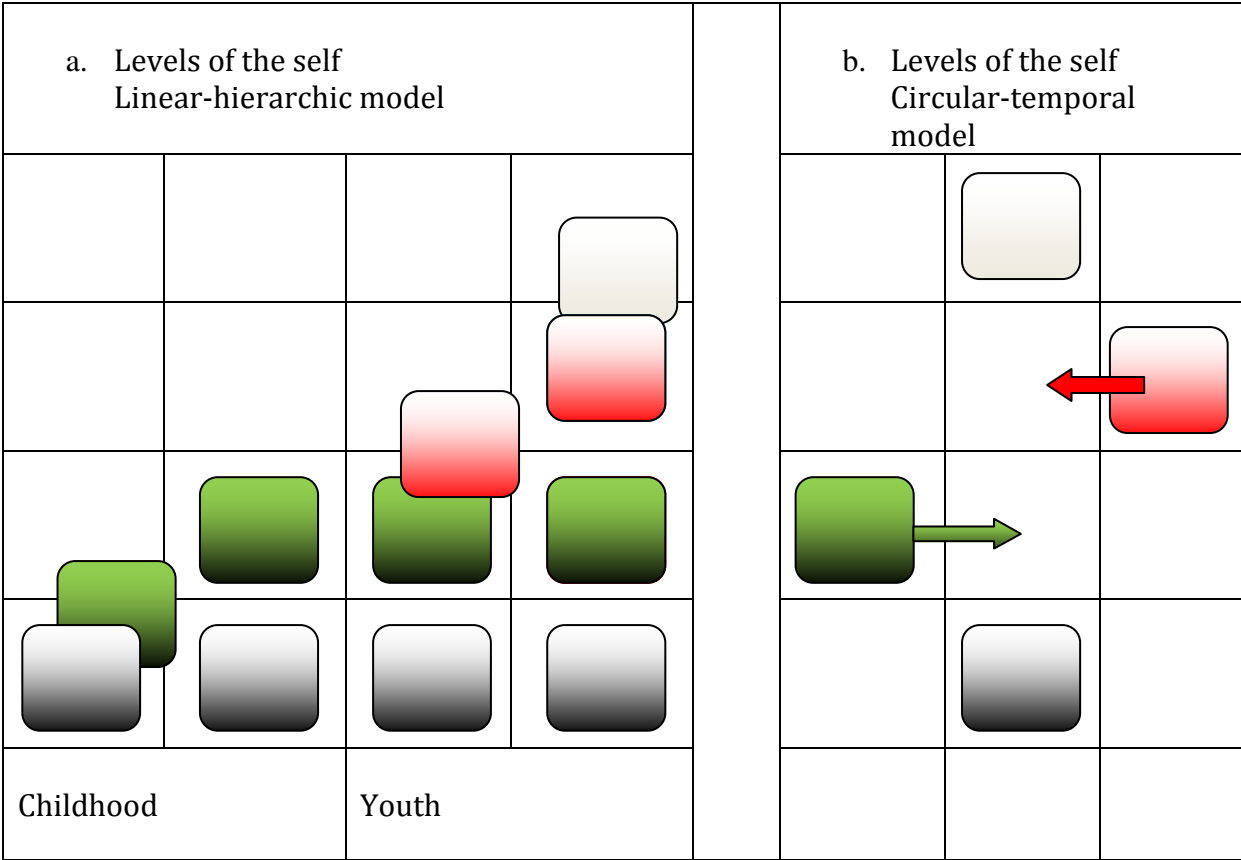
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Figure 1







-  Ego-organisation
-  Astral body
-  Etheric body
-  Physical body

Figure 2

### Image colours and lustre colours

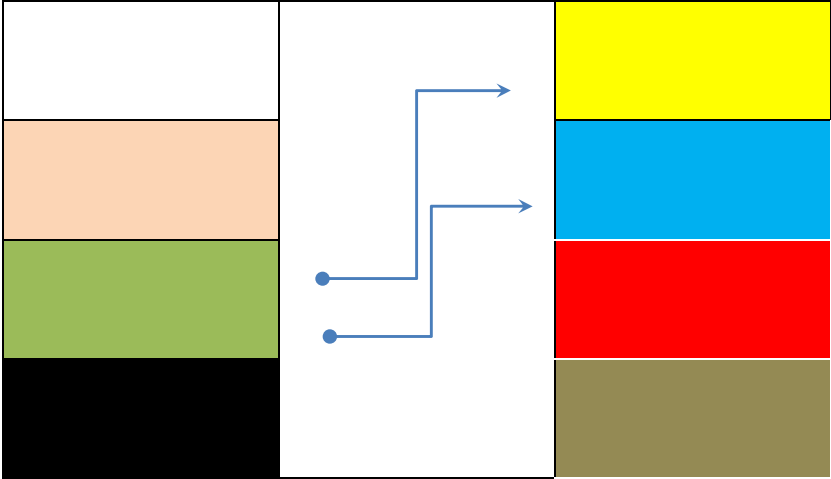


Image - latent

Lustre - manifest

White is the soul-based image of the spirit

Yellow is the lustre of the spirit

The colour of incarnation is the living image of the soul

Blue is the lustre of the soul

Green is the dead image of life

Red is the lustre of life

Black is the spiritual image of death

Figure 3

## Steiners psychosophical diagram

(Psychosophie 1910)

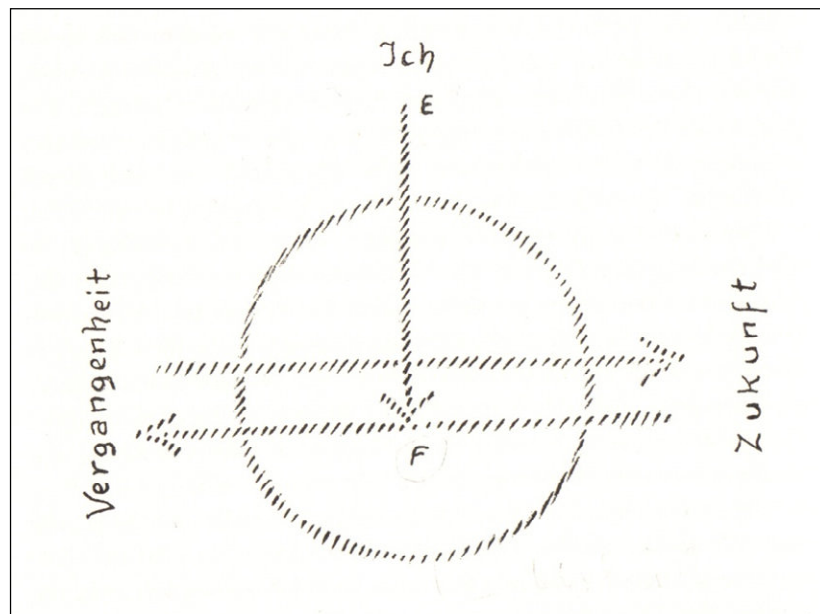


Figure 4

