

From Aesthetics to *Vitality Semiotics* – From *l'art pour l'art* to Responsibility: Historical change of perspective exemplified on Josef Albers

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Abstract

The paper follows the thesis, that the perception of real or virtual media shares the anthropological state of “Ausdruckswahrnehmung” or perception of expression (Ernst Cassirer). This kind of perception does not represent a distant, neutral point of view, but one that is guided by feelings or “vitality affects” (Daniel N. Stern). The prerequisites, however, for triggering these feelings/“vitality affects” are not recognizable objects or motifs, but rather their sensually evaluable “abstract representations” or their formal logical structures. In contrast to aesthetic feelings, however, they affect not only our feelings *of lust or unlust* or our knowledge (formal aesthetics) but also our actions (semiotics). So, when I extend aesthetic experiences to semiotic effects, I will talk about *vitality semiotics*. This new concept is of consequence, because the thesis of the responsibility of the producer is based on these effects.¹ This is to be carried out by analyzing and presenting the approach of the Bauhaus master Josef Albers.

Keywords

action theory, aesthetics, Josef Albers, artistic research, ethics, life sciences, philosophy of perception, vitality semiotics

¹ Many thanks for fruitful discussions on this topic at and after the conference Fure+ in Münster go to Boris Kochan in his function as spokesman for the Department of Design of the German Cultural Council (Deutsche Kulturrat).

1. Introduction or Premise

A basic assumption cannot be ignored for both media-areas, whether analog or the digital, that they are equally dependent on the conditions of human perception. With this in mind, it is obvious that not only recognizable images of the world, but the technical-creative decisions of imaging must conform with the principles of human perception. In terms of this assumption, however, it is of less interest that and how we perceive something as images in the world and in artefacts, but why we do so. Contrary to the fact that man is able to distinguish and name things that we see and designate as trees or tables, I am interested in the question of why this is important. The answer to this question follows an assumption in empirical and philosophical research, since it is a matter of life and death. Remarkably, this simple premise opens the mind to an understanding of human perception based on its relevance to action. Is it dangerous? May I eat it? May I come closer? Do I have to run away or attack? Starting on the assumption that we never lose this kind of perceiving world, I look for the triggers in "things" and living beings that enable us to decide these fundamental questions. However, the answer is not only of relevance for living beings and "things" in the world, but also to artefacts, since both are related in perceptual premises. Unlike the world, however, the relevance of actions in designed objects is special because they are artificial products. This means, they are produced by someone to a purpose. Accordingly, in this case, it is not the world that gives us information, but something that has been done in relation to the goal of the manufacturer or the customer, and therefore can be relevant not only for knowledge and benefits, but also for actions, and the latter not only for survival needs but social or political issues. The thesis of the responsibility of producer of artefacts base on this.

2. Empirical Backgrounds

Focusing on the question what does trigger action-relevant information, already the first closer examination of environmental and developmental psychological research shows that knowing, and thus naming things and beings in the world cannot be assumed as the beginning in confronting with the world (Werner [1926] 1959, cf. as well Uexküll 1909). In contrast, first connections of human beings with the world are pragmatic and functional as Heinz Werner says, a developmental psychologist or “scientist of livings” (*Lebenswissenschaftler*) from the University of Hamburg, who emigrated in 1933 to the USA. Reacting in this sense to the world, Werner states, we need all our senses. However, the information from all our senses only become relevant, if – regardless of whether it is about a thing or a living being – each is treated as alive and expressive. This is, we have to conclude, since only when we interpret encounters as alive and expressive, we are able for appropriate responses which have to be pragmatically and functionally meaningful actions. As it becomes obvious through the research of Werner, our system of perceiving world has adapted itself to this necessity of life. Conceptually ordering capacities follow this regime. In conclusion, Werner states that everything which encounters us, is taken with an a-modal vitality sensibility (“*amodale Vitalempfindungen*”) of different senses at the same time which influence each other (*Ibid.*, 67–77). The state of man is that of a “complete emotional motor situation”. All is taken as “things of actions and signals”, as objects of a “course of events”. The world is captured less as a matter-of-fact than expressive, as face-to-face and as alive (*Ibid.*, 38–47).

In the 80s it has been the American psychiatrist and psychotherapist Daniel N. Stern who confirmed and refined these insights from Werner. His research is based on experiments with infants less than 18 months old before using language and thus words for orientation in the world. Due to his observations and conclusions it becomes obvious that already infants aged six weeks old orient themselves by comparing forms, differentiating intensities as well as time patterns, and value them as vitality affects overall. These aspects have in common, that they are abstract representations of properties, which are expres-

sively evaluated. Thus, says Stern, infants secure “with powerful purposefulness” social interaction with the world (Stern [1986] 1992, 49). A simple experiment from 1979 already shows this. Two blindfolded infants sucked pacifiers, one had pimples and the other was smooth. After they were put on the table, and the bandages removed, everyone recognized her pacifier. This shows, on the one hand, that the infant is able to develop abstract representations of properties of something that she does not know beforehand, and on the other hand can compare and verify the information with different senses, in this case by touching the pacifier with her tongue and through looking with their eyes (Ibid., 74–76). Thus, Stern concludes, that only when abstract representations are grasped and evaluated, information can be recorded, exchanged and compared by all senses at the same time. So, he states, that the perception system is a-modal, trans-modal and cross-modal:

These abstract, perceptible representations are not images, sounds, haptic impressions and nameable objects, but rather forms, levels of intensity, and time patterns – the more “global” characteristics of experience. (Ibid., 74–103, 80)

These findings of Stern to the sensory system were confirmed by experiments such as of Wolf Singer and Rainer Mausfeld as Lars Grabbe shows (Grabbe 2016, cf. Mausfeld 2006).² On the basis of this, substantial insight was obtained regarding the ability of man to gain “models of the world” (Singer 2004). In addition to these fundamental possibilities for grasping world, Stern, like Werner, emphasizes its relevance for action. Ultimately, for them it is precisely the capacity of man to translate these inherent perceptual qualities into qualities of

²These empirical results have then been transferred by Grabbe into a new *phaenosemiotic model*, that brings together bodily based multimodal mechanism of perception with semiotic orientated, mental orders as representations of signs (Grabbe 2016, 10–20). In philosophical terms and rendered up into a mathematical applicable formula the *phaenosemiotic model*, Grabbe describes the balance of multisensory modalities of media and their interaction with bodily based multimodal mechanism of perception parallel to their mental order as representations and signs. Thus, Grabbe concludes, that new media, e.g. games, are switching the balance to perceptual-bodily directed immersion in contrast so mental-guided psychological immersion effects of classical media (Ibid., 7–9).

feeling, that provide the necessary information to respond appropriately. The translation process into feelings is based on the active perception of the recipient himself. He is dependent on abstract representations of properties be it in this case on the different forms of the pacifiers, that are grabbed by the infants through curving with the tongue around the irregular surface or by sliding without interruption around the smooth form. The qualities of feelings that are arousing by doing this can be characterized by dynamic, kinetic terms. Stern himself describes these effects with respect to stronger “situations”, and thus refers to hard felt affective vitalities such as bubbling, fading, explosive, fading, bursting, attracting, and so on (Stern [1986] 1992, 83). It is precisely in these situations, that their relevance for action generally becomes clearer. For example, a loud bang of a falling chair lets the toddler stop her tour through the room, turn around and seek for further advice from a trustworthy person. Indeed, both examples show, that what we see is not only perceived as something that can be called, but is also interpreted by the recipient – sometimes by the help of a more experienced person – as a living meaningful being that does not need to provoke, but can provoke decisions and thus actions.

Remarkably, these results correspond to a study of Thiemo Breyer, who points out that purely internal mirroring actions are insufficient to describe intersubjectivity. Their social relevance, as Stern already shows, is not only to mirror their effects, but to interpret them analogously or as metaphors in order to orient us in life situations (Breyer 2018, 17). This is significant in that Stern’s findings, which are based on abstract representations and their interpretations as so-called vitality affects, were later transferred to mirror mechanisms in neuroscience. This connection has already been made in a joint experiment on observed, imaginary and/or real actions in a collaboration of Stern with Giacomo Rizzolatti in 2012 (Rizzolatti et al. 2013) and later, after the death of Stern, independently (Rizzolatti et al. 2015). The latter is a neuroscientist at the University in Parma, Italy, who is well known as a member of the research team that discovered mirror neurons in monkeys (1996). This is again important in relation to the proposed action-relevant approach, since mirror neuroscientists tend to interpret mirror mechanisms of animals as well as human beings, as already Ruth Leys

criticizes, as basic emotional processes independent of “cognitive” or “intentional” aspects (Leys 2012, 1–5).

In contrast to Ley’s in some respects justified objection, Stern’s and Rizzolatti’s collaborative research as well as parts of research of other neuroscientists’ research, who undertook an approach to neuroaesthetics, do not exclude cognitive aspects, and thus intentional and therefore action-relevant interpretations (Gallese and Freedberg 2007; Gallese and Cinzia di Dio 2012; Gallese 2019, 114). In order to take this assumption into account, the neuroaesthetic concept of emotions must be distanced from the idea, as some researchers assume, that it describes discrete emotions as fear or disgust. In contrast, it is necessary to insist on the purely abstract affective vitalities or affective impulses, as originally Stern proposed and my own research in the art historical field confirms (cf. Sauer [1999/2000] 2014, 131–156; Sauer [2012] 2018, 19–30, 181–190). The latter concept depends on interpretations by recipients, which are made by exchanging and comparing abstract but also affective relevant information with all other senses or in exchange with others. The interpretations are not only relevant for survival needs, but also for cultural experiences. Based on this understanding, the information is used to gather knowledge about something or someone and to check its relevance for one’s own actions.

3. Philosophical Backgrounds

Considering this research background in empirical studies, we speak with respect to philosophical research of a world view in sense of an imagination of her (“*einer Anschauung von ihr*”) which is not neutral and which can therefore differ between individuals or groups. Moreover, it is of importance, that we not only express our needs or ideas but also communicate them with the help of sounds and gestures (cf. for this Mittelberg 2014) as well as later with the help of language and images. In terms of images, therefore, the arts are of interest, as Werner already assumes (with reference to Kandinsky, *ibid.* [1926] 1959, 47) and later Stern confirms:

In the case of the artistic style, the translation from perception to feeling thus requires the transformation of “truthful” perceptions (color harmonies, lines, etc.) into virtual forms of feeling, for example the feeling of silence. The analogous translation of the perceptions that we make in the behavior of another human, into feelings requires the transformation of perceptions of time patterns, intensity, and gestalt into vitality affects that we experience within ourselves through cross-modal transfer. (Stern [1986] 1992, 225–230, cf. 226–228)

This is relevant for the action-relevant approach to be presented here, since with Stern the arts fulfill also the premise to arouse vitality affects, and thus stimulating the imagination of the recipient. Moreover, this is important in a wider sense, because the possibility was known not only in ancient times, but was feared, as the researcher of antique philosophy Ernesto Grassi shows. His 1968 first published book on the subject bears the title *Power of Image* and the *Powerlessness of Rational Language* (*Macht des Bildes. Ohnmacht der rationalen Sprache*). The fear and thus rejection of Plato in face of the arts as medium of image formation that purposefully direct our imaginations is based on the fact that they arouse our musical enthusiasm (“*musischen enthousiamós*”), or more precisely, our vitality affects for something. Plato concludes that, for this reason, the arts shall not be guided by selfish purposes, but should belong only to the divine (Grassi [1958] 1970, 164).

Thus, Plato is at the beginning of a tradition that the philosopher of the Enlightenment Immanuel Kant pursued much later. He, too, follows the idea that what we see is not only perceived and then designated but is first felt and thus interpreted by the recipient as living and meaningful. He mutually reflects this connection in discussing the power of imagination (“*Einbildungskraft*”) and its relation to the designation (“*Begriff*”) in his concept of imagination (“*Anschauung*”) in *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1787 (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant [1787] 1989). In this context, Kant speaks of a line the recipient perceives as if she is suffering on her way to finding the right word for it. Kant says, that people are “affected inwardly” (“*innerlich affiziert*”) just as “we should to behave as suffering against ourselves” (“*in dem wir uns gegen uns selbst als leidend verhalten müssten*”) (ibid., 193). According to Kant, the power of imagination (“*Einbildungskraft*”) is a sensible,

active doing (cf. Sauer 2012, 21). Kant thus already describes the step from perceiving to understanding or imagination (vom Wahrnehmen zum Angeschauten), and thus from bodily-sensitive to cognitive-known processes as a process of feeling. Only in his book on the *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant [1790] 1991), however, is this context regarded as relevant to action. In the discussion about the power of arts this becomes important. After all, only a judgment based on a reflexive aesthetic judgment is acceptable. This is because it has a direct connection to “the Good, the True and the Beautiful” which refers to the divine. But when, in contrast, a simple aesthetic judgement is aroused, the arts can be used as “machines of persuasion”. (Ibid., cf. § 53, Vergleichung des ästhetischen Werts der schönen Künste untereinander, 266–273, cf. 268) Kant and Plato are therefore skeptical of art because of their seduction possibilities.

Subsequently, this concept of perception sensitivity controlling the imagination is deepened by the cultural anthropological research of the Neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer (cf. 1929, 1942 and 1944). In terms of art, this concept was also adopted by his fellow in mind, the art historian Aby Warburg (1923) and the two founders of the *Gesellschaft für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 1913 the philosophers Max Dessoir and Emil Utitz. Above all Utitz and Dessoir come to the conclusion, that the arts can influence the recipients in such a way that we must fear them (Collenberg-Plotnikov 2015, 28–33). Although Cassirer does not explicitly follow this idea, his concept provides the conditions for this conclusion. This is because the perception of man is not neutral but expressive. Cassirer speaks accordingly of a “perception of expression” of man (“Ausdruckswahrnehmung”):

Her safety and her ‘truth’ are, so to speak, a pre-mythical, pre-logical and pre-aesthetic one; she forms the common ground from which all those designs emerged and to which they remain attached. (Cassirer [1929] 1964, 94, translation MS).

With respect to the research line of this paper it have been after the emigration of Cassirer to the United States of America in particular the American process-philosophical research of Alfred N. Whitehead ([1924] 2000; cf. Schwemmer 2018) and of Susanne K. Langer (cf. [1965] 1985, and 1972) and the theory of embodiment of John Michael

Krois (cf. [2005] 2018, and [2010] 2011) which partly independently followed this line of concept by underlining the meaning of bodily sensations or feelings which are part of the processes of perception and thus are not only important for epistemological, but as Whitehead and Krois discuss in contrast to Cassirer and Langer, to action-relevant information (cf. Sauer 2014).

4. Backgrounds in Formal Aesthetics and Artistic Research

In addition to this research tradition of perception as action-relevant imaginations influenced by the arousal of vitality affects as specified by Stern since 1986, it is of interest that their implications since the advent of research in the mid-nineteenth century have always been related to “formal aesthetics” or formal logic in the art sciences (Wiesing [1997] 2008). In contrast to a possible relevance to knowledge or action, the relevance of abstract representations and their vitality affects in this tradition was initially limited to aesthetic feelings such as *lust and unlust* and then opened to aspects of knowledge. Acts, on the other hand, hardly play a role by the formal aesthetics until today.³

In the beginning it has been Robert Zimmermann who undertook research on the effects of designing with abstract representations on aesthetic feelings. His focus was on the study of harmonic and inharmonic compositions in art that evoke aesthetic values of *lust or unlust* (Zimmermann 1862). Independently of this approach, Alois Riegl

3 Only the most recent publication of the research group around the art historian Horst Bredekamp, who belongs to the wing of classical art historians who traditionally do not see any connections to formal aesthetics initiates an approach to action relevant theories with ambivalent results (Lauschke et. al. 2018, cf. review of Sauer 2019a). More than noteworthy is on the other hand the research of archaeological studies which, through conceptual strategies of frames and affordances discuss the action's relevance of artefacts (cf. the last conference of Johanna Fabricius and Elisabeth Günther as part of the Exzellenz-Cluster *Topoi* at Freie Universität Berlin, November 2–4, 2018. Accessed July 15, 2019: <https://www.topoi.org/event/46051/>).

(1901), Heinrich Wölfflin ([1915] 1923), and Max Imdahl (1987) distinguished between preferences of compositional styles in the visual arts (in German: “Kunstwollen”). By separating preferences for line or color in different centuries, they classified history of art in terms of human mentality. Gottfried Boehm from 1978 on distanced himself from this idea of historical developments in favor for lines or for colors but binds what we see in images of the world to a basic ground (“Ur-Grund”) which since ever is known to us (Boehm [1978] 1985, 454; *ibid.* 2008, 21). Inherent, however, in his art-historical history of perception (“Geschichte des Sehens”) there is again the idea of different mentalities of man. According to Lambert Wiesing, on the other hand, “new realities”, and thus new ways of seeing world can ever be created through artistic means (Wiesing [1997] 2008, 18–19).

In contrast to the theories of sciences in formal aesthetics, artists interpret these phenomena differently. Their starting point is the artistic work itself and therefore the conditions of artistic means be it colors and lines, materials and techniques. So, their accesses are dominated by experimenting with the prerequisites and the goals of designing. Thus, this kind of work cannot be characterized as a theoretical but be declared as artistic research. Particularly noteworthy in this context are those artists who not only experimented with creative means, but also expressed their views in writing. These include the Bauhaus masters Wassily Kandinsky and his two books from 1911 and 1926, Paul Klee with his article from 1924 and Josef Albers with his first article from 1934 and his book on color from 1963, and the artist Willi Baumeister and his book from 1943/44 that has not been published until after World War II in 1947. In this context it should be mentioned that these artists had a strong connection not only to art but design. This is because they considered – perhaps more than others – that feelings or rather vitality affects should not to be associated with easily identifiable elements, as they are already descriptive, but rather with their “abstract representations” or formal-logical structures and insofar with their “appearance styles” (Sauer 2018; *ibid.* [2012] 2018, 95–106, and [1999/2000] 2014, 34–41). Moreover, it was clear to them that both, artists and designers, work with these effects and thus arouse special feelings that are important for the respective topics. In addition, they can be used to provoke decisions and thus actions.

5. Methods of Designers and Artists: Analysis of Abstract Representations or Logical Formal Structures with Respect to their Potential to Arouse Vitality Affects Exemplified on Josef Albers

To prove these assumptions the artistic works of a member of the Bauhaus, who is connected to both, art and design, will be analyzed. This is Josef Albers, who emigrated to the USA after his years at the Bauhaus and its suppression first from Weimar and then from Dessau and finally with its closure by the National Socialists in Berlin in 1933. Invited by the heads of the Black Mountain College in North Carolina, he first became the head of the creative arts and later, from 1950 founder of the design department at Yale University. Indeed, not only Albers's experiences with the National Socialism regime and his habit to arouse "aesthetic feelings" to guide people (cf. Friedländer [1984] 2007, 11–12), but the discussions at the Bauhaus on the effects of artistic means to elicit purposefully feelings in recipients, convinced Albers that art and design have the ability to functionally influence people and thus have an effect on social and political life be it for the good or the bad. The artistic means thus deserved special attention. By teaching designers, experimenting with the artistic means with students and discussing the results with them, and by his own artistic work, and finally by writing about it, he took up the challenge. Thus, Albers faced up to his conclusion that artists and designers can use their artistic means according to their goals and are therefore responsible for them (cf. Sauer 2019).

Adobes, 1949–1953

In terms of the thesis that artists and designers neither only give pleasure or displeasure to recipients nor only let them something know of the world, but also influence their actions, the task of the following is to check this assumption. For this purpose, two images of the colorful

series of *Variants/Adobes* from 1948/55 and 1958 by Josef Albers are compared. They belong to a series, he realized in his late phase, after his emigration from Germany to the United States in 1933. After already experimenting with various materials from 1920 to 1933, which he had performed in class during the “Vorkurs” or basic course of the Bauhaus in Germany, he began to work with color too in the USA. But only under the impression of Mexican arts and crafts during 14 trips including two sabbatical years with his wife Anni Albers to Latin America from 1934 until 1949, he not only learned to know but to love color.

Inspired by the typical colorful Mexican adobe style of house buildings, he launched his series of *Variants*, the so-called *Adobes*. With that he had in mind a question that had occupied him already in earlier times since his time at the Bauhaus and his friendship with Kandinsky and Klee who were professors of the basic courses in form and color. In particular Kandinsky had already described in his first book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (*Über das Geistige in der Kunst*) from 1911 that the pictorial means are not to be understood only in terms of recognizable objects but due to their own appearances. Translated to Albers's *Adobes* this means, that the color's tone and its application which is not pasty but transparent, and the flat rather than line-shaped forms trigger their own dynamics or, more precisely, their own vitality affects in the recipient, that is immediately noticeable to us. Quoting Kandinsky, images trigger a “mental impression” (“seelischen Eindruck”) or an “emotional vibration” among recipients. Similar to music, Kandinsky points out that these sensations are triggered by the “inner sound” of each design means in relation to the respective others. Finally, Kandinsky says in his first book on color, including the task of the artist:

The color is the key (of a piano, M.S.). The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand, that vibrates purposefully the human soul with this or that key. *So, it is clear that the color harmony must rest only on the appropriate touch of the human soul.* This basis should be called the principle of inner necessity. (Kandinsky [1911] 1952, 59–79, cf. 64, italics in the original, translation M.S.)

Taking into account these ideas deepened by Klee's courses and his lecture in Jena 1924 about “creative thinking on structuring forces”

(“Bildnerisches Denken über formende Kräfte”), Albers systematically begins his own artistic research of colors. After repeated experiments on the effects of various colors in similar form and the discussion with the students of the aroused feelings, he published in 1963 the results in his well-known book *Interaction of Color*, which has been translated not only in Central and Northern European languages, but also into Japanese and Chinese. In German it has been published in 1970.

After all, it is the interactions of bright colors with the same shapes, that Albers experimented with in all of these variants of *Adobes*. So, he played with the different vitality affects of the abstract representations or pictorial means that they produce in us. Moreover, he showed, that the vitality affects of colors are in a stark contrast to the distribution of color and form on the screen. Specifically, this means that the so-called “factual fact”, and therefore the real colors on the carrier, do not correspond with the so-called “actual fact” the colors trigger in the recipient (Albers [1963] 1970, 112–120, cf. 117–118).

In order to check his thesis, in his last year at the Bauhaus in 1932 he already began to systematically experiment with the various effects with his so-called *Treble Clefs* and pursued them in the USA later. Only in the 40s he resumed his research on colors and forms by making variants of *Adobes* which based on a single mold of identical dimensions pre-planned on graph paper and colors pressed directly out of the tube, and always with a spatula be evenly distributed. Furthermore, he always used the same carriers, a plate of Masonite but in different dimensions. By systematizing forms, colors and carriers he fulfills the scientific requirements to make the same experiment repeatable. Based on the forms of the *Adobes*, he focused on two windows or doors which are connected with something like a doorstep and surmounted by a flat roof. For some of the *Adobes* he varied the depths of the entrance doors. As far as I can see, he works with this concept of *Adobes* more than ten years from his second sabbatical year in 1946/1947 until 1959. A similar scientific system was used by him for his famous series *Homage to the Square* and in addition for his so-called *Structural Constellations* which are basing on lines. A discussion of the effects of the latter goes beyond the scope of the present study and will be further explored elsewhere.

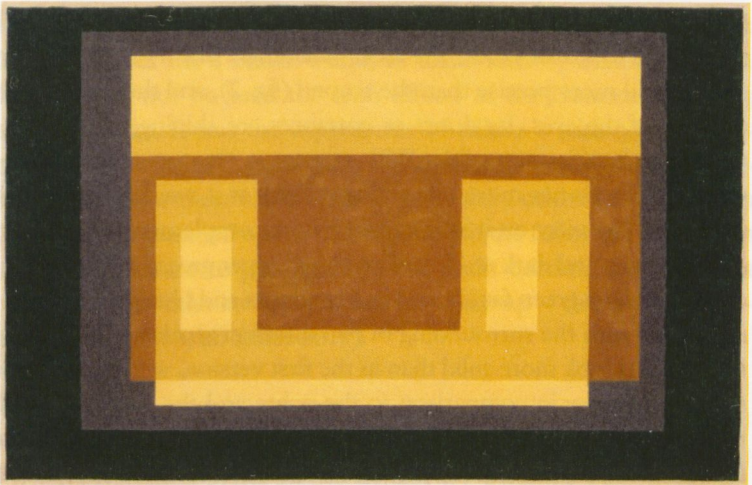


Figure 1: Josef Albers, *Variant / Adobe*, 1948–1955, Oil on Masonite, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm), Private Collection © 2019 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. (Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art)

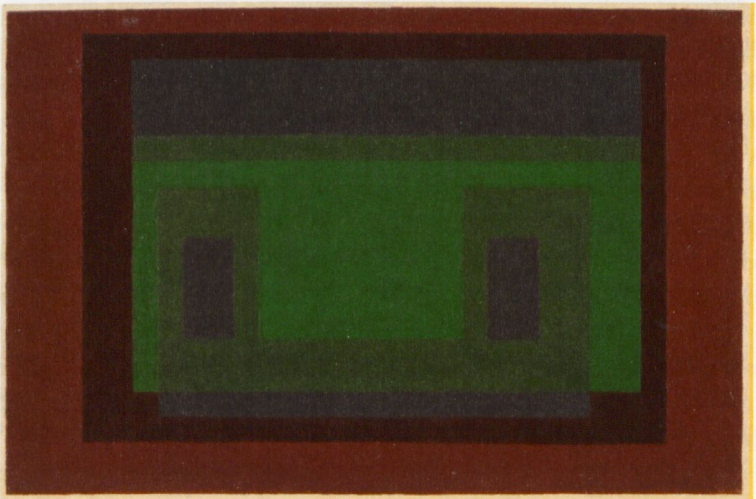


Figure 2: Josef Albers, *Variant / Adobe*, 1958, Oil on Masonite, 23 × 35 in. (58.4 × 88.9 cm), The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, 1976.1.1089 © 2019 The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. (Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art)

Nevertheless, already the comparison of two *Adobes* shall make this clearer. In terms of color, the first “building” (fig. 1) appears more present and more precise than the second (fig. 2), and thus completely in front of the eyes. Its doors or entrances are shining brighter, and thus appear easier accessible. With respect to the second, it shall be said that it becomes more interesting to look at it a second time. This is because the view on it is attracted by the complementary contrasts of dark green and dark red (mediated by a lighter green) as well as blue and ochre. The green façade and its blue doors and blue pedestal zone, combined with the surrounding in two different shades of red, makes the building look more solid than in the first version, with its luminous shades of yellow in comparison to the ochre and the grey and finally to the green surroundings. The first version has more presence in the foreground than the second, which seems to be more in the background.

In summary, this means that the effects are different although the dimensions of both buildings are the same. Dependent on the composition of the artistic means, the different color combinations trigger different vitality affects and thus meanings: the first appears closer and more open and thus more present, while the second is more distant and solid. When, in several other *Variants* Albers describes the image by titling it for example “Red, Violet around Orange, Pink” (*Variant/Adobe*, from 1948, Josef and Anni Albers Foundation), he inspires the recipient not only to see but rather to feel the special effects or interactions of color. Obviously, factual fact and actual fact differ. Remarkably, however, Albers always realized perfect, harmoniously coordinated color spaces be it with respect to the *Adobes* or the over 2000 variations of the well-known *Homages to the Square* since 1950. This is, because for Albers it is important to know about the effects of the artistic means since they influence the value formation of the recipient for the better or worse, and thus they are not neutral. Seeing this, he wrote shortly after arriving in the USA:

To understand the meaning of form is the indispensable preliminary condition for culture. Culture is the ability to select or to distinguish the better, that is ... the more meaningful form, the better appearance, the better behavior. Therefore, culture is a concern with quality. (Albers 1934, 1)

For Albers, this means that it depends on the producer's intention to use the effects for a better world, as demanded by Plato and Kant. They should not be used for such effects as the National Socialists tried to realize. It was the experiences of Albers's with National Socialism in Germany that convinced him that it was all the more important to know these effects just to make the world a better place. In this sense, he summed up his conviction with the following words: "In conclusion: I dare to predict it. It will again become apparent that beauty is more than an external surface make-up – that beauty is virtue" (Albers 1958, cf. Sauer 2019).

Final Words: From Aesthetics to *Vitality Semiotics* – From *l'art pour l'art* to Responsibility

Supported by theoretical positions in developmental psychology, philosophy, formal aesthetics and artistic research, it was necessary to concentrate on the methodological premises of artists and designers. The analysis of artistic artefacts such as Albers', for example, was intended to show how the decisions of designers, which including the choice of carriers and materials as well as the organization of forms, lines and colors, affect the recipient. The vitality effects they trigger not only create a vision ("view of") of space, volume (or corporeality) or form of more or less recognizable objects, but also influence our vision of it ("view of"). Yet we are only more or less aware that we are turning to a decision and thus an action that, as Albers aspires, should make the world a better place. Because in contrast to Albers's goals, the intentions can also be others, which Albers knew about, be it to stimulate the purchase of a good or to follow an idea through artistic strategies.

With regard to the task of the contribution, it should have become clear that artists and designers bear a responsibility for the image production, because by vitality effects they can influence ideas or desires after their or the goal of a customer. This seems all the more important when one considers that the reactions of the recipients are only more or less conscious.

To sum up, thus, it is a myth to judge the image of an artist and designer as a product of *lust* or *unlust*, or beyond that, as an object of *l'art pour l'art*, and thus as one that has no influence on the history of the world. Instead of aesthetics, we must talk – based on Stern's vitality affects and their relevance for meaning and action – of *vitality semiotics*. (cf. Sauer 2015).

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