

HISTORY OF COLOUR

For over 2000 years colour has fascinated and intrigued varied and different civilisations, even today we are still exploring its effects on our surroundings and us.

Those who accept that the mythical island of Atlantis existed believe that they used colour to treat and enhance themselves and their surroundings. For others who take a more grounded viewpoint the use of colour to treat ailments has been traced back to Ancient Egypt. The Ancient Egyptians were a people who worshipped the earth and its planets and they used green on the floors of many of their temples. They have a link with the modern use of therapeutic colour as they created different rooms in specific colours for spiritual and healing purposes, harnessing the power of the sun which they worshipped as a deity to illuminate and energise the colours. They were also aware of the therapeutic uses that crystals and gems could be put to.

Although there is written lists which date as far back as 1550 BC giving colour “cures” a great deal of this knowledge could have been lost with the advent of Ancient Greece when colour became regarded as a science. The practice of using colour as a therapeutic tool however was handed down by a very few people. There are records of the Chinese using colour nearly 2,000 years ago too.

It was the Ancient Greeks who took a more scientific stance with Plato and Pythagoras studying the effects of light and Aristotle producing a third colour by combining two others. It is reputed that in order to illustrate this he carried around two pieces of glass, one coloured yellow and another blue. When these were overlaid he produced green as many young schoolchildren will testify. He was also responsible for the discovery that light travelled in waves.

In Europe Paracelsus brought the subject to prominence again in the middle Ages, combining music and herbs with colour rays. Paracelsus also worked with flower remedies before Edward Bach and although many now think of him as ahead of his time and possibly one of the greatest healers of all times

he was, whilst alive, the subject of ridicule and isolation, not able to stay in one place for very long.

In 1672, Isaac Newton published a highly controversial paper on colour. Newton was the pioneer of the theory that white light consisted of a spectrum of 7 different coloured rays. He discovered this by passing a sunbeam through a prism. As the light passed through the prism the colours split into Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet. Newton called the coloured rays “the spectrum” and the act of light rays being broken up “dispersion”. Newton also discovered that if the light rays were returned back through the prism they would again become white light whilst if only a single ray was permitted to pass through the prism it would come out the same colour as it went in.

In 1813, Michael Faraday, whose work with electricity is more well known and who is considered by many to be one of the leading experimental scientists, was apprenticed to work with a leading chemist in those days called Sir Humphrey Davy through their work together it was discovered that it was possible to connect circuits without a visible connection using an electrical wave. Following on from this work, James Clerk-Maxwell presented a paper in 1864 which highlighted the possibility that everything carried an electromagnetic field concluding ‘Light is an electromagnetic disturbance propagating through the field according to electromagnetic laws’.

Around this time a German writer called Johann Wolfgang van Goethe was working with colour and light and trying to link the physical with the spiritual. This work was taken up by Rudolf Steiner who tried to create an alliance between religion, science and arts. He met opposition to his theories from clergy but also academics.

More recent pioneers of Colour and Light Therapy are Jacob Liberman author of *Light: Medicine of the Future*, John Ott ‘*Health and Light*’ both of which discuss the effects of light on health and emotional wellbeing, Theo Gimbel of the Hygeia College of Colour Therapy and is currently considered to be the foremost expert on Colour Therapy in Europe pioneering the use of colour in homes, hospitals etc, Harry Oldfield whose work with electro crystal therapy is continuing to push scientific boundaries forward, Dr Max Luscher who devised a psychological colour test which is used by

psychiatrists, physicians and psychologists and Vicky Wall, the blind founder of Aura Soma.

Nowadays, we are beginning to accept that a deprivation of light can lead to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) in countries where there is limited daylight available such as Iceland which at sometimes of the year only have 4 hours of daylight. Even in England, SAD is becoming a more accepted reason for depression and much work is being done to evaluate and understand this disorder in order to alleviate its effects. There are a growing number of light boxes available which can be used to stimulate the various energy and hormonal centres of the body to reduce or remove the effects of lack of light.

Colour is used to great effect in marketing goods and services and the psychological effects of colour are being harnessed to enhance and strike the right note in institutions such as prisons and hospitals. Businesses are beginning to accept that if they are given the appropriate environmental colours work rate and efficiency as well staff turnover improves.

Companies producing paint have not been slow to jump on the “colour therapy” bandwagon as have cosmetic and makers of holistic wellbeing products such as Aura Soma.

Listed below are some colour correspondences which illustrate the therapeutic benefits of each colour:

Red – activation, movement, passion, danger, excitement. Red can raise the blood pressure and libido but also encourages us to live in the moment and leave the past behind.

Orange – confidence, enthusiasm, liberation and release. Orange is used therapeutically to treat conditions such as asthma, menstrual problems but also tiredness and depression.

Yellow – intellectual, self empowerment, extrovert, clarity, focus. Can be used to treat exhaustion, arthritis and aids the release of toxins from the body.

Green – peaceful, calming, regenerating and harmonising. Green is a good stressbusting colour, relaxing and calming it is used by colour therapists to relax the nervous system and calm emotions.

Light Blue – serene, cooling, trust, communication. Light blue helps to lower blood pressure, is anti-inflammatory and is used to relieve conditions which are itchy, sore etc. This colour is also linked to the thyroid gland and the throat.

Indigo – insightful, intuitive, meditative. Indigo is good to calm an overactive mind, a colour therapist might use it to treat conditions such as boils, shingles and as an antidote to hot flushes. It is seen as a purifying and calming colour.

Violet – restorative, spiritual, aspirational, inspiring. Violet can be used to treat blood conditions, headaches and migraines.

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