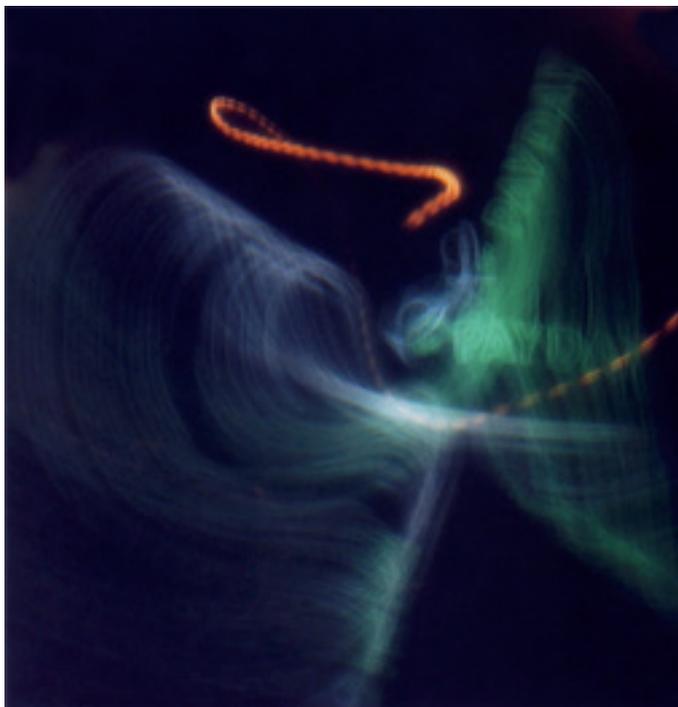


# Color Field



Mark Cunningham

number 21 in the 2River Chapbook Series



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## White

I read that most people think of their bodies as if they have a black outline surrounding them, a border holding them distinct from their environment, like the outline you see around bodies in the early days of special effects filming. (But egg needs sperm, flesh skeleton.) Dan Flavin designed a space lit by green fluorescent tubes. As you look, the tubes wash out to white. (This provokes desire or fear, but never a feeling of completeness.) My black outline, my little night-dream border: I'm not lulled. At any moment, it could be re-drawn in chalk.

## Gray

The clock's hands are black, its face white. Between: a lead band a little before, a little after. Two nights before the break-up, you talked to your mother in a dream, and you said, "I'm tired of helping people." Everything went silent, as when the audio cable is pulled from the back of the TV. The night before the break-up, you listened to a voice over the phone, the lights glaring off and on, the phone blanking out, crackling back, no way to tell it that you couldn't hear, that you knew what it was saying. You've stepped across the static-line. You can't tell to which side.

## Brown

Soiling, maybe, but when 18th-century French ladies drank their chocolate, it was a sign of refinement. Always a niggle. Always the sense of no solid ground. And what *does* the earth rest on? You nibble a Snickers for solace, then fret about your weight. Children sit in rows, tormented by division like twigs devoured by wood lice. It's years before they learn that there's no real way to handle remainders. As you rest from one errand, plan another, you feel your body fizz, persistent as cola foam shaken, riddling away.

## Yellow

Children cry more often around it. But there are no children. Now the freezer sweats, and when you put the DVD on fast forward, the figures jitter with nervous ticks. All that glitters involves your Gold Card, so you want to be careful, check *Consumer Reports*. The delays, the gall of people--do you have the liver for it? The places in *National Geographic*, that's what you want, more sun, less closet clutter. The more you think, the more you have to pee. And if you just knock off and open three beers? Which can't you face, window-jarring stereos or beaches with no footprints but yours? Whichever, sign here, the middle copy is yours, and have a nice day.

## Purple

Molehills, love bites, peyote visions, oral lesions, Voltaire's dressing gown, afterbirth, curtains in *The Raven*, Kaposi's sarcoma nodules, Jim Jones's Kool-Aid, aphrodisiac pills, collapsed lungs, scarlet, Greta Garbo's eyes, *symbol of vomiting*, the rose called *Night Time*, Nembutal paste clotting the tongue, the priest's stole during confession, hypodermic tracks, Mae West's dress, *verbose when witnessing misfortune*, night-vision, mountains: the boss won't stand for it.

## Green

Rain light. Or tornado sky. This acts as a hypnotic on the sympathetic nervous system. Pus. A green room eases the change from one state to another. Mold. As a child, Tolstoy believed that a green stick buried in a ravine near his family's home had the secret of happiness scratched on it. Now his bones lie near that ravine. But you? In color Doppler echocardiographs, fast-moving blood glows green. When you stand among trees and close your eyes, it's easy to imagine you hear an engine running. Usually there is one.

## **Mulberry**

Mix of venous leak and August dust? When your tongue distills the juice, sensation seeps into numbness or a drench beyond your limits. There's a Mulberry Street in Montgomery, Alabama. You could no more tell what's on that street than chart the lines between the second and third fingers of your right hand. When you imagine it, the air is clotted with crepe myrtle. Dusk. Headlights on but they make no difference. When you press the breaks, you feel for an instant that the pedal is connected to another car.

## Indigo

Newton put it between blue and violet, though most people can't distinguish between blue and violet. Half way through the expert's lecture on Petrarch's view of ignorance, Joan whispered, *This guy is an idiot*. To see spectral indigo, you have to look at the reflection of a fluorescent tube on the underside of a blank CD. Intelligent, creative, sure of themselves, indigo children "often tell the parents 'who they are,'" though it's not clear here who "they" are.

## Red

A red suck draws into a wall. The deeper you look the more it comes out at you. Not the steady *stop*, but the instant *can I make it?* Even sitting in a red chair, you breathe faster. When you close your eyes, you have to outlast the crimson beneath before it's rest.

## **Pink**

Young nipples, flamingoes gaudying the driveway into a little Florida: naive or obscene? Delicate matters. Delicacy matters. *Pink, pink*: working at something or glancing off. Or working at something by glancing off. Reach for the Pepto-Bismol. In a few minutes, you'll be smiling till your gums show; you'll be back in the. . . . No end to the way the tongue slips, holds, slips.

## **Orange**

The philosopher's stone mantles citron. Lungs dilate, pulse sharpens. An orange blouse increases milk production. Greek prostitutes wore orange to draw the body's passion; Tibetan monks wear saffron to overcome it. Carrots started purple, then turned white, then yellow, before ending orange. Setting sun, rising moon. New dreams tempt. You might bite.

## Blue

You have to go after it. The crying has mostly stopped and any direction you walk is toward the *azure distance*. Nine hours later, any direction you walk is toward the *azure distance*. You're all right: your blood pressure has eased. Where the water is deepest cobalt, cup your hands. Nothing. You read your palms for so long they numb. The moon sets and you light a candle. A blue flame. *Ghost*. You're not frightened. You're sure you're the only one here.

## **Black**

Not a blink, which I don't see since my mind switches off my eyes. And a blink repeats. Not blindness. Borges said that once he went blind, he became an insomniac: he used to sleep in total darkness and now there was too much light under his eyelids. Or the grave, where you hone white. The opposite of *memento mori*. No gloss. The umbilical cord, but not in the womb: the nub three days after.

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### **Acknowledgments**

The following poems first appeared elsewhere: “Brown” in *The Glut*; “Black” and “White” in *Poemeleon*; “Mulberry,” “Purple,” and “Silver” in *Prose Toad*; and “Blue,” “Green,” “Red,” and “Yellow” in *Uber*.

### **About Mark Cunningham**

Mark Cunningham is the author of four other chapbooks: *Second Story* and *nightlightnight* (Right Hand Pointing), *10 specimens* (Gold Wake Press) and *Nachträglichkeit* (Beard of Bees). He also has three books: *Body Language* (Tarpaulin Sky Press), *80 Beetles* (Otoliths), and *71 Leaves* (BlazeVox).

### **About 2River**

Since 1996, 2River has been a site of poetry and art, quarterly publishing *The 2River View* and occasionally publishing individual authors in the 2River Chapbook Series.

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