

# *The Village*

Zachary Thompson

*Commentaries on Goethe*, presented with Anthony DiBattista

November 9, 2025

I have been provisionally referring to the color wheels as commentaries on Goethe. I don't see the book as an artwork, but rather as a preparation of my visual field for use by another.

The social triangulation around the color wheels relates to the historical paradox of German Romanticism. Goethe is not a lone figure in this regard; Philipp Otto Runge, August Heinrich, and Caspar David Friedrich also contribute, to name just a few. The ideal type proposed by Goethe as well as new technologies of classification coincided with a radical reconfiguration of aesthetic experience. The Romantic obsession with the moon and its poetic triangulation of the earth and the sun are inseparable from the formation of the idea of subjectivity.

I am very fond of Joseph Leo Koerner's *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (1990). Here is an excerpt: "In the early self-portraits of 1800, 1802, and especially 1810, Friedrich struggled to depict what is most elusive in the human face: the active eye as mediator of the inner self. It was in landscape painting, however, that the artist discovered a *via negativa* to this end. Turning first away from the viewer, then replacing his person with a surrogate, and finally absorbing himself into the substance of his paintings, Friedrich depicts his gaze for what it is to *him*: not something seen, but that which sees. It is in this context that we can begin to understand the Romantic philosopher F.W.J. Schelling's statement that 'in landscape painting only subjective representation is possible, since landscape has only a reality in the eyes of the beholder', and Friedrich's lapidary assertion: 'The painter should not paint merely what he sees in front of him, but also what he sees within himself. If he sees nothing within, he should not paint what he sees before him...' Friedrich's landscapes are perhaps the most consciously subjective works of art before our century. Which is to say: as speculative Idealism's proper pictorial incarnation they represent the 'subject' not as mere substance presentable to itself, as in the Cartesian *cogito*, or, for that matter, the self-portraits of a Rembrandt or a Dürer, but as a *function* of the cognition of appearances."

I (or was it someone else?) positioned my own subjectivity as a moon in the form of a beach ball attached to a building across the way from my open studio door. The beach ball effectively turned me into an object as it became itself transfigured. This sculptural context is able to be extended into the contexts that are shared *between* artists. Within the social context I propose, there are no fixed relations; a diagram would be ineffectual. The interactions will find their basis in a field of vision that is not limited to one individual; its cornerstone will be the color wheel that is visible.

- Zachary Thompson