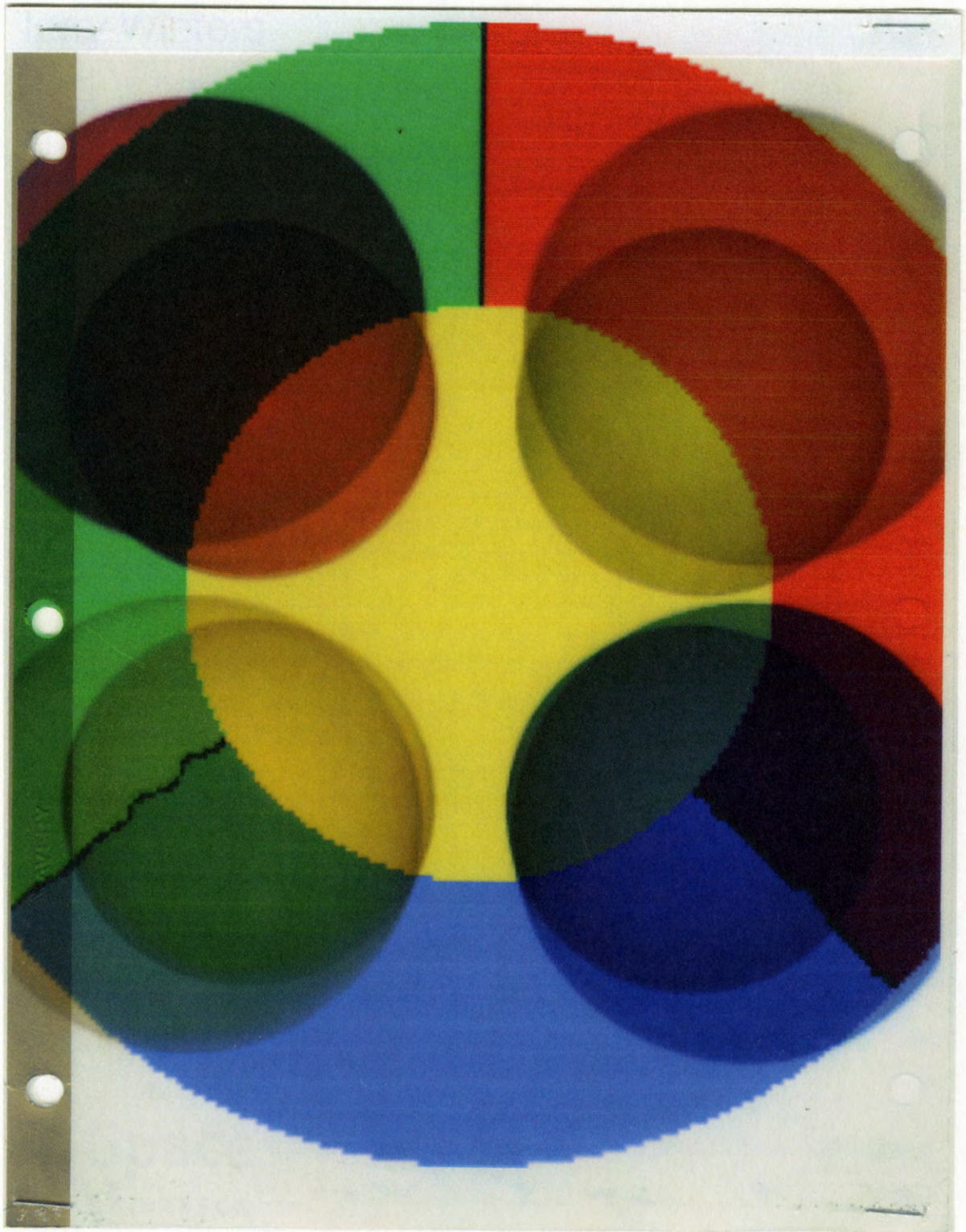
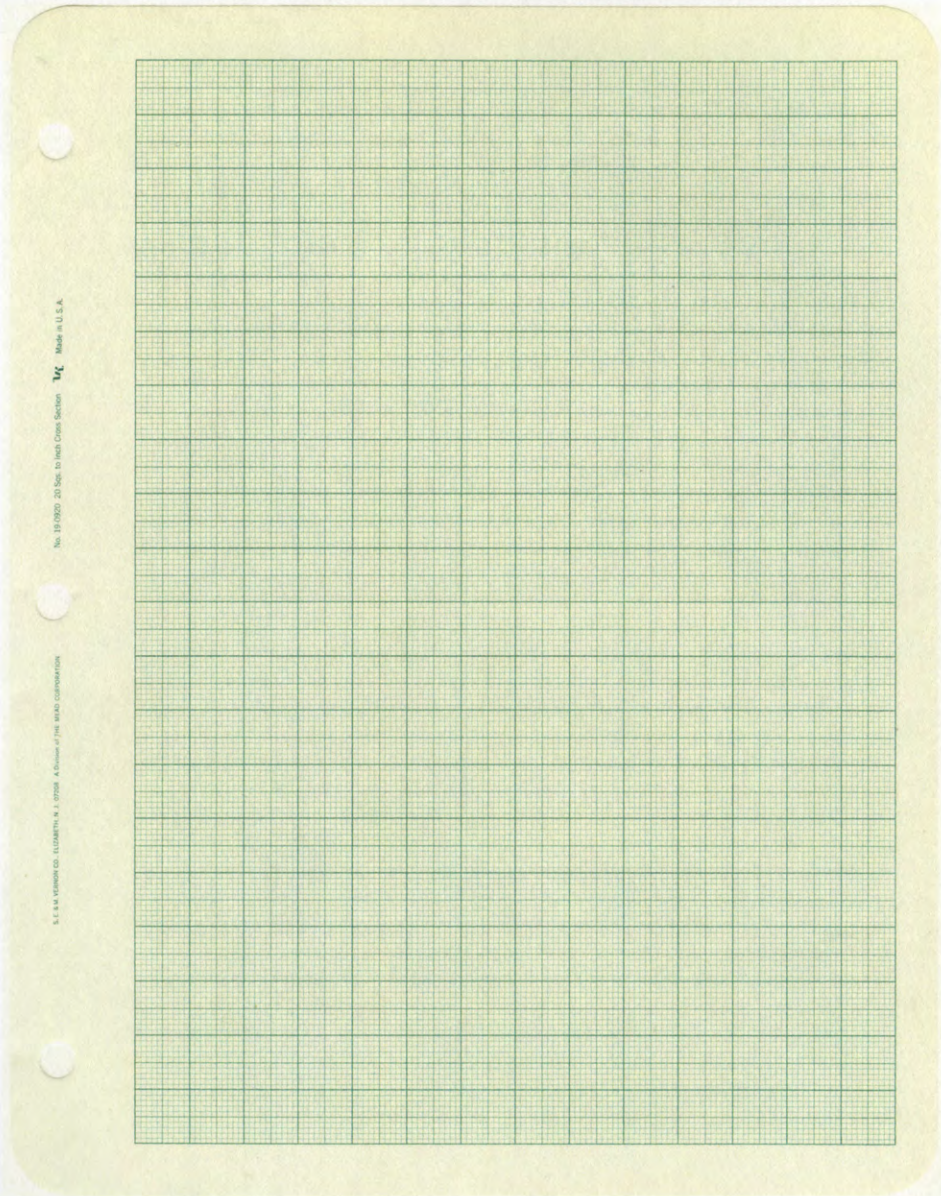


Terry Winters Red Yellow Green Blue







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Red Yellow Green Blue

August 30 — October 30, 2014

The Temperature of Things

Sanford Kwinter

**'T' Space**

RHINEBECK



Notebook, 2012  
(242, 247, 243, 244)  
Collage on paper  
11 x 8.5 inches; 28 x 22 cm.











## The Temperature of Things

Sanford Kwinter

A central problem in modern thought, as in modern aesthetics, is the problem of temperament. Although disavowed in the modern era, the Hippocratic universe was a commerce of humor-types—the sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic temperaments—that expressed with beauty and concision the essential *mixtures* (Latin: *to mix*, to compound, to blend) that determine the action of persons and objects on the world. This belief explained the psychology, the sociology and the political relations that make up the life of every larger ensemble. The four temperaments described the modes of action—the speeds, intensities, and rhythms of unfolding—that stir the world and integrate matter and movement into the salient events that leave trace and bear meaning.

Disposition then, or *character*, was made to explain why things happened and why things were always and forever differing—every



natural entity in the classical world was conceived to be at once out of balance yet also endowed with an inbuilt propensity to restore the same. This view of things explained space, time and matter as *metabolisms*, as problems of life. No part of being escaped the logic of *temperature* and a lesson of reason was learned two millennia later when sound underwent its own system of tuning that lay a scrim of rational pattern ('equal temperament') over the sound continuum (the less tidy "just intonation") to invent a new artificial consonance, one whose incompleteness remains fully apprehensible today. For example, every musical performance audibly expresses the imbalance or incommensurability at its core, the duality of what overlies against the messy, living orders that move, resist, and escape below.

These invisible antinomies, as one witnesses them expressed throughout Terry Winters' paintings, pertain to the world of the eye just as they do to the ear. Color and light, for example, have no independent existence of their own but are entirely the result of tempering and of accommodation to the chance physiologies of the animals that work out their livelihood in the world. Primary colors as in the RGB scale form the

basis primarily of machine vision and image reproduction—a continuum that may well include the chemistry and physiology of the human eye but which is no better than a workable approximation of all possible colors for that. In each case they work as a system of mixtures and combinations that offers us a chimera—and no more—as a complete rendition of the world. Every actual shade or timbre is an aggregate, an overlap and integration of other colors, shades, or hues. The world and every feature that composes it arrives as mixture, as *an arrangement* perpetually moving out of phase with itself.

So let us leave "thought" to the side for the moment and consider the problem as it pertains to the maker of things: How might an artist depict or make perceptible the movement of entities as they pass endlessly in and out of phase with themselves and with one another? No doubt, the world of natural objects provides the primary model given its essential embeddedness in processes of organization and communication with the surround that supports it. If the Cinquecento gave us a new kind of painting surface, for the first time mathematically integrating every point

and part into an isotropic whole, it remained a window and picture of space, a convention of vision and mimicry, not an entity itself endowed with the peripeties of time. The artist seeking to espouse the differential transformations that characterize the activity, rather than the look, of matter would naturally welcome the flat all-overness of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American Modernism, to the extent that these newly agitated surfaces favored local physical "incidences" over abstract views. But the action painting remained a trace of the performance that produced it, a logic external to the pigments and impastos that organize its surface. The inflated heroism of self-referentiality (habitually seen as a triumph of rigor and autonomy), moreover isolated the surfaces from participation in the murmur of the world.

In legitimate crisis since the rise of primary—or minimalist—practice, painting needed to advance a step further from naive abstraction, to perform not simply as an object itself, but as a conductive matrix or diagram through which the world and its beings could connect—send, receive and store—among themselves. If there seems a hint of vitalist rhetoric in this formulation, it is not mistaken, for it is the necessary

framework through which the modern problem of pattern must be understood. It is also the key to understanding what is novel in Winters' work. Winters' sustained concern and engagement with the modalities of natural objects—these are no more "botanical" than animal, bacterial, population-al or even chemical in form or scale—exhibits an abiding concern with formalization of communicational pulses and pathways, as every form endlessly participates in, and modifies every other in its network of implication. As the physicist Erwin Schrödinger famously remarked: "life is a pattern in time", an island of order detectable against the less ordered or patterned surround. Although even here, with the benefit of 60 years of theory and hindsight, and as a glance at almost any Winters work reveals, it may be affirmed that life is a continuum of simply more or less ordered domains. Winters' works are in fact sections through this continuum, biopsies that report on the state of the larger field by bringing into visibility with precision what is shaping, forming, occurring—here, now—in one part of it.

It is therefore an error to see in Winters' painting a routine procession of objects, figures and forms, for what is brought to expression is



foremost a type of catalysis that relates information and signals across space and time, that actively processes them. The works express a space that metabolizes and digests—just as a population can be said to digest or combust the triggers in the environment that pressure it and cause it to adapt and transform. This continuous tempering and mixing give rise to a new aesthetic space altogether, akin to the evolved niches and habitats of the natural world, and connected explicitly to them. What are the causes of shape in the world? Every natural object comprises and expresses these causes—cryptically yet obliquely within the opacity of its material organization. Yet, as with everything in evolution, we can never say precisely and comprehensively what the logics are. Just as nature proceeds by preserving successes and building on them, Winters' surfaces gather and compound effects already assembled in the world—tessellations that distribute, filaments that conduct, islands that capture order and insulate it from external assault, diagrams that rhythmize procedures and order events, surface patterns that partition and filter resources with a view to optimizing the (life) forms they support. Winters'

paintings are assemblages of social interactions of form, literal (not metaphorical) ecologies that make visible what goes beyond what is present to the eye.

The apparent trope that would reduce the impetus of Winters' work to a "meditation on natural form" is nowhere more firmly discounted than in the exquisite notebook studies that compile separations and laminae of color, matrix, diagram or found organizational form in a way more evocative of geology than of traditional art collage practice. The dominant principle of Winters' notebook works is that of polyphony—the formal deployment of the pattern-principle in our world that necessarily escapes our notice because it has the nature of clouds, rather than clocks (to invoke Karl Popper's phrase), because patterns always appear in mixture: the periodic is always shot through, syncopated, riddled, with aperiodic sets.

One might consider any Winters work from earlier decades to confirm that aperiodicity always unfolds, mines, or provides a contrapuntal foil for other patterns and forms of more stable appearance, and that only in composite—pitched into time—do they find their deferred but thoroughly worked-out stabilities (phasing). Only by following the sequential beat of



what points just beyond the temporality of a given framed work (as in polyrhythmic or atonal musical performance), does one engage, or even grasp the existence of, the logic that sends them toward their syncopated equilibria. The paintings and notebook “combines” are restless, and by nature discrepant entities whose rest points drop anchor just beyond the temporal ‘now’ of the canvases. In sum, the objects figured on them compose their environments as organisms do in taut negotiation with them.

Hence natural objects—the predominant motif of the earlier work—carry no essential distinction from the technical organizations or motifs drawn from our media, working or cultural worlds that one encounters in the notebook studies. It is always *the logic embedded within form* that is made to play—as if musically—over the canvas or work surface that knits together all the human and non-human actors of the world. To miss this consonance is to miss what makes these surfaces distinct from traditional painting practices: they perform as resonating apparatuses that connect viewer/maker to the abstract melody that is both beyond the work (the world) *and* the work itself.

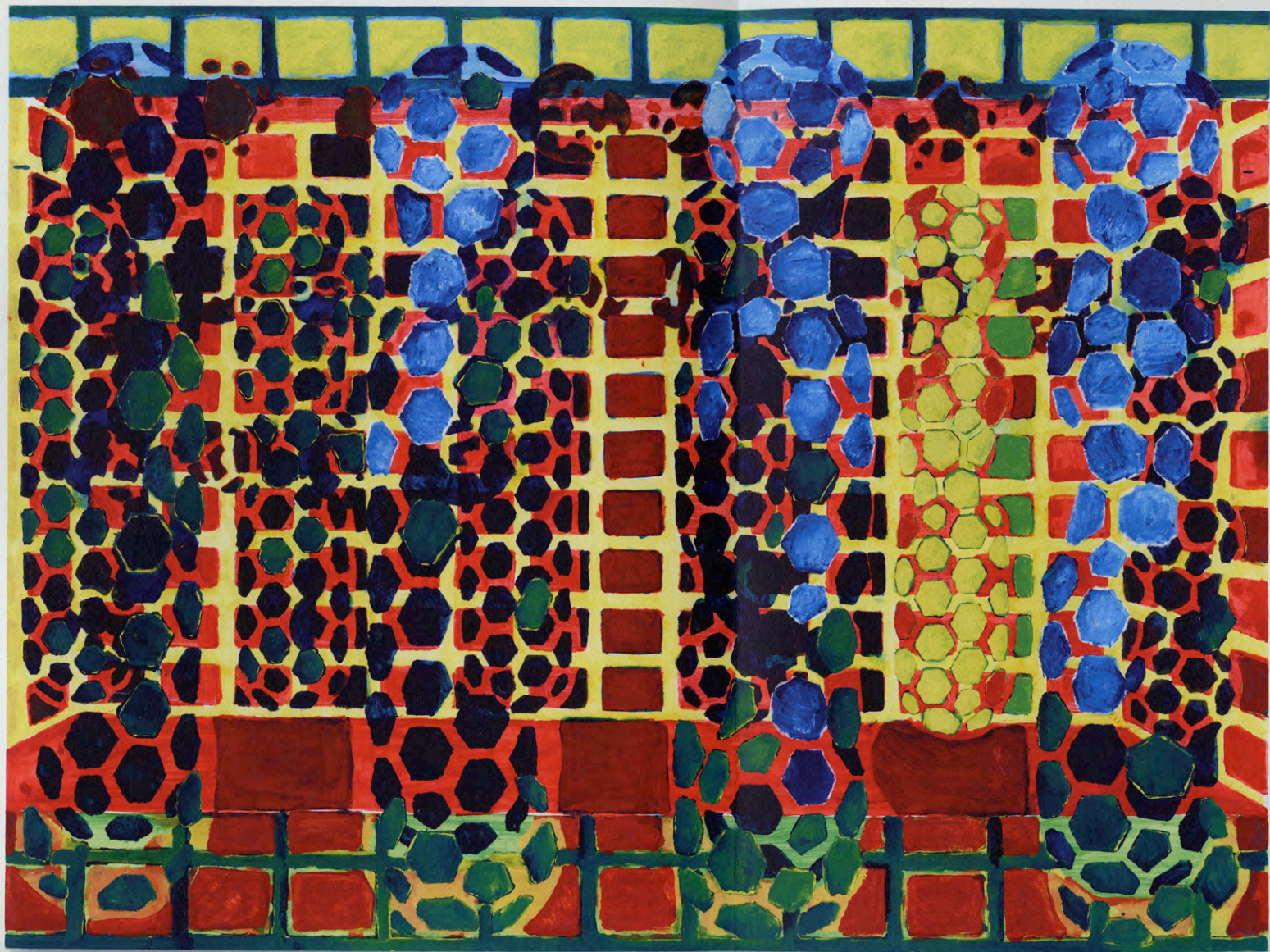
Art practice—irrespective of medium but all the more remarkable when it achieves this within the parameters of what common parlance calls painting—largely activates and no longer depicts, separates but also connects and does so without peril of simple contradiction. To make a painting, as for decades Winters has sought to show, is no longer a problem of working out the physics and metaphysics to credibly connect vision and world but concerns the task to extend and make sensible the bio-logic of shape, behavior and meaning and especially their inseparability—in a word, to penetrate into the broader existential matrix of pattern formation and its endless tempering, calibration, modification and transformation. In this curious continuum, humans find not only their fate and the essential rhythms of their own historical existence, but also discover that there is nothing that is not human, or at least nothing material that is not already or potentially connected to, or extended from them.



Red Yellow Green Blue, 2014  
Oil, wax and alkyd on linen  
90 x 120 inches; 229 x 305 cm.

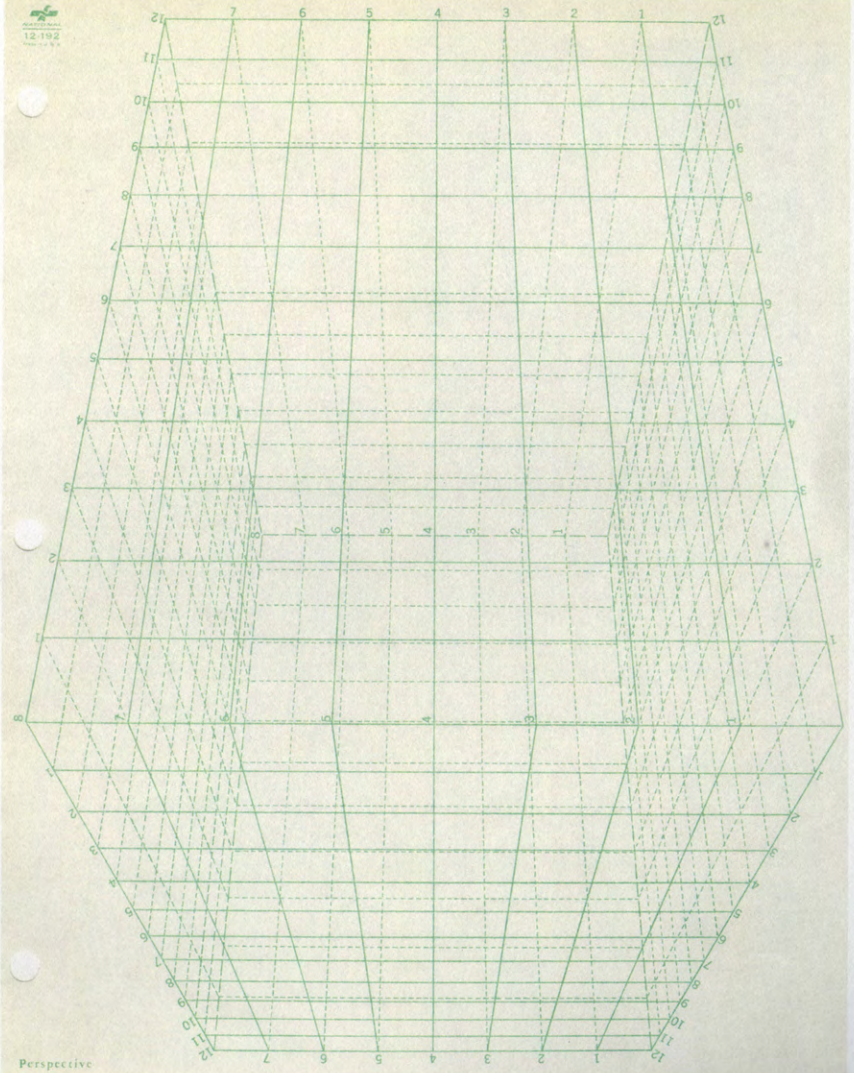








12-119-2  
1980-1981



Perspective



Red Yellow Green Blue

