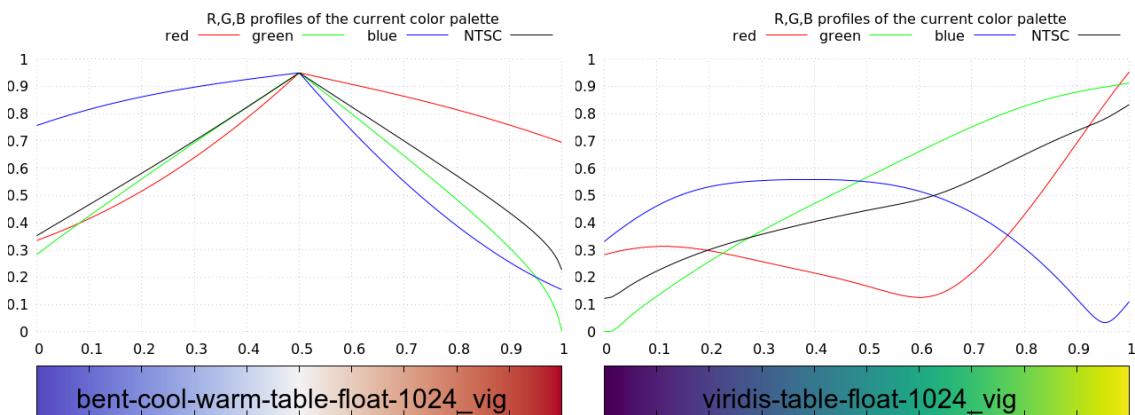


1 Background

On his web page, Kenneth Moreland suggests a number of continuous and diverge color palettes to improve scientific visualization.¹ Contrasting to other approaches, they aim for a smooth variation of the hue between the extremes of a scale displayed. While this reduces the brightness of the colors to choose from, their continuous transient hue offers a better visual inspection already when print in color. Contrasting to classical "jet" or "rainbow" palettes (*vide infra*), they retain their information if the output is constrained to gray scale (e.g., if xeroxed).



Where possible, this project renders Kenneth Moreland's set of .cvs palette information accessible to gnuplot as .plt files.

2 How to use the .plt palettes

The color palettes are provided with a varying number of explicitly defined colors. This range spans from eight up to 1024. For smaller color palettes, a copy-paste of their content into an already existing gnuplot script file may be an option. More convenient however, especially while working with larger color palettes, is to access them from gnuplot by adding the command

```
load "example_palette=plt"
```

at any point prior to the [s]plot instruction.

Each sub-folder contains the corresponding .plt files. The number in the file name indicates the number of explicitly defined colors in the file.

3 Palettes at disposition

For the displays in this section, using the Bessel function $f(x, y) = x^2 + y^2$, for each palette type the synthetic data are plot using the highest number of explicitly defined colors per palette file

¹<http://www.kennethmoreland.com/color-advice/>

available ($n = 1024$). Next to it, a diagram depicts how the R, G, and B channel sum up to yield the RGB color displayed. In addition, the NTSC luminance value is traced. This is indicative about how the calculated result would look like for an output constrained to gray-scale. Thirdly you see the Bessel plot a twice, actually simulating the gray-scale output.

At present, conversions of eight color palettes are provided: black-body, extended-black-body, kindlmann, extended-kindlmann, magma, plasma, and viridis are palettes designed for the display of continuous data sets.

On the other hand, palette bent-cool-warm is designed with diverge data sets in mind where highlighting the transition across a critical value is important. This may be useful to indicate relative velocities, or pressures below / above a threshold, for example.

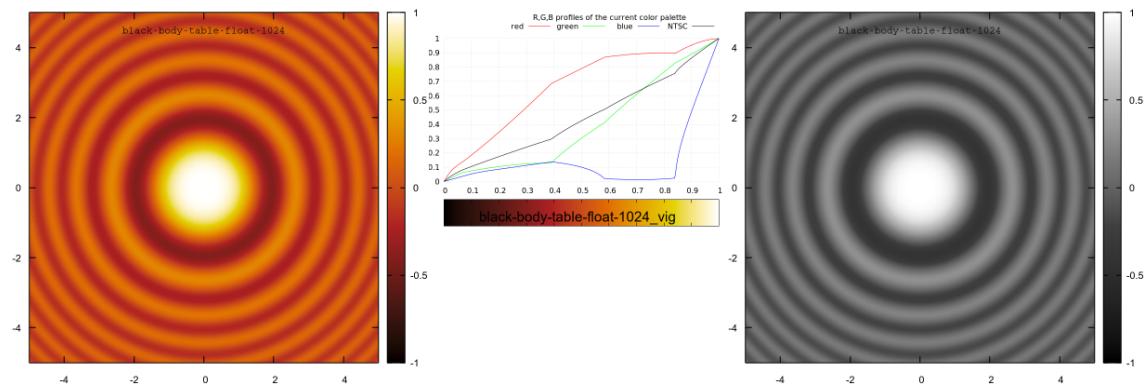


Figure 1: Kenneth Moreland's continuous palette "black-body" displaying the Bessel function $f(x, y) = x^2 + y^2$. This and the plots following are based on the explicit gnuplot instruction set `sample 2024` and set `isosample 1024` to accommodate up to 1024 colors explicitly defined in the palettes used.

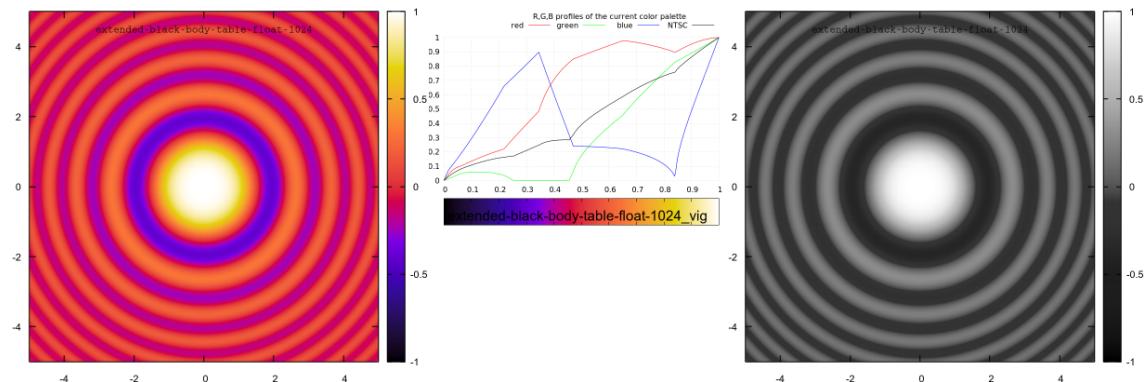


Figure 2: Kenneth Moreland's continuous palette "extended-black-body" applied to display the same function.

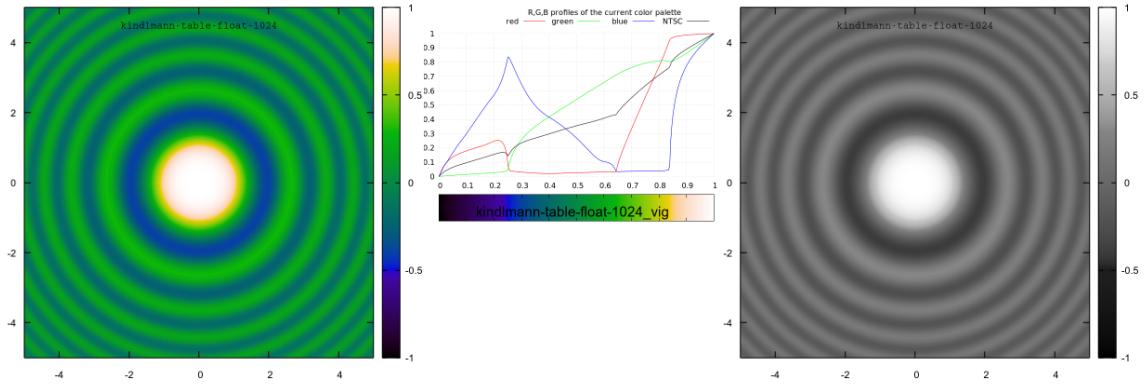


Figure 3: Kenneth Moreland's continuous palette "kindlmann" applied to display the same function.

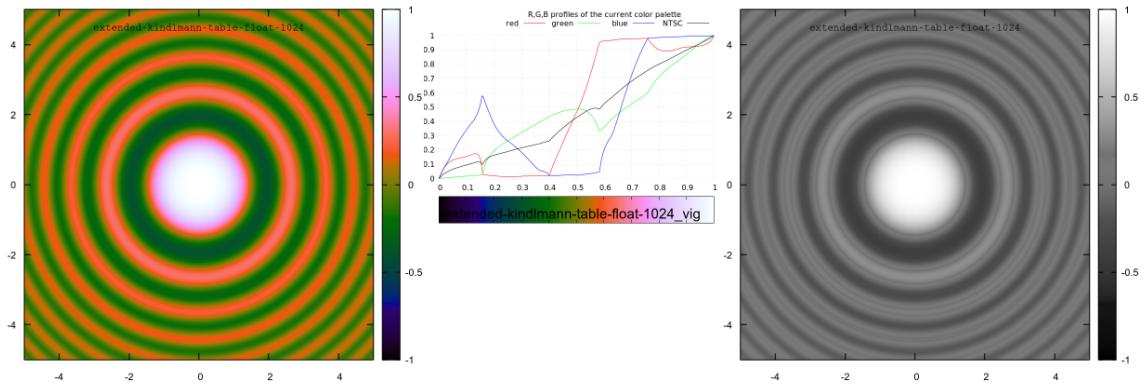


Figure 4: Kenneth Moreland's continuous palette "extended-kindlmann" applied to display the same function.

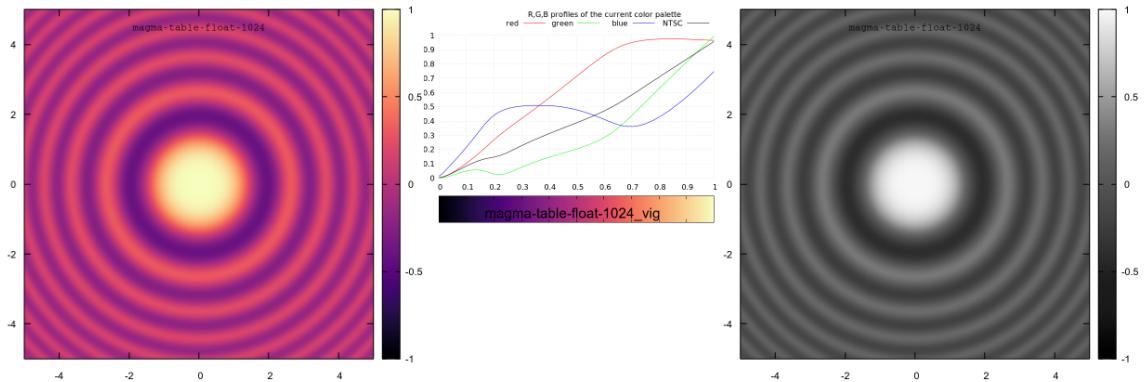


Figure 5: Kenneth Moreland's continuous palette "magma" applied to display the same function.

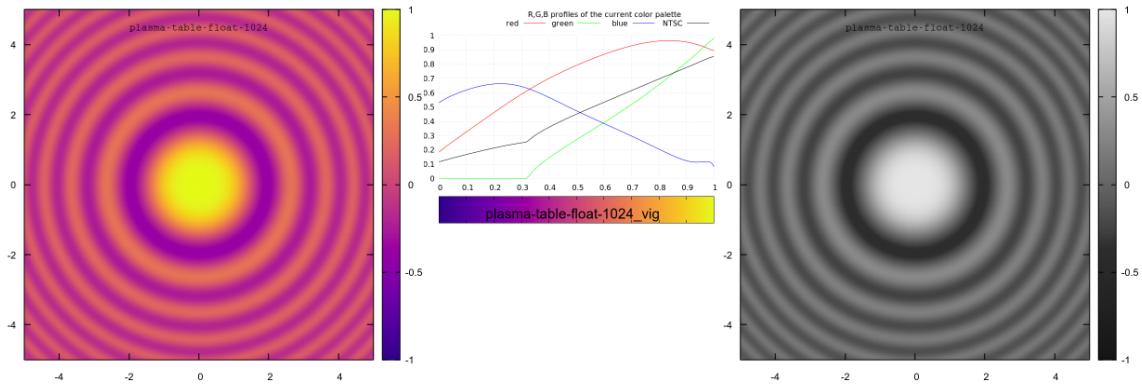


Figure 6: Kenneth Moreland's continuous palette "plasma" applied to display the same function.

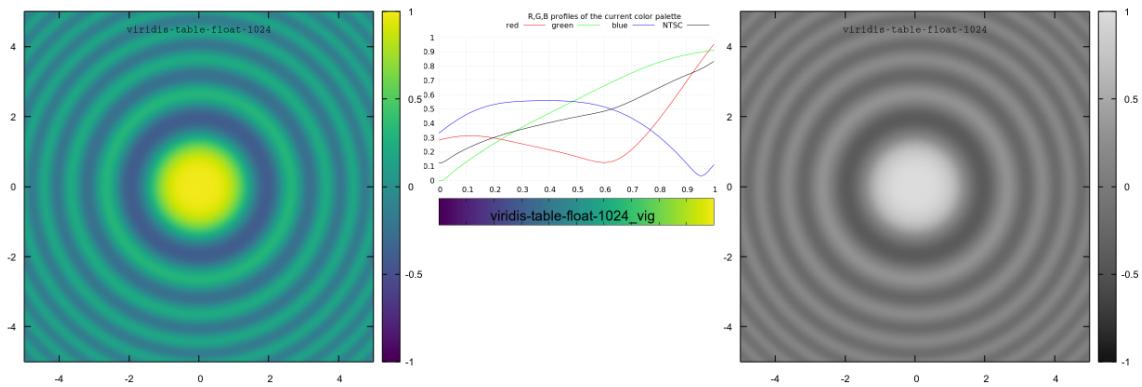


Figure 7: Kenneth Moreland's continuous palette "viridis" applied to display the same function.

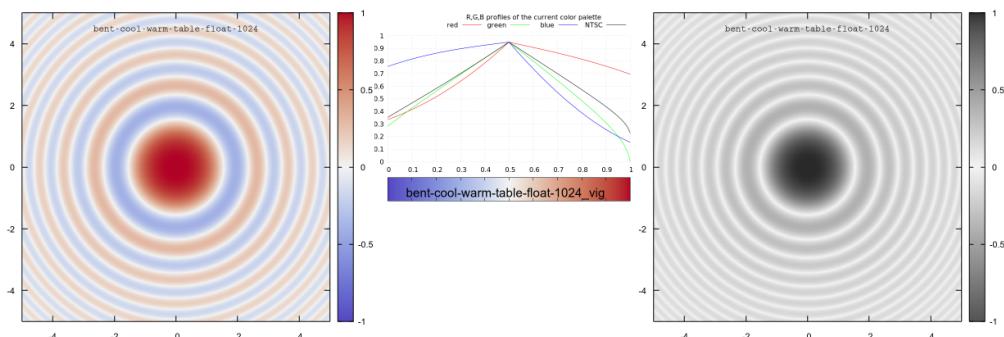


Figure 8: Kenneth Moreland's diverging palette "bent-cool-warm", which accentuates the transient at the center, displaying the Bessel function.

4 Comparison with other palettes

A few color palettes relatively easy to set up and use with gnuplot are shown below for comparison with those provided by Moreland. The computations of the color plot again explicitly set the high level of iso-levels (set iso 1024) and samples (set samples 500) in x - and y -direction.

Note that there are repositories dedicated to provide of gnuplot palettes (for example, gnuplot-colorbrewer,² and gnuplot-palettes³) easing to venture out alternatives, too.

- For the display of continuous data, either one of the following instructions prior to the [s]plot instruction may initiate palettes already included in gnuplot:

```
set palette gray    # gnuplot's gray palette
set pm3d map        # access to gnuplot's default rainbow palette
set palette cubehelix start 0 cycles -1. saturation 1
```

Note that palette cubehelix equally counters some cases of color blindness, too.

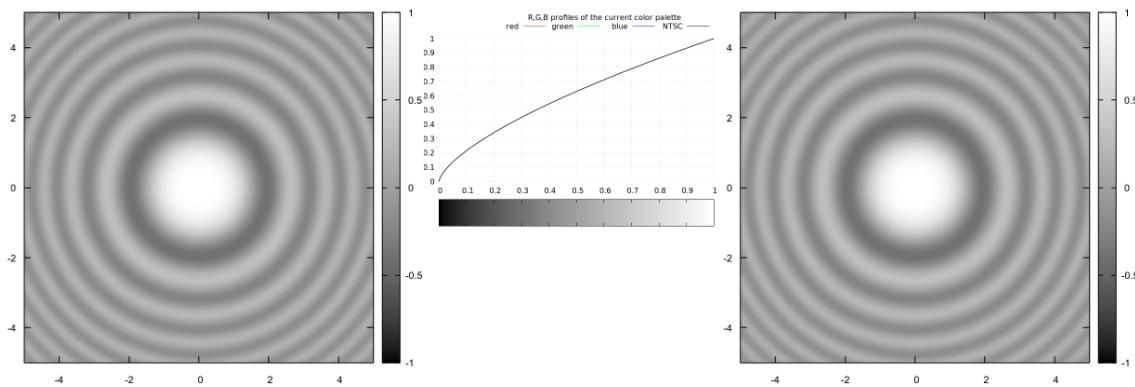


Figure 9: Gnuplot's gray palette (set palette gray) displaying the Bessel function $f(x, y) = x^2 + y^2$.

As a contrasting example, the jet.pal palette (provided by gnuplot-palettes) mimics an elder matlab default palette with the perceptual problems meanwhile addressed by palettes by Moreland and others. address. Its definitions relevant here are:

```
set palette defined (0 0.0 0.0 0.5, \
                     1 0.0 0.0 1.0, \
                     2 0.0 0.5 1.0, \
                     3 0.0 1.0 1.0, \
                     4 0.5 1.0 0.5, \
                     5 1.0 1.0 0.0, \
                     6 1.0 0.5 0.0, \
```

²<https://github.com/aschn/gnuplot-colorbrewer>

³<https://github.com/Gnuplotting/gnuplot-palettes>

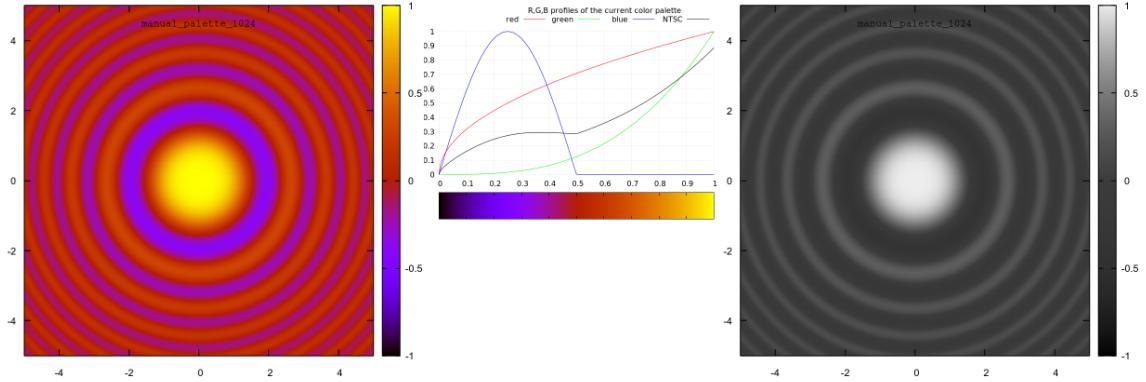


Figure 10: Gnuplot's default rainbow palette (set palette; set pm3d).

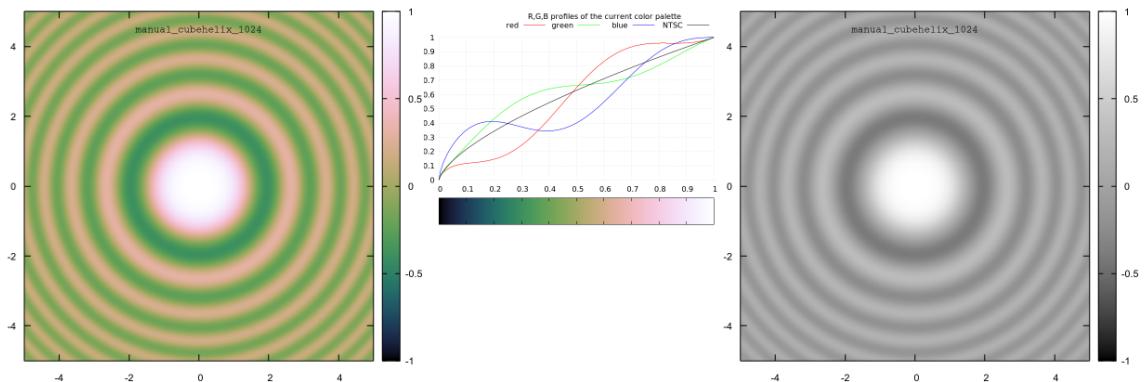


Figure 11: Gnuplot's cubehelix palette (set palette cubehelix start 0 cycles -1. saturation 1)

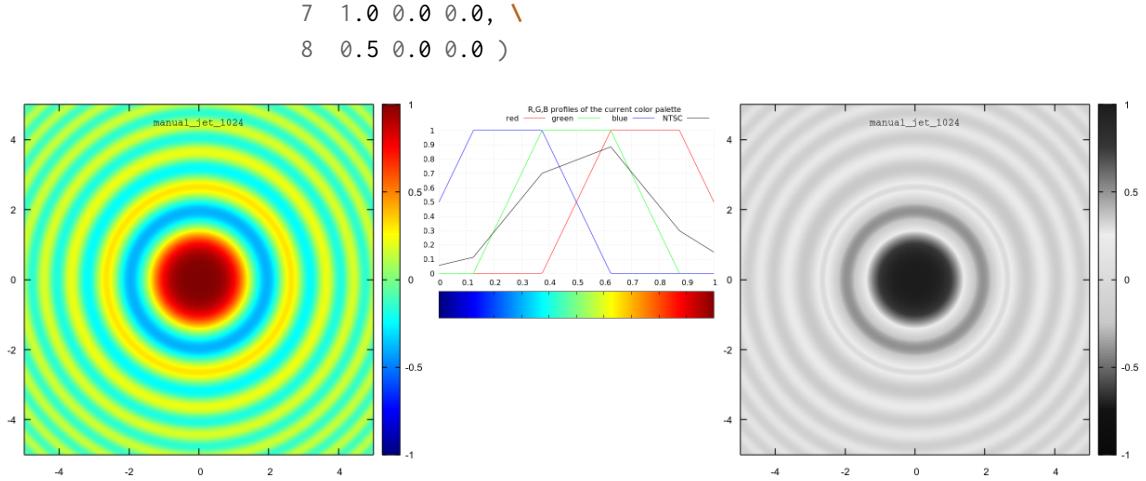


Figure 12: Display of the same Bessel function with defined with the "jet" palette. Note how the ease to assign levels from the reference bar to the map is influenced by the color-space accessed.

- For diverge data, using a blue-white-red transient is a good choice *to begin with*. For the RGB color space by the pngcairo terminal, these palettes may be defined by 'named colors' as with either of the example instructions below. Similar as seen with Moreland's palettes, it is helpful to decrease the maximal luminosity, though (second example).

```
set palette defined (-1 "blue", 0 "white", 1 "red")
set palette defined (-1 "blue", 0 "light-gray", 1 "red")
```

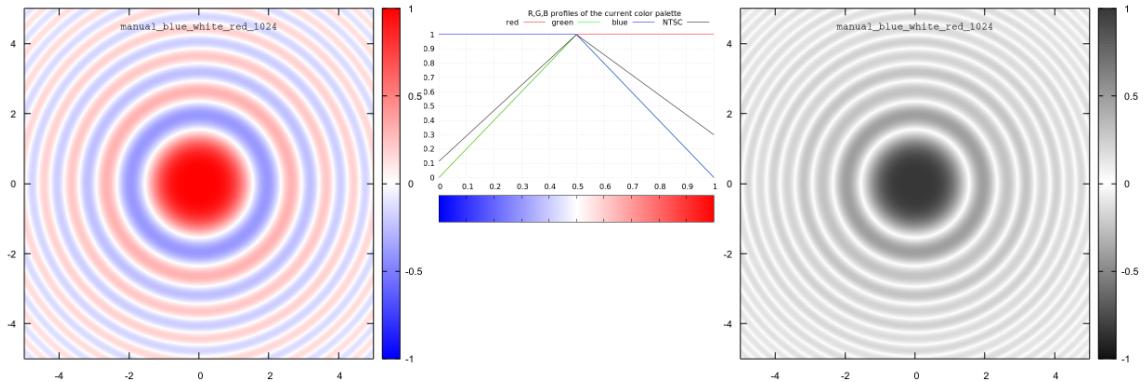


Figure 13: Manually set up diverging blue–white-red color palette displaying the Bessel function.

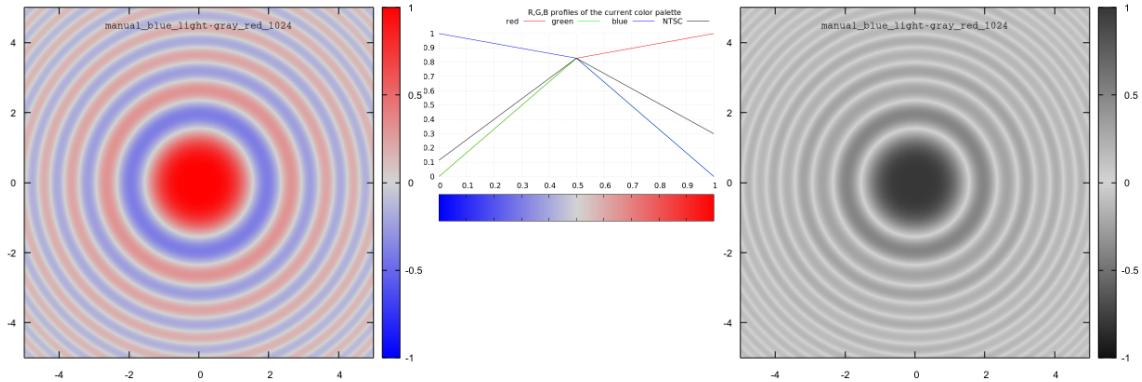


Figure 14: Slightly improved version of the earlier diverging three-level color palette by exchange of "white" by "light-gray" as central transition.

5 Generation of the data

Departing from Moreland's RGB palettes defined as *floating numbers*, script `csv2plt.py` (sub-folder `tools`) reformatted the entries to five decimals. Script `RGB_check.py` provided a control if the RGB tuples converted stay within the permitted interval of $[0, 1]$.

Script `palette_decomposition.py` provided a quick channel-wise decomposition of the RGB color space, complemented by the NTSC luminosity. Each synopsis per `.plt` file displays this result in between the test plots in color and gray-scale.

Script `bessel_test_center.py` computed the synthetic data of the Bessel function $f(x, y) = x^2 + y^2$ eventually displayed as color plot. It called ImageMagick to convert this result into gray-scale, and concatenated the two plots with the diagram by `palette_decomposition.py`.

6 Comparison of similar palettes

Gnuplot's rapid scrutiny about the contribution of R, G, and B channel of a palette, reported as `.png`, allows a programmatic visual comparison of palettes with each other. This task addressed by script `vignette_comparison.py`, to be run right after `palette_decomposition.py`, without provision of parameters from the CLI by

```
python3 vignette_comparison.py
```

Each pairwise comparison yields a new file named in the pattern of `diff_fileA_fileB.png`. Differences identified by ImageMagick will be indicated with bright red pixels. This reveals, for example, palette `magma.pal` provided by [gnuplotting.org](http://www.gnuplotting.org/)⁴ / `gnuplot-palettes` differs from all `magma=plt` definitions derived from Kenneth Moreland's palettes based on floating numbers in this repository.

⁴<http://www.gnuplotting.org/>

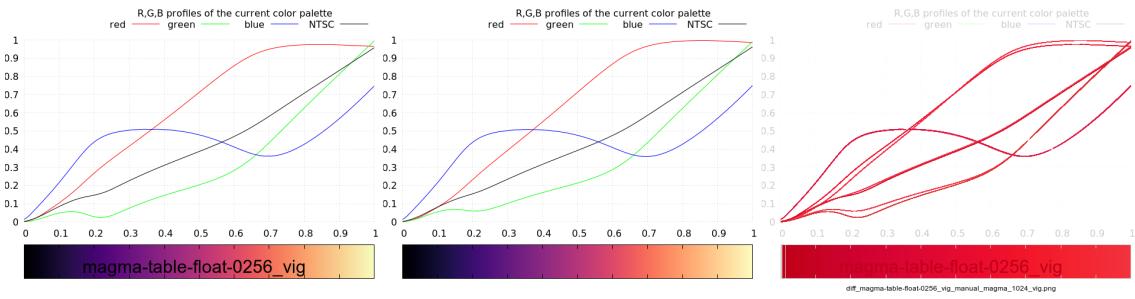


Figure 15: Comparison of two `magma` palettes: Kenneth Moreland’s `magma` palette (256 colors, floating RGB definition, left hand side). Gnuplotting’s definition of `magma` (256 colors, floating RGB definition, center). Difference plot by ImageMagick’s `compare` of the two former (right hand).

Sub-folder `extra_palette_tests/magma_testing/` includes further details about this analysis and an animated .gif about all tests performed relevant here. This and all other data processing was run under Linux (Xubuntu 18.04.3 LTS) with CPython (3.6.8) and ImageMagick (6.9.7-4).

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