An exploration into colour symbolism as used by different cultures and religions

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"Response to color symbolism is a response to color preconception, and is a predetermined response based on literary and psychological ideas about color, rather than a response to the nature of color itself. In part, man feels impelled to create symbols – and to impute symbolic connotations to color – because he cannot help allowing his feelings and emotions, his literary, psychological and intellectual preconceptions, from interfering with his direct perception of the physical world."

(Patricia Sloane, *The Visual Nature of Color*, 2006
New York: Design Press/Tab Books)

Contents

List of illustrations

Abstract

As any visual artist will know, the use of colour plays an extremely important part in a piece or work whether we are dealing with still or moving images. However, throughout history the way that colour is used has evolved in a way that can be seen to vary greatly between different nations, continents and religions. Colour does not follow a unique, universally recognisable code, and we must be aware of this not only as viewers, but perhaps more importantly as artists and directors. The associations that we make with any form or media that involves colour are dependent upon the culture in which we have been raised. Therefore problems may arise when we are dealing with media that is intended to be shown across a range of cultures. You could, for example, choose a colour palette in such a way as to encode a hidden message that would provide extra information to the viewer who was able to interpret the signs. However if you do so, it is important that you are aware that depending on the cultural or religious background of your audience, the signs and thus the message that you wish to convey, may be misinterpreted or even completely overlooked.

Introduction

Colour can serve as a powerful visual element that acts as a code that provides a deeper level of meaning to those who are able to interpret the signs. Consider how much less information a map would provide if it were in black and white – the different types of road would not be so distinguishable, and you may even confuse contour lines for rivers and streams. The simple yet effective use of colour provides a visual code that allows us to correctly interpret the image that we are seeing (Zettl 1999).

For centuries, people from all over the world have used colour to symbolise particular beliefs or events, from the ancient art of Feng Shui to the liturgical seasons of the church year. However, the associations that people have made with certain colours are by no means fixed. Depending on the culture or the part of the world that we are from, the symbolism of a colour varies according to our habits, traditions and even myths. Within a culture, colours may also symbolise different things in different contexts, and have been subject to change over the years. White as a religious symbol is associated with purity, joy and glory; but a white flag seen during times of war would be viewed as a signal of surrender (Zettl 1999).

In some situations such as this, certain colour symbols are recognised all over the world. Another example could be the traditional octagonal red “stop” road-sign that we in the West are accustomed to and which can also be seen in Arabic countries, as far away as China, and in remote places such as Mongolia (see Figure 1). Similarly yellow is generally used to mark hazards and dangerous substances because it is brightly coloured and as such is visible and stands out. On the other hand, if you were to look for something as simple as a post-box in a country different to your own you may well be confused because not everywhere uses the red

specimen to which we in the United Kingdom are accustomed. They may not even be the same recognisable pillar-box shape. In Spain for example they are yellow, in the United States blue and somewhat box-shaped, and in the Gion district of Japan you may even see one coloured orange (see Figure 2).

a) Tyendinega Mohawk Territory, Canada
b) Seoul, Korea
c) Mongolia
d) Tunisia
e) China
f) The English version

Figure1: "Stop" signs from around the world
(See end for all image references)

a) United Kingdom
b) Spain
c) Gion district, Japan
d) USA

Figure 2: Post-boxes from around the world

The strength of a colour-related symbol is increased further when colour is combined with form. In Japan, white carnations signify death, and if you were to give a married Chinese man a green hat you would be telling him that his wife had been unfaithful (Kyrnin 1/3/06).

Colour symbolism has even been integrated into the languages that we speak. English speaking countries have expressions such as “blue blood”, “black sheep”, “green-eyed monster” and “red-light district” to name but a few. However when translated into other languages some colour-related phrases can take on an entirely different meaning. One example of this is that in English when we say that someone is “blue”, we mean that they are feeling sad or depressed, but in Germany “to be blue” means “to be heavily intoxicated” (Zettl 1999).

This paper aims to look into the way that the symbolism associated with colours varies from culture to culture, and religion to religion. It discusses the evolution of colour symbolism as according to various theorists from history, and then moves on to look at the influence of heraldry, before outlining the associations that are made with the main colours of the spectrum, attempting to focus on the differences between the Eastern and Western worlds. I have then looked at how colour symbolism and its varying interpretations have had an impact on the field of visual media, including some specific examples that can be seen in film as well as the real world. Ultimately I aim to highlight the key areas for concern when producing any piece of work that is intended to convey a message through use of colour, and to provide a point of reference for anyone who wishes to enhance the impact of their work using the associated symbolism that colour provides.

Work of past theorists

In order to understand the symbolism that is assigned to a colour, we have to consider how the meanings that have come to be associated with that colour have evolved throughout history. Since antiquity many prominent scientists, philosophers and theorists have attempted to investigate the development of colour symbolism. Others, such as Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) and more recently, Johannes Itten (1888-1967), also carried out extensive studies and research, but they were only interested in the physics of colour, and not its emotional or psychological significance. Not all developed their own conclusions, some merely expanded on the work of others who had gone before them, adding to it or disagreeing with it as they saw fit. Below I have outlined some of the most notable contributors, in the chronological order that they were active.

As far back as Ancient Grecian times, colours were used as a mark of social respect or suspicion. The Pythagoreans had a marked aversion to colour, whereas Empedocles (c. 490 BCE – c. 430 BCE) considered it to be "the soul of life and the root of all existence", assigning the key natural elements of earth, air, fire and water to be represented by the colours yellow, black, red and white respectively (Brusatin, 1991).

In the second century CE, Artemidorus Daldianus wrote that in dreams red clothes are a sign of "good fortune and fame", and that white clothes signify "great calamity" and uncertainty due to the association with the white shrouds in which the dead were clothed when they were buried (Brusatin 1991 cited Daldianus). He went on to say that black is a symbol of mourning and slavery, but in a dream it represents only "minor misfortunes". He also mentions violet, describing it as a "shade of separation" and a "sign of detachment and widowhood".

During his extensive studies, Galileo Galilei (1564 - 1642) also carried out some research into colour, remarking that:

> "Colours, like odours and tastes, become mixed according to the variability of who is perceiving them and can only reveal themselves to be 'secondary' phenomena of scientific interest with respect to those considered 'objective', such as form, movement and numbers."
>
> (Galileo 1623 cited Brusatin 1991)

A little later, in his "Treatise on Painting" (published in 1651) Leonardo Da Vinci's studies led him to rank the main colours in order of importance, assigning them as representatives of the natural elements, including light and darkness:

- White - Simplest colour, representing light
- Yellow - Earth
- Green - Water
- Blue - Air
- Red - Fire
- Black - Total darkness

(Da Vinci 1651 cited Feisner 2000)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "Farbenlehre" ("Theory of Colours") was published in 1810 and is considered to contain some of the earliest and most accurate observations about colour, the way it is perceived, and its affect on the emotions. Even today it is still widely accepted to be one of the most comprehensive works on colour theory ever written.

Also in the nineteenth century, Frédéric Portal wrote a particularly thorough work on the symbolic value of colours, entitled "Des Couleurs Symboliques dans l'antiquité, le Moyen-Age, et les tempes modernes", which was published in 1857.

In fact, whilst many studies have been made into all aspects of colour including the natures of various hues and their symbolic values, it remains to be seen that, even though the results do in most cases show signs of some correlation, some of the greatest minds this world has ever seen could never manage to agree on one single, definitive "colour code". It is unlikely that this will ever be possible, save by the unification of all countries, cultures and religions. Colour cannot, and will not be organised into a fixed system of symbols (Brusatin 1991). Due to its subjective nature, what a colour represents to us is wholly subject to variation, and is dependant on the part of the world that we are from.

> "Astrologers called Saturn brown, Jupiter blue, Mars red, yellow the Sun, green Venus, ashen Mercury, white the Moon. Others bestowed the colours upon them otherwise, Saturn black, Jupiter green, white Venus, variegated Mercury, yellow the Moon, and on Mars and the Sun all are in agreement: the meanings of colours for Italians, Spaniards and French vary in certain places."
>
> (Equicol 1525 cited Brusatin 1991)

Colour throughout history

For the Chinese, the relationships between audio and visual matters and their connections with certain colours are not only part of their educational system, but they are also actually incorporated into the code of law (Eisenstein 1986). These relationships are derived from the principles of Yin and Yang, which form the basis for the whole of Chinese philosophy and their entire world-outlook. This "code of law", according to Sung tradition (ho t'u), was

brought to the world in the form of a diagram, held in the mouth of a dragon-horse that emerged soaking wet from a river (see Figure 3).

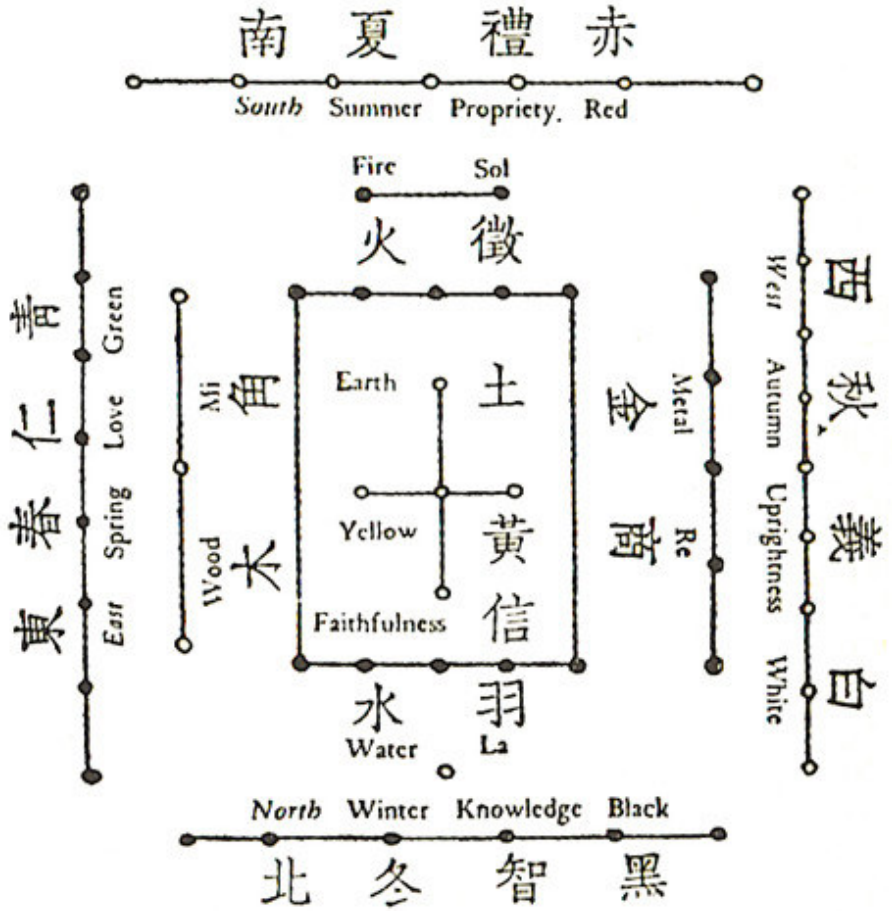


Figure 3: The diagram that the dragon is believed to have brought, showing the associations of specific colours with the compass points, seasons, and the natural elements

In the East, the influence of the ancient cultures may have had a greater longevity on the symbolism attached to certain colours. However in the Western world meanings of colours have been far more subject to change over the years. For example, green used to be a popular colour for automobiles until in the nineteenth century a number of deaths were caused by the green pigment. The offending colour, "Paris Green", contained arsenic and is also thought to be a contributing factor to the decline of the health of many artists. Paul Cézanne, who used the colour extensively in his work, developed severe diabetes which is a symptom of arsenic

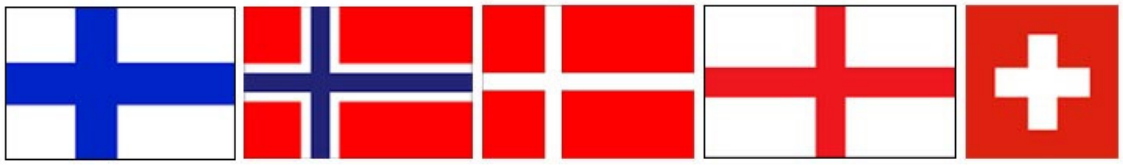
poisoning. Monet's blindness and Van Gogh's mental instability are also likely to have resulted from their use of this and other arsenic-based pigments. However since then green has since come back into fashion, aided by increased medical knowledge and the development of new pigments that are safe to use and do not cause harmful side effects (Feisner 2000). It is now in some cases considered to be the colour that is easiest on the eye, and its calming, relaxing effects are well documented. (Freisner 2000).

The influence of flags and heraldry

Flags such as a country's national flag have come to play a significant role as patriotic symbols. The citizens of the United States provide perhaps the strongest example, with many families proudly displaying the Stars and Stripes inside their homes or in their front gardens.

The design of most national flags is derived from the history, culture or religion of the country in question, and as such their colours either reflect or have an influence on the associations we make with colours in general. Many designs of European flags originate from heraldry in medieval warfare, when the bold designs on shields were used do distinguish friends from enemies on the battlefield. The oldest flags, such as those of England, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Switzerland are distinguishable because they all depict the Christian cross, dating from when they were used during the Crusades (see Figure 4). Curiously, within Europe the flag of the Netherlands has had perhaps the most impact, despite it not being a particularly large or prominent country. It was used in the war of independence against Spain and as such it became linked to notions of freedom and a republican government. This association was further strengthened after the French Revolution of 1789, when the country took on the same colours and stripy design, only they exchanged the horizontal stripes for

ones that were vertical. Italy also adopted this arrangement, except the blue was replaced by green (Feisner 2000, see Figure 5).



a) Finland b) Norway c) Denmark d) England e) Switzerland

Figure 4: European flags that still show the Christian cross

a) The Netherlands b) France c) Italy

Figure 5: Illustrating the influence of the Dutch flag on that of the French, and how Italy adapted it one step further

Since then, the colours white, green and red have come to symbolise the three fundamental values of faith, hope and charity respectively, as exemplified in Dante's "Divine Comedy".

> "Three women in a circle next came dancing
> At the right wheel; the first one was so red
> She scarcely would be noticed in a flame;
>
> The second seemed as if her flesh and bone
> Had been cut out of emerald; and the third
> Appeared to be of freshly fallen snow.
>
> And now the white one seemed to lead them round
> And now the red, and from their leader's song
> The others took the measure fast and slow."
>
> Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy (Part 2: Purgatory), Canto XXIX: The Earthly Paradise, lines 121-129

In Medieval times, flags of Islam were either plain black, white or red in colour. Black was associated with vengeance, and was also believed to be the colour of the Prophet Mohammed's banner. In the Middle East, the Islamic religion restricted the traditional colours to red, white, green and black with the result that these are the main colours seen in flags of Arabic countries, usually in combinations of three (Feisner 2000, see Figure 6).

a) Afghanistan b) United Arab Emirates c) Iraq d) Egypt

Figure 6: Flags of Muslim countries,
showing the four traditional colours of Islam

When the early leaders of the United States first designed the Stars and Stripes, they based the colours on those of the Union Jack. Furthermore, the colours of the Great Seal were specifically selected for their symbolic values: white stands for innocence and purity; red for hardiness and valour; and blue for vigilance, perseverance and justice (Feisner 2000, see Figure 7).

Figure 7: The Great Seal of the United States

Colour and religion

The meaning of a colour can be seen not only to vary between religions, but to times assume a completely opposite meaning altogether. White for example, is not only linked to joy and festivity, but it can also signify death and sadness. Similarly red relates to both life and death (Feisner 2000). The following outlines the usage and symbolic value of colour within some of the main religions in the world today.

Colour in Christianity

With the development and spread of Christianity, ancient pagan traditions slowly became extinguished, along with the old associations that the pagans made with certain colours. Green for example, was banned by the Christians at first, because it was used in pagan ceremonies. It is now however affiliated with the liturgical season, "Ordinary Time". Yellow was also unfavourable, because Greek gods were often portrayed with yellow hair or wearing yellow clothes (Feisner 2000). According to Havelock Ellis's article, "The Psychology of Yellow", early Christians not only had a strong aversion to the classical world of the Ancient Greeks and so on, but also they rejected everything that was a symbol of joy and pride (Ellis 1906 cited Eisenstien 2000). The classic world held the colours red and yellow in high favour: red in particular, with the result that even Christianity could not overcome its popularity. Yellow on the other hand proved less of an obstacle and hence became the colour of envy, jealousy and treachery. The apostle Judas was portrayed wearing yellow clothing (see Figure 8); traitors in sixteenth century France had their doors painted yellow; and Spanish heretics who recanted were made to wear a yellow cross as penance (Eisenstein 1986). Thus until about the fourth century CE, Christianity decreed that white was the only colour that was really considered acceptable for use.

Figure 8: The Pact of Judas by Giotto
Two priest's discus Judas's betrayal, while the third plots with Judas (in yellow), who is in the clutches of the devil

It was not until many years later that other colours began to play a significant role in the Christian religion. Pope Innocent III (reigned 1198-1216) was the first to introduce other colours into common use. Based on interpretations of colours and flowers in Scripture, alongside white he established the use of red, green, and black for general purposes, reserving violet for special occasions (Feisner 2000). Violet has since become significant for the Catholic Church as the colour of fasting and prayer. In Christianity, violet is said to be a sign of "the temporary death that occurs in a state of sin while awaiting baptism and penitential liberation" (Daldianus cited Brusatin 1991).

Another of the main colours of Christianity is green. It is associated with "agape", the Eucharistic love feast, the white robe worn by a novice, and with the sacramental white of communion. Violet is believed to create a triangular balance with white and green, signifying

"the reawakening of conscience in every rite designed as an act of penitence, forgiveness and remission of sins" (Brusatin 1991).

The colour that resisted the influence of religion for the longest was black. It is now the colour worn by members of the clergy and is a symbol of a minister's devotion, but for a long time it remained a pagan symbol of hell and eternal damnation. It was seen as a negative colour that represented the denunciation of sin, and was held in stark contrast to the green "fertility" of mass (Brusatin 1991).

Since Pope Pius V (reigned 1566-1572) however, the five colours of red, white, green, violet and black have been officially denoted for use within the Roman Catholic Church, with each colour having a specific symbolic significance. The most obvious place this can be seen is in relation to the liturgical seasons of the church year (see Figure 8b). Red, for example, represents the language of fire and blood, and indicates burning, charity, and the sacrifice of martyrs. It is used at Pentecost and is intended to raise connotations with the "fiery tongues that descended on the Apostles when they received the Holy Spirit" (Feisner 2000).

Figure 8b: The Liturgical seasons

The other seasons are as follows:

- Advent - Violet
- Christmas - White or gold
- Ordinary Time - Green
- Easter - White or gold
    - Pentecost - Red

The Roman Catholic religion also uses colours to indicate the rank of its officials. Cardinals are second in rank only to the Pope, and dress fully in red when they are in choir. At other times their black robes are decorated by a red sash and trim. This is symbolic of the bearer's

willingness to die for his faith. The Pope himself is always to be seen in white, and when the new Pope is elected white smoke is sent up from the Vatican, which in our Western culture raises connotations with purity and goodness (Anon Wikipedia 5/3/06).

As mentioned in the previous section, it was during the Crusades that the use of heraldic colours (tinctures) first became popular. At first the leaders of the Crusades used a wide range of tinctures, but gradually the impact of the associations made with one particular combination began to stand out. The result was that early Christian emperors generally took gold and blue as their colours, because these colours had come to be symbols of the power, dignity and rank of whoever bore them. Their influential significance has since spread beyond the bounds of Christianity and into everyday life, and can easily be seen even today (Brusatin 1991).

Although the Christian religion has many variants, they have all generally followed the lead set by the Catholic Church. However, in latter years there has begun to be more deviation from the long-established traditions. Since the Second World War the old symbolisms that have been passed down from the Middle Ages have begun to be discarded, and greater colour variation has started to be seen in vestments and church decorations (Feisner 2000).

Colour in other religions

In my research I discovered that the use of colour in religions was most documented for Christianity, perhaps because the texts on other world religions were not available in English. However the information that I did manage to find is presented below.

Judaism

In the Jewish religion, the various levels of "moral conduct" expected of Jewish priests are correlated to precious stones, the colours of which are exclusively linked to the twelve ancient Tribes of Israel (Brusatin 1991):

Stone	Colour	Association
Sardonyx	Red	Courage
Emerald	Green	Curative powers
Topaz	Yellow	Gentleness
Carbuncle/Garnet	Orange	The force of life
Jasper	Dark green	Fertility
Sapphire	Blue	Purity
Zircon	Purple	Strength
Agate	Pearl grey	Happiness
Amethyst	Violet	Relief of sadness
Chrysolite	Golden yellow	Protection against envy
Beryl	Azure	Calmness
Onyx	Pink	Chastity

Like the Egyptians, the Jews dress their priests in white, in stark contrast to the sombre black attire of the Christian clergy (Brusatin 1991). Furthermore the "tallit", the traditional Jewish prayer shawl is mainly coloured white, representing earth, and trimmed with blue, which represents heaven (see Figure 9). White is also a symbol of purity, and is traditionally worn on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). The Israeli flag, which is also white and blue, was designed to echo the colours of the Jewish tallit (Feisner 2000, see Figure 10).

Figure 10: The Jewish Tallit

Figure 11: The Israeli flag, Designed to echo the tallit, blue represents heaven and the white represents earth

Islam

The Islamic religion does not have a specific order of priests as such. Instead their teachings are delivered by "those that are learned in the Law". However this is not to say that the religion does not show signs of colour symbolism. The Prophet Mohammed is believed to have been attended by angels wearing green turbans, and hence green is thought of as the colour of Islam (see Figure 11). A green turban indicates that the wearer is a descendant of the Prophet, known as a "sharif" (Feisner 1991).

Figure 11: A depiction of the Prophet Mohammed showing a predominant use of green

Figure 12: Whirling dervishes in white, having cast off the black outer robes that are representative of the grave

It is also to be seen that many of the mysterious dervish orders (Sufi Muslim religious fraternities, who are renowned for their extreme poverty and austerity) wear characteristically coloured clothing during ritual dances (Anon Wikipedia 6/3/06, see Figure 12). Their outer robe is black to symbolise the grave, and during the dance the black robe is discarded and cast aside to reveal a white robe that is meant to represent the white shroud of resurrection (Feisner 1991).

Hinduism

There is little differentiation between the clothes that Hindus wear in everyday life, and those which they wear for religious purposes. However, colour symbolism can be found in other areas of their religion. The deity Krishna (otherwise known as the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, who is believed to be the "Ultimate Reality") is usually blue or dark blue in colour, and wears yellow or orange clothes (see Figure 13). The blue represents the sky and ocean and is the colour of the infinite, while the yellow represents earth. Thus in combination the blue figure of Krishna in yellow clothes is symbolic of the "transcendent, infinite reality reduced to a finite being" (Feisner 2000). Furthermore his name also means "black", which explains why he is depicted with such an unusual skin tone (Anon Wikipedia 6/3/06).

Figure 13: The Hindu god Krishna

Buddhism

Figure 14: Buddhist monks in their striking attire

Buddhists wear colours such as orange and brown (see Figure 14) because they avoid wearing the primary colours. During rituals such as purification ceremonies, Japanese followers of the "Shugen-do" tradition wear white clothing, which symbolises purity (Feisner 2000).

Colour in Culture

Colour does not only change connotations between religions. More importantly, and perhaps more obviously, it changes in meaning between different cultures. This section attempts to outline just a few of the many differences, concentrating on the main colours of the spectrum in order.

Red

Red is an extremely provocative colour, and has many conflicting meanings. In the Western world we would associate it with danger and fire, but also with things such as love, passion and sex. In the days leading up to Valentine's Day, shops surround us by a barrage of red hearts, flowers and decorations. Similarly at Christmas, along with green, red is thought of as a traditional colour. Interestingly, Father Christmas himself, who today is always depicted wearing a red outfit, used to be dressed in green until the early twentieth century when the Coca Cola Company decided it would be a good advertising ploy to colour him in their distinctive red (Anon 6/3/06).

Another common red-coloured symbol is the poppy, which has been taken as the emblem that is used for Remembrance Day (see Figure 15). Poppies are to be found in many locations throughout Europe, including Flanders Field in Belgium where there is a well-known military cemetery (Anon Wikipedia 6/33/06). As such they stand as reminders not only of the blood that was shed in the World Wars, but also as a literal reference to where some of the dead are buried.

Figure 15: Red poppies are commonly associated with Remembrance Day in the Western world

This association of red with blood is a somewhat obvious one, and can be seen elsewhere in the world. According to Hebrew tradition, the name "Adam" (i.e. the first man) means "red" and "alive" – red being the colour of blood, without which human life would be impossible. Similarly red vases are used in Chinese sacrificial rites and are as such a sign of the living (Brusatin 1991). In the West, wearing red to a funeral would be considered in bad taste and many people would see it as disrespectful to the dead; however in South Africa it is the colour of mourning (Howard Bear 1/3/06). This can be seen as another example of how colour sometimes has completely opposite meanings depending on our country of origin.

Red has long been viewed as an opposing colour to white, even before the War of the Roses (see Figure 16) in the fifteenth century cemented this affiliation with the conflict between the House of Lancaster (represented by a red rose) and the House of York (whose emblem was a white rose). Red and white have since come to be associated with opposing parliamentary situations – "left" and "right" wing politics. In Britain red is the colour of the Labour party (see Figure 17). Elsewhere, in both the French and Russian Revolutions white was the symbol of the legitimists, whilst red has traditionally been that of the revolutionaries (Eisenstein 1986). Red also has strong associations with communism, because it was the main colour of the flag of the Soviet Union (Anon Wikipedia 28/2/06).

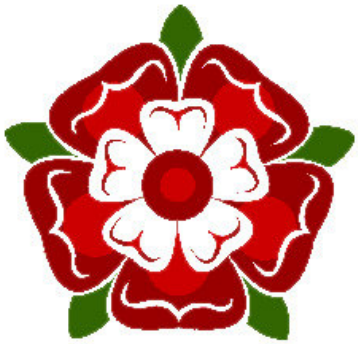


Figure 16: The Tudor Rose, comprising of the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster

Figure 17: The red rose logo used by the UK's Labour party

Figure 18: A sign warning about mines in Mozambique

Red is also commonly used on traffic and warning signs (see Figure 18), due to its association with danger and its high visibility. However for the Chinese, bright colours are considered to be lucky and to scare away evil spirits, red in particular. Traditionally red is worn by the bride at a wedding to bring good luck (see Figure 19), and also on Chinese New Year it is believed that wearing red will bring you luck and prosperity for the coming year. At this occasion money is traditionally given as a gift, wrapped in a red packet. The Chinese flag is also red, but this is due to their historical connections with communism (Anon Wikipedia 28/2/06), see Figure 20).

Figure 19: A Chinese bride dressed in traditional red

Figure 20: The Chinese flag

How red came to be considered lucky

In China the association with red being a lucky colour originates from a very long time ago. It is told that a great beast called "Nian" wrought devastation on a village, killing the inhabitants and their livestock. Soon the beast had eaten all of the livestock, and returned to the village looking for more food. A brave man decided to try and put an end to the beast's reign of terror, and went to attack the beast. He was wearing red clothing, and as soon as the beast saw him it immediately shied away. The man realised that the beast was afraid of bright colours like red and orange, and he shouted to the other villagers to find as many brightly coloured objects as they could and together they were able to scare the beast away. Since then, at New Year people have worn red and hung up brightly coloured decorations to bring luck and keep evil away (Anon 28/2/06).

Orange

The national colour of the Dutch is orange (see Figure 21) in honour of William the Silent (1533-1584), who was the Prince of the Dutch province of Orange, and founder of the House of Orange-Nassau. William was the main leader of the revolt against the Spanish that developed into the Eighty Years' War and resulted in the unification of the Dutch provinces in 1648. The flag of the Netherlands is based upon the so-called "Prinsenvlag" ("Prince's Flag"), which used the colours of William's coat of arms and was popular with the Dutch rebels (Anon Wikipedia 6/3/06).

Figure 21: Dutch supporters at a football match

Orange is also an important colour in Ireland. Its use dates from the reign of the Protestant king, William of Orange (also known as William III of England), who lived from 1650 –1702. Since then, orange is the colour that has come to be used by the Irish to represent the Protestant religion. It is featured on the Irish flag, along with white for peace and green for Catholicism and "the Emerald Isle" (Anon Wikipedia 6/3/06).

Yellow

In his book, "A Film Sense", Sergei Eisenstein (1986) writes extensively on the significance of the colour yellow, and throughout history, many important artists such as Kandinsky, Gauguin and Van Gogh, have commented on the influence of this colour, particularly on the psyche. It is to be noted that Van Gogh had a particular affinity for the colour, a fact that becomes poignant when you consider the psychological association of yellow with madness

(Walker 2004). Yellow is also known for its connotations with sickness and illness. For example the medical condition of jaundice causes the skin to turn a distinctly yellow colour, due to liver malfunction; and a yellow flag has often been raised during epidemics and is used to indicate areas of quarantine (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: A quarantine flag, in this case displayed on a ship to indicate there is sickness onboard

Goethe wrote that yellow was the colour "nearest the light" and that the pure hue had a serene, uplifting quality On the other hand he also noted that it was also easily susceptible to becoming tainted, upon which occurrence its qualities become reversed to those of "ignominy and aversion" (Goethe 1840 cited Eisenstein 1986).. This negative connotation was also noted by Frédéric Portal, who later described how the colour yellow came to be affiliated with treason and sin, whilst at the same time being associated with more positive emotions such as happiness and well-being.

> "Divine and sacred languages designated with the colours of gold and yellow the union of the soul with God and, by opposition, adultery in a spiritual sense."
> "The golden apple was, for the Greeks, the symbol of love and concord and, by opposition, it represented discord and all the evils in its train; the judgement of Paris proves this. Likewise Atalanta, while gathering golden apples picked in the Garden of the Hesperides, is beaten in the race and becomes the victor's prize."
>
> (Portal 1857 cited Eisenstein 1986)

The works of the writer T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965), particularly his earlier poetry, make frequent references to the colour yellow:

"The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains…"
(Eliot cited Eisenstein 1986)

In all mythological writings to do with yellow, the meanings that are associated with the colour are not only varied but often contradictory. As already mentioned, Portal explained that this stems from the way the symbolic value of the colour developed. In the early stages of the evolution of colour symbolism, the same colour would often represent two mutually exclusive opposites (Eisenstein 1986). We can also see this in the associations made with other colours. Hence for example red is associated equally to both life and death.

Portal also explains that the symbolic associations with yellow did not arise from the colour itself, and that its negative connotations stem from the Middle Ages due to "…the sum of associative and no longer narrowly colour indications". In essence, people saw only the "bad" side of its character, never its "good" side: the Arabs for example saw the colour as pale rather than brilliant (Eisenstein 1986). Furthermore, in Egypt yellow is the ancient colour of mourning (Kyrnin 6/3/06), which is in stark contrast to the positive associations that it has in the Western world.

Figure 23: Egyptian funerary art, depicting a mourning woman pouring ash over her head, dating from 525-405 BCE

Curiously, many of the associations that we relate to yellow come from those characteristics assigned to green, the colour next to which it lies in the spectrum. Green is associated not only with symbols of life, but conversely it can also be related to symbols of death and decay. Foliage, young sprouting plants, and greenery in general all raise connotations with life; whereas things like leaf mould and slime remind us of death (Eisenstein 1986).

Green

It is generally believed, by the Chinese, Christians and Muslims alike, that the colour green is representative of new life, regeneration and hope. In "The Arnolfini Wedding" by the painter Jan Van Eyck (see Figure 24), the bride is depicted wearing green to symbolise her fertility (Freisner 200). The pose in which she stands, with her dress gathered and held in a way that makes her abdomen look like it's swollen, is also ambiguously suggestive of pregnancy, which further emphasises this symbolic link.

Figure 24: The Arnolfini Wedding
by Jan Van Eyck (1434)

However there are a number of conflicting associations related to this colour, some of which are considerably less positive. Whilst it may often be seen as a colour of hope, in some circumstances green is also seen as a symbol of hopelessness and despair. Furthermore, under certain circumstances in traditional Greek theatre a dark green sea has menacing connotations, and similarly in Japanese theatre evil or sinister figures were often clothed in blue, one of the primary additive hues that are combined to make green. Portal stated that green was a

"…symbol of the soul's regeneration and of wisdom…", but also "…by opposition, moral degradation and madness" (Portal 1857 cited Eisenstein 1986).

Blue

In the Middle East, blue is thought of as a protective colour. People have been known to paint doors blue to ward off so-called "evil spirits" (Freisner 2000), and in Turkey the "Nazar Boncuk" is a particularly popular charm, usually made of blue glass, and which is believed to protect against the "evil eye" (see Figure 25). For the Chinese, blue is associated with immortality (Anon Wikipedia 6/3/06).

Figure 25: A Turkish "Nazar Boncuk" charm, believed to protect against the Evil Eye

Purple

The ancient Greek world can be held considerably responsible for the tendency in the Western world to associate the colour purple with fame and wealth. Important members of state were decorated with the colour, and it was also seen as a sign of "personal and political productivity". The Romans reinforced this tradition further: It was used as a symbol of respect to the extent that it became the "color officialis" – a colour that was reserved for use by the imperial Caesars, and which became a kind of emblem for the Augustan family (Brusatin 1991).

The other main connotation associated with purple is that of death and mourning. Max Nordau (a physician and social critic) wrote that violet is chosen as the colour of mourning

my many countries because "…the unpleasant feeling evoked by it induces dejection in a sorrow-fully disposed mind" (Nordau 1895 cited Eisenstien 1986)

Good or bad colours?

It is interesting to note that the colours which we associate with ideas of "good" and "bad" also change depending on where in the world we are from. In the Western world, we see the colours white and black as good and bad respectively. These colours have regularly been used to indicate good or bad characters in films, theatre and other visual media. Indeed, their usage has been so consistent and widespread that in some cases they have come to be features of satirical and comedic productions. On the other hand, the Japanese for example see the colours red and blue as good and bad (see Figure 26), as reflected in the costumes used in their traditional theatre (Eisenstein 1986).

Figure 26: Characters from traditional Japanese theatre

Universal colours

As already mentioned, under some circumstances some colour symbols may be globally recognised. It is usually the case that these symbols have simply been established by some international agreement, be it official or unofficial. However, in recent years, it has become more and more common that some ancient traditional colours are also being abandoned in favour of those that have a more global significance. As a result, white for example, which is traditionally worn by brides in the West, is being increasingly used at weddings all over the

world. Even some countries that would otherwise associate white with death and mourning can be seen to be mimicking the Western world and its traditions.

Varying interpretations within a country

The meaning of a colour may also vary within a country, particularly if the country in question has a number of separate sub-cultures. Among the Native Americans there are strong associations of colours with the four points of the compass. For example the Cherokees associate colours with directions as follows:

Direction	Colour	Associations
North	Blue	Cold, defeat, trouble
South	White	Warmth, peace, happiness
East	Red	Sacred Fire, blood, success
West	Black	Problems, death

(Anon 1/3/06)

In contrast, the White Mountain Apaches not only relate a different colour combination to the compass points, but also in some cases the colours have completely opposite associations.

Direction	Colour	Associations
North	White	Source of snow
South	Green	-
East	Yellow	Where the sun comes up
West	Black	Where the sun sets

(Anon 1/3/06)

The misunderstanding of these ancient cultures is a common occurrence that has happened many times in this modern day and age. When the Americans attempted to force some tribes-people to vote in an election, they assigned each of the candidates a colour to bypass the problem of illiteracy among the voters. However, what they didn't realise was that, for the tribes-people, certain colours had strong associations with being "good" or "bad". Hence they

voted according to the colours that the candidates wore, and not on their suitability for the position (Brusatin 1991).

This association of colours with social standing can also be seen within other tribes elsewhere in the world, such as those in Africa. For example, girls from the Zulu culture are taught traditional bead work and the meaning of the colours and symbols created therein. Their creations are usually worn as ornamental head or neck bands, and because only the women make them and their knowledge is only passed on to the next female generation, the men of that culture do not understand what the colours are representative of and so rely on their female kin to reveal the hidden meanings. The patterns and colours can explain things like the region the wearer comes from, what her social standing is, and even messages or reprimands (Anon 1/3/06).

Colour in the media

Within any project, colour should always have a purpose (Freisner 2000). Even the choice of whether to produce a piece of work in colour or black and white should be an informed decision, based upon what we are trying to convey by the use, or lack, of colour.

Due to the way that the symbolic meaning of a colour changes depending on the context and culture within which it is viewed, when using colour as a symbol in your work it is important to first establish who your audience is. Using a symbol that is unfamiliar to your audience, or which causes them to make different associations to what you intended could have an extremely detrimental effect on the impact of the piece. Symbols that are misinterpreted or misunderstood are of no purpose at all.

The usage of unusual or unexplained symbolism is particularly something to avoid in television or film. Paintings, drawings and other still images allow for easy examination: if the viewer is unsure or unclear about the message that the artist is trying to convey, then they are able to closely study the piece in question in order to ascertain what the symbolism is intended to say. On the other hand, moving images do not lend themselves for detailed analysis without some effort on the behalf of the viewer. As such, if the artist wants to use symbolism that is conveyed by colour then they must ensure that the message is instantly recognisable. Furthermore, if you wish to establish a colour as a symbol for something other than what convention dictates, then your chosen audience must be provided with sufficient clues so as to enable them to learn the new association (Zettl, 1999).

The symbolic use of colour should be orchestrated such that the viewer will be able to understand the intended message, based upon their culture and experience. Colour can therefore be seen as a logical process, whereby a symbol or idea can be understood through our experience of the world around us (Brusatin 1991).

> "Since colour occupies so important a place in the series of elementary phenomena… we shall not be surprised to find that its effects are at all times decided and significant, and that they are immediately associated with the emotions of the mind."
>
> (Goethe 1840 cited Brusatin 1991)

Colours can also be specifically selected in order to make us feel a certain way (Zettl 1986). They can provide a very useful method of establishing a particular mood, or even signifying the essential quality of an object or event. In industry, package designers are very careful in the choice of colours they use to represent a particular product (Zettl 1986). For example if you wanted to purchase a variety of tea that was intended to have a calming and relaxing

effect, you would probably choose a tea packaged in a pale green box over the variety packaged in a bright red box. The associations that we automatically make with certain colours have been learned over a period of time and ingrained into our culture, and as such are inherently difficult to disregard.

As visual artists we need to think about how colour affects the impact of our work: does it reflect our cultural background and the message that we are trying to communicate? Who is our intended audience, and will they be able to interpret our intended message correctly, based on their own understanding of colour symbolism?

As artists and designers we have control over what our audience sees, and we need to be aware that, unless we are careful, we may be sending the wrong messages because of the influence that we can have over the way that they respond (Freisner 2000). An example of the way that the inappropriate use of colour can have the completely wrong effect on an audience is the original design of the signs at the Euro Disney theme park. The bright colour scheme was meant to visually compete with the red used by Coca Cola, and the colour purple featured prominently. However this turned out to be a serious error because much of Europe is Catholic, and as such purple is a symbol of death and the Crucifixion. It then emerged that the only reason the colour was chosen in the first place was because the CEO liked purple (Anon 27/3/06). It is therefore to be seen that the consideration of how colours are used is particularly important when dealing with media that potentially will be viewed all over the world, such as films or websites.

When dealing with media viewed on computers it is also necessary to take into account the way that there is an extremely wide variation in the way that monitors are calibrated. Thus if a

company such as an airline had a elegant dark blue background on their website, it may in fact appear to be black to some people. As the colour associated with death, particularly in the Western world, this is not the colour you would want to be suggestive of the dependability and safety of your airline (Anon 27/3/06).

Case studies

Let us take a closer look at some films from both the Western and Eastern worlds, bearing in mind their target audiences and countries of origin.

Kill Bill

(USA)

In the media furore surrounding the release of Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill", one could hardly have avoided noticing the bright yellow posters and adverts that were displayed everywhere from bus shelters to on our televisions. This is the nature of yellow however: its high visibility grabs our attention, and while its extreme use in the advertising of "Kill Bill" is likely to have been a media stunt to do just that, it is possible that the colour may have had another purpose too. I will admit to not having actually seen the film, but from what I do know, and from the clips I have seen, Uma Thurman's character is dangerous and extremely vengeful. What better colour to represent her with than that which is commonly associated with

Figure 27: Uma Thurman's character in Kill Bill

caution and dangerous hazards? (see Figure 27). Furthermore, as previously mentioned yellow is renowned for its impact on the psyche and has been linked to mental instability and madness. Thurman's character is so intent on the destruction of her enemies that one would be forgiven for thinking that she were at times more than a little deranged.

City of Lost Children

(France)

Throughout "City of Lost Children" there is a very distinct colour scheme. The two complimentary colours red and green are used extensively, both in the colours of the costumes as well as for the environment. The use of colour highlights two distinct types of environment within the film (see Figure 28). The first is the City itself, which is depicted in very reddish tones including browns and oranges. This raises connotations with danger and caution, which is echoed in the actions and emotions of the few children that remain in the City. The second type of environment relates to the sea and the evil character Krank. It is not hard to associate the distinctly green colour palette with the menace and eeriness of Krank's world.

Figure 28: Examples of stills showing the two distinct colour themes in City Of Lost Children

Mulan

USA

The use of colour in “Mulan” is not as straightforward to analyse as it may seem at first. This is because the film is an American product and aimed at mainly Western audience, but it is set in China and attempts to deal with some of the traditional values and customs of that country. As a result, the symbolism is mixed. In order to be at least a little authentic, the producers could not avoid using colours that are traditional to China. However to a Western audience, not all the symbolism that is inherent would be obvious to someone who was not familiar with some of the more common colour associations of China. Problems may therefore arise in situations such as this, where the colour that is necessary to use for reasons of authenticity may in actual fact give rise to connotations that are completely undesirable. Fortunately, it appears that the directors of “Mulan” have successfully managed to satisfy their audience.

The first main use of symbolic colour comes at the beginning of the film when the prospective brides are being put through their paces. They are all dressed in shades of red, which as already discussed is the colour traditionally worn by brides in China. However a symbol which is less obvious is the yellow flag that is born by the messengers calling the men of the village to arms. Yellow is the national colour of Old China, and as such was sacred to the Emperor. To the more attentive viewer this connection is further established later in the film, when we actually meet the Emperor, who is dressed in yellow.

The colour red is of course also associated with being lucky, and notably Mushu the dragon, who is sent to protect Mulan, is a bright red. Furthermore, one of the soldiers shows us that he has a tattoo of a red dragon, which he actually says is for good luck.

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon

(China)

Perhaps the most obvious instance of colour symbolism that occurs in this film is the wedding procession, which is resplendent in its use of red. However were you not already aware that the Chinese traditionally dress their brides in this colour, you may well have wondered what the procession was in aid of. To a Western audience, even this strikingly bold use of colour could in fact appear meaningless, particularly if the reference to the main character's recent engagement earlier in the film was missed.

There are however plenty more symbols that are more subtle and perhaps not apparent to all viewers. The Green Destiny sword for example holds an important significance. Green is the colour of life, and to the Chinese it represents growing energy and thus regeneration and transition. This is appropriate to the changes that the main characters undergo, particularly the young girl Jen. Furthermore, the use of green jade for Jen's comb and the in name Jade Fox is significant because to Taoists jade symbolises perfection and immortality.

Figure 29: The characters Jen and Lo before they have fallen in love

When she is depicted in the desert, we see Jen dressed in white (see Figure 29), but after she falls in love with Lo ("Dark Cloud") she appears in red. In the West this particular colour transition from white to red is often used as a symbol of innocence being lost or tainted, and is seen in many films such as "The Go-Between". This prominent use of the colour red can be

thought to symbolise her energy and fiery personality, but also the evil that she could fall prey to, should she allow it. The character Lo, or "Dark Cloud" as he is known, is also shown wearing almost entirely red when we first see him in the desert. However later in the film he wears more subdued colours from the blue end of the spectrum, which can perhaps be seen as a symbol of his rejection by Jen and the way that his vitality is diminished.

The other main character, Yo Shu Lien, is almost invariably shown wearing purple or lilac clothes, which I am sure also bears some significance. The Chinese see purple as a colour of "yin shui", and it represents energy approaching its peak latency. There is also the fact that the poison that ultimately kills Li Mu Bai is called "Purple Yin poison". Its use could perhaps be reflective of the power that both Yo and the poison have ready to be unleashed. In the West, it is likely that it would be linked to death and mourning, however it is debateable as to whether this was intended, since the white is traditionally the Chinese colour of mourning and diminishing energy.

Hero

(China)

If you read any review of "Hero" it will undoubtedly mention the extremely powerful and effective use of colour in this film. The director Yimou Zhang has clearly identified four key themes, and these are symbolised through colour (see Figure 30). Passion is represented by red: the association of this colour with love is recognisable all over the world and cannot be missed no matter where you are from. Blue can be seen to represent sacrifice, and death is represented by white. These however may not be so clear to audiences of all nationalities. As previously explained, white is the colour that the Chinese associate with death and mourning,

so an audience in China would easily pick up on this association straight away. Elsewhere this would not necessarily be the case. The fourth colour is green, which represents new life, hope and a fresh beginning.

Figure 30: Montage of stills illustrating the use of colour to symbolise the main themes of the film

Interestingly, not all sources agree with the above associations made with the colours of the four sections of "Hero". Some reviews state that the green stands for peace for example (Anon 7/3/06), and that instead of passion the red is representative of fire (Heiter 7/3/06). This is a clear example of the way that colours can be interpreted depending on what country you are from.

Another online review (Tran 7/3/06) lays claim to further symbolism within the film. It states that the First Emperor of China was a scholar who believed in the five elements of fire, water, metal, earth and wood. Since the Emperor believed that he reigned in the cycle of water, hence the palace is completely black because of its association with the element of water.

House of Flying Daggers

(China)

"House of Flying Daggers" uses colour extensively to great visual impact. However unlike in "Hero" the associated symbolism is not always so clear. The majority of the shots lean predominantly towards the use of one colour in particular, and nearly all are of exterior environments. We see brilliant rusty-coloured autumnal forests, yellow leafy glades, and are surrounded by the cold whiteness of silver birch tree trunks and snow. Most striking of all however, is the use of green particularly in the scenes that are shot in the bamboo jungle. Colour also plays a role in the costumes of the characters, with the soldier Jin wearing dark blue or purple, and the members of the House of Flying Daggers resplendent in vivid green (see Figure 31).

Figure 31: The character Xiao Mei, a member of the "Flying Daggers", in the bamboo forest

However, whilst there is a strong use of colour to be seen in this film, it is not entirely obvious as to what the symbolic connections are, if indeed there are any. The only one that can be seen to be of any significance, is the staging of the final fight to the death, which takes

place in the snow: white being the colour of course, that the Chinese associate with death, however most Western viewers would probably have been unable to interpret this symbol. Any other use of colour is of course open to interpretation, but personally it is hard to conclusively link any of the colours to a particular symbolic value. Green for example, despite its very strong presence does not seem to connect to the traditional associations with life, hope, regeneration and so on. Nor does it really fit with the more negative symbols with which it is associated. The only obvious link is that of nature, reflecting the Flying Daggers' supreme awareness of their environment. Indeed it is widely acknowledged in many reviews that "Hero" demonstrated a far more masterful command of the use of colour.

Conclusion

Colours imply different things for different people. The meanings that a colour suggests to us are based on many things including our experiences, but our perception is perhaps most significantly affected by the cultural background that we come from. This is not only determined by the traditions and customs of country that we live in, but also those of the main religions active in our area.

The symbolisms that have been mentioned in this paper are by no means definitive. Colour is a subjective phenomenon; we all interpret it in different ways. Indeed, on a number of occasions during the compilation of this paper sources gave conflicting opinions on the associations made with a colour, and it was necessary to select only the most common attributes. The field of colour is still evolving even today, with old traditions being replaced by more widely accepted and predominantly Western symbols.

As producers, artists and film makers, it is our duty to delivery colour symbolism correctly and appropriately, in a manner that is comprehensible even if it requires some effort on the part of the viewer. In order to do so, it is imperative that we are aware of who our target audience is. Without establishing this, any symbolic use of colour that we chose to include would be pointless. Not only is it likely that we would include mixed and perhaps contradictory symbols, but most significantly our audience would be unable to interpret these symbols in the manner that we desired. In order to be truly safe, we would need to use colour in a way that was globally accepted, however this could be seen to have a detrimental effect rather than a positive effect. Symbols that are internationally accepted can be considered too obvious or overused, and hence lose their impact. Furthermore, it is known that most audiences like to feel clever. Presenting information to them plainly and clearly may be appropriate in some cases, but at other times it is better to make people work to gain a better insight into the action. This has the added effect of guaranteeing that a film will hold an audience's attention. If an audience feels that they have correctly interpreted an unobvious symbol, then the positive feeling gained from this enlightenment is likely to have a positive influence on their enjoyment of the film

However it is also important that as viewers we do not try to over-analyse what we see. If you were to go into a cinema bearing in mind everything that this paper contains, then you would be forever looking for "hidden" meanings that simply did not exist. Not every single colour is a symbol, and we must be rational in the way we separate out those which are intended to be symbolic from those which is merely passively included as aspects of design.

The use of colour in film, television, art and other forms of media can be extremely powerful – but only if it is used correctly. In order to do so we first need to identify our main audience,

and then match the symbols that we wish to include to the relevant colours to which our audience would associate those symbols. If we want to create a piece of work that is designed to be aimed at or depict a culture other than our own, then we should first make sure that we are aware of the symbolism associated with that culture. This will enable us to avoid making mistakes and should help enhance the impact of our work.

If on the other hand we are aiming at a global audience, we should be aware that not all symbols may be recognisable. This could perhaps explain why most American or Western film makers do not use colour in a considerably adventurous or innovative way. The big studios are less concerned with film as an art form, more as a money-making machine. Their productions are hence aimed at as wide an audience as possible, and as such cannot use symbolism that is unlikely to be reasonably universally recognisable. In some other circumstances it would also be advisable to use colours with a more universal significance, for example media such as websites that could potentially be viewed by anyone all over the world.

Colour without purpose is meaningless, as is colour presented to an audience that will not understand its intended interpretation. In order to understand how our audience will react we must first gain at least some insight into their culture, for the symbolism associated with colours is inextricably bound to our background and experience.

Critique of report

Originally when I set out to compile this paper, I intended to make a product as well, instead of just writing an essay. I wanted to look at how artists had used colour to create different effects, and then my aim was to produce some networks in Shake that would emulate their style. As part of my research I was also going to look at how artists had also used colour for its symbolic value, because symbolism is an area that has always particularly interested me and I usually try to incorporate it into my work in some way.

However it soon became apparent that the field of colour is extremely vast, perhaps more so that I realised, and I became so involved with my research that I lost focus of what I set out to do. Hence my project changed into a research paper. In retrospect however, it is clear to me that my heart was not really in producing something to show the application of my research, because I was far happier simply to read and learn. If I can impart in someway the knowledge that I have gained, then that is all that matters. I do not think it is important that I did not manage to produce anything to demonstrate the topics that I have discussed. I honestly found the research far more interesting that I expected, and there are numerous examples of the use of effective colour symbolism already to be seen, such as in “Hero”.

If I had had time, I would have liked to produce a short film or animation to demonstrate the differences in the way that colour is perceived by different cultures and religions. One idea I had was to focus on the use of a specific colour, and its use in the Western world versus the way it is used in China. The colour I was going to use was red because it is such a provocative colour, and I wanted to show the way that in the West we associate it with things like love and passion; then showing its universal association with fire and danger; and finally illustrating its

use as a traditional Chinese bridal colour, and the way it is believed to bring good luck. However I could not think of a way to tie the three sections together. Something that I have thought of now, is to produce two short pieces of animation, portraying an event such as a wedding for example, and display them in split screen format. One side would be set in a Western environment and the other in an Eastern or Oriental environment so that direct comparisons could be made between the use of colour. Each animation would have to be timed so that similar things were happening at the same time with regards to the action. I think this is an idea that I would perhaps like to experiment with in the future.

The most important thing that this project has made me realise is just how essential a role colour can play in any kind of media, be it a moving or still image. I was aware of its use, as I am sure is everyone, but I think that now I have a much better understanding of how powerful a device it can be. I learnt a lot during my research and I would hope that anyone reading this report would learn something that they didn't know before as well. The use of colour cannot be treated lightly, and if we want to use it for a specific reason I think it is important that we first understand what our intentions are. I want to stress that firstly it is vital that we identify who our target audience is, because this has such a great influence on what symbolism it is appropriate for us to use in out work. Secondly, if we are portraying or even aiming our work at a culture other than our own then in order to use colour symbolically we must find out about the associations that the people of that culture would make, because they may not necessarily match our own perceptions.

I feel that I have definitely learnt a lot from this project, and I will take this knowledge with me and apply it to my other work. I had already considered the symbolic use of colour in my

Major Project, but knowing what I do now I am going to go back to it and check that the colours I have used lend to the mood that I want to convey.

If I were to start over again, I would from the outset have chosen a specific area in which to conduct my research, because I feel this lack of direction could have had a detrimental on my final paper. When I first began this project I set myself too wide a target, which meant that I wasted a lot of time researching things that ultimately were unrelated to what I have produced. To some extent this is not an issue, as I was interested in what I was learning about, but I should have focused my efforts more towards a certain topic. This is something that I will make sure that I do the next time I undertake a similar project. I almost wish that we had more time to carry on with Innovations, because there is so much more that I could have researched on the topic of colour symbolism. I would have liked to focus more on a specific country or culture that wasn't my own, and look at how the use of colour in their films and artwork differed to that from my own experience. I have done this to some extent, but there is so much that could be said about the use of colour even in one country that I could not include everything. After all, colour is a subjective medium and one person's perception of it may differ from the next, whether they are from the same country or not.

List of Appendices

Appendix A

Table compiled by Apple in the 1980's describing some common colour associations.

(Marcus 1986, Apple Computer, Inc.1986 cited Pribadi 1990)

Appendix B

Table describing some common colour associations in Western World.

(Compiled from Freisner 2000)

Appendix C

Table showing some colours used in the art of Feng shui, and their meanings as would be interpreted by both the Chinese and Western world.

(Compiled from Anon 1/3/06 and Sibagraphics 1/3/06)

Appendix A

Common Western affiliations with colours (Marcus, 1986, Apple Computer Inc., 1986).

Colour	Denotions
Red	Stop, Danger, Hot, Fire, Failure, Error
Yellow	Caution, Slow, Test, Delay, Warning
Green	Go, OK, Clear, Ready, Power On
Warm Colours	Action, Response Required, Spatial Closeness
Cool Colours	Status, Background Information, Spatial Awareness
Greys, White, Blue	Neutrality

Appendix B

Some common Western colour associations in language and emotion.

Colour	Positive/Negative	Associations
Black	+ve	Sophistication (fashion), power, sexuality
	-ve	Death, emptiness, depression, disproval (black mark), bad luck
White	+ve	Purity, birth, cleanliness, innocence, peace, empowerment
	-ve	Surrender, cowardliness (white feather), perversion of justice
Grey		Confusion, lack of distinction (grey area), intelligence (the brain's grey matter), technology
Red	+ve	Love, luck ,passion, sex, festivity (Santa Claus), memorable things (red-letter day), important (red carpet), compassionate (Red Cross)
	-ve	War (red uniforms disguised blood from wounds) revolution and anarchy (red flag), prostitution (red-light district), the devil, danger, fire, debt (to be "in the red"), bureaucracy (red tape)
Pink		Healthy ("in the pink"), pretty, feminine
Orange	+ve	Warmth, fruitfulness, brightness, cheerfulness
	-ve	Brashness, danger
Brown	+ve	Comfort, security
	-ve	Gloom , boredom, melancholy
		Earth, wood, coffee/chocolate
Yellow	+ve	Cheerfulness, the sun, gold, happiness, vitality, hope, optimism
	-ve	Caution, sickness (jaundice, yellow flag of quarantine), betrayal, cowardice ("yellow-bellied")
Green	+ve	Environment, growth and renewal in spring, fertility (the green man was a pagan fertility symbol), freshness, nature ("green-fingered"), youth, health, peace and calm (the green room in a theatre/studio), things that are cool/refreshing
	-ve	Poison, envy, gullibility, immaturity, eeriness, nausea, sourness
Blue	+ve	Royalty/aristocracy (blue blood), heaven, truth, tranquillity, conservatism, loyalty and dependability, security, nautical things (the Navy wear blue uniforms)
	-ve	Introversion, sadness, depression, winter, the unexpected ("out of the blue"), things that are cold, indecency ("blue" jokes)
Purple	+ve	Bravery, aristocracy, spirituality, mystery
	-ve	Conceit, pomposity, mourning, death, rage

Appendix C

Colours used in the ancient art of Feng Shui and their interpretations in both the Western and Chinese cultures.

Direction	Colour	Interpretation	Western	Chinese
South	Red	Fame	Traditionally on the shields of many heroes and high-achievers (e.g. Hannibal) Means generosity in European heraldry Symbol for things such as anger, alertness, passion and sexuality Celtic colour of death and the otherworld	Marriage and the birth of sons "Happiness red" is a distinct hue The Chinese emperor wrote his decrees in a kind of red called vermilion In Chinese science and philosophy red signifies spice, vitality, and energy at its peak level Fire, good luck, money, respect, recognition, protection, vitality
Southwest	Pink	Partnership, Marriage	Ancients of the Western world believed girls were born inside pink roses Gentle associations such as love, beauty and health A pink triangle was used in Nazi Germany to indicate homosexuality	Love
West	White	Children, Pleasure	Innocence and the young In heraldry white stands for purity and truth Magi and Druids are often depicted wearing this colour in Western art, as is Jesus after the resurrection	Things do to with the absence of life, including death, mourning, ancestral spirits and ghosts from the land of the dead Also diminishing energy ("yang chi") Metal, death, mourning, ancestral spirits, ghosts, poise, confidence
North	Black	Career	Dignity and solitude	The colour of bruises, and therefore is unpopular as it is thought to be a sign of evil In science it is "yin shui", latent energy that is about to

				become active Water, money, income, career success, emotional protection, power, stability, bruises, evil
Northeast	Blue	Knowledge	Traditionally the colour of the European Great Goddess Sophia, and Divine Wisdom (Chokma) Supposedly worn by the deities of the Neolithic period and the Virgin Mary Used in many countries to ward off evil	The colour that was used for the chairs of high-ranking Chinese officials Indigo is meant to be the colour favoured by peasants Like black it represents "yin shui", but as energy on the decline Water, calm, love, healing, relaxation, peace, trust, adventure, exploration
East	Green	Family	The colour of life, growth and youth Signifies joy and abundance in European heraldry	Used for the chairs of minor officials The royal colour of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Green is also "yin shui", but represents the growing phase of energy Wood, refreshing, nurturing, balancing, harmony normalising, healing, health, peaceful, calming
Southeast, Northwest	Purple	Wealth, Helpful people (patrons)	Generally symbolic of wealth, royalty, mysticism and power Also linked to death and mourning	Worn by the literati and grandsons of the emperors of Ancient China Represents "yin shui" as energy approaching its peak latency Spiritual awareness, physical and mental healing
Centre	Yellow	Health	Caution and information Warns of sickness and quarantine Also associated with happiness and creativity	Popular use within religion Yellow was the national colour of Old China, and as such was sacred to the emperor: only him and his linear descendants were permitted to wear it The royal colour of the Qings (1644-1911) In science it represents "yang chi", energy in balance Earth, auspicious, sunbeams, warmth, motion

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