We see color—Patti Bellantoni feels color. She is passionate about how we (the audience) are affected by the use of color as an emotion in film. This book pulls me back into my favorite films and helps me look at them in a new way.

—Judy Irola, ASC, Head of Cinematography, USC School of Cinema-Television

IF IT'S PURPLE, SOMEONE'S GONNA DIE

The Power of Color in Visual Storytelling

PATTI BELLANTONI

Praise for

IF IT'S PURPLE, SOMEONE'S GONNA DIE

Patti Bellantoni's *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die* has given us a highly entertaining exploration of the world of color and its impact on our emotions. Told through a careful analysis of motion pictures that have used color to enhance or define their characters or dramatic needs, we are given a lively and insightful view of our reactions to the film experience.

Leading us gently but firmly through places we may have taken for granted, we find revelations that can be of real help to readers who use color to shape emotional responses to concepts, as well as physical environments. We can never again take the world of color for granted.

—Robert Boyle, four-time Oscar-nominated Production Designer:
North by Northwest, *The Birds*, *The Thomas Crown Affair*, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

A wonderful idea and very impressive! Patti's book shows the importance of color in developing both character and story.

—Henry Bumstead, two-time Oscar-winning Production Designer:
To Kill a Mockingbird, *The Sting*, *Unforgiven*, *Mystic River*.

We see color—Patti Bellantoni *feels* color. She is passionate about how we (the audience) are affected by the use of color as an emotion in film. This book pulls me back into my favorite films and helps me look at them in a new way. The book is a first of its kind and a great asset for our students on the impact of cinematography and production design.

—Judy Irola, ASC, Head of Cinematography, USC School of Cinema-Television

Bellantoni's evidence is confident and her examples are authoritative. Like Robert McKee's Story Seminars, hers is a breakthrough concept.

There comes a point, as Bellantoni spins example after example, where it all suddenly clicks—the use of color in motion pictures is not just a happy coincidence, but a conscious artistic choice that wafts with concrete meaning through all of the film's language. Unconscious and primitive in many respects, conscious and sophisticated in many more, the use and choice of color in motion pictures depends on the filmmaker's instinct and intellect—the pillars of all great art.

No one can ever look at moving pictures the same way after steeping themselves in this excellent book of discovery.

—Sam L. Grogg, Ph.D., Dean, AFI Conservatory

Color remains one of the filmmaker's greatest assets—and opportunities. With the new arsenal of digital tools available, the range of options for color has grown dramatically in the last three years. For filmmakers, Patti Bellantoni's new book is a great resource for what is now possible.

—Robert Hoffman,
Vice President, Marketing, Technicolor Entertainment Services

Patti Bellantoni has opened our eyes to the power of color in our lives. Her book is an invaluable resource not only for film professionals but also for artists, writers, designers, psychologists, educators, healers, and all who seek a deeper understanding of visual experience.

—Judith Searle, Author,
The Literary Enneagram: Characters from the Inside Out

A fascinating exploration of how color affects our emotional perception of the world. Although Patti primarily discusses the impact of color in film, her book is an indispensable resource for all visual artists.

—Ralph Funicello, Tony Award nominated Set Designer,
Don Powell Chair in Set Design, San Diego State University

Patti does a wonderful job of dissecting color and its presence in film. She makes us aware of the visual path in our brain and how a film touches us. This is a critical concept as we contemplate the digital medium in filmmaking!

—Beverly Wood Holt, Executive Vice President,
Technologies & Client Relations, Deluxe Laboratories

IF IT'S PURPLE, SOMEONE'S GONNA DIE

About the Cover

Why the image from ***Chicago***?

There is something about the presence of deep purple while singers sing and dancers dance that makes the message more serious. Rich purple is not only associated with death and delusion, it is perceived as having weight. Underneath all the singing and dancing, there is killing going on.

IF IT'S PURPLE, SOMEONE'S GONNA DIE

The Power of Color in Visual Storytelling

PATTI BELLANTONI

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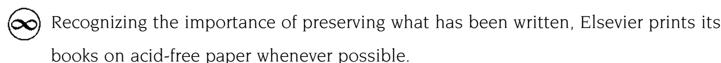

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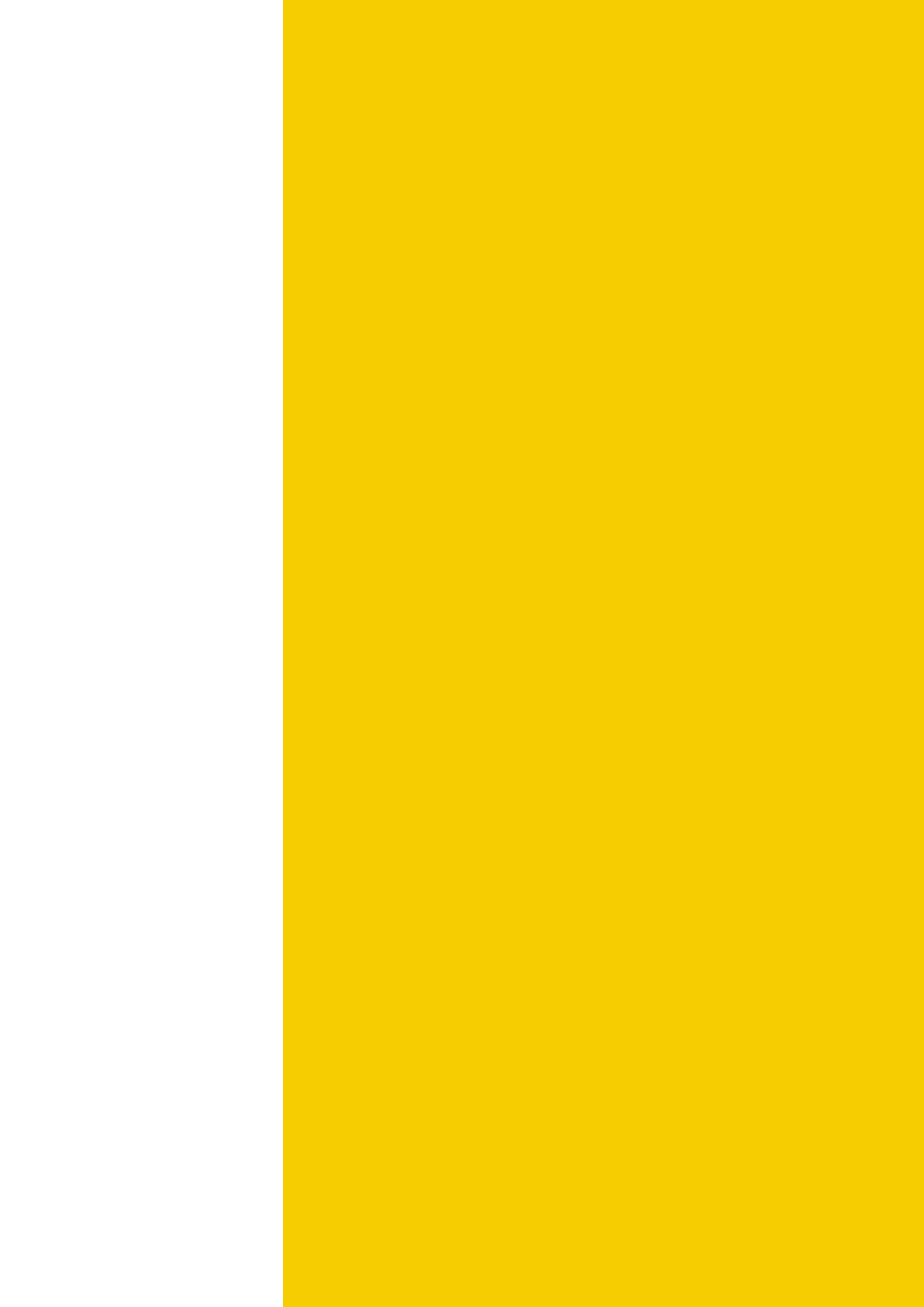
FOR MY DEAR FRIEND AND MENTOR

ROBERT BOYLE

whose commitment to making it human is my greatest guide



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Brief Filmographies

Following are filmographies of cinematographers and production designers who are featured in *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die*. Each of these filmmakers has done many superb films. These are the ones that are, at this moment in time, the most relevant to this book.

Robert Boyle:
The Shootist, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Thomas Crown Affair* (Original), *Marnie*, *The Birds*, *North by Northwest*

Henry Bumstead:
Million Dollar Baby, *Mystic River*, *Bloodwork*, *Unforgiven*, *The Sting*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Roger Deakins, BSC, ASC:
House of Sand and Fog, *A Beautiful Mind*, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, [*O*] *Brother, Where Art Thou?*, *Kundun*, *The Shawshank Redemption*

Edward Lachman, ASC:
Far from Heaven, *Erin Brockovich*, *The Virgin Suicides*, *My Family/Mi Familia*, *Mississippi Masala*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*

Larry Paull:
Escape from L.A., *Naked Gun 33⅓*, *Another Stakeout*, *Born Yesterday*, *City Slickers*, *Blade Runner*

John Seale, ACS, ASC:
Cold Mountain, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *The English Patient*, *The Firm*, *Witness*

Wynn Thomas:
Cinderella Man, *A Beautiful Mind*, *Analyze This*, *Wag the Dog*, *Malcolm X*, *Do the Right Thing*

Amy Vincent, ASC:
Hustle & Flow, *The Caveman's Valentine*, *Way Past Cool*, *Freedom Song*, *Some Girl*, *Eve's Bayou*

he magic of movies, a phrase often coined but seldom defined. Maybe we call it magic because it affects us in ways we've never taken the time to analyze. We talk about script, performance, and in my field, how the cinematography impacts (supports) the script. We probably feel the importance of color viscerally but we haven't brought it to the table to talk about.

> *"The interior of the Lisbon house is permeated by a sickly yellowish green, the kind of green that comes from not being exposed to enough light. In essence, it is a guardhouse of five virginal, about to bloom, young sisters. The house becomes a metaphor for the parent's obsession with not allowing any light to come inside. The film is very much about not seeing."*
>
> —Patti Bellantoni on *The Virgin Suicides*

Yummy. This book opens up new ways of looking at films we love. It allows us to revisit and appreciate our romance with movies. It's like looking at a Vermeer when one is 20 years old, and then again at 50. It only gets better and more intimate for the viewer.

—Judy Irola, ASC
Head of Cinematography
USC School of Cinema-Television

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To the brilliant and talented cinematographers and production designers whom I interviewed for this book, I give thanks from the heart. You have enriched the tone and texture of the book. Above all, you have humanized it. U*n abrazo* to Bob Boyle, Henry Bumstead, Wynn Thomas, Larry Paull, Roger Deakins, Ed Lachman, John Seale, and Amy Vincent.

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To my Production team, headed by Kyle Sarofeen, who was always willing and available to patiently explain the production process to me.

Backstory

THE BEGINNING

The genesis for this book goes back to a day more than twenty years ago at the School of Visual Arts in New York when I observed that my design students were making arbitrary color choices in their work. In order to investigate the conceptual possibilities needed to inform their color decisions, I asked them to bring to class what they thought was "Red." There was no further instruction and no discussion.

On the day of the appointed class, the students appeared wearing red, and predictably brought in paint chips and color swatches, along with wrapping papers and fabrics. They even flooded the room with red light. What also arrived, however, were things no one had anticipated: hot peppers, muscle balms that made the skin feel hot, toy fire engines with blinking lights and sirens, red hot cinnamon balls, and rock 'n roll music. What everyone experienced that day forever changed our awareness of how we *see* color.

We became aware that there was a "Red" behavior happening. The students compulsively gulped down salsa, talked louder, and turned the volume up on the rock music. The males in particular became sweaty and agitated. (One year later on Red Day, I had to break up a screaming match between two young men who normally were great friends.) After twenty minutes in the red environment, the students were ready to leave. What had happened here? Everyone agreed to try the experiment again the following week, with a different color. They chose blue.

As word of this experiment spread, students from other disciplines asked to participate, and they came to class. The class of roughly twenty-five people divided into several groups. There was only one rule: concepts and decisions were to be kept within the confines of each group until Color Day.

Blue Day clinched that we were on to something. This time, what the students brought was completely different. There were big

pale blue pillows, cooling mints, and new age music. Within minutes, those loud, boisterous students from the week before stopped talking, laid back and became almost listless. A sense of calm permeated the room. As opposed to racing out the door, as they had done previously, they didn't want to move. Clearly, whatever was happening needed to be explored further.

The following year, I incorporated this experiment into my curriculum and made the project more specific. The class was to select a color and then build an environment that explored the color's association with the five senses. Students divided into four groups, each with four to five members. They were encouraged not to disclose their plans outside the group so their solutions to the assignment would be kept secret until Color Day. When the assignment became more specific, the solutions became more revelatory. As students began to explore the sounds, tastes, smells, textures, and, of course, "sight" of a color, they discovered, for example, that what smells, feels, or tastes a certain color may not *be* that color (e.g. strawberries do not taste red). Because of this, the students began to blindfold each other during their explorations of the color's smell, touch, and taste. Although their environments were filled with the color, not being able to see what they were smelling, touching, or tasting for those few minutes led them to a heightened awareness of their visceral responses. It also freed them to seek out sense associations other than sight, which, in turn, gave them a deeper understanding of that color's effect on their perception. It also inspired the students to go beyond the superficial. If red's taste, for example, inspired students to bring in white raw garlic and not red strawberries, then there is more to consider than surface observation. For example, cinnamon was consistently perceived as a red taste, but cinnamon sticks are brown in their natural state. However, the cinnamon-flavored candies called "Red Hots" are artificially colored red. Similarly, artificially colored mint candies and cough drops are often blue—a decision that seems to be based on what the taste of mint looks like. It appeared to us that product marketers were exploring something that our research validated.

During this twenty-five-year period, patterns in the solutions to the color problems began to emerge. In our experiments, red environments indeed nearly always included the tastes of jalapeño peppers, the smells of spicy sauce, and the feel of hot muscle balm.

There were sounds of cap pistols and those red balls of caps that make sharp noises when hitting the floor. One of the reddest sounds I have ever heard was a bullwhip that cracked like thunder inside a kettledrum. The color indeed often inspired loud, compulsive, and aggressive behavior. The following, written by former SVA student Peter Coleman, is in response to my request to write a paper on Red Day. Comments like these surfaced year after year:

> It's important to note that I'm not a "red" person. If I had to guess, I'd say I'm more blue . . . violet, maybe. But not red. Definitely not red. Which makes it all the more peculiar that I petitioned so vehemently in favor of the color in the first place. (Author's note: Students selected which color to explore by majority vote.) In the process of campaigning for "Red," I became louder, more aggressive, and, in short, a bigger, more cartoon-like and obnoxious version of my usual self, challenging my classmates to "Screw the underdog" (being any color other than red) and to ask themselves if they had "the mettle"' to choose red. Indeed, it took more guts for me to choose this color than I had imagined.

After the "Red Experience," Coleman continues,

> Somewhere between the erotic and the ridiculous lies the explanation for our demonic and bizarre behavior on Red Day. Red comes at you. It's in your face. That element of the color seemed to possess the group. I fed off the adrenaline created by the participants' reactions . . . A heat seemed to be generating in the room, and I guess I just went with it.

What began as a simple experiment became a revelation of a force far more powerful than we had imagined, or really noticed. The listlessness of Blue Day and the otherworldly atmosphere of Purple Day, described next, reinforced my belief that color influences our choices, our opinions, and our emotional state. Our feelings of euphoria or rage, calm or agitation can be intensified or subdued by the colors in our environment. This is powerful information in the hands of a filmmaker.

WHY THIS TITLE?

Perhaps it is a reflection of our times—of our living on the edge of the unexplainable—but each semester at least one class chose to investigate purple, a color often associated with the mystical and

the noncorporal. The color resonated with the students in ways that were consistent. The designs for their environments often dealt with ritual, magic, and the spiritual. Every year at least one group built an altar.

I had anticipated a royal interpretation of purple, but interestingly enough, interpretations of a royal connection to purple were outnumbered by the mystical, spiritual, and paranormal by approximately ten-to-one. The association with the royal and regal comes from the fact that purple is the most difficult color to come by in nature. Its very scarcity associates it with the rare trappings of emperors, kings, and queens. But altars are in a different genre altogether. Altars are in the province of something beyond the material. The altars the students designed for purple often used religious associations as a springboard. There were even altars to chocolate (a taste, we discovered, they associated with the color) and to the smells of lavender. There were psychics, fortunetellers, and witch doctors. The most pervasive interpretations of purple, however, dealt with vigils, wakes, and funerals. One funeral was complete with a tombstone for each member of the class.

These experiments led us to become more aware of the use of purple in popular culture in general (ads for yoga are often purple) and, of course, the use of purple in movies.

Films as varied as ***Cabaret***, ***Dick Tracy***, and ***The Sixth Sense*** all use purple to foreshadow death. Purple, however, doesn't always signal a literal death of someone. It could mean *something* is going to die. For example, Max Fisher, the adolescent rogue in ***Rushmore***, climbs a ladder to the purple bedroom of his teacher, only to lose his delusion that he will sleep with her. In ***Tootsie***, Dustin Hoffman's character Dorothy Michaels wears purple when she reveals her character's true identity as a man, thereby "killing" Dorothy.

Both colleagues and students tell me they were not previously aware of how often the title *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die* manifests itself in movies. Investigate it for yourself. The next time you see purple in a film, watch carefully for what it reveals. Start with ***Far from Heaven*** or even ***Chicago***.

Out of more than a dozen potential titles for the book, my students chose *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die* because they felt this title captured both the spirit and content of my color seminars in Visual Storytelling at AFI.

THE BOOK'S LANGUAGE

You will find I often tend to attribute characteristics to a color. For me, after years of investigation, colors indeed have distinct personalities. For example, hot reds are "lusty." This does not mean the color itself has that inherent emotional property. It means that it can elicit that physical and emotional response from the audience. Both Gwyneth Paltrow's bedspread in ***Shakespeare in Love*** and Nick Cage's bedspread in ***Moonstruck*** are a hot orange-red, and they certainly accompanied lusty activity in those films. Does it mean that that particular red is restricted to lusty activity? No, but it's a valid description of one of the activities the color can trigger. A strong color elicits a strong visceral response. This, in turn, can set up an audience to anticipate a particular action (in this case, a lusty one).

Colors indeed have their own language, which can visually help define a character arc or layer a story. In ***Malcolm X***, for example, bright, "look at me" red is the color that defines Malcolm's cocky small-time hoodlum years; blue, the contemplative years in prison; and gold, his enlightened time in Mecca. Each of those colors layers the journey of this man and has a different (and cumulative) effect on the audience. Red is energizing, blue affects introspection, and golden light inspires the spiritual or enlightened. Wynn Thomas, production designer for ***Malcolm X***, describes how he envisioned the film in three acts, each defined by a particular color, on page 14.

WHY THE TERM "PURPLE"?

For years, I advised my students to use the term "violet" to define the color that is midway between red and blue (in the additive system). But "purple" kept creeping into our day-to-day vocabulary, especially in communicating color names in the commercial world. Indeed, a 1992 press release from Pantone, Inc. (a color system for designers and printers), refers to purple as "a blend of the excitement of red and the tranquility of blue." The word "purple " in this book is used in that context. In the interest of communicating clearly, I have chosen terms for colors that are most consistent with our day-to-day living experiences: red, yellow, blue, orange, green, and purple.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The book is divided into six parts, one for each of these major colors in the spectrum: Red, Yellow, Blue, Orange, Green, and

Purple. Each part has a home page, which describes the emotional and psychological influences we discovered about the color, and contains two chapters, each of which explores films that best illustrate those influences. Within these chapters, the color is divided into six characteristics that help to influence our emotional responses to the films.

Some films use a color's transformation, or its flow, to support the evolution of the characters and story throughout the movie. Others have one brilliant scene that captures a color's role in defining a character or expanding the story. Consequently, some of the chapters are longer than others. If more than one color is explored in a film, the film is listed under the color that is the major influence in the story and the other color(s) will be keyed under "supporting color" icons in the margin of the page. As well, "cross-reference" icons will appear in the margins of the pages of the films where the same color appears. Please note that, because my film commentaries follow the order of the script, sometimes a supporting color may precede the major color in the film.

LEGEND

SUPPORTING COLOR

CROSS REFERENCE

Films are indexed by movie title, color, and emotional state, allowing easy access to a wide range of information, Or, led by the moment, the book can be read beginning anywhere.

WHY THESE FILMS?

If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die explores big studio films and limited-release indie films, Oscar winners and films that at the time were critically dismissed and are just now being revisited. Each of the films was chosen because it illustrates a brilliant use of color, either in just one crucial scene or sequence in a movie or thematically throughout the entire movie. A film like Ang Lee's ***Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon*** uses color to define the story and the characters' arcs so completely that it appears under four colors.

There are some films where the visual storytelling is so rich, particularly with visual metaphor, that it could become a seminar unto itself. Accordingly, in keeping with our goal to expand the way we *see* movies, I have chosen at times to explore in more detail elements like subliminal symbols (***The English Patient***), visual irony (***Unforgiven***), and visual politics (***My Family/Mi Familia***).

THE SIX CHARACTERISTICS: AN IMPORTANT NOTE TO THE READER

The six characteristics listed for each color (e.g., Powerful, Lusty, and Defiant Reds) were selected because these emotional

associations repeated themselves over and over again in our research. These are simply examples of how a color can be used. In no way are they meant to limit you, but rather to act as springboards from which you can go off and test further interpretations on your own. Please remember, just because blue might appear under Passive Blues, for example, does not mean it cannot exhibit characteristics like Melancholic or Cerebral as well. By the same token, both green and purple are listed as having the characteristic of Ominous. It all depends on the context in which they are used. All the more reason to think for yourself and not try to turn these categories into rigid formulas for color selection. Get a group together and have them create a color environment and observe how behavior will change (see page xxii). You will find that if you don't try to skew the results by giving your audience clues as to what you want, your research will be amazingly consistent.

My goal is to facilitate your reliance on nonverbal information. I want to encourage you to exercise your visceral muscles. *Seeing* a movie demands skill that *watching* a movie doesn't.

A CAVEAT FROM THE AUTHOR

There are times when I hear a filmmaker say, "Color can be whatever you want it to be." My experience tells me this is a dangerous misconception. It's the cart before the horse, really. In fact, my research suggests it is not we who decide what color can be. After two decades of investigation into how color affects behavior, I am convinced, whether we want it to or not, that it is *color* that can determine how we think and what we feel.

One of the reasons color influences us is due to a phenomenon called *resonance*. MaryAnn Kilmartin, a bio-resonance expert in San Diego, talked to me about the ideas of Carlo Rubbia, who won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1984. According to Kilmartin, Rubbia calculated that we are one billion parts light to one part matter. She explains, "Human beings are basically all light. We look like we are all matter because we are hard-wired to see the particle nature of light. As you recall, light has two forms: particle (solid) and wave (frequency). We 'feel' light however because we are in resonance with light in its wave form. That is what we mean when we talk about feeling red/anger/energy, etc."[1]

[1] *Bio Resonance and Multi-Resonance Therapy*, Vol. 1, ed. Hans Brugemann, Carlo Rubbia, Hague International, Brussels, English Edition, 1993, pp. 208–209.

So our perceptual nature is unable to see the wave nature of light that affects how we "feel." The irony is that color impacts us in ways we cannot see, but it affects how we feel and how we behave. When we walk into a red room, for example, it is as if the color red and the human body become two resonating tuning forks. Like a note, our whole system begins to "hum" red—physically, psychologically, and emotionally.

Each color affects us uniquely. Even the slightest variation of a single color can have a profound influence on our behavior. In wise hands, color can become a powerful tool for filmmakers to subliminally layer a story—to make a situation ironic, or absurd. In ***Philadelphia***, as the dying Tom Hanks clings to his IV stand, translating the lyrics to an opera whose theme is love and loss, he is slowly enveloped by an intense red light from nowhere. It is like visual salt rubbed into an emotional wound. Hanks speaks of love and life, but the red belies his emotional reality. We are powerless to ignore it. The red is the visual counterpoint to the words and music. It is his unspoken rage and mortal pain, as well as a visual adjective that supports and sustains Hanks' brilliant performance.

On the other hand, the pale red (pink) in ***The Royal Tennenbaums*** makes an enormous difference in the audience's attitude toward the title character. Royal Tennenbaum does incredibly despicable things, but because he's surrounded by bubble-gum pink, we know instinctively not to take him seriously. The color has rendered him silly.

Color is one of the elements rarely recognized by the audience as manipulating them. This subliminal quality can be magic in the director's hands—or not. This much is clear: if we remain unaware of this power awaiting our command, we relinquish a large part of our control to chance. Color will continue to resonate, to send out signals, irrespective of our intentions. So, whether it's on or offscreen, it's essential for us to know what we are doing.

GOING BEYOND THE VERBAL

How do you develop this facility with color? How can you use this powerful force to layer a story? How can you create the magic?

First and most importantly, you select your left-brain and click "Quit." You have to relinquish control of your thinking self and give it over to what you are *seeing*. This is not easy in a culture that prides

itself on hard-nosed reason and in which our softer perceptual skills are often dismissed. Most of us love to analyze films and love to talk about what we analyze. Indeed, we are often so busy analyzing the plot points that we are unaware of how we are being affected by what we see. We've evolved into a generation of talkers with lazy vision. We "watch" but we don't *see*. And we miss out on an experience that enriches our emotional core.

It will maximize your experience if, after reading this section, you first see a film before you read the book. For example, if you want to explore the emotional influence of blue, you might screen ***About Schmidt***. The film opens with one of the bluest offices in the history of cinema. Don't just register that as an idea and move on. See how blue follows Warren Schmidt wherever he goes and pay very close attention to what the blue is doing to *you* both physically and emotionally. Of course, it has layered Schmidt's character, but it has also allowed you to have a *visceral* understanding of who he is. That is a very different experience. If you use the book in this way, you can compare and contrast your observations and discoveries with mine. It will be more like a seminar than a lecture.

Another way to begin is to choose a film you are familiar with, run it on fast-forward and look for how a color or colors propel the story or modify the characters (color is, after all, a visual adjective). In ***Elizabeth***, for example, the color of Cate Blanchett's costumes defines her character arc as it morphs from innocent pale coral to powerful blood red.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

Filmmakers should be careful not to make color choices based solely upon an intellectual or abstract notion. If, for example, a director chooses blue to symbolize "hope" because the sky is blue when the sun shines, he or she may find it is possible for an unwanted reaction to occur. Instead of feeling hopeful, the audience may involuntarily respond to blue by feeling tired—even melancholy.

This is a true story: An executive decided on his favorite pale blue as the color for his office reception area. As the months wore on, he found himself complaining about the passivity, complacency, and lack of curiosity among his current crop of job candidates. He attributed it to the millennium and seriously contemplated initiating a seminar called "Initiative for the 21st

century." My research has suggested that pale blue makes people passive and introspective. Without knowing it, he spaced out every person who sat more than five minutes in his waiting area. They hummed to the tune he visually played for them.

Of course, it depends on which blue is used, but what one director thinks of as sky blue, another would call azure. Adjectives for color are subjective. The experience of reading or hearing a word and the physical sensation felt by seeing the actual color is not the same. Actually, Jasper Johns, in an exhibition in the early 1960s at the Jewish Museum in New York, "illustrated" the dichotomy between a word and the thing that a word describes by hanging an actual teacup on a canvas and then writing the word "cup" on the painting with an arrow pointing to the cup. There was a lot of dialogue that took place about this piece, but the consensus seemed to be that Johns was pointing to the fact that the two are not equal. The same is true for color and the description of a color.

Interestingly enough you already possess the information you need in choosing a color. It is simply stored in your own perceptual depository. Only recently a young designer, unknown to me, asked me what a particular color meant. I asked her to close her eyes and remember a time when she felt afraid and to tell me what colors her feelings were. The colors she chose were exactly the colors that my students had chosen over and over again in our color experiments.

This book encourages you first to approach both filmmaking and film viewing viscerally. Still, your intellect will always be waiting. Sometimes it will want you to put a round peg in a square hole because it wants the story to be more linear. Just demand that it be patient. Once you've trained yourself to really *see*, your intellect will be back to weave its own brand of magic.

ARE COLOR CHOICES REALLY PLANNED?

At my seminars in Visual Storytelling, the first question often asked is, "Is all this really planned?" The answer is not a simple yes or no. Color may play a role in weeks of planning in preproduction. Sometimes, however, plans are supplanted by gut decisions for which a color simply "feels right" on the spot. Oscar-nominated cinematographer Roger Deakins explains how he works with both the planning and the instinctive in filming ***The Shawshank Redemption***:

> I was involved in *Shawshank* from very early on and had time to discuss all (production designer) Terry Marsh's plans for his sets and how they would work in conjunction with the location. As our choice [of color] had to work in varied lighting conditions we tested paint colors on film many times before settling on the final tone. The warm brown tones that I was intending to use for the night lighting had a different effect on the gray we chose for the cooler daytime lighting. It is simply that warm light hitting a bluish gray wall will create a brown color, whereas cool daylight striking the same wall will often bring out the blue in the color to a degree that can appear too extreme on film. Film will often enhance blue anyway so it is important to test colors of paint and costumes when a particular "look" is sought.

ROGER DEAKINS

As our choice [of color] had to work in varied lighting conditions, we tested paint colors on film many times before settling on the final tone.

Ultimately, it is your relationship with what is there in front of you—the actors and the set—that counts. It is a gut reaction to these elements and not some thoughts you bring with you.—Roger Deakins

However, Deakins also talks about how he likes to work from instinct when he shoots:

> It can be an analytical process but I think it is more often instinctual. It is usually a "feeling" that something is right or "it just looks right" and what might have "looked right" in preproduction may not be right on the day of the shoot. The instinctive may overcome the analytical . . . That is the only way I work and many such choices are made as the camera is being set and, maybe, after I have seen a rehearsal.

Filmmakers can pragmatically verify a desired emotional response to a color. An excellent example of wise decision making is the way director Kasi Lemmons chose a particular green light, which played a key role in ***The Caveman's Valentine***. In the script, writer George Dawes Green had specified a "pernicious" (wicked) green. Lemmons and cinematographer Amy Vincent tested the effects of different greens on actor Samuel L. Jackson and gauged his physical and emotional reaction to each one.

Color-flows that track the emotional arcs of a story are appearing on walls of studio art departments. More and more, colors are being digitally altered in order to emotionally emphasize a scene. So, yes, it is often planned, not just on the set but also in both preproduction and postproduction. Consideration of how a color will manifest in a film is essential.

It's obviously impossible that David Hand, the director of ***Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*** (1937); Sofia Coppola, director of ***The***

AMY VINCENT

We wanted the green "Z-Rays" in The Caveman's Valentine *to affect Romulus (Sam Jackson's character) negatively in his very core. "Z-Rays," according to Rom, are "the color of a rich man's bank account." There are many different rules of the game in business and finance, and Rom doesn't live in that world at all, so the green "Z-Rays" are terrifying to him. When Sam reacted to it strongly, we knew it was the right green.*

—Amy Vincent

Virgin Suicides (2000); and Kasi Lemmons, director of ***The Caveman's Valentine*** (2001) met and decided unanimously to choose green liquid as a metaphor for poison. But choose it they did. What inspired these decisions? We do not know for certain, but imagine how you would feel if someone offered you a tall glass of bright green liquid. Maybe our knee-jerk response lies deeply buried in our unconscious. Perhaps it's a fear reaction lodged deep in our genetic memory since we crawled up out of primal pond scum. (See the opening scene in Terrence Malick's ***The Thin Red Line***.)

In the air or in liquid form, green can effect an association with the poisonous or toxic. Green in the atmosphere, for example, often precedes a violent storm. This is an important consideration in choosing to use green light. In both the African American and the gay bars in Todd Haynes' ***Far from Heaven***, green light signals to the audience that something is being perceived as not acceptable in the social environment. The audience responds to this viscerally. Their interpretation depends on how carefully the context is established.

Throughout this book, you will find anecdotes from award-winning cinematographers and production designers whose comments will underscore the essential interplay between the technical and the esthetic and between the planned and the instinctive. In choosing a color, one thing is for certain: Each without the other can leave the end result to chance. And that is not, whether it's onscreen or off-screen, where you want it to be.

AN INVITATION

You are about to begin an exploration of more than ninety selections from films in which color influences your perception of who is a villain, who is a victim, who is about to fall in love, and, sometimes, who is about to die. *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die* is written the way I teach: in an informal style and in accessible language. It is important that your visual processing not be interrupted by the need to digest unfamiliar terms. The concepts presented in this book will demand your complete visual attention. Using film after film as a reference, you will be building an awareness of how color affects your attitudes toward the character and story. I hope you will use this book as a springboard to jump off on your own. If you're not sure a color will give you the effect you want,

test it on your audience. Whatever you do, don't just talk about color. Have swatches, photos, fabrics—whatever you like—to illustrate what is in your head. *Feel* what the color is doing to you physically.

It's sneaky business, this thing called color. It's right there in front of you, but more times than not you don't notice what it's doing. This book is written to heighten that awareness. Consider it an invitation to join in our Visual Storytelling Seminars.

Patti Bellantoni

Red
The Caffeinated Color

1

Lola has twenty minutes to find 100,000 marks to save Manni's life. Red is her visual fuel.

Bright red is like visual caffeine. It can activate your libido, or make you aggressive, anxious, or compulsive. In fact, red can activate whatever latent passions you might bring to the table, or to the movie. Red is power. But red doesn't come with a moral imperative. Depending on the story's needs, red can give power to a good guy or a bad guy. After all, both the Wicked Witch and Dorothy wore the ruby slippers.

Because we tend to see it first, red gives the illusion of advancing toward us. Due to this, it can manipulate our sense of space. In Sydney Pollack's ***The Firm***, for example, the camera places us directly behind Tom Cruise when the door to the law firm opens. What we see is what Cruise sees: It is a bright red wall that visually says "power." Because bright red has this visually aggressive quality, the space does indeed appear to come forward, and it looks shallower than it actually is. That is exactly what is going to happen to him at the firm. Cruise is about to enter a high-powered place in which there is little room to maneuver.

Red can also make something appear to move faster. (Red cars get more speeding tickets than cars of any other color.) Bright red can raise your heart rate and anxiety level. It is visually loud and can elicit anger. One of my students told of how her happy, well-adjusted family was bored with the neutral color in their dining room. They wanted to make it more cheerful. After selecting a number of paint chips, they decided on a bright red. Almost immediately and without warning, they began to have altercations every night at dinner. It sent them into a tailspin. In fact, it got so bad, they went into family therapy. A few months went by with no appreciable change. Frustrated, they ultimately searched for an answer in the dining room itself. As the only thing that had changed was the color, they decided to change the color back to the original pale yellow. They stopped fighting almost immediately.

Bright red tends to be cold. Power-hungry Sigourney Weaver wears red in ***Working Girl***, and in ***The Sixth Sense*** the cold-blooded murderer wears it at a funeral. This aggressive quality of bright red is somehow tempered when the color becomes warmer. Warm reds (red-oranges) tend to be sensual or lusty. Think Gwyneth Paltrow's bedspread in ***Shakespeare in Love***. Rose (light red tinged with blue), like the train car in the last scene of ***Racing with the Moon***, is more romantic. (See illustration on page 39.)

Red darkened to burgundy reads as mature, regal, and elegant. In ***Moonstruck***, when Loretta (Cher) buys a burgundy dress for the opera, it's an important clue to a change in her heretofore-mundane character. Burgundy, a deep red, that has a whisper of blue, is more sophisticated. It's like a fine vintage wine. It signals a growth and maturity in Loretta. This may be her first opera, but that burgundy suggests it probably won't be her last.

In the last analysis, the color most people think of as "red" is the one we call "fire engine red." This is the red that makes people eat faster and gamble more. Think of the sound a fire siren makes. Red is its visual equivalent. It makes it difficult to believe that the red in the traffic lights visually signals us to "Stop!"

Think About This:

Does the red in a traffic light really signal you to stop?

Powerful, Lusty, and Defiant Reds

Powerful Reds

The Wizard of Oz

1939. Judy Garland, Ray Bolger, Burt Lahr, Jack Haley, Margaret Hamilton. Directed by Victor Fleming. Cinematography: Harold Rosson; Art Direction: Cedric Gibbons.

RED: LITTLE SHOES/BIG POWER

Think of it this way: The green brick road, the yellow shoes, and the ruby red city. Doesn't work, does it? And it's not only because this film is part of our cultural heritage (it was voted number six on AFI's list of the 100 greatest American movies of all time) that the yellow brick road, the emerald city, and the ruby-red shoes are impressed as clichés in our consciousness. It's because those specific colors send specific signals for specific intentions in the story.

Underneath all the charm, underneath all the delight is a serious and scary story about the struggle to find power, compassion, and courage. It's about facing the green witches and blue monkeys of the adult world. It's akin to Luke Skywalker's using "the force" to fight the dark side or Harry Potter's summoning his Patronus to repel the dementors. Luke had his lightsaber. Harry had his wand. Dorothy, in a sweeter time, had her magic shoes. It's interesting to note that even though Dorothy's slippers look like adult shoes, they fit this little girl. Dorothy's ready to grow up, and they give her something that she desperately needs to travel down that yellow road, and red is the clue to what it is.

Dorothy needs power. The pale blue of her pinafore doesn't send a strong enough signal to ward off the scary trees and flying monkeys that she will face along the way to Oz. After all, it's the red shoes that will have contact with the cautionary yellow of the

road and, therefore, need the most power to carry her there. Red is her visual courage.

Dorothy's also a kid who's been wrenched from home and feels powerless in this strange world of witches and munchkins. It is important to remember that in 1939, when the film was made, audiences were viewing films in black and white, and so it was brilliant for the filmmakers to expose the audience to black and white in the beginning of the movie so that they too could experience the incredible shock of the exotic and bizarre Technicolor world along with Dorothy. Intimations of vulnerability were rumbling through the cosmos in 1939. People wanted to feel strong and invincible. It was good to know that it was the home from Kansas that squashed the Wicked Witch so Dorothy could have those ruby slippers and the strength and the power to make it to the Emerald City. The number one red signal is Power.

YELLOW: THE PROMISE AND THE WARNING

The yellow has it all. It's bright, and it's a color, like red, that tends to take over the visual field. After all, we see it all the way to the Emerald City. Because of its brightness and warmth, it is often associated with happiness. Perceptually, it appears to come forward. We "see" it first, which is one of the reasons it is used to signal caution in traffic signs. That road leads the way to finding happiness over the rainbow and at the same time it cautions Dorothy of the unknown obstacles that will test her along the way.

BLUE: POWERLESS PINAFORES AND SCARY MONKEYS

Actually, Dorothy's pinafore was a blue gingham-check, which reads as pale blue. Year after year, our investigations revealed that the paler a color is, the more powerless it is. She definitely needs that red.

Those monkeys, on the other hand, are a very cold and very bright blue, and combined with their gargoyle-like faces, they are the stuff of which nightmares are made. Scary-looking things that are a cold color do not read as compassionate, and consequently become even scarier. Blue is the coldest color in the spectrum. In its most saturated form, it is not associated with emotional warmth or empathy.

GREEN: THE MEAN OLD LADY AND THE EVIL WITCH

In the black-and-white beginning of the movie, the face of Miss Gulch (Margaret Hamilton) is really scary. But when the scene shifts

Green transforms the already horrid Miss Gulch into the even more evil Wicked Witch of the West.

to the Technicolor land of the Munchkins and she becomes the Wicked Witch of the West, her face is green and she becomes absolutely virulent.

She is evil incarnate. Chalk it up to genetic memory of venomous reptiles crawling or sliding out of the slime, but our reaction to green skin is programmed at a very deep level. Our aversion is a knee-jerk response. We can't help it.

GREEN: THE EMERALD ANOMALY

Then why aren't we afraid of the emerald castle? The answer lies perhaps in the *idea* of this green as a beautiful jewel. Not to cast a shadow over a film icon, but in the last analysis (my research shows green, when not in a natural state, can have very negative associations), green may not have been the best choice for this magical city. Renowned color consultant Faber Birren says in his well-known book *Color*, "Green . . . is used to express both the curse and the blessing of youth."[1]

[1] Faber Birren, *Color*, Marshall Editions, Limited, 1980, p. 206.

Try this experiment yourself: In the last sequence, the Wizard is about to fly off in the balloon. A crowd of people dressed in green forms around him, and the green city surrounds him. Wait until the screen is nearly filled with green and put the video on "pause." Just stare at the screen as if it were an abstract painting and see how you feel physically. Then you decide: Does it feel magical or not?

Working Girl

1988. Harrison Ford, Melanie Griffith, Sigourney Weaver. Directed by Mike Nichols. Cinematography: Michael Ballhaus; Production Design: Patrizia von Brandenstein.

THE FALL AND RISE

Accompanied by Carly Simon's "Let all the dreamers wake the nation," the Staten Island ferry, in all its working-class glory, heads toward Manhattan. This is a journey between two worlds. And the credentials required to gain access into the more powerful one are hard to come by for a girl from the "Bridge and Tunnel" crowd. Tess McGill (Melanie Griffith) is a young woman who has worked hard and long, gone to school at night, and won a degree with honors. Yet she doesn't have the resumé to make it in this part of town. Her big hair lets us know that right away. When we first see Tess, she's in a brown vinyl car coat, rosebud textured tights, and lots of costume jewelry. But Tess has great instincts. Her transformation begins on her first day in her new job as a secretary in Mergers and Acquisitions. She wears black. Her new boss, Kathryn Parker (Sigourney Weaver), makes her entry softly, wearing an elegant suit the color of deerskin with simple pearls over an ivory-colored blouse. It doesn't, however, take Kathryn—an egotistical power-obsessed control freak if ever there was one—long to begin wearing red.

She throws a cocktail party to introduce herself to her colleagues. In a brilliantly staged scene, a gaggle of gray-suited men swarms around her, like little boys to a candy store. Kathryn, sophisticated and elegant, is a corporate temptress incarnate. In the midst of this grayness, she stands, wearing a deceivingly simple bright red dress. The color is dominant and signals power, but her dialogue is laced with lusty innuendo. She promises "a bottle of

Cristal with two straws" to a smarmy guy if he can get her in on a divestiture deal.

Tess, dressed in gray, disappears into the haze of the steam table as she wheels a tray of Chinese dumplings through the crowd. She may appear powerless, but she is also nearly invisible, which allows her to listen, watch, and learn from Kathryn's every move.

Put this scene on "pause" and just look at the image, not for the subject matter but as an abstract design, and you will see Kathryn's red visually "take over" the frame while Tess' gray recedes into the background. It's a visual translation of exactly who each woman is. At this moment.

A prophetic bright red, magenta, and orange watercolor of two cougars walking in opposite directions hangs on Kathryn's office wall. Chances are, they are female cats.

Then there is the relationship-defining scene involving the red ski boot: The sequence begins in Kathryn's office as Tess, on her knees, is fitting Kathryn's big bright red boot. It's shot in close-up, so red dominates the screen and we get the lord-and-master relationship visually.

Once the scene moves to the slopes, however, director Mike Nichols riffs on the power angle by pushing Kathryn's red to the max. She's in red from cap to boots, and with great élan she skis confidently over the edge of a cliff and breaks her leg, allowing Tess to commandeer her office and mask as a Mergers and Acquisitions executive. This is a great visual set-up. Nichols has turned the power thing on its head and used it sarcastically. It's also an ever-so-light-hearted foreshadowing of Kathryn's ultimate downfall. Another huge clue to Tess's rise/Kathryn's fall in this scene lies in what each of them is wearing. It's very subtle and very significant: in the ski-boot fitting scene, both Tess and Kathryn are wearing nearly identical clothes—white blouse and a black skirt. It's a subtle hint of the equal matching of these women, like the two powerful cats walking in opposite directions in Kathryn's painting.

All the reds Kathryn wears are cold. There is not one hint of warmth in them. Warm reds are closer to the color of a pimento or a persimmon (see ***Shakespeare in Love***). Colder reds are closer to the color of a Red Delicious apple. They're perfect for power. Kathryn's energy is cold, arrogant, and analytical, and in the end it traps her. In her last scene, dressed in red, she tries to lie her way

out of the Machiavellian situation she has created. But this time her power fails her.

It's a wonderful visual irony, seeing Kathryn limping arrogantly through the office corridor, wearing the color that no longer works for her. Aside from the great "Get your bony ass out of my sight" line, we see the demise of her power visually. As we watch her walk away, both Weaver and the red diminish in size.

POPSICLE BLUE: BACK TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

A witty and obvious visual conceit is Nichols' use of hair as character definer. Tess' cutting of her big hair marks the beginning of her conscious transformation from a naïve Staten Island secretary to a sophisticated executive in Mergers and Acquisitions. Far subtler is his use of color to chart the journey of her character. For her new "promotion" in the corporate world, Tess has worn tailored, subdued blacks and whites and neutrals.

After her ruse is discovered and she gets the boot, she returns to her working-class neighborhood to be a bridesmaid in her best friend's wedding. Her bridesmaid's dress is a blue that defines where Tess is at this moment. It's a happy, unsophisticated, warm blue that's not been muted or otherwise intellectually messed with. It's simple, not subtle. It's a sweet color, like the color of a blue popsicle. The more elegant a dessert, the less sweet it is. It's exactly the same with color. Not better. Not worse. Just a different taste. But Tess has tasted something *different*. She's not the same girl she used to be and it shows. This is a color from the old neighborhood.

It's a great character-revealing scene at the wedding when she and her ex-boyfriend (Alec Baldwin) run into each other. He's in a rented powder-blue tux. He looks at home. She, now accustomed to a more elegant environment, doesn't. Seeing them standing together, we remember where she's been and see where she is and feel the difference. And it's her color arc that adds dimension to that realization. What's important is that Nichols does this without slandering class or stereotype. It's clear he can poke gentle fun at each side equally.

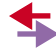
Dick Tracy

See "Red: A Power Force" on page 59.

The Thomas Crown Affair

See "Red: The Unspoken Lust" on page 58.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon



See "Red: The Dangerous Romantic" on page 210.
See "Red: The Lusty Bandit and the Spoiled Brat" on page 212.

Shakespeare in Love

1998. Gwyneth Paltrow, Joseph Fiennes, Geoffrey Rush. Directed by John Madden. Cinematography: Richard Greatrex; Production Design: Martin Childs.

LUST DROWNED OUT

In Shekar Kapur's ***Elizabeth***, the director uses colors and textures of his native India to evoke psychologically Elizabeth's exotic (read lusty) side. In ***Shakespeare in Love***, director John Madden uses a different approach to achieve the same end. His interpretation of Elizabethan colors reveals the architecture to be filled with neutral grays and browns. Consequently, when a hotter or more intense color appears, our senses respond accordingly.

Sometimes a minimal use of color can clue us in to how the characters will behave within a given environment. Because it's in a darkened room, our heroine's hot red bedcover appears even more sensual. The color glows on the two young bodies as they make love. This is the chamber where the heroine's virginity is lost behind closed doors, but to riotous effect due to the squeaking rocking chair comic relief supplied by Viola's (Gwyneth Paltrow's) nurse.

Warmer reds are more orange influenced but can run from the color of poppies to the color of pimentos. They're the ones that really raise your temperature, pulse rate, and blood pressure. They can inspire love or lust—emotions that are passionate, sometimes compulsive and intense. The hot orange-red of Viola's bed cover is different from the cooler blue-reds of the Victorian red drawing rooms in Martin Scorsese's ***The Age of Innocence***.

Two concepts are important here. One is the power of color by contrast. If an environment is subdued or neutral, anything that is placed within it will appear to be more intense. The sensual warm red of Viola's soft bedcover sends signals that this is a good place to woo.

The second concept is that of warm and cold. Warmer, more orange-reds tend to come forward and be inviting or romantic. The colder reds like the Victorian reds in ***The Age of Innocence*** are blue-reds and tend to recede and are more staid and old-money-powerful.

Sea of Love

1989. Al Pacino, Ellen Barkin, John Goodman. Directed by Harold Becker. Cinematography: Adam Holender and Ronnie Taylor; Production Design: John Jay Moore.

THE REBELLIOUS SEXPOT

Al Pacino, after an extended hiatus from film, chose this thriller as his comeback vehicle. It's an interesting setup: in order to catch a serial killer, Frank (Pacino), a lonely divorced cop, masks as a poetic lonely guy who places an ad in a Personals column. The murderer has a thing for killing men who write rhyming ads. The murderer also has a penchant for leaving the song "Sea of Love" playing at the murder scene.

Hoping to catch the killer, Frank and his partner (John Goodman) set up a scheme to meet the women who respond to the fake ad. Helen (Ellen Barkin) answers the ad and meets Frank in a local bar. Barkin is a real bombshell. She wears a leather jacket the color of a red-orange chili pepper. If there ever was a perfect example of color as character, this is it. Red defines who Helen is. Her animal presence is so powerful, it's scary. She's so sexy even the camera sidles up to her the first time she's onscreen. Helen is a woman who knows what she wants (and what she doesn't). Her thoughts ricochet out of her mouth in a rhythm that even sounds red: "I don't believe in wasting time." "You know what you know and you go with it." "You're just not my type." In less than two minutes of screen time, she's outta the bar, leaving Frank in the dust before he could get her fingerprints on her wineglass.

There is no way in the world that Helen could wear anything but red. As defined by the script, she embodies power, sex, and fear

all rolled into one dynamite package. Her sexuality and the power that comes with it consume Pacino with fear, and his reactions in turn provoke fear in her. As the story develops, they both become compulsive and reactive. We, the audience, experience it all, and it's the energy of red that does it to us. It's red that signals our nervous system to respond. And sometimes, all of these emotions colliding at once can be very funny.

It's not just the sexy lady in the red jacket. Bright red, no matter what its manifestation, jolts you physically. Helen's jacket is a hot orange-red and it affects your pulse rate and anxiety level. Remember, red is visual caffeine. That jacket goes way beyond sexy. It's meant to scare you and it does, especially when it looms up out of a dark hallway. Red and darkness are lodged in our unconscious as always foreboding. It's what sets us up for the "surprise" ending.

Even Barkin admits this was a gutsy role for her. This is, after all, the part that brought Pacino back, and she was his co-star.

Defiant Reds

Rebel Without a Cause

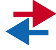
1955. James Dean, Natalie Wood, Sal Mineo.
Directed by Nicholas Ray. Cinematography:
Ernest Holler;
Production Design: Malcolm Bert.

THE DEFIANT HERO

The red jacket in ***Rebel*** became part of James Dean's iconography. Of course, it's bright and iconoclastic in the pink world of the 1950s, but there's a lot more to it than that. The minute we see that red, we form an opinion of this guy. Of course Dean would be the rebel without it, but red pushes his personality to the max. It's a visual translation of who Jim Stark is.

We can't separate Dean from red. It's who he was. Especially back then. It's important to remember that the 1950s sensibilities kept the idea of sex under wraps and reduced it to a whisper. But that red jacket shouted not only "Sexy!," it signaled danger, rage, torment, and courage as well. It's the red jacket that gives the visual power to Dean as the quintessential antihero. A historically accurate black jacket would have made Dean a cliché—a Brando knock-off. (It would also have made him visually fit in with the bad guys.)

Think about this: Do we perceive red differently when it is worn by a guy? Is our reaction to James Dean in red different from our reaction to Ellen Barkin in ***Sea of Love***? You betcha. No matter how we try to explain it in our 21st-century sensibility, red on a woman is often perceived as sexy, sometimes even slutty. Red on a man is perceived as heroic. Very interesting.

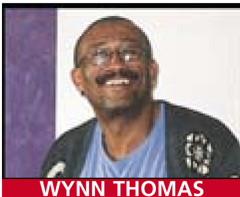


Chocolat

See "Red: The Rebel and the Count" on page 96.

Malcolm X

1992. Denzel Washington, Angela Bassett, Albert Hall, Al Freeman, Jr., Delroy Lindo, Spike Lee. Directed by Spike Lee. Cinematography: Ernest Dickerson; Production Design: Wynn Thomas.



WYNN THOMAS

The first act is the story of Malcolm's youth. It's an exciting and extravagant time in his life. It's a riot of emotions and feelings and . . . color. Spike, Ernest Dickerson, and I decided that Act One was the "Technicolor ®" portion of the film. This allowed us to use a wide range of color. Generally, I develop the visual concept for each act. After getting the director's approval, I then share those concepts with every department . . . costumes, camera, props . . . Very often, words mean different things to different people, but that's where the artistry and the collaboration comes in. It allows someone else to interpret what I'm saying.

—Wynn Thomas

This film could be a primer on how to use color to mirror the life-arc of a real person. Follow the color as Malcolm evolves: from his youthful escapades in Boston, to his hustling in Harlem, through his time in prison, to his becoming a minister in the Nation of Islam—and finally, to his enlightenment in Mecca. This is a man whose ability to evolve from a two-bit hustler to a spiritual leader is translated into three major color arcs in the three primary colors. The filmmakers have taken contextually accurate colors from the time periods of Malcolm's life and artfully photographed them to reflect the inner workings of the man. This is not easy.

Wynn Thomas, ***Malcolm X***'s production designer, explained his process to me:

> Malcolm X's story is larger than life. Designers have a responsibility to place the story in its proper historical context. What I try to do is to satisfy my "sense memory" of what that time period was and my hope is I will also convince the audience that the choices I made are correct. So it's not that I'm trying to re-create things realistically. I'm trying to capture what they felt like, as opposed to what they really were. The Roseland Ballroom did not look the way that I designed it in the movie. My goal was to capture the "spirit" of the Ballroom. I start off with a "feeling," then go back to my research material and use that research material to build upon what I think it should feel like. The whole idea

At the Roseland Ballroom, Malcolm gets set to boogie up a storm.

was to establish this sense of time and place very quickly so the audience knew exactly where it was. The scale is much larger than it was in reality. So what we're doing is letting the audience see something that is epic in scale.

RED: RAW POWER AND SEASONED CUNNING

Red is Malcolm's energy, all right. No matter where he is, it is his innate power that defines the man and propels him to his destiny. We only *see* him wear red, however, in the beginning, in his early days. In Boston, he's a lightweight. He wears what he thinks is cool. His zoot suit is powder blue. He's a slick innocent with no awareness of his charisma. Still, Malcolm's a fast learner and he's got a gut take on color. At the Roseland Ballroom, he boogies up a storm in a red striped suit; and by the time Malcolm Little arrives in Harlem, enters the Paradise Bar, and attracts the attention of the powerful West Indian Archie, he's wearing bright, cocky, look-at-me red.

Archie, on the other hand, wears a suit that is the color of cayenne—more refined and sophisticated. Archie's a master of façade. His power is based on his "rep." He's been at this game longer and quite likely has reached his zenith. The cayenne pepper red he wears is hot and spicy. Red signals both men are powerful, but between Malcolm's raw power and Archie's seasoned cunning there exists a fiery potential. The defining characteristic of their relationship is the potential of the two reds to ignite. The possibility for violence always existed between them. Malcolm was always brighter in every way. Archie was hotter. Archie's fragile ego didn't allow for ambiguity, and because of this Malcolm narrowly escaped with his life.

The color is drained from the movie in Act Two. I used primarily blues and grays in this part of the film. Malcolm is about to be reborn spiritually. I saw this rebirthing happening in environments that were devoid of color

—Wynn Thomas

BLUE: POWERLESS AND CEREBRAL

Archie had, however, given Malcolm a taste of the good life, which led inevitably to a bust for robbery and to his going to jail. It is here where the color arc takes a dramatic change. No more red. Yes, it's true prisoners wear blue denim and prisons are in neutral colors, but much of the way we respond to this period of gestation for Malcolm is due to the colors of his environment. Think about this. In prison, a person is "neutralized." Colors in the environment are meant to keep order and calm, not to inflame or agitate in any way. What Malcolm is taught there is pretty inflammatory stuff, and the fact that it's done in such a neutral environment allows the audience to hear it more dispassionately. Two of blue's major signals are Powerless and Cerebral, and Malcolm's environment reflects both. He's put in solitary confinement. He copies the entire dictionary, including dubious definitions of the words "black" (wicked, sullen, soiled) and "white" (pure, innocent, the opposite of black). It is here where he meets Baines (Albert Hall) and learns of Elijah Mohammad.

Malcolm begins his transformation convinced that in order for African Americans to have self-respect, they must separate from white society. Even though the colors of the period of Malcolm's ministry are historically accurate, they mirror the qualities dominant in Malcolm's life at that time. When Malcolm becomes a minister for the Nation of Islam, the screen is dominated by black and white supported by blues, grays, and browns worn by the followers of Elijah Mohammad. This is a period of preaching for Malcolm. He believed strongly in what he had learned from his prophet. The white shirt and dark suits reflect the serious discipline

of the Muslim men. Because of the relative absence of color, this period also emotionally prepares us to more fully experience the golden aura surrounding Malcolm's enlightenment during his trip to Mecca.

GOLDEN YELLOW LIGHT: ENLIGHTENED AND IDYLLIC

Malcolm breaks from the Nation of Islam. For the first time, he reaches out to other black leaders to "find a common solution to a common problem." He states, "Black nationalism means control over the politics in our own community." To understand the practice of Islam more fully, he embarks on a pilgrimage to Mecca. There he discovers a feeling of brotherhood with fellow Muslims who are blonde and blue-eyed—followers from all over the world who come together in faith. The warm golden light of the desert immediately reflects the evolution of Malcolm's beliefs. We see an exquisite long shot where a line of white-garbed pilgrims defines the space between golden desert and azure sky. Together, they form a stunningly balanced image. Throughout this sequence, the color of the light is a fusion of rose petals and amber. It is a profound reflection of the enlightened change taking place deep within Malcolm. He prays on a rich red carpet—a far cry from the flashy red he wore in his youth. It signals the maturity of the man. Upon his return home, he announces, "I do not subscribe to the tenets of racism." Malcolm has become a dangerous man.

Malcolm's personal journey is bracketed by two ballroom sequences. Boston's Roseland Ballroom is a visual masterpiece that not only captures a place and time, but a *sound* as well. That velvety golden haze, the kind seen in a dream, is like a visual vibraphone. It's the Big Band forties and young people, wearing a lot of exuberant red, dance with abandon. It is a time for youth, where everything seems possible. The red is the energy and the golden light is the memory. This scene is not only a marvel of art direction and cinematography, it is conceptually critical in providing a sense of continuity for the film's conclusion.

The night before Malcolm's assassination in 1965, young people again dance in an amber light in another ballroom—the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem. They're dancing to R&B now, but in their youthful exuberance, we sense a continuation of Malcolm's dream. This time, however, the light is darker, tempered with red. The dancers are intercut with shots of unknown assassins prowling through the crowd, checking stairways and exits, and with Malcolm,

In the third act, Malcolm has converted to Islam. I felt this was the most earthbound time in Malcolm's life—what I tried to do was to use colors that we associate with nature. . . colors from the earth. Browns, ochres, and greens. No oranges or reds. I tried to eliminate red completely and just use it for Malcolm's assassination scene. I did not succeed. There were limited color choices in Egypt. In Cairo, there's a scene where Malcolm's praying in a tent (See following page). I couldn't find anything but red carpets. Sometimes we give ourselves these conceptual restrictions. Sometimes it works out and often it doesn't.

—Wynn Thomas

Interestingly, the Audubon Ballroom set was actually the same physical space we used for the Technicolor extravaganza of the Roseland Ballroom in Act One. We were supposed to shoot at the real Audubon Ballroom up at 160th and Broadway. The space was in an immense state of disrepair and it was going to cost us a half million dollars to fix it up. We were

During his pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm prays surrounded by a deep red that signals his maturity.

running out of money at this time. So, for budgetary reasons we went back to the Hotel Diplomat, which was the location for the Roseland Ballroom. I changed the architectural elements and repainted it using dark, sober browns and greens—the color palette for the third act. These colors also captured the mood of the story in this act. The change in color also helped disguise the fact that I was revising a location that had been seen in Act One of the movie.

—Wynn Thomas

isolated in his self-imposed hideaway, in an undisclosed hotel room.

As Malcolm heads to speak at the Audubon the next day, in contrast to the amber light of his pilgrimage, we see stark, leafless trees in colors neutralized by winter. "It's a time for martyrs now," he says. "The way I feel, I shouldn't go out there today." And as he stands at the podium, in front of a golden velvet curtain, he is riddled with bullets. The assassins were young black men.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THREE ARCS

We've followed Malcolm's life as mirrored by the three primary colors. This inevitably becomes a profound metaphor: it is from these three pigments that all other colors are created.

Unfortunately, Malcolm might be remembered by some for only the red and/or blue arcs of his life. But to look at the golden arc only is also a mistake. Without seeing them all as a whole, we would never know of the incredible transformation of this man who was just beginning his journey into the interconnectedness of all people.

Anxious, Angry, and Romantic Reds

Anxious Reds

The Sixth Sense

1999. Haley Joel Osment, Bruce Willis, Toni Collette. Directed by M. Night Shyamalan. Cinematography: Tak Fujimoto; Production Design: Larry Fulton.

HEROES, ICONS, AND DEMONS

Early in the film a door opens and Cole Sear (Haley Joel Osment) scurries from his house with the faded red curtains and disappears through a bright red door to a church. Inside the church carpeted in red, this strange and timid boy and his small army of toy soldiers find momentary sanctuary. As Cole leaves, he snatches a red-robed statue of Jesus and stuffs it into his coat. Once back in his room, he places the statue alongside an army of religious icons, standing at attention, in wait for the terrifying forces that seem to come at will and chill the darkness. These icons, like spirit warriors standing sentinel, live in his red tent that glows in the dark.

The sentinels Cole steals from the church and the red tent he constructs protect him with the strongest energy of the spectrum. Red is the color Cole instinctively chooses to defend himself. He desperately needs strength and courage. Just as Dorothy did to get to Oz, Cole needs red's energy.

Red is such a visceral presence in this movie that we have no choice but to become reactive. It becomes our guide to a twisting journey through emotions we can't anticipate because their causes are often unseen. When a bright red party balloon leads Cole up a spiral staircase to the invisible demons that will claw at his back, like a knight from his toy army, he wears a red sweater with the

texture of chainmail. Pitting the forces of good and evil in equal bright reds is unsettling to say the least. And it keeps us in a constant state of anxiety. These red energies play out against the dull and dying colors of the interiors of home and school (but not church).

Dr. Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) is a psychologist who, because of a past failure with a patient, desperately needs to help Cole. Crowe, however, has troubles of his own. He feels estranged from his wife, Anna (Olivia Williams), who seems more and more to ignore him. At home, Anna is often cold. Literally. And it is she who wears the warmest red in the movie. She wears a shawl the color of a ripe red papaya, which she pulls around her when Malcolm is near.

Anna's repeated wrapping of the shawl around her seems like such a normal thing to do, until we begin to sense it may be a clue that M. Night Shyamalan has left for us. Clues are visceral in this film. And falling temperature is a major one. In the end, it is when Anna pulls the warm red shawl around her and we hear the sound of a ring hitting the floor that we (and Malcolm) finally discover the truth.

It is as if there is a medieval subtext to the movie. Cole's sweater, his knight's costume in the Arthurian school play, his speaking Latin to his toy soldier, and the ruby red glass doorknob are all profound clues to the surprise ending of the story. We know the doorknob is important because the director repeatedly shows it to us at our eye level. Whenever we see it, it is always in close-up, so it visually registers as the subject. Mystical in its deep transparency, like a fragment from a medieval rose window, it guards the doorway between realities. The door to the basement is always locked, but in scenes structured so seamlessly by the director, we are tricked into not noticing, not realizing how Dr. Crowe gets to his files in the wine cellar. We have not yet realized he no longer needs to open a door. We don't connect it with the fact that the language Cole speaks and Malcolm researches is Latin: the dead language.

Ultimately, red has taken us on an emotional journey that has given us visual clues to the story all along. The force inherent in red is what allows us to *feel* that the "dead people" Cole sees have died violently. The murderer wears an intense red when she's confronted with the truth. This is a red that is visually agitating. It is

the perfect energy for confrontation—guilt and victory colliding together all at once. A bright, powerful red is the color of Cole's fortress: a fortress that in the end, he no longer needs. As the story ends, Cole's mom wears a warm red-orange sweater and Malcom's wife is wrapped in a soft warm red shawl. These softer, warmer reds allow us to feel the emotional climax of the story. For Malcolm and Anna and Cole and his mom, the cold reds have gone.

BLUE: THE TURNING POINT

Red has guided us viscerally through the movie and kept our anxiety level vibrating just beneath the surface. When the story arc turns and Cole takes on the mission to help the dead girl Kyra, we are, for the first time, confronted with blue. Kyra's house is decorated in cold, all-pervasive blues. It's in the walls, the drapes, the glass candleholders, and up the stairway to Kyra's blue room. This is a cold, icy blue and it's the setting for a turning point in the film. We're in the presence of the dead girl but we don't see breath vapor. We see a video of an unmitigated act of brutal, planned murder of a child by her mother. Emotionally, the blue becomes horrifying in its coldness. When we return downstairs, we are jolted by the red fury again—a mother who wears red at her daughter's funeral.

THE PURPLE OMEN

In the opening sequence, a lone bulb silhouettes a dimly lit wine cellar. It is as if we are hiding behind the shelves as we watch a woman in an iridescent purple dress descend the stairs. We don't see who she is. Shyamalan doesn't show us her face. It's the color, iridescent and shimmering, that is the first real color we see. She selects a bottle and returns upstairs where her husband is waiting.

Anna is the character who inevitably reveals the secret to the story, so it makes sense she is the first one we see. But, more importantly, she is the vehicle for setting up the energy of this mystery. Purple is the vibration of the nonphysical. We don't see *her*. We *feel* the signal purple sends and it provides the essential clue to what will happen when she goes up the stairs.

Run Lola Run

1999. Franka Potente, Moritz Bleibtreu. Directed by Tom Tykwer. Cinematography: Frank Griebe; Production Design: Alexander Manasse.

HIGH-OCTANE VISUAL FUEL

The opening sequence begins with lines from T.S. Eliot, which in essence suggest that we begin where we end and it is like the beginning.

And so a strange fusion begins: T.S. Eliot meets a video game, meets Lola, who has twenty minutes to find 100,000 marks to save Manni's life. But, the time/space continuum keeps changing, beginning again and repeating and changing, beginning again and repeating. Breathlessly trying to keep up with each new scenario, Lola runs for nearly the entire 81 minutes of the film. In fact, if it weren't for red's energy, Lola couldn't run fast enough for the various time/space continuum shifts to play out. Not only is red her high-octane visual fuel, the color also keeps our anxiety level at the bursting point. Lola's hair is dyed fire-engine red and inside her head, her mind, racing with solutions, is what keeps her running. (See the Red Home Page on page 2.)

In the red ambulance, Lola changes her future by bringing the security guard (who began the movie) back to life.

It's in the saturated red light of the "dream sequences" when Lola and Manni choose whether to live or die.

With all of this "redness" going on, we are visually held hostage and kept in a state of panic throughout the movie. When we are unexpectedly released and Lola and Manni simply walk away, we want to call them (from the red phone booth) back, and have them do it all over again. After all, red has made us compulsive too.

Philadelphia

1993. Tom Hanks, Denzel Washington, Antonio Banderas. Directed by Jonathan Demme. Cinematography: Tak Fujimoto; Production Design: Kristi Zea.

ECSTASY, RAGE, AND PAIN

Sometimes a film is designed with completely "normal" colors—appropriate to the location except for one key scene in which the ambient color changes for a reason. When it is done well, we're not conscious of it, but our nervous system and emotional centers register it and it manifests physically. Without red, in the scene described below, we would not experience the degree of empathy we do with the Tom Hanks' character. The red affects us on a preverbal level. It is a response over which we have no control.

Philadelphia is about transformation and its vehicle is AIDS discrimination. Hotshot lawyer and AIDS patient Andy Beckett (Tom Hanks) has been fired by his prestigious law firm for "incompetence." Attorney Joe Miller (Denzel Washington), initially homophobic, takes on Andy's case. It is the night before Hanks is to give his testimony. As Joe begins to go over Andy's courtroom testimony, Andy, already very weak, tells Joe what he already knows—that there is a possibility that he "won't be around for the end of the trial." As they begin, music from the opera *Andrea Chenier* begins to play in the background. Sensitive to Joe's initial homophobia, Andy asks if he "minds" opera. Joe shakes his head and Andy begins to translate from the Italian. As if strengthened by the music, Andy rises, leaning on his IV stand for support. The camera moves to a downshot of Hanks. For the remainder of the scene, when the camera is on Hanks, it keeps us in the air. Andy narrates the story . . . a mother's death . . . "Do you hear the heartache in her voice? Can you feel it, Joe . . . ? 'I bring sorrow to those who love me . . . .'" Andy's face, now a contorted mask of exquisite bliss and profound suffering, is shot in deep light and shadow. He continues, "Live, still . . . I am life!" With these words, a red light very gradually crescendos from nowhere and the camera slowly moves in closer to Andy. Tears are now streaming down his face . . . The red light intensifies even more. Andy's tortured voice is barely audible, "I am

divine . . . I am oblivion . . . I am love." Tears well in Washington's eyes. With an extreme close-up on Hanks' exhausted face, the intense red light slowly recedes. Hanks sighs heavily and the walls of the room return to their normal blue green. Red has become the visual metaphor for Andy's emotional journey through an aesthetic ecstasy, to profound yet gentle rage and ultimately to raw existential pain. After all, the two things at stake here are love and survival, and red is the metaphor for each. If this scene had no red light, we would still be shaken by Hanks' brilliant performance. But it is the primal energy of red that agitates our very core.

Red's association with blood extends to association with both pain and healing. (Think of the Red Cross.) Red is associated with all "hot" emotions (e.g., aggression, lust, or anxiety), but it is more than that. In all the years of my color experiments, I have never seen a color affect people so physically. Sweat often broke out on the participants' faces and they often became louder and more agitated as the experience wore on. Indeed, one year, I had to break up a potential fight between two young men who actually liked each other. Hanks' anger was pressurized and had nowhere to go. The red light allowed it to escape.

Up to this point, Demme has kept us in an environment dominated by neutral colors that act as metaphors for the impersonal systems of corporations and courts. When the red does come, it has a primal force. Like death, it comes from an unknown source. And, when it comes, the director suspends us in the air. Visually, he has placed us in a state of vulnerability. We, like Andy, are powerless to change the inevitable. Red then becomes the ultimate rage.

BLUE: TORN BETWEEN TWO IMPULSES

Embarrassed by such excruciatingly intimate emotion, Washington leaves and enters a hallway lit by pale blue. As he walks away, he turns back to Hanks' door, begins to knock, and then turns away. He's torn between two impulses. He desperately needs to return home and hug his wife and daughter. His emotions too are in an ambiguous state. Because of its kinship with passivity and powerlessness, blue is often associated with the ambiguous.

Schindler's List

1993. Liam Neeson, Ben Kingsley, Ralph Fiennes. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Cinematography: Janusz Kaminski; Production Design: Allan Starski.

A VISUAL NAME

In this quintessential tribute to the human spirit, the use of transparent red for the little girl's coat layers our experience of the story. The red gives her a visual name and allows us to have a living being to cling to in this mass of nameless dehumanized near-ghosts. The child runs. She plays. She hides in this perverse metaphor for hide and seek. The gentleness of the transparency of that red coat is exactly what makes the metaphor profound. Somehow we know it was once brighter, and the transparency is what tells us that. Her coat is not pink, the color of little girls. It is red, robbed of its power.

The irony of personalizing this color that symbolizes both birth and death sets us up for the shock when we last see her, lifeless, in the pile of nameless corpses traveling to a mass grave.

American Beauty

1999. Kevin Spacey, Annette Benning, Mena Suvari, Chris Cooper. Directed by Sam Mendes. Cinematography: Conrad Hall; Production Design: Naomi Shohan.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

Sometimes when color combinations are used obviously in a film, we are lulled into not seeing when they also appear subtly. Red, white, and blue permeate this dysfunctional family fable, both obviously and subliminally. The three colors infiltrate even the dialogue. When the Burnham family's neighbor asks Carolyn (Annette Benning) how she grows such beautiful (red) roses, her answer is, "Egg shells (white) and Miracle Grow (blue)." Run the film on fast-forward to see how often and in what guises red, white, and blue appear in the movie.

As Lester (Kevin Spacey), late for work, dashes toward the car, his briefcase spills file folders over the sidewalk. If you look care-

Red, white, and blue file folders spill out of Lester's briefcase.

fully, you'll see that they're red, white, and blue. Mendes keeps the trio coming in a visual rhythm of their own. Carolyn, wearing a blue shirt and apron and white pants, cuts red roses on a white picket fence. In a family portrait, Carolyn is in red, Lester in white, and Cora in blue. In the living room with a blue and white striped couch, Lester plays with his red toy car. Look for more. There are others. The subliminal effect of the tricolor repetition is to burn into our consciousness a terrifying archetype of the classic American Family: good to look at from the outside, but tortured and decaying behind closed (and red) doors.

The dining room becomes a place where the real dynamics of the Burnham family are exposed, literally and metaphorically. It is here where the three familial strangers participate in an easy and brutal ritual so well known to them, it's terrifying.

The red, white, and blue table is designed in a quasi-religious composition, its blue placemats, white candles, and ruby-red roses glowing like a medieval *rose* window (cinematographer Conrad Hall hid tiny little lights in the flowers). It is a ritualistic and vitriolic

family get-together, enveloped by the national colors. It's like *American Gothic* painted by Francis Bacon.

SEETHING REDS

Then, of course, there are the fantastic super-saturated red rose petals that tumble out of Lester's mouth, Angela's (Mena Suvari's) jacket and her virginal white bathtub. The intense reds comically clue us in to Lester's hyper-delusional lust. But there is also an omen in the hyper-reality of those reds. They're just a little too dark. Too alluring. Like a kind of come-on from the underside. Theirs is the reality more of a nightmare than a dream. And in the end, no matter how hard he works out to "look good naked," Lester is too much of a nice guy to manifest what they represent.

Ultimately, it is the red of the tricolors that really takes us through the story. And it is Lester's arc that is defined by red. When we first see him, he's powerless in a bland blue-gray existence. As he begins the transformation that leads to his empowerment, he quits his job and buys his dream car, a 1975 red Pontiac Firebird. Even Rickey Fitts (Wes Bentley), the dope dealer who sees beauty in the ordinary, meets Lester and defines him by saying, "You live in the house with the red door." That door will open to events no one could ever have anticipated. The repetition of red lulls us subliminally into becoming accustomed to the color's appearance. Cleverly, almost sadistically, this sets us up to expect red. But when the red blood spatters on the white wall, we're not prepared. We, like Lester, have been blown away.

PASSIVE BLUES

One of the things you'll learn about really *seeing* films is there is almost always a color theme on screen. It's just hiding, waiting for you to see it. But it's there to influence you. The color of Kevin Spacey's office is not really gray. This blue undertone affects how you perceive Lester. It is the quintessential pale gray-blue that signals passivity and powerlessness, similar to Tobey Maguire's character in ***The Cider House Rules***. It is the pale gray-blue of the kind of day when you feel like doing nothing. It's a perfect jumping-off place for a character who is about to change from passive to active, like Lester. And like Maguire's character in *Cider House*. Look for the jail-like bars on Lester's computer screen.

Romeo + Juliet

1996. Leonardo DiCaprio, Claire Danes, John Leguizamo, Brian Dennehy, Pete Postlethwaite, Paul Sorvino. Directed by Baz Luhrmann. Cinematography: Donald M. McAlpine; Production Design: Catherine Martin.

FOLLOW THE TRAIL

Yes, it is Shakespeare on fast forward and full volume. But if you suspend your judgment, you'll be rewarded with brilliant and witty visual metaphors and glorious production design. This is not a trendy MTV riff. It is a carefully planned work of wit and intelligence. We may not know *why* yellow was chosen for Montague and blue was picked for Capulet, or whether the choice was intellectual or instinctive, but we do know once these colors were chosen to identify each family, they remained consistent over the course of the film. For example, the family cars are yellow and blue and the fish in the tank through which the two lovers first flirt are yellow and blue. The colors even act as a nonverbal layer of the plot, when as a visual pledge of his fidelity, Romeo begins to wear Capulet blue after he marries Juliet (and kills Tybalt). Hot yellow and cold blue mirror the oppositional relationship between the two families. And even more profoundly, because yellow and blue are the colors of the poison each of them takes, they represent the fates of the astrologically challenged young lovers. Remember Juliet's "poison" was Capulet blue and Romeo's was Montague yellow. Each, in the end, were poisoned by the colors of their own family. If you do nothing more than follow the trail of the primary colors—yellow, red, and blue—you will discover a very sophisticated visual system at work.

RED: THE VIOLENT COLOR

The title appears with white type on a black background, with one very important exception: the subtle "+" of the title (instead of the traditional "and") is in red. Separately the lovers are innocent. When one is added to the other, there is the potential for violence.

Juliet's nurse (Miriam Margolyes), whose temperament is like that of a wind-up toy on speed, becomes the surreptitious go-between for the lovers. It is she who delivers the messages that

result in the secret marriage. She is the "+" incarnate. By her connecting them together, the dormant potential for death predicted by the stars is released. As she schemes to arrange their secret marriage, she wears red.

Red, the color of both rage and passion, is tightly controlled, so when it's used it becomes even more powerful. The threat of red's violence is always near, sometimes only suggested. When Romeo sees Juliet for the first time, an intense red glows behind him signaling an ardor that will become consummated and sadly terminated before the sun sets twice. There is one red fish in the aquarium filled with harmonious blues and yellows (and ironically, a fish that is red, yellow, and blue that teases with infinite possibilities) when Romeo and Juliet first meet. It is as if the two see their ideal lives moving before their eyes. But, just as each of the families has a loose cannon, that red fish is the loose cannon metaphor in the mix.

At the gas station, it is Tybalt's (John Leguizamo's) match that ignites the fires of violence and vengeance literally and metaphorically. His character dresses in the red and black of Satan at the Masked Ball. And it is he who when he kills Romeo's best friend, Mercutio (Harold Perrineau), sets off the awful stream of events that will inevitably condemn each family. Mercutio, with his bright red lipstick, drives a red car. And Mercutio and Tybalt are the first to die.

Blue neon crosses line the aisle of the church where, ultimately, Juliet sleeps. Inside each one is a red +, reminiscent of the "+" in the film title. As if a memorial, only one of the red +s is lit. Its effect is visceral. The red visually mirrors Romeo's pain. Earlier, when Romeo says, "My mind misgives some consequence hanging in the stars," he has a vision of himself walking down this very aisle. Romeo has no idea that when, in reality, he walks down that aisle and reaches that altar, he will die.

YELLOW: THE MONTAGUE COLOR

It's real visual noise, this bright yellow car. As soon as it careens onto the screen, we know it defines the over-the-top Montague Boys. Because it is so visually aggressive, opaque bright yellow, depending upon the story, can signal both obsessive and daring (see the Yellow Home Page on page 42). Here, in this film, it's also threatening because of the company it keeps. Orange, yellow's welcoming cousin, accompanied the playful hot rod in ***American***

Graffiti. This yellow car screams along with violent red and super cold blue. It's visually loud and cacophonous, just like its owners. The three primary colors at full saturation like this always visually vie with each other for attention.

But Romeo is a Montague and he's not in the car. He's defined by a completely different yellow. Indeed, Romeo is defined by golden light. When yellow manifests as light and not as an opaque impenetrable surface, its character changes. Its very transparency transports a story to the realm of romance and nostalgia. Romeo, backlit by this golden glow, sits writing poetry in a "proscenium" by the sea. Baz Luhrmann lets us know right away that we are seeing this play on his own terms. The proscenium in which Romeo sits is a hole blasted out of an old wall. Like ancient sentinels, two Corinthian columns are standing on either side. Silhouetted beyond him stands an empty lifeguard stand. With this vision, Luhrmann lets us see and feel Romeo's inner nature. He also shows us he is mortally defenseless in this wild world of Verona Beach. In essence, Romeo's poetic nature isolates him from the gang mentality played out by his family peers. The hole he sits in renders the wall useless. It is there to show us vestiges of a once formidable power. Even the sentinels are part of the ruin. They have only the hole to guard. Perhaps, most critically, the (life) guard post is vacant. Romeo is vulnerable and he is alone.

Still, this scene, as brilliantly conceived as it is, would not work at the level it does if it weren't for that soft honey color. The romantic golden light sets us up emotionally. When the suicides come, we feel even more devastated because we fall farther.

The design of the place of Romeo's banishment is a flawless visualization of the term "deserted." There is no evidence of water, the element that has protected him in the past (see Blue: The Capulet Color on page 31). Each dust-covered trailer is a world unto itself. If Edward Hopper had painted a desert trailer park, although his yellows would have been colder it would feel like this one. Romeo, the poet, is alone and isolated among other exiles. With a makeshift bat, he hits a stone to no one. He is a poet with no audience to hear or help him.

The golden of the light and of the sand is the height of irony. It is bathed in a romantic glow, yet it is lonely and desolate. It is a world of and for the forgotten. And the golden light makes us perceive it as if it were already a place of memory. Because of this

contrast of place and atmosphere, it becomes a space in which we don't know exactly how to feel. Luhrmann deliberately sends us these contradictory visual messages to foreshadow what is about to happen. As Romeo runs to meet the car from Verona, he unknowingly steps on the crucial message he is waiting for. Instead, he receives the erroneous news of Juliet's death. Romeo falls to his knees and screams at the golden sun.

BLUE: THE CAPULET COLOR

Our color experiments have shown pale blue to be a passive color. Yet the Capulets are anything but passive either in their choice of cars or their fish. But that Capulet car is no passive blue. This bright, saturated blue has energy like an ice cube—so cold it seems hot. It's a perfect foil for the Montague's hot yellow.

The first time we see Juliet, her head is underwater and her hair swirls around her face like an Aubrey Beardsley drawing. Water is a silent place of escape for Juliet. When her head is underwater, she cannot hear all the screaming that goes on in her household. For Romeo underwater becomes, as the story develops, a place of protection. Several times, he is able to hide under the blue water of the Capulet pool. When Romeo first plunges his head in the shell-shaped basin at the Capulet mansion, it is to clear his head, and it is there that he loses his mask in the blue water. Even though he wears the armor of a knight, he is a poet at heart. When he first sees Juliet, it is through the blue water of an aquarium. As if to remind him of his family however, exotic yellow fish swim in front of his field of vision. (See following page).

When Romeo sneaks into the Capulet courtyard and surprises Juliet, she is so startled that she grabs him and they both fall into the blue pool. Here we see the aquarium metaphor become real. The blue water that is like a baptism—a new beginning cleansed of all familial history. They kiss underwater, unseen and protected by the blueness. But before he leaves, he falls in the water once more. Juliet has a vision of him "as one dead."

When Friar Laurence (Peter Postlethwaite) sees the possibility of an alliance between the two warring families potentially brought about by their marriage, Romeo begins to wear blue. He will both marry into and murder in that family.

Distraught over Romeo's exile and pressured to marry Paris, the Governor's son (Paul Rudd), Juliet, for the first time in the film, dresses completely in her family's blue. She runs to the Friar and,

As if a reminder of his family, yellow fish swim by Romeo as he first sees Juliet.

feeling trapped, threatens suicide. Seeing a young girl with a schoolgirl blue beret, white-collared blue dress. and blue gloves put a gun (with a blue handle) to her head is dramatic enough. But this blue—a deep dark blue—lets us know she is serious. Dark blue is not an irrational color. When a color becomes darker, it reads as "heavier." Heavier, in turn, is perceived as more serious.

To give him time to arrange a pardon for Romeo and make peace between the families, Friar Laurence creates the blue potion that will feign death in Juliet. It is this blue potion, the same color as the sky that surrounded Romeo on the night they met, that will cause the consequences predicted by the stars.

The Age of Innocence

1993. Daniel Day-Lewis, Michelle Pfeiffer, Winona Ryder. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Director of Photography: Michael Ballhaus; Production Designer: Dante Ferretti.

RED: A GUIDE TO WHAT IS NOT SAID

There are many films in which color is meticulously researched in order to provide historical accuracy. But it is the true master who goes further and uses color as well to capture the inner life of the characters and mirror the subtle intricacies of the story. Martin Scorsese's Victorian reds are accurate to a fault. But it is the *way* that he shows them to us that affects us psychologically and emotionally. The brilliance of Scorsese's approach to the use of red in this film lies in the fact that it is reality-based and interpretive at the same time. Ironically, the Victorians chose to act out their rigid rules of strict behavior within drawing rooms and opera houses where red, the color of lust and ardor, was a dominant visual theme. Red becomes our guide to what is not said.

Unspoken intrigues are consistently being played out among the characters in this tightly knit society. Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis), a scion of one of New York's most prestigious families, is a master of repression. Red is constantly around him, tantalizing him with its many guises. At the opera when he first is introduced to the Countess Ellen Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer), the woman who will become his obsession, a bright red wall vibrates around him. As he admires the "audacious" painting of a nude in the Beaufort's drawing room, the crimson of the interior activates the unspoken sexual energy in the room. Even in the uptown sitting room of powerful and very clever matriarch Granny Mingott (Miriam Margolis), red's personality mirrors and supports the intrigues that are hatched there. Granny, after all, has a bit of the devil in her.

Red defines who Granny Mingott is. Under the guise of gentility and charm she is a powerful woman who enjoys creating intrigues with other people's lives. Granny is also very independent. Due to her considerable girth she is virtually immobile, but rather than succumb to this inconvenience she builds her house at

the very edge of uptown New York. All the people who matter in her class are obliged to come to her. Granny understands the intricacies of power and she actually delights in activating anxiety. She keeps setting up situations to throw Ellen and Newland together. When we see Granny, she is always in her red sitting room. The deep red of the room actually sets up a spatial intimacy where the walls tend to close us in. Scorsese understands the intricacies of color. He uses red to keep the tension level alive and well in Mrs. Mingott's house.

In a luxurious gown, arriving late at her first New York formal dinner party, or walking bundled in a bright coat through the white snow at the Van der Leyden's country estate, Ellen wears red. She, like Granny, appears to be direct, but we are never quite certain how much of it is planned and how much of it is innocent. She may be a temptress, but a temptress who still stays within the rules. She is the flame and Newland is the moth. Nevertheless, this moth averts the flame as often as he is tempted by it, and sometimes the flame avoids the moth. This dynamic, consistent throughout the film, is both supported and sustained by the anxious energy of red.

In a strange way, each of them is compulsive. She flees to the country. He goes after her. She flees to Boston. He goes after her. However, in the end, both of these not-quite-lovers wavered when they might have acted. Red has the kind of compulsive and tense energy that can be consuming, and then quickly gone. Newland's compulsion was always tempered by his caution. Another part of his character was yellow. (See "Yellow: A Paralyzing Caution" on page 35.)

Only twice in the film is red allowed to crescendo and saturate the entire screen. These are key moments where we are able to actually *see* abstractly what Newland feels. Of course, they both relate to Ellen. However, ***The Age of Innocence*** is ultimately Newland Archer's story, and Scorsese uses these saturated reds to give us a glimpse of the intense inner feelings of this elegant and restrained young man. When all of New York Society declines Granny Mingott's invitation to meet the Countess, Newland believes the refusals are not a rejection, but, rather, eradication. As we hear these words, we see Ellen, her head bowed, bathed in an intense red light. She turns, stares directly at us, and dissolves into the saturated red that fills the screen. It is a brilliant visual translation of both the seething anger of Newland and the pain of Ellen.

We see what he feels and why he feels it at the same time. It is not a simple thing Scorsese does when he allows red to take over and fill the screen. When the red light floods over Ellen, we're trapped between the objective and subjective and the specific and abstract, simultaneously. It's almost as if we bump into ourselves emotionally. Ellen's body language signals a profound sadness, but the bright red color signals Newland's intense anger. For a brief moment we are left in an uncomfortable place between a powerless image and an active energy.

Scorsese, however, saved the most subjective yet very abstract red clue for last. After the farewell dinner for Ellen, Newland leaves his circle of male friends in the drawing room and stands alone, facing the fire, a mahogany red in front of him. His back is to us so it is as if we are standing behind him. The red of the wall becomes redder, slowly intensifies, surrounds him, and leaves. You can actually *feel* that energy as it envelops him. It is this color and its energy that intensifies Newland's pain. He can no longer remain in denial.

The red that visually overwhelms Newland is an irrational force. It's repressed fury. It's angst. It's intense pain. And all of this is communicated without seeing that incredibly expressive face of his. Red reveals an emotional response to a realization that he has been avoiding all evening. Somewhere deep within him he knows he will never see her again.

PURPLE: THE DEATH OF DELUSION

Perhaps, all along, Newland's wife, May (Winona Ryder), was his perfect match. The first time we see her, she is in the palest of pink, a distant reminder of red. That, in the end, makes a good deal of sense. Pink sends a very innocent signal and it captures a critical element in May's disingenuous character. She may appear innocent, but she is more than clever. May, in the final analysis, was the most passive controller of all. It was she who wore purple at the last dinner party.

YELLOW: A PARALYZING CAUTION

Newland sends Ellen roses that are yellow—a color that captures an essential element of his character. He can't possibly send Ellen *red* roses. It would be way too obviously lusty for him, and besides, he's far too romantic. Actually, yellow, particularly a golden yellow, is the perfect color for a romantic idealist (think of

the great romantic legends, like Arthur and Guinevere or Romeo and Juliet, and see if you don't visualize them in golden light). Yellow is cautionary: a trait that all but paralyzes Newland. It is warm, not hot. It is just edgy enough to satisfy his romantic idea of himself. In a moment of brilliant character exposition, Scorsese has Newland put his card in the florist's envelope, hesitate, and then take it out and send the flowers anonymously.

Yellow also reflects the dynamic between Newland and Ellen. When we see her arranging the roses he has surreptitiously sent her, Scorsese shows us the importance of yellow to the dynamic between Newland and Ellen. The blossoms have opened and the color fills the screen behind her. (See the image in Chapter 4 on page 70.) Gradually the entire screen becomes yellow and we see her only enveloped in that light: his light. She is, after all, the object of his passive obsession. The screen is filled with caution and the object of his obsession all at the same time. It's ingenious. Even when the clever Ellen asks him at the theater if he thinks the heroine's lover will send her a box of yellow roses, Newland's response was "I was thinking about that too." That's what Newland does. He thinks about it. He dreams about it. His actions stay within the golden confines of his mind.

Indeed, yellow defines the arc of their relationship. To the end, Newland is a dreamer. Even as he sees Ellen for the last time, a vase of yellow roses stands like a sentinel at his side.

Both Newland and Ellen ultimately preferred to live with the *idea* of being together. Even years later, when they are both free, Newland chooses to sit directly beneath her window and *remember* her. In his vision, she is bathed in a romantic golden glow and she turns and looks directly at him—an act that would shatter everything.

An American in Paris

1951. Gene Kelly, Leslie Caron. Directed by Vincente Minnelli. Cinematography: John Alton and Alfred Gilks; Production Design: Preston Ames and Cedric Gibbons.

DANCING WITH DUFY

Rent this movie if for nothing more than to spend 17 minutes inside the color-saturated world of turn-of-the-century French

paintings. It's like art history meets MTV as Gene Kelly, Leslie Caron, and troupe become color incarnate, dancing through the *arrondisements* of Dufy, Utrillo, Rousseau, and Lautrec.

Sure the story's dated. But that's not why you're watching this movie. Basically, an artist (Gene Kelly) and a shop girl (Leslie Caron) fall in love. They sing "Our Love Is Here to Stay" on the banks of the Seine. Problem is, she's promised to marry a man whom she loves and admires but is not *in love* with. Kelly and Caron meet at a Black and White Ball the night before her wedding and part tearfully. He rips a Dufy-like drawing of Paris and as a breeze blows it back together, it becomes the backdrop for what's to follow. Kelly fades in to the foreground, picks up a red rose from the street, and the dream sequence begins. Red, blue, and green, as if brush-strokes, wash over the painting. Dancers emerge in intense reds and French blues. They dance through familiar post-impressionist paintings you'll recognize immediately. Kelly, dressed as the capped dancer at the Moulin Rouge in the well-known Lautrec drawing, is a classic.

As the dream sequence begins, red is the first color to appear. It streaks onto the screen like a compulsive brushstroke. The first dancers to appear are in red. Vincente Minnelli has grabbed our attention and sustains it. The bright intense reds he uses energize the screen whenever they appear. It's visual exuberance with a touch of lust thrown in.

We're taken from the black and white reality of the ball and moved into a fantasy not only of color, but of a time period when, as Kelly says, artists came to Paris to find beauty. Minnelli's visual decision allows us be in that world of the romantic dreamer and, at the same time, experience the physical charge of energy that comes from the colors. The shot of Kelly and Caron as black sil-houettes in front of a fiery sky is a visual analogy to another great pair of movie lovers. Ultimately, when Caron and Kelly move in a cloud of red steam, we're transported to the emotional core of what it's like to be young and in love. When the fountain around them glows red, it will take you over. Glue your eyes to red in this dream sequence and feel your heartbeat. You'll be saying Rhett and Scarlett *who*?

Witness

See "Red: The Emotional Undercurrent" on page 164.

Racing with the Moon

1984. Sean Penn, Nicolas Cage, Elizabeth McGovern. Directed by Richard Benjamin. Cinematography: John Bailey; Production Design: David L. Snyder.

A COLOR OF FIRST LOVE

This is an often-overlooked jewel of a film set in the Pacific Northwest at the beginning of WWII. It's the last summer before Hopper (Sean Penn) and Nicky (Nicola Cage) go off to war, and it's love or the lack of it that propels the story. The movie captures both the innocence and sweetness of first love and the brutishness of first lust. Director Richard Benjamin has recreated a unique time and place with such fidelity that it makes you long for something lost, something you can't quite put your finger on, but you know it's gone and not coming back. Additionally, the film has the best bowling alley in movie history.

The last sequence is a simple one. As the boys are about to leave for the war, Hopper and Caddie (Elizabeth McGovern), the two young lovers, say goodbye in front of a red railroad car. It's a classic setup, but the artistry in the shot is that it uses one thing to say another. The metal freight car loses its identity as part of a train and becomes instead the romantic energy that envelops the moment. It's visual storytelling at its best.

The color that surrounds Hopper and Caddie at the train station has a lot to do with affecting how we think and feel about them. It is like magic the way that the color of the railroad car controls the atmosphere. In the moment when that particular red surrounds these two, the quality of the cold steel that is the railroad car transforms. It becomes a soft rose-petal-colored valentine to young love. And yet, it's still a railroad car. Indeed, it's the same railroad car on which Hopper and Nicky ride the rails into their future. That, in the end, is the film's brilliance. It appears to be a simple narrative, but the use of color layers both the characters and the story. When anyone suggests to you that young people back then were simpler, suggest they get to know Hopper, Caddie, and Nicky.

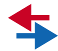
AUTHOR'S NOTE:

In ***Witness*** (see page 164), Peter Weir also used a reality-based red to inspire romance. However, when he used a glowing red taillight to illuminate the interior of the barn where Harrison Ford and

In *Racing with the Moon*, the color of roses transforms a steel railroad car into a valentine to young lovers.

Kelly McGillis danced, it amplified the sexual tension between them. The red in ***Racing with the Moon*** is very different from the lusty red glow in ***Witness***. In fact, this is really not red at all. It's rose, a relative. This color is cooler (slightly bluer) and softer (a touch paler). Our research indicates that rose is a color that inspires romance. Actually, it is more like a color of a memory of a romance.

The Cider House Rules

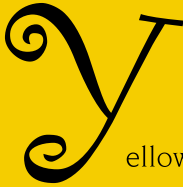


See "Red: Apples and Orphans" on page 108.

Yellow
The Contrary Color

2

Director Kenneth Branagh moved the location of *Much Ado About Nothing* from dry and dusty Sicily to take advantage of the marmalade-colored Tuscan light.



ellow is a contrary color. It's the color of both jonquils and yellow jackets. That's your first clue, or warning. One of the reasons yellow is the color used for caution signs is that it's visually aggressive. It appears to come toward you. We've built it into our consciousness as a cautionary color. Venomous reptiles and amphibians often are yellow—a warning to all who come near, a big beware built into our genetic code.

It is also the color we identify with the sun. We associate yellow with powerful life energy—exuberance itself. In whatever situation you find it, or wherever it is, bright yellow can be the scene-stealer, always clamoring for attention. Intense yellow, however, has an underbelly. The late Dr. Harry Hepner, Professor of Psychology of Advertising at Syracuse University, claimed, "Yellow is the color longest remembered and most despised." This is an interesting parallel to the color associated with happiness. Actually, this quality makes yellow a perfect signal for obsession. Steve McQueen, the bored banker looking for a thrill in ***The Thomas Crown Affair***, wears it. So does Tom Ripley (Matt Damon), the twisted romantic in ***The Talented Mr. Ripley***. Travis Bickle (Robert de Niro), one of the greatest obsessives in film history, drives a saturated yellow cab in ***Taxi Driver***. Even Warren Beatty as ***Dick Tracy*** wears it. All of them are, in one way or another, obsessive. Dr. Hepner's claim that the color is most despised probably comes from the fact that bright yellow in large quantities can be very hard on the eyes. Actually, in our experiments, we found an all-yellow environment to be anxiety producing. Yellow was like a visual car alarm trying to horn in on us. Carlton Wagner of the Wagner Institute for Color Research, in the August 1990 issue of ***Woman***, said, "People in the doldrums believe yellow is light and sunny and will cheer them up. But yellow creates anxiety and makes you more stressed out. . . . In yellow's presence, you'll be more apt to lose your temper."

In spite of this, yellow can be amazingly versatile. One key to putting it under your control is to desaturate it. The more it is lightened, the more elegant it becomes. The almost-white yellow of Faye Dunaway's Packard in ***Chinatown*** is the height of sophistication. A pastel yellow (half-yellow, half-white), like the color surrounding Mia Farrow in ***Rosemary's Baby***, mirrors her innocence. When left in a saturated state, like the acid yellow bathing suit Matt Damon wears in ***The Talented Mr. Ripley***, however, it becomes a color that is so visually hostile, you back away from it.

Bright yellow's aggressive quality, when used as light, can also read as threatening. The "Y-rays" in ***The Caveman's Valentine*** are a bright yellow light that Samuel L. Jackson's character characterizes as "cruel."

Something magical happens, however, when the sun's yellow begins its transformation to the color of honey. It is in this golden light, the light of the late-in-the-afternoon long shadows that memories, dreams, and idylls are visually born. Think of how those shimmering golden strands of the fishing line danced in the air in ***A River Runs Through It***, or the how the honeyed world of the young and rich on the Italian Riviera set the stage for ***The Talented Mr. Ripley***.

Think About This:

Bright opaque yellow can put you on alert.
Warm golden light can lull you into memory.

Exuberant, Obsessive, and Daring Yellows

Exuberant Yellows

American Graffiti

1973. Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard, Cindy Williams, Charles Martin Smith, Candy Clark. Directed by George Lucas. Visual Consultant: Haskell Wexler; Cinematography: Jan D'Alquen and Ron Eveslage; Art Direction: Dennis Clark.

A CAR THAT DEFINED A GENERATION

The yellow neon of Mel's Drive-In dominates a still photo of a 1962 inland California sunset. With the great cinematographer Haskell Wexler as a "Visual Consultant" to this movie, you know that this opening shot is not an accident. Like a snapshot, this image captures an instant. It's the perfect visual metaphor for late adolescence.

It's 1962 and the clock is rockin' at Mel's. As waitresses on roller skates weave in and around the yellow and orange carhop, Toad (Charles Martin Smith), the lovable and innocent nerd, pulls in. In a great character-defining action, he loses control of his little white Vespa and slams klutzily into a red-orange wall. Steve (Ron Howard), in a pale blue shirt, watches, leaning against his 1958 Chevy Impala with the laidback indifference of an ex-Senior Class President. Curt (Richard Dreyfuss), the conflicted lead character, arrives and kicks at the door of his battered blue Citroen, as out of place as he is. Laurie (Cindy Williams), wearing Steve's varsity sweater, swings in, in a turquoise and cream 1958 Edsel—a car whose time will soon be over—like their relationship. The sense of location and time is set up. The passive blues temper the dominant yellows and oranges. The metaphors are in place.

And then it arrives. The exuberant yellow hot-rod glides into the frame with the purr of a lion cub. This is the car that captures all our attention—for different reasons. One look at that color and you get a sense of playfulness. You also get a feeling of a time gone by. It is, after all, a 1932 Ford deuce coup in a 1962 drive-in. Like its owner, twenty-something John Milner (Paul LeMat), it's a piece of nostalgia, at first playful and attractive, but out of place in its own context. John, the perpetual seventeen-year-old, is still spraying shaving cream on cute blondes' windshields.

Bright yellow hits your eye fast and always wants to be noticed. The moment you see that car, you know yellow is John's color. It is also the color for this generation at the end of a long and playful limbo. The longer you're exposed to bright yellow, the more uncomfortable it can become. The yellow time for these kids is about to be over, and they're not sure how to deal with it. The blue shirt Ron Howard wears and the blue of Richard Dreyfus' car is a color that recedes into the background. It's a good color for passivity or indecision.

As the hot-rod arrives, we hear Steve admonish Curt, "Do you want to end up like John? You just can't stay seventeen forever."

THE ORANGE THAT GAVE IT THE SYNTAX

And that is what the story is all about. The yellow hot-rod in an orange world is a romantic illusion of perpetual adolescence made manifest. It is what the early sixties were, at least as we remember them: playful, exuberant, and short-lived. This saturated yellow defined an era that had a brief encounter with innocence and, like the hot-rod, was gone. November 22, 1963 wasn't that far away.

Orange is a warm color that signals a sweet presence. Its combination with the drag-race yellow becomes a supportive environment for the end of an era. Without orange, yellow could become too agitating a presence in the film. Yellow's energy becomes happier in the presence of orange. The orange of Mel's Drive-In provides the emotional context for these characters who are struggling to grow up, but not in an extraordinary way. Our research has shown orange to be cheerful, simple, and uncomplicated. Like the time period. Like Mel's. Like Toad.

This is not to suggest that all of these color choices were planned out analytically. These color choices may have been com-

pletely intuitive. The point is, they work and can be used as a jumping-off point for color selections in the future.

Billy Elliot

2001. Jamie Bell, Julie Walters, Gary Lewis. Directed by Stephen Daldry. Cinematography: Brian Tufano; Production Design: Maria Djurkovic.

A FAMILY IN CONFLICT

To the lyrics "I was dancing right out of the womb," Billy (Jamie Bell) bounds onto a screen filled with yellow sunbursts. He is exuberance itself, all twelve years of it. He's twisting and turning and running in air, as if to break out of some unseen force holding him back. Without skipping a beat, he goes to the kitchen to make breakfast for his dotty and lovable grandma, unconsciously choreographing, bopping his head into towels, and catching her toast as it pops into the air.

Yellow is visually powerful. It's a good choice for a character who is both daring and exuberant. It's a color that, once seen, tends to stay in your consciousness, so it's also a good choice for Billy, who's obsessive, not to mention obstinate. Yellow is a great way to introduce this extraordinary young man, but it will be a long time before we see him wear it again. In his house, yellow is mostly in the presence of blue. Billy may be defined by yellow, but his world is very much defined by blue. Normally, when in the company of blue, yellow will always dominate. In the Elliot kitchen, however, the blue is not a wallflower. It is the bright, saturated blue that is like the feel of ice. It's so cold that when you touch it, it exhibits the opposite quality of heat. The Elliot family lives in a struggle between two opposites. Between love and survival.

Billy's grandma has wandered off into a field, and as Billy collects her, we see police in riot gear assemble on the hill above. The Elliot men are miners and this is 1984 in Northeastern England, where the miners are on strike. It is a year that, according to director Stephen Daldry, was "one of the defining moments of British history since World War II." If the miners lost their struggle, they would lose their future. A young boy wanting to dance in this climate was inconceivable, and not only did Billy want to dance, but his teacher wanted him to audition for the Royal Ballet School. The theme of this film revolves around struggle in the midst of

changing paradigms. A lot of different paradigms. And the opposite signals sent by hot bright yellow and cold bright blue in the Elliot household define the characters and visually set up the story.

But what also works here is how the signals sent by yellow and blue allow the audience to feel the tensions of this all-male mining family. The yellow is happy, hot, and emotional, like Billy. The blue is cold, repressive, and unyielding, like his dad (Gary Lewis). It is as if what each of these colors represents struggles for dominance. And no one struggles more deeply than Billy's father.

THE MANY PERSONALITIES OF BLUE

Yellow is the unbridled Billy, but blue is the color that controls his environment. Daldry uses different blues to provide insight into the characters and the dynamics between them. In addition to the bright cold blue, there are pale blues, gray blues, and a turquoise blue. Each represents a different emotional state in the narrative, or in a particular character or characters. Sometimes a blue is worn. Sometimes it is in the environment. Sometimes a character or an environment changes from one to another. This transformation provides underlying clues to the evolution of this family.

The evolution begins when Billy's dad sends him off to a boxing club. The room normally used by a ballet class is being used for a soup kitchen for the striking miners, so their class is moved into part of the boxing hall. When Billy hears the sounds of the ballet class's piano, he's in the midst of a sparring match. The kid can't help it: the music puts him on "auto-dance." He begins to move and weave to the rhythms of the piano and is knocked out cold. The minute a punching bag sways, Billy's swaying with it as if it were his dance partner. This boy just has to dance. Through a series of very funny mishaps, Billy secretly winds up in Mrs. Wilkinson's (Julie Walters') ballet class.

Billy gets serious immediately and goes to the library and steals a book on ballet so he can catch up in class. When Billy finally hits the mark in a difficult move, he comes out of hiding. He dances exuberantly down the village street in his light-blue jacket, his ballet shoes hanging around his neck for all to see. When his dad finds out, he orders him out of the class.

Throughout all of this, his dad is struggling with the cops in riot gear, with the scabs who cross the picket lines, and now with himself, as his son fights to follow his heart in a rapidly deterio-

rating world. We see blue playing different roles on each side of the conflict. With the cops, darker blue is cold determination. In the boxing/ballet hall, the paler blue is something else. As Billy and Mrs. Wilkinson work together, the blues in the scene begin to get softer and warmer. They become more a more warm blue-green. Daldry shoots the blue in the boxing hall so that it appears to be colder at times and warmer at others—like the dynamic between Billy and his teacher. As Billy improves, and as his relationship with Mrs. Wilkinson deepens, the blue of the hall and the blue Mrs. Wilkinson wears both become warmer.

When Mrs. Wilkinson and Billy dance to "I Love to Boogie," Daldry shows us a great sequence of cuts: Tony, Billy's brother, dancing with an imaginary guitar in his room, grandma doing her thing at a phantom ballet bar, and even dad doing stretches while shaving. It seems the family, in its intimate moments, loves to boogie, too.

There is a profound connection between blue and Billy's much-loved dead mother. Billy tries to teach himself to play his mother's piano. His father yells at him. "Mom would allow it," Billy says softly. His father, clearly in conflict, slams down the piano cover. Billy stubbornly plays on, looking at a photo of his mom on top of the piano. She wears a pale blue dress, at once peaceful and powerless. This blue establishes Billy's tie to his mother, who encourages him always to follow his dream. He goes to tend his mom's grave dressed in a pale blue jean jacket.

In order to design choreography for his audition for the Royal Ballet School, Mrs. Wilkinson asks Billy to bring in objects that have a special meaning for him. The first of those things is a tender letter from his mother. As Billy and Mrs. Wilkinson both read the letter aloud, they are sitting on the blue floor of the ring, the punching bag ever so slightly moving in the distance. There's a great close-up where Billy is alone against an out-of-focus background. The blue guard-rope is in the foreground, suspended in a gentle curve. The rope is shot so it loses its identity as a boxing ring boundary. It becomes instead a visual metaphor for a connection to his mom. It has no beginning and no end.

Back in his house, Billy goes to the fridge and begins to drink milk out of the bottle and a voice says, "What've I told you about drinkin' out of the bottle?" It's his mom, in flashback, and she's wearing a light-blue dress. Later, at the film's turning point, as Billy goes off to the Royal Ballet School, he carries a suitcase in the

The blue of the boxing rope becomes a visual metaphor for Billy's connection to his late mother.

same light blue. The last thing his mother's letter said was "Always be yourself." And that's just what he did. The pale blue becomes the visual metaphor of this pact between them.

The situation for the miners worsens, tempers flare, and resistances strengthen. Billy misses his audition. Mrs. Wilkinson and Billy's brother Tony and dad have a screaming match, and Billy rebelliously dances out his anger and anguish, literally bouncing off the narrow walls of his neighborhood. As a lone sailboat glides by in the distance below, he dances up and down stairs and hills until he's literally stopped by a wall. The wall is old and rusted. It's been there for a long time.

Things are so bad that Billy's mom's piano is chopped up for firewood. Around the fire, eating Christmas dinner, Billy's dad cries in anguish. Nevertheless, the room glows with a warm turquoise blue. This is where they live. This is the color grandma wears. This is a different blue from the strong cold blue in the kitchen and it sends a different signal for what is beginning to happen in this

family. Under all the conflicts, the love has always been there. The turquoise blue reflects the warmth of their emotional reality.

Dad goes to the pub and when, on the way back, he hears music coming from the boxing hall, he goes in and finds Billy. Billy stares straight at him and begins to dance defiantly. He blows his father (and the audience) away with his brilliance. Dad walks out and goes determinedly to Mrs. Wilkinson's house and says, "How much will it cost?"

The audition room at the Royal Ballet School in London is in a blue that reflects the social class of its patrons. This is a prime example of how color can define social and/or economic class. It is a sophisticated blue, lighter and subdued, grayed slightly. It is a color created by a mixture of hues. It is not a simple color and subliminally commands respect. The Elliot house, on the other hand, is bright and loud and boisterous. Its power is not hampered by subtlety. It is what it is. Direct and without guile.

When the miners lost in their struggle, as Daldry said, it was the end of a way of life in Britain. But endings have a way for paving beginnings not only in careers, but in frames of mind.

AND THE WINNER IS . . .

The decision to have Billy wear the exuberant yellow only at the beginning and ending of the movie is a brilliant dramatic device. Some years later, as Billy's father and brother leave the London underground, they follow a yellow line from the station to the theater where Billy is performing. Yellow, long absent from the movie, seems to be everywhere. The playbill is yellow. (The scene, in reality, is from the much-lauded all-male production of "Swan Lake.") The "House Is Full" sign is in yellow. When Billy's father, with great pride, asks the usher to tell Billy Elliot "his family is here," it's a full-circle moment. And when Billy, who has the lead, leaps onto the stage, the yellow stage light dissolves into the sunbursts he leaped into as a boy in the opening sequence. We realize now that they're the sunbursts from the wallpaper in his room back home. His family was always there. They just had to catch up to realizing it.

The Wizard of Oz

See "Yellow: The Promise and the Warning" on page 6.

Obsessive Yellows

Taxi Driver

1976. Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel, Jodie Foster, Cybill Shepherd. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Cinematography: Michael Chapman; Production Design: Charles Rosen.

A CAR THAT DEFINED AN OBSESSION

In the first thirty seconds of this film, we find ourselves visually choking on fumes from unknown but menacing exhausts. The camera places us on the ground. Literally, our eye level is at the bumper. We have the visual alertness that comes from being physically vulnerable. The cab looms like a warning, nearly grazing us, and leaves. We know only that it is a threatening, ominous yellow that curves into a blackness, leaving us in the wake of its contempt.

Travis Bickle, everyone's worst nightmare, stalks his dream girl in a car the colors of a stinging bee.

This is a long way from the California of both ***Chinatown*** and ***American Graffiti***. This yellow lives in the shadow of black and sends a different signal. In nature, yellow and black are companions in venomous insects, reptiles, and amphibians who attack to kill or at least incapacitate. With this title sequence, Martin Scorsese creates the perfect fusion of color and character. Underexposed so that the blacks are darker and the yellow of the cab is more saturated, the yellow combined with black signals there's poison lurking about.

Watch how all color drains from the cab as it moves out of frame. It's as if it's been a hallucination sent from the underbelly of the delusions Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) pursues. The yellow resurrects itself again as the sequence ends, in the title itself, proclaiming its dominance as a theme. There will always be a Travis out there. And Scorsese knows this.

Romeo + Juliet

See "Yellow: The Montague Color" on page 29.

The English Patient

1996. Ralph Fiennes, Juliette Binoche, Kristin Scott Thomas, Willem Dafoe, Naveen Andrews, Colin Firth. Directed by Anthony Minghella. Cinematography: John Seale; Production Design: Stuart Craig.

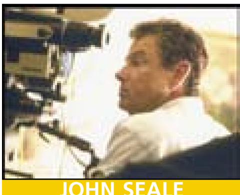
A "SUBLIMINAL" PLANT

The opening sequence of the film begins with a close-up of a painting in progress. We see the forms of umber swimmers gradually emerging from a watercolor brush. We don't yet understand their significance, but we know they are important because they're the first images the director chooses to show to us. The camera moves into the air and a swimmer dissolves into a tiny shadow of a biplane moving slowly over undulating waves of sand. The camera pans, keeping us in the air, and reveals a silver biplane with two passengers: one, the pilot, the other, a beautiful blonde woman with an elegant white scarf fluttering in the wind. The plane is shot down, crashes in a fiery mass, and a caravan rescues one terribly burned survivor. The meanings of the images we have just seen will be revealed slowly throughout the story. It is important to lock them in your memory.

We are shown a close-up of a nomad's hands examining a small object from the wreckage. This tiny artifact will become a central symbol for the love between these two passengers—between these two explorers in the desert. We will see it again, but not until much later, and its meaning will unfold gradually. Anthony Minghella has put it there as a "subliminal" plant. We aren't really supposed to see it the first time around. Here's a clue: look for a thimble.

Cinematographer John Seale, who won the Oscar for this film, told me:

> I'm always searching for what is in the frame at any moment to continue telling the story of where we are, who these people are, why they're involved in something. It could be something so subtle like a flower, or, as you note, a thimble, as an ongoing theme. But the beauty of it is in the editing. The editors only use it when it becomes a power. I can't just say, "Go to the thimble," because that can overdo it. Then the audience can say, "Aw, there's that bloody thimble." Instead, I give the editors the choice of how to tell the story and it can really hit the audience, and they go, "Oh gosh. The thimble!" That's the beauty of the editing. So there's a long story trail to get to the final result and a lot of people are involved in making it work. Anthony put a keynote in people's minds that this thimble had something to do with something important.


JOHN SEALE

We decided on a deliberate color change in preproduction. Anthony wanted a distinction between Italy and the desert. The memory of the English patient had to be distinct because he didn't want to use "supers" (i.e., "Italy 1944"). We took all the color out of the Italian scenes so the audience would know immediately that they were now in Italy. When we went to the desert, it became more golden, hotter, and more appealing.

—John Seale

The English Patient is so richly layered with complex relationships and story lines that it could become a seminar unto itself. To that end, our exploration of this film will examine multiple aspects of visual storytelling. It will also follow the thimble.

Unfortunately, we do not have the space here to explore the incredible production design of the Italian sequences. It is something you can screen for yourself and see how the color-shifts between the two places affect your response to what is going on in the story. Watch how these two colors not only define place but become the metaphors for present and past and reality and memory as well.

A GOLDEN OBSESSION

It's an odd choice to begin the film with a painting of a painting on a cave wall. The Cave of the Swimmers is a profound metaphor, and it is important that the brush of Katharine Clifton

(Kristin Scott Thomas) paints it. This cave, lit by idyllic golden light, is a repository of memories. In another age, in another time, another painter recorded water here. It is a refuge from the desert, hidden under "the shape of a woman's back," sculpted by the dry winds of this now arid place. Katharine, who loves water, who re-records these swimmers in water, will offer them to Almasy (Ralph Fiennes) as a record for his explorer's diary. These paintings of people swimming on yellow ochre walls begin the powerful push/pull dynamic between them—a dynamic that will stop only with her death in this very cave. In the end, only her diary kept in an ancient book remains. It's as if their time as lovers was borrowed somehow. Borrowed from another time and place. Like this one.

Those waves of sand in the opening sequence, repeating without boundaries, become a visual clue to what becomes one of Almasy's sensual fixations with Katherine. The shadow of his biplane is like a tiny ghost that caresses the undulating forms, so like that place at the base of her neck that became his obsession.

What we don't know when we first see the moving shadow of the plane is that it's an airborne coffin. It's a flashback, and Katherine is dead. The plane that carries her is a color with no warmth. Geoffrey's (Colin Firth's) exuberant hot-yellow plane that looped the loops at magic hour is gone. Gone in one obsessive and raging murderous yellow crash. And in a few more moments, this plane, too, will explode in a fiery collision where earth and sky meet.

The four primal elements—air, earth, water, and fire—were always part of who the lovers were. They were nearly buried in sand by the howling desert winds when they first huddled in the cab of the expedition truck. She loved to swim. He loved the rain. Fire inevitably killed them both. Yellow light in its many incarnations followed them everywhere. Yellow light is the color of the idyllic; Opaque yellow, of obsession. (See the Yellow Home Page on page 42.)

Another odd directorial choice is to select a tiny thimble that doesn't appear until the second half of the film to be a major metaphor in an epic. The metaphor of the thimble unfolds in time that shifts like the sands. At the beginning, we see it emerge from the charred wreckage of Almasy's plane, but the image isn't clear

enough for it to lodge specifically in our conscious mind. Because it's in close-up, it does, however, register on a level that informs us enough to know it's important. This is a mark of directorial magic: the subliminal plant. Deep in your unconscious, you store it in your memory. It is only at the very end that the light bulb goes off and you think, "Wait a minute. That was the tiny burned object in the beginning!" Always look for clues in opening sequences. You'll soon find you are seeing (and consequently experiencing) the entire movie differently, and you'll soon discover which directors are the masters at giving you tip-offs to the characters and story. Minghella is a good place to start. (See ***The Talented Mr. Ripley*** on page 76.)

In reality, the thimble began as a kind of intimate joke between them. She doesn't sew at all. He sews "very badly." It is an act of exquisite tenderness when Almasy sews Katharine's dress, which moments before, in the romantic golden light of his room, he has torn off in a scene so lusty and intense it excites either gasps or concentrated silence from the audience. So, when later, he buys her a thimble in a Cairo market, it has already lost its meaning as an accessory to sewing. It has become a symbol of an intimate (and obsessive) memory and of an enduring love. When Almasy carries Katharine from the crash of Geoffrey's yellow plane and sees she's wearing the thimble around her neck, she says, "I have always worn it. I have always loved you." Neither he nor we have been led to expect this. We have been given the gift of surprise. Without it, there would really be no story.

Like Almasy and Katherine, this thimble transcends its accepted role. It is handcrafted silver. It is filled with saffron, an exotic spice of rare value. And a spice that is yellow. It is from this thimble that Almasy takes the yellow powder and tenderly paints marks on Katharine's dead face, while her voiceover says, "I want all these marks on my body where the real country is, not the boundaries drawn on maps" Almasy, the mapmaker, at last draws the lines of no boundaries on the body that the desert sands emulate. He draws them in a pale earthen yellow, a color born from pollen that flies in the air and has the color of fire. The fourth element, life-sustaining water, is missing. It is present only as a memory, in the drawings in the Cave of the Swimmers.

The Thomas Crown Affair

1968. Steve McQueen, Faye Dunaway. Directed by Norman Jewison. Cinematography: Haskell Wexler; Production Design: Robert Boyle.

THE OBSESSIVE DAREDEVIL

This is the perfect movie to see what the fuss over Steve McQueen was all about. The chess game between Vicki (Faye Dunaway) and Tommy (McQueen) is one of the sexiest scenes in cinema, and not one piece of clothing hits the floor. He's a millionaire who, for fun, plans and executes the perfect bank robbery. She's the insurance investigator trying to trap him. They both like to operate outside the rules and on the edge. It's intellectual and sexual magnetism at its most dangerous, but done with Norman Jewison's playful touch.

Robert Boyle, ***The Thomas Crown Affair's*** production designer, describes it this way:

> For me, one of the most fascinating things about the story is this constant adversarial situation that exists throughout the film. Old money/new money, wealth/thievery, the hunter and the hunted, and, of course, man and woman. Dunaway wants to convict McQueen but at the same time is sexually attracted to him. At one moment, a tempestuous attraction and at another time, like opposing magnets, they may come apart. There is a constant changing of the magnetic relationship between the two characters. In a sense, they require hot and cold color treatments. Crown has both a light side and a dark side. The rich darks of his apartment speak of old money, yet he wears a hot golden bathrobe, which is very modern. In contrast to the colder fortress-like feel of his home, the bright sun of the polo match and the yellow glider, from a color standpoint, are an expression of freedom, which is what he's trying to get. He wants to be free. Both his light side and his dark side are looking for freedom.
>
> Dunaway wears violet, the opposite of yellow. Maybe what dies is their relationship. But you don't go into these things without somewhere in your mind thinking about the fact that you may be done in by all of this.

A key to the character of Thomas Crown is the particular color yellow of his bathrobe. The yellow reflects Crown's social status and

ROBERT BOYLE

It's a very war-like picture. The chess game is a great metaphor for that. The only thing that brings McQueen and Dunaway's characters together is a kind of respect for each other. . . . And sex.

—Robert Boyle

his consequent need to invent "the Affair" in the first place. The financial tycoon wears a bathrobe the color of rare and exotic saffron (or the color of Midas' gold). Tommy Crown is a golden boy, who is cool and arrogant. This yellow is rich. Even in the confines of his apartment, it maintains his status. The quintessential use of yellow in defining his character, however, is in that elegant glider.

A man with mutable (and secret) identities, Crown chooses the loudest color in the spectrum to silently glide alone, distanced from his environment. That color tempts fate. It's the perfect toy for the man who has accomplished everything he's ever wanted (except maybe a successful bank heist), and whose only concern is who he wants to be tomorrow. He needs that kind of edge. That's why he needs Vicki.

Their relationship is all about sex, but they don't talk about it. What they're talking about is business, so we had to show a subtext. Red makes it visually erotic. It becomes a comment on the narrative.
—Robert Boyle

RED: THE UNSPOKEN LUST

Jewison also has a way with red. As he did later in ***Moonstruck***, he uses it brilliantly for layering both character and story. McQueen and Dunaway's sauna scene would be hot enough, but when that bright red light fills the screen you really don't need the steam. The red affects you physically. You have no control over it. Your pulse rate accelerates. It's as if you were implicated somehow in their scheming. Red raises your anxiety level way up.

It is in the sauna that Tommy agrees to make a deal (at least for the moment) with the police. When the police say "No deal," Crown says to Vicki, "Can't you see? You've done too good a job, Vicki. I'm all hung up." The saturated red intensifies the anxiety level both on the screen and in the audience. During the sauna scene, put the player on pause and really stare at that screen and feel what happens to your body.

The image dissolves to Crown alone speeding at the water's edge in his red dune buggy. The amount of red on the screen reduces, and so does the anxiety level. Tommy's a master at blowing off steam.

In the end, the question is, did he blow it off for good?

Dick Tracy

1990. Warren Beatty, Madonna, Glenne Headly, Al Pacino, Dustin Hoffman, Charlie Korsmo. Directed by Warren Beatty. Cinematography: Vittorio Storaro; Production Design: Richard Sylbert.

As the title appears, we see the bright yellow fedora slide down from the top of the all-red screen and we feel his presence. Yellow hits your eye like a blaring visual sound.

THE SCENE STEALER

The camera pans over a city that is flat and three-dimensional at the same time. It is a reality of the print comic, color saturated to the max. Oil drums, glowing in red and violet, green, and yellow, surround a menagerie of poker players who look like relics of a Halloween party gone wrong. In walks Tracy (Warren Beatty), sauntering in his bright yellow coat (more polo than trench) and trademark hat, and the audience reacts with delight. Tracy's yellow is a very controlled color presence. Notice how the screen becomes energized whenever Tracy enters an environment. Bright yellow always steals any scene. It's the brightest and the lightest color, so it leaps out of the background, energizing its surroundings. It's brash and daring. Like Tracy.

RED: A POWER FORCE

Tracy may have a two-way wrist radio, but this is definitely a three-way love story between Tess Trueheart (Glenne Headly), Tracy, and the Kid (Charlie Korsmo). The Kid, although the first time he meets him tells Tracy to "Go suck an egg," is a tough but sweet orphan—an eating machine who idolizes the detective. Red becomes a dominant presence in the relationship between the three of them. They become a power force to be reckoned with. And we can feel ourselves heat up physically.

THE COLOR RIOTS

The color energies never quit in the film. They are all supersaturated, so they set up visual tension, especially between Big Boy Caprice (Al Pacino) and Tracy. We know what color Tracy wears, but Big Boy is a fashion riot. He wears bright reds, blues, and purples. His "boys" play poker with chips the color of M&Ms. Pacino clearly gets a kick out of romping in the midst of this merry band of

deformed miscreants. The effect of all these colors keeps us where the director intends: anxious, in the over-the-top realm of comic absurdity.

The one character who has not jumped into this brawling spectrum is Breathless Mahoney (Madonna). She always wears black (unless she's aping Marilyn). Breathless, who's held hostage singing in Big Boy's club, has a thing for Tracy and totally becomes the femme fatale around him. "Tell me you want it all," she coos.

As Big Boy plots to take over the city, a faceless black-clad mystery man enters the scene and shoots a mobster who tries to kill Tracy. The tension builds visually, as red, green, and blue ricochet off the screen in tandem with sprays of bullets. **If you don't know his identity, don't read the following until you've seen the movie.**

PURPLE: A TIP-OFF TO THE SURPRISE ENDING

Purple is the clue to the surprise ending. Big time. The color surrounding Breathless is a huge clue to the story. We should have seen it coming. The clues are all there. Breathless is surrounded by purple. The camera pans over a purple street as we hear her sing "I'm gonna love you and love you alone" in Lips' club (see image on page 196). She's lit by purple light, which vibrates on the floor she stands on. The first time they meet, Tracy opens the door and walks into her purple room. It's the encounter of the quintessential opposites in every way. (Purple is opposite from yellow on the color wheel. Opposite colors are what I call "power pairs." When next to, or near each other, they become more intense.) Breathless does everything she can to seduce Tracy (and nearly succeeds).

When the Mystery Man sets a trap to frame Tracy, there is a purple light behind him. Breathless sings, "Sooner or later, you're gonna be mine" under a purple light. When he finally tells her outright that he loves Tess, Breathless walks out and gets in her purple car, and Tracy, in his yellow coat, stares up at a brilliant yellow moon.

What follows is a series of plots and counterplots between Tracy and Big Boy, eventually framing Tracy for bribery and murder, and kidnapping Tess. Tracy escapes and captures Mumbles (Dustin Hoffman), one of Big Boy's boys. Mumbles also wears purple in the movie and he, in a very original way, loses his identity.

But the big surprise is the Mystery Man. In the end, as Big Boy and Tracy face off in a dark tower, slow-moving gears cast gigantic shadows over the stone walls. Tess is tied to one of them and is about to be squished. It's Lang's ***Metropolis*** meets ***The Perils of Pauline*** done as high camp. Suddenly, out of the shadows, appears the mystery man. He pulls a gun on Big Boy and Tracy, and offers to make a deal with Tracy.

"Together we can own this town'" he says. The Kid tackles the Mystery Man. Big Boy shoots him and falls into the gear pit. Tracy saves Tess and goes to the Mystery Man and pulls off his mask.

It's Breathless, wearing a purple scarf.

"Tell me the truth, could it ever have happened between us?" she asks. She raises herself up and kisses Tracy and . . . If it's purple, someone's gonna die.

Innocent, Cautionary, and Idyllic Yellows

Innocent Yellows

Chinatown

1974. Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, John Huston. Directed by Roman Polanski. Cinematography: John A. Alonzo; Production Design: Richard Sylbert.

A CAR THAT DEFINED A CHARACTER

Filmmakers have a way of getting us to visually register who and what's important to the story. It could have been just another luxury car, an elegant accessory to go with an elegant lady. But the filmmakers wanted more. We know because of the way we first see Evelyn Mulwray's (Faye Dunaway's) pale yellow Packard convertible.

Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) has come to the home of Hollis Mulwray, Chief Engineer for the Department of Water and Power for the city of Los Angeles. The butler, with a "Wait here" command, has just closed the heavy carved Spanish door unceremoniously in his face.

As he stands there, we hear a high, rhythmic squeaking sound, the kind that comes from the polishing of many layers of wax. With a sardonic, world-weary smirk, Jake turns toward the noise and we cut to the car standing alone in the driveway. Gradually, we see the source of the sound: a chauffeur emerges from behind the car, waxing and polishing. He's lit with dappled light, like a Renoir. We have been introduced to a metaphor for Evelyn Mulwray, a woman with whom Jake will soon build a past. When Evelyn arrives, dressed in a pale ivory riding outfit, we see why she is the owner of the car.

The car tells us a lot about Evelyn Mulwray. It is well cared for, like its owner, and set against the dark streets of Los Angeles, its color is a defining clue to her character. It is the color of rich

smooth cream, a refined yet undefined color. Evelyn Mulray is a woman who discusses ideas that are never really complete, never really defined.

By drawing us to the specifics of the car, Roman Polanski lets us know on a subliminal level who and, often, where she is. Very little in this movie is what it seems to be, so by defining this car in specifics, Polanski lets us know that this car is where crucial things are said and done. The car carries the action forward and lets us know where it's going. Jake kicks the red glass from the rear taillight so, in the dark, he can easily follow Evelyn to a house where a major secret is revealed. When he threatens her that he will go to the police if she doesn't tell him the truth, Evelyn hangs her head and sounds the car horn by mistake. We will hear that horn again in Chinatown.

To take a color that is the brightest in the spectrum and desaturate it down from noisy to a murmur is understatement personified. It becomes more delicate, and it perfectly reflects the essence of Mrs. Mulwray: chic, enigmatic, and vulnerable. She is a fragile woman with a dark secret, and an obsession. Bright yellow, lightened to a pastel (e.g., 50% white) is archetypal innocence: perfect for Rosemary in Polanski's ***Rosemary's Baby***. Yellow lightened to the color of Dunaway's Packard (e.g., 90% white) is quintessentially elegant.

The car takes Evelyn, and by extension us, on a journey of intrigue and obsession that is both literal and metaphorical. Chinatown is a place where nothing is what it appears to be. The car takes on an expanded role as Jake's ensnarement in the corrupt politics of water in Los Angeles deepens and the secret of Evelyn's past comes to be revealed. We know where she is by where we see the car parked. (By keeping the car in our field of vision, the filmmakers make certain of that.) The car traces Evelyn's location as her secret begins to spin out of control. Near the end, Jake pulls down bamboo blinds as he watches Evelyn and the mystery girl leave in the car, for Chinatown. Like everything else in the film, they are partially obscured.

In the end, it is in the elegant pale yellow car where the years of lying and corruption come together in a shattering effect. The horn from the soft yellow car blares loudly into the dark night of Chinatown: a place where nothing is what it appears to be. Not even the car.

Rosemary's Baby

1968. Mia Farrow, John Cassavetes, Ruth Gordon, Sidney Blackmer. Directed by Roman Polanski. Cinematography: William Fraker; Production Design: Richard Sylbert.

A TRUSTING INNOCENCE

The titles are written in a pink script and a little girl's voice sings a la-la melody in the background. From the air, the camera moves over The Branford, a rather austere and foreboding-looking building. In reality, it is The Dakota, a sinister-looking landmark on Manhattan's upper West Side. It is also the place where John Lennon was murdered some twelve years after this movie was made.

Newlyweds Guy and Rosemary Woodhouse (John Cassavetes and Mia Farrow) have just moved into a building that is rumored to have a history of strange occurrences. According to a friend, a dead baby was found wrapped in newspaper in the basement and a man named Adrian Marcato even claimed to have conjured up a living devil. Even though the former occupant of their apartment has died, (and left an ominous portion of a diary page), Rosemary falls in love with the potential of the place. Soon, she transforms it from a heavy, dark, and closed-in space to a light and airy one, opened up by pale yellows and soft whites.

Polanski makes certain that Rosemary has a strong association with yellow, particularly pale yellow. She wears it in many permutations. She and Guy sleep on yellow sheets. Their bedroom wallpaper is a yellow print. Their kitchen appliances and curtains are yellow. Their couch is yellow. Eventually, the dress she packs for the maternity hospital is yellow. Pale yellow is like Rosemary. It signals open and happy and innocent.

Shortly after they move in, Rosemary meets a young woman who lives with their next-door neighbors, Roman and Minnie Castevet (Sidney Blackmer and Ruth Gordon). She wears a round "good luck charm"—a filigreed amulet that has a strange smell. A former drug addict, she tells Rosemary that Roman saved her life. Soon after, she's found dead on the sidewalk below the building, lying in a pool of bright red blood, the charm still around her neck. Emerging out of the darkness, Roman and Minnie, whom Rosemary and Guy have not yet met, walk up to the scene, which has been logged as a suicide.

RED: THE WARNING SIGNAL

With this sequence comes the introduction of red in the movie. Other than a few isolated ambient pots and casseroles, red has not yet appeared on the screen. And Roman is the first to wear it. This is not insignificant. Little by little, red begins to appear onscreen. Be aware of how it affects you physically. Like a flashing red light, it is sending you warning signals. That night, Guy and Rosemary hear eerie chanting sounds through their bedroom wall. A vision of the dead girl, surrounded by the red pool of blood, appears on their yellow wallpaper.

A short time later, Minnie comes charging into their apartment uninvited, and asks them to dinner. Later that evening, in the Castevet's dark interior, Roman, dramatically lit from above and dressed in a bright blood-red sweater, sits at the far left side of the screen. It is a composition that is asymmetrical and unsettling. It acts in contrast to their easy social dialogue about travels and careers. Red can activate anxiety, particularly when it's in the presence of darkness. Think of our association of red and black to devils on Halloween.

Little by little, the Castevets insinuate themselves into Guy and Rosemary's lives. Minnie gives Rosemary what appears to be the same charm worn by the dead girl and which has the same strange odor. Minnie tells Rosemary that it is a special root, and it's for good luck. Upon Guy's urging, Rosemary reluctantly puts it on.

Roman is keenly interested in Guy, who is a struggling actor who can't seem to get a break. The young man, in turn, develops a strong attachment to Roman and spends time alone with him during the evenings. Guy, who does TV commercials, suddenly gets a major stage role because the actor who had initially won the part becomes blind. The more Guy and Rosemary see the Castevets, the more red creeps slowly into the story. A big red bouquet of roses fills the screen. It's an apology from Guy for obsessing about his career. He tells Rosemary he wants to make a baby. For their intimate "seduction dinner," Rosemary atypically dresses in elegant blood-red crepe. Unexpectedly, Minnie arrives with a mousse she's made for their dessert and promptly departs. Rosemary doesn't like the "undertaste" of it, and upon Guy's urging to finish it, she feigns eating and dumps most of it into her napkin. Shortly after, she begins to feel very dizzy. Guy puts her to bed and takes off her wedding ring.

Her dreams are filled with bizarre, unrelated imagery. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling appears on a yacht.

Naked and in the dark, she walks by a crackling fire toward a terrifying image of a ritualistically lit bed, surrounded by chanting naked bodies. In bright red paint, Roman draws a symbol on her body. Her legs are tied down. She hears Guy's voice say, "She's awake! She sees!" We hear Minnie say, "She don't see. As long as she ate them, she can't see or hear. She's like dead. . . ." The horrific and traumatic sequence that follows is the stuff of night terrors. Especially those bestial, red-rimmed yellow eyes. Our experiments have shown that red, yellow, and black are the colors most often associated with fear. Without a single special effect, Polanski has created one of the most terrifying scenes in American cinema. If evil has a face, this is it.

The next morning Rosemary wakes up in her sun-filled yellow bedroom. Guy tells her she was drunk and he didn't want to miss "baby night." "It was kind of fun . . . in a necrophiliac kind of way," he jokes. There are red claw scratches on her back. In this innocent—looking pale yellow room, they are all the more horrific.

THE COLOR SWITCH

The specific character associations with both red and yellow in the film are so established that if someone else wears them, it signals an important change in the dynamic of the story. Beginning with Rosemary wearing red the night of the rape, the colors that initially defined the characters begin to move around. Roman wears a golden yellow and Guy wears a blood-red scarf, normally associated with Roman. Each of these changes subliminally affects our attitudes toward these characters. Polanski has put us in an involuntary limbo, and it is not a nice place to be. When we see soft-spoken, innocent Rosemary in that intense red, it's a physical jolt to the system. It's a seductive color. This was the night she and Guy were going to "make a baby." Only she was horribly duped. As the "pimp" for the act, Roman wears yellow, the color associated with Rosemary. It's a familial relation and its intimacy is unnerving.

Rosemary has her hair cut and even though it's by the then very hot Vidal Sassoon, it is reminiscent of other short haircuts of other women in the history of western civilization. The cutting off the hair of women who have collaborated with the enemy has long been a custom. It is significant, within the confines of the story, that Rosemary had her own hair cut.

Rosemary becomes pregnant but begins losing weight and having pains. Upon Roman and Minnie's urging, Rosemary goes to

With the power to end the evil in her hand, Rosemary wears the color of powerlessness.

a new doctor, a Dr. Sapirstein (Ralph Bellamy). The doctor has Minnie prepare some special herbal remedies. Rosemary begins to eat raw red meat.

The Castevets have a New Year's party, where they toast: "To 1966—the year One!" This may be one of the scariest references in the movie. For them, the calendar has been recast. Rosemary, unaware of the nature of the seed growing inside of her, decorates the nursery with sweet patterns of yellow on white.

Their friend Hutch, who had been suspicious of Roman, mysteriously dies. At his funeral, an unknown friend gives Rosemary a book Hutch had intended on giving her. She tells Rosemary that Hutch said, "The name is an anagram." The book's title is *All of Them Witches*. This annotated volume reveals the significance of the charm, the herbs, the deaths and disabilities, the rituals, and, ultimately, the identities of Roman and Minnie. It also sends her speeding away from the Castevet's obstetrician friend, Dr. Sapirstein. Rosemary, however, goes into labor before she can escape, and when she wakes up in her pale yellow bed, the doctor tells her there were complications and the baby died. But an infant cries in the background.

PALE BLUE AND POWERLESSNESS

Wearing a robe of pale blue, the quintessential color of powerlessness, Rosemary grabs a knife, finds the secret passageway in their linen closet, and enters unseen into Roman and Minnie's apartment. A crowd is there, happily chatting and eating and drinking. In their midst is a baby bassinet. It is black.

Rosemary walks to the bassinet, parts the drapes and recoils in horror.

Rosemary: "What have you done to it? What have you done to its eyes?"

Roman: "He has his father's eyes."

Rosemary begins to rock the bassinet. A photographer shoots a picture. A smile begins to cross her face. She has the object to end the evil in her hand, but she is incapable of using it. The powerless signal the color sends affects us on a visceral level. We hear the little girl singing the la-la song that began the movie. Polanski ends the film leaving us afraid.

The camera, high above The Branford, backs off and away.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Polanski uses a pale yellow clue to character once again, six years later, in ***Chinatown***. In both cases, the yellow is a metaphor for innocence. But it is innocence violently lost. Rosemary's yellow is pastel and childlike. Evelyn Mulwray's is pale and elegant. Both women are raped.

Cautionary Yellows

The Age of Innocence

See "Yellow: A Paralyzing Caution" on page 35 and on the following page.

The Caveman's Valentine

2000. Samuel L. Jackson, Ann Magnuson. Directed by Kasi Lemmons. Cinematography: Amelia Vincent; Production Design: Robin Standefer.

AMBER CLOISTERS AND YELLOW Y-RAYS

We hear otherworldly sounds like wings flying, whooshing. We see curved veins in slowly moving translucent forms that turn from

In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland can't possibly send Ellen *red* roses. It would be too obviously lusty for his cautionary nature.

golden to reddish amber. Large wings, maybe? We don't know where we are. It's some kind of a gothic vault. Maybe a cloister. From above, we come slowly down to a man with long dreadlocks, seated, head down in front of a closed grand piano. He raises his head, looks at us, and screams, "Don't you watch me!" and suddenly, we are outside in the snow. Romulus is screaming. He thinks a social worker is trying to crawl into his brain to "see a show." Rom points to his head, "I've got legions of angels up here . . . like little moths. . . ." We're beginning to get an idea of where we've just been.

Romulus Ledbetter (Samuel L. Jackson) lives a very full life. It is populated by yellow and green rays of light, by a man named Stuyvesant who spies on him from the top of New York's Chrysler Building, and by strangely powerful winged beings who play the violin and saxophone and who writhe and fly within the confines of exquisite golden vaulted arches. It is a breathtakingly beautiful place. It is inside his head.

The world outside his head, however, is a very scary place for Rom, and it's dominated by intense yellow "Y-Rays." Rom believes

that the Y-Rays are sent by Stuyvesant to terrify and destroy him. Yellow, indeed, seems to be a double-edged sword for Romulus. On the one hand, the cloistered space in his head is illuminated by a warm amber light. On the other, as Rom begins to play a grand piano in the real world, traffic lights turn yellow—the color of caution—and intense acid-yellow rays shoot outward from the top of Stuyvesant's Chrysler Building and surround him. As he finishes playing, the lights gradually fade away, leaving Rom totally spent. Betty asks, "Why does it hurt you to play?" Rom responds, "That was another life." It was his life before he chose to live free, in a cave.

Amy Vincent, ***The Caveman's Valentine***'s cinematographer, explains the conceptual color choices for the Y-Rays:

> To work as a metaphor for Rom's paranoia, yellow needed to be something that exists in the real world but is exaggerated in Rom's head. If you notice, when he's digging in a dumpster and the Chrysler Building is in the background, a yellow tow-truck goes by, and all of a sudden, he's encased . . . engulfed in that yellow light. The flash of the yellow triggers something in his brain and it freezes him. Y-Rays for Rom are cautionary things, something that's reminding him, "Hey, look out! There may be someone following you." So for him, that obvious yellow traffic light, the tow-truck yellow, are all warnings.

The saturated acid-yellow playing off the rich, warm amber inside his head is like visual schizophrenia. Bright yellow is associated with obsession (see page 42), whereas the more orange-amber is welcoming and comforting. If there's anything Rom needs in his obsessive life, it's the emotional protection of feeling safe.

AMY VINCENT

In the **The Caveman's Valentine**, *the Y-Rays came from above. It was as if they were pinned to the floor encasing Rom. We knew when we had found the right yellow. You could see it in Sam's [Samuel Jackson's] body physically. The audience can feel that he's an oppressed man—a creative genius who's unable to work, and the Y-Rays are a force that's bearing down on him.*
—Amy Vincent

GREEN: LIME RICKEYS AND Z-RAYS

Rom lives in a cave in a Manhattan park, where an unplugged television broadcasts images of the Chrysler Building. Bob (Anthony Michael Hall) and Betty (Kate McNeil) live in an elegant uptown apartment, heavy with mahogany. Bob, who's a bankruptcy lawyer, has just given a hand-me-down suit to Romulus. Rom, who's a Julliard graduate, has just blown Bob away with his virtuoso playing on Bob's 1930s grand piano. Everything in this room is from the thirties, which were, according to Bob, "something of a golden era for my kind." Bob offers a toast "To eternal cycles of failure and reorganization." He proffers a tall glass filled with a bright green liquid to Romulus and, because of the angle of the

shot, it's as if he's also offering it to us. The jarring color of the lime rickey is visually in conflict with the conservative dark mahogany interior, but conceptually, it's on the money. Quite literally. It's a subliminal message—this toxic-looking green liquid—Bob is basically a generous man who gains his financial fortune from the misfortune of others. Rom, the sensitive and tortured eccentric, tunes into this. (Deep in our visceral storehouse, green liquid can register as poison, and beginning with the green liquid that poisoned the apple in ***Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs***, wise filmmakers have taken advantage of this.) Rom downs the drink in one gulp and begins immediately to harangue Bob, implicating him with Stuyvesant. As he does this, an intense green light envelops him and eventually all of three of them. When Betty asks what it is, Rom tells her, "It's a new weapon. Something I've never seen before . . . Z-Rays!"

During pre-production, the props people brought Kasi a bunch of green-looking drinks. We wanted a murkiness to them. We didn't want them to be crystal clear. The color was also offset by the underplayed colors (all the women wearing little black dresses), as well. Obviously, the absurdity of the Caveman going up to Bob and Betty's for a cocktail party is not funny. The lime rickeys were filled with fear for Rom.

—Amy Vincent

This is not the opaque green makeup of the Wicked Witch of the West or the CGI coloring of ***The Hulk***, where the green color creates a character that is evil or alien. This is a green light from an unknown source. It is like poisoned air that takes over all of these people: both the well-off and the impoverished genius. Z-Rays do not discriminate. They become a metaphor for an entire climate. The green becomes the filter that allows us to see how Rom perceives his world, and understand why he chooses to live in a cave.

Amy Vincent explains:

> There's literalness to Y-Rays being yellow and Z-Rays being green. Rom says that very literally when he says, "Z-Rays are the color of a rich man's bank account." Green and the color of money are the same thing to Rom. He doesn't live in Bob and Betty's world at all. So, Z-Rays are terrifying. They are what he's deliberately removed himself from.

Rom himself says, "Y-Rays are cruel, but this new weapon, Z-Rays, are green. They're soft like moonlight . . . seductive . . . and much more vicious. . . . Z-Rays smell like success."

Cinematographer Vincent continues:

> The Z-Rays are much more evil, much more deceptive, much less clear to him. Y-Rays he's been dealing with for a long time. He knows them. There's a familiarity to them even if it's not comfortable. When his ex-wife comes to visit him at Bob and Betty's, she's encased in

> a Y-Ray. There's a cautionary aspect with Y-Rays that's beautiful and compelling and you want to know more and you want it to go further. Green, on the other hand, to me is quite ugly. It's offensive and not comfortable. Rom perceives both of them as forces he can't control. But one of them is much more filled with fear for him because he doesn't know it as well.

As director Lemmons and cinematographer Vincent tell it, author/screenwriter George Dawes Green describes the Z-Rays as having a "pernicious shade of green." The dictionary definition of pernicious is "wicked or meaning to cause harm." They tested many greens and chose the one Samuel Jackson adversely reacted to.

THE GOLDEN CLOISTER REDUX

Gradually, the story expands, and the camera finally reveals the strange partial images we've been seeing in the amber-lit cloister. As Romulus develops a unique relationship with the reality of a crime he's obsessed with solving, we see him come more and more to grips with the Y-Rays. Ultimately we see him playing the piano in the yellow light surrounded by his "legions." We finally see the exotic winged men/musicians/dancers. We finally see the moth seraphs. According to Lemmons, it was a conscious decision to reveal the seraphs slowly. The seraphs are what help Romulus to "hold it together." They represent his "ancestors . . . his posse . . . his courage. They come to his rescue." He was their flame, and they flew to him gladly. The warmth, richness, and translucence of amber have become the perfect metaphor for compassion.

The look of the inside of Rom's head begins with George Dawes Green's writing, which incites all the ideas and Kasi's interpretation of the moth seraphs, which become twelve naked, bald, black men with moth wings. Combined with Otis Sallid's choreography, and Terence Blanchard's music, and Robin Standefer's set, and Sam Jackson's performance . . . it's an exemplary collaboration.

—Amy Vincent

Vincent describes the process of conceptualizing the look of the cloister inside of Rom's head:

> The inside of Rom's head is more of an amber—an amalgam of a lot of different tones. Kasi and I started looking at entomology books for the moth's wings for the seraphs and gothic architecture books for the structure of the inside of Rom's head. Robin combined real human anatomy from *Gray's Anatomy* for the interior of a head with the color and softness of the moth's wings. Somewhere in between the gothic arches and bones, which have a translucent quality, she created the design. She brought us this amazing book of these German wax figures, which are all anatomically perfect, and inte-

> grated that information into the mix. So, the concept comes from really literal research but then you take it, meld it, and blend it, and you add twelve naked, bald, black men and you put them into this set and it's like I feel as if I didn't have to do anything.

That is hard to believe. But it is clear that this is an extraordinary work born from a marriage of talent, exhaustive research, and powerful imagination—and of commitment to a unique vision.

So in the end, we are left where we began. Only this time, we thrill to see these exquisite creatures slowly dancing and flying through the vaulted golden archways of Rom's mind. We understand that although Rom is still mad, he has functioned in the real world to bring justice to a dead boy. And to forge a new relationship with his family.

The Z-Rays are gone. At least for a while.

Idyllic Yellows

Much Ado About Nothing

1993. Emma Thompson, Kenneth Branagh, Denzel Washington, Michael Keaton, Robert Sean Leonard, Keanu Reeves, Kate Beckinsale. Directed by Kenneth Branagh. Cinematography: Roger Lanser; Production Design: Tim Harvey.

TANNED (AND SILLY) IN TUSCANY

The screen is dark. Accompanied by an Elizabethan lute, Beatrice (Emma Thompson) reads Shakespeare's words. As she speaks, they appear, phrase by phrase, in white type on the black screen. When her reading ends with "Converting all your sounds of woe, into 'Hey nonny, nonny,'" we know we're in for some kind of silliness. The words dissolve into a painting in progress: a villa set luxuriously in a hillside. The camera pans beyond the painting to reveal the actual villa.

Kenneth Branagh has Beatrice read aloud what is already written on the screen to let us know that the written word and the word heard in a visual context are not equal. They are not the same. We see a painting of a villa, and as the camera pans beyond it, we see the real, three-dimensional villa. They are not equal. They are

not the same. The virtual play takes on a new reality in the virtual medium of cinema. The subliminal message here could easily be: experience plays as plays, movies as movies, and art as art.

Beatrice, tanned and golden haired and clearly without undergarments (which is made abundantly clear in the bathing scene that follows), sits casually in a tree, reading to a handsome, elegant crowd, both young and older, who look healthy and vigorous. By the familiarity of their jests, we understand that these people have known and loved each other for a long time. There are tanned voluptuous women and open-shirted men, who eat grapes and loll about awaiting the arrival of Don Pedro (Denzel Washington) and his men coming home from the wars.

Branagh moves the film's location to the golden highlands of Tuscany to allow him to create a sense of place, which is essential to his interpretation of the story. By moving the location from dry Sicily to sunny Tuscany, Branagh transforms the film's color palette from dusty browns to golden honey and butterscotch. And therein lies its magic. Everything glows golden. Lovers are tanned, buildings are ochre, and the elegant dark skinned Don Pedro exudes graceful sexuality.

As the announcement of the arrival of Don Pedro's troops is signaled throughout the villa, female bodies, young and old, race down a hillside, strip off their clothes, and leap naked into communal baths. (See the Yellow Home Page photo on page 41.) When we see Don Pedro and his men, we understand why all the fuss. Branagh has their handsome heads appear first, rising up from beneath a crest of hill, pumping up and down on their horses urging them forward. The men, too, leap stark naked into huge baths, while the women scurry about pulling clean skirts over bare bottoms, grabbing their mirrors, and powdering their bodies. It's a visually delirious moment. And it's bathed in golden light.

When Branagh was asked what the opening sequence was about, his reply was quick and immediate: "Sex!" was his answer. That honeyed light had a lot to do with it, and, of course, we have the two pairs of lovers. The sparring and witty-but-not-wise Beatrice and Benedick (Branagh) and the young and impressionable Claudio (Robert Sean Leonard) and Hero (Kate Beckinsale). It is within this marmalade-colored world that Don John (Keanu Reeves), replete with a villain's goatee, spreads the vicious lie that Hero has been unfaithful to Claudio. And here is where we're set

up. Everything is romantic and wonderful in this ideal world and this horrid lie begins to ruin everything.

But from that first "Hey nonny, nonny," we know this is a comic melodrama, so we go along with all the silly subterfuges and fake-outs, knowing all along that everything's going to be all right. So we have some fun with the over-the-top Constable's (Michael Keaton's) bizarre antics along the way, and forgive Claudio for being such a prude and delight in the final getting together of the sparring partners, Beatrice and Benedick. The golden light has provided a velvety playground for all of it.

The Talented Mr. Ripley

1999. Matt Damon, Jude Law, Gwyneth Paltrow, Cate Blanchett, Philip Seymour Hoffman. Directed by Anthony Minghella. Cinematography: John Seale; Production Design: Roy Walker.

THE PRODIGAL AND THE IMPOSTER

There are strange similarities between ***Much Ado About Nothing*** and ***The Talented Mr. Ripley***. Both films are set in astonishingly beautiful parts of Italy. Both, even though one is twisted, are love stories. Both use honeyed light to establish a sense of place both geographically and emotionally—with one big difference. While Kenneth Branagh uses the golden light in the classic, idyllic sense, Anthony Minghella allows us to feel the very romantic qualities of this light, and then slowly and gradually, turns them upside down. Both stories revolve around a lie. In ***Much Ado About Nothing***, the lie is revealed in service of good humor. In ***The Talented Mr. Ripley***, through what may be arbitrary twists of fate, the lie chillingly prevails. And the fact that it's so terrifying is because the romantic light subliminally takes us to a place where we're unsuspecting and vulnerable. It is a perfect example of setting up an audience for a dramatic emotional shock.

The transparent bands of colors that appear during the credit sequence mirror important aspects of the story as you watch the movie. The film opens with angled verticals slowly cutting into darkness, both forming and fragmenting the face of Tom Ripley (Matt Damon). The screen fragments again to Tom playing the piano at a party on an elegant balcony overlooking Manhattan's Central Park. Here he meets Herbert Greenleaf and allows him to

assume he is a friend of Dickie, Greenleaf's son (Jude Law). Greenleaf gives him one-thousand dollars to lure the prodigal son home from the Italian Riviera, unwittingly setting off a series of events that allow Ripley to display the full range of his bizarre talents. The sequence ends with the Greenleaf limo leaving Tom's grotty loft in the meatpacking district and heading off to the Cunard Pier. Slaughtered pigs hang in rows across from his entrance. Throughout this sequence, the film's credits appear in transparent bands of color, each altering the natural colors of the scene underneath them.

THE GOLDEN PEOPLE AND THE YELLOW VOYEUR

Both ***Much Ado About Nothing*** and ***The Talented Mr. Ripley*** have scenes of young people diving into water in golden light, but there is a big difference in how they are shot. In ***Much Ado About Nothing***, the cameras are right there as young tanned bodies leap exuberantly into communal baths. We're in the moment, leaping right behind them, experiencing the anticipation of what's about to happen. In ***The Talented Mr. Ripley***, we see the lean tanned bodies of Dickie and Marge (Gwyneth Paltrow) dive from their yacht into the Mediterranean at the golden hour. But this time, we're set apart, hidden, watching them through binoculars. We are not there. We're spying and it's creepy. When Ripley looks at Dickie's face through those binoculars and matter-of-factly says, "This is *my* face," an uneasiness begins to insinuate itself into the scene.

The bright yellow bathing suit he wears reveals Tom's character while the honeyed golden light captures Dickie's. No matter how well he plans his cover, there is something that feels out of place about Tom here on the Riviera. It's not just his white skin and brown tie shoes. There's something about his bright yellow bathing suit that doesn't work either. It sends a different signal from the golden light of the idyllic village of Mangiabello. Bright yellow calls attention to itself. A strange choice for one who is trying to blend in. Tom seems always to be a beat out of synch. He's psychologically a bit too close and physically often half hidden or watching from afar. With all of this playing out in this honeyed light, he seems even more out of place.

On the other extreme, Dickie is the quintessential spoiled Golden Boy in perfect harmony with his surroundings. He belongs on his yacht in the golden light. His girlfriend, Marge, describes Dickie perfectly: "The thing with Dickie . . . It's like the sun shines on you . . . It's glorious. Then he forgets you and it's very, very cold."

Remember those transparent bands of color in the opening sequence? When Dickie says, "Everyone should have one talent. What's yours?" (Dickie's is spending his allowance), Tom answers, "Forging signatures, telling lies, and impersonating practically anybody." Those bands are like filters that change the realities of the environment they enter. Like Tom, a psychopath on autopilot, who disarms people by telling the truth.

As time goes on and Tom insinuates himself into Dickie's life, we begin to relax and dismiss our gut warnings. The light is golden, the houses are rose-colored, and the jazz clubs are smoky. Tom moves in with Dickie. One night Tom and Dickie play chess as Dickie soaks in the tub. When Dickie steps out of the bath and Tom watches his naked body in the mirror, the romantic golden light begins to take on another meaning.

MURDER IN THE AFTERNOON

Tom and Dickie go to Rome. Enter Freddie (Philip Seymour Hoffman), Dickie's friend from Princeton. Freddie has a nose for sniffing out false notes in this finely tuned world of the young and rich and bored: "I want this job of yours, Tommy. You live in Italy. You stay at Dickie's house. You eat Dickie's food. You wear Dickie's clothes. And his father picks up the tab." Freddie may have good instincts. But not this time. Tom's obsessive delusion with Dickie as his brother/lover peaks and cracks, and in a fit of jealousy, and as they drift in the golden light of the Mediterranean, he does the unspeakable. To witness such a brutal act in this romantic light leaves us, the audience, in a state of disbelief that is profoundly unsettling.

THE LIGHT DIMS

Tom begins to exist as Dickie, but because of the many people who know them both, he also has to exist as himself. What follows is an incredible balancing act that requires all of Ripley's many talents. But he's not always successful. Sometimes he gets caught because he's not able to finesse a total impersonation. When Freddie visits Dickie/Tom's place in Rome, Freddie observes, "The only thing like Dickie in this place is you." Bad move for Freddie. Marge observes, "Whenever I look for Dickie, I find you." Almost a bad move for Marge. As suspicions mount, the body count goes up, and something happens to the light.

As the body count goes up, the light changes. The golden light begins to fade into shadow after Dickie's murder and to darkness after Freddie's. Beginning with Freddie, Tom's murders or potential murders happen in a darkened interior.

THE MURDERER IN THE MIRROR

Something about the last shot is familiar. We've seen it before in the opening sequence. As we hear the sounds of what we know to be a murder, we see Tom's face. We know now he's in his stateroom and he's again murdered someone he loved. The camera moves around to his full face, half in the light and half in the dark, and then to him facing left, his face now totally dark. This is the visual story of Tom Ripley. He arrived in the light and left in darkness. In the end, his mirrored stateroom doors, now echoing the verticals from the opening sequence, close in on him, leaving him confined. He is trapped, alone with his multiple reflections in the darkness. Minghella clued us in from the very beginning.

Malcolm X

See "Golden Yellow Light: Enlightened and Idyllic" on page 17.

Gladiator

See Golden Yellow: a Farmer's Dream on page 203.

Blue
The Detached Color

3

In a few weeks, a warm-hearted woman in a Winnebago will tell Schmidt that he is a sad, sad man.

Blue can be a tranquil pond or a soft blanket of sadness. It is quiet and aloof. Year after year, our color investigations show that in a blue environment, people become passive and introspective. It's a color to think to, but not to act. Think ***Hamlet***. Director Lasse Hallstrom is a master at creating a sense of longing—of something left unfinished—with a grayed blue. Think of ***The Cider House Rules*** or ***The Shipping News***. Both have a pervasive sense of melancholy—what the dictionary calls "a gentle sadness."

There's a great story about Knute Rockne, the famous Notre Dame football coach, who, back in the 1920s, painted his visitors locker room blue and won every game season after season. Theory is, he totally spaced out his opponents with blue and fired up his own team with red. True or not, it's a great illustration of another of the influences of blue. Blue is the quintessential color for powerlessness. Take one look at the gray-blue of Kevin Spacey's office in ***American Beauty*** and you know he is a powerless man.

A saying like "true blue," however, is not a visual concept. It doesn't stem directly from how the color affects us viscerally. It comes from an idea. For example, we can depend on the sky being blue; therefore, blue is synonymous with loyalty and dependability. Don't fall into that trap. Even a very pale blue has an amazing ability to influence our emotional reactions to what is happening on screen. In fact, as the films in this section will show, it can set the tone for the entire movie.

Steel blue and dark indigo are colors least associated with the sensual and most associated with the intellect. Governesses and maiden ladies wear dark blue. It's the color worn by Charlotte Gainsbourg in Zeffirelli's ***Jane Eyre*** and by Emma Thompson in Ang Lee's interpretation of Jane Austen's ***Sense and Sensibility***.

Hallstrom's ***Chocolat***, on the other hand, uses an intense turquoise blue as an exotic presence that, because it's combined with green,

visually warms the conservative forces in a tiny village. In our explorations of blue-green/turquoise, we found it to be a color that inspired openness and interaction. In the presence of blue-green, students happily chatted away and actually lost their concept of time. In the presence of a paler, cooler blue, they wanted to be quiet and still.

Because of its tendency to effect inertia, blue is rarely used as a dominant color. In ***Billy Elliot***, however, an intense blue is used to signal a cold determination of a father who tries to keep his exuberant son under his control. The son's defining color is yellow. The cold blue and the hot bright yellow in the Elliot kitchen set up a kind of visual warfare that mirrors the arc of the story.

Blue can have seemingly contradictory traits because it's the coldest color in the spectrum. The slightest change in that color, therefore, can completely alter how you respond to it. Perhaps blue, statistically, is everyone's favorite color because each person thinks of it in a different way. It is also why you need to make certain that the blue you choose will create the response you want. Don't just describe it. Test it on your "audience" and then decide.

Think About This:

Feeling blue isn't turquoise.

Powerless, Cerebral, and Warm Blues

Powerless Blues

Tootsie

1982. Dustin Hoffman, Jessica Lange, Dabney Coleman, Charles Durning. Directed by Sydney Pollack. Cinematography: Owen Roizman; Production Design: Peter S. Larkin.

THE RELUCTANT FEMINIST

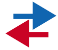
We all know the story, but look at it this way. ***Tootsie*** uses powerless blue in a way rarely seen on film. The color becomes an ironic undercurrent. In this case, it's the guy who is powerless. Michael Dorsey (Dustin Hoffman), an unemployed actor, can't get a job. Through incredible ingenuity, he transforms into Dorothy Michaels, snags a plum role on a soap, and becomes a huge star. Dorothy's on the cover of a national magazine in a red sequined dress, but Michael, who wears faded blue sweatshirts, is miserable because he's fallen in love with his co-star Julie (Jessica Lange) and can't let her know he's a guy. Without Dorothy, Michael's powerless economically. As Dorothy, he's powerless to put a move on Julie.

PURPLE: THE DEATH OF DOROTHY

We don't normally associate purple with comedies, but this comedy deals with transformation. As soap character Emily Kimberly (a.k.a. Dorothy Michaels) reveals her true nature as Edward Kimberly (a.k.a. Michael Dorsey), she wears a purple orchid.

It's the death of Dorothy. Michael has been trying to kill her off for a long time, and he did it when Dorothy was wearing a purple orchid. Michael is finally free to be "a better man than I ever was as a man, as a woman." He just has to "learn to do it without the dress." Chances are, the choice to have Dorothy wear purple for this scene was intuitive. But that is exactly the point. In our

explorations, purple often had an association with death and transformation. (See "Why This Title?" on page xxiii.)



The Wizard of Oz

See "Blue: Powerless Pinafores and Scary Monkeys" on page 6.

Sense and Sensibility

1995. Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, Alan Rickman, Hugh Grant. Directed by Ang Lee. Cinematography: Michael Coulter; Production Design: Luciana Arrighi.

OPPRESSED, REPRESSED, AND SINGLE

Underneath the rigid rules of social behavior in Ang Lee's interpretation of Jane Austen's novel lies a psychological world of abject powerlessness. The director very subtly allows us to feel that world—the world of the Dashwood women—by creating an environment dominated by blue. They wear blue, drink tea from blue cups, and are closed in by walls that are a faded Wedgewood. Even their weather is a pale gray-blue. The persistent presence of the color provides the emotional context for their plight and influences our sympathetic response to it.

Blue does what blue does best in this film. It subtly manipulates you. Look carefully at their surroundings. It's hiding there. Even when the women move to a new cottage, they can't escape blue. The walls and the staircases that appear to be a pale gray actually have a subtle blue underpainting. These women are intelligent, beautiful, and decent, but not empowered. Blue, unless it is bright and bold (think royal blue), is not a color that denotes power. If anything, our research has shown blue to inspire lethargy.

Elinor (Emma Thompson) often wears a dark gray-blue that reflects both her social position and her emotional state. This has got to be one of the least sensual colors in the spectrum. It is cold and it recedes into the background. Actually, this is the same color worn by Charlotte Gainsbourg as ***Jane Eyre*** in the 1996 Franco Zeffirelli version of the Bronte classic. It is the color of governesses and maiden ladies of modest means.

Jane Eyre was an orphan, so she lost all the way round. The three sisters from ***Sense and Sensibility*** are from a higher class,

Elinor wears a color that is one of the least sensual colors in the spectrum. It reflects both her social position and her emotional state.

but they too are subjected to profound restrictions. Their father has just died, and women were not allowed to inherit property from their fathers. Further, if they were from an elevated social class, they were not allowed to earn money either. Ergo: no dowry; ergo: no marriage prospects. These talented, intelligent, and attractive young women became prisoners both of their class and their sex. Existing on a meager allowance from the uncle and help from distant relatives, they saw their environment shrink to a tiny cottage and their happiness disappear and drift away.

Although they were victims of the kind of gossip that was social currency, custom demanded a polite behavior that did not overtly acknowledge their dilemma. The girls were entrapped in the required bows and curtsies by a society that was visually defined by the warmer colors seen in the scenes of the elite London parties. Their blue environment set them apart.

OUT WITH THE BLUE, IN WITH THE RED

When a warm color appears, as in the golden yellow of the sitting room of Mrs. Jennings' house in London, it opens up the

screen for expansive emotions to take place. But the real award for visually obliterating this repression goes to Alan Rickman's Colonel Brandon. On his wedding day as he exits the church, Kate Winslet on his arm, the saturated red of his coat visually explodes on the screen and signals that repression is over and passion is about to begin.

The Shawshank Redemption

1994. Tim Robbins, Morgan Freeman. Directed by Frank Darabont. Cinematography: Roger Deakins; Production Design: Terrence Marsh.

THE CYNICAL STORYTELLER AND THE RELUCTANT HERO

As a van arrives with the newest crop of inmates, the camera pans over the fortress-like building from above. We see a crowd of men below moving toward the van like ants in slow motion. This begins Shawshank Prison's welcoming ritual where inmates tease and threaten new arrivals. It is designed to intimidate and provide grist for gambling on which one of them will break down first. The prisoners disembark and Red (Morgan Freeman) bets on Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins), a banker who claims to be innocent in the killing of his wife and her lover. This marks the beginning of an enduring friendship between the two men, one of whom was wrong for the first time in more than thirty years. Andy didn't break down. In fact, Andy became the hero in a very quiet human revolution.

Red is the observer/narrator in this place, where the very air seems tinged with a pale blue-gray. From the moment of the van's arrival (the van, ironically, is white—the color of innocence; everybody in Shawshank, Red tells us, is "innocent"), the men are surrounded by this color. This is a film where color keeps us under its control in an almost invisible way.

You can feel the impenetrable thickness of the stone as the men file in under an archway and into a low-ceilinged gathering area. Light filters in from small barred windows high in the wall and backlights the men. Chained together in regular intervals, they cast long shadows across the stone floor, creating a pattern of bars formed by their own bodies. It is a brilliant way to visually begin a movie whose ultimate theme is redemption.

Throughout the film, the men struggle with the "prison" inside. Some win. Some don't.

The hope that Andy inspires becomes all the more poignant because it plays out in this blue-gray atmosphere.

Van Gogh could have painted this scene. The stone, the blue prison uniforms, and the gray-blue atmosphere are actually reminiscent of his painting *Prisoners Exercising* (*after Doré*), done in 1890. The lighting in this film is so artfully done that we are not aware of its effect on us. Because of this gray-blueness, there is an all-pervasive melancholy that underscores the story. Prison is a sad place, and the hope that Andy engenders in the men becomes all the more poignant because it plays out in this atmosphere.

When warmer light appears, it often supports acts of Andy's kindness. He creates a prison library, prepares tax returns for guards, barters for beers for the men, and, one day, locked in an office, he broadcasts an opera over the yard. The men stop what they're doing and listen transfixed. As the camera pans over them in the sunlight (with the exception of the library, most of the results of Andy's benevolence happen outdoors), we can actually see the humanity surface in their faces. Red says it best: "It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away. And for the briefest of moments, every last man at Shawshank felt free."

ROGER DEAKINS

The scenes on the roof were shot late in the day with sunlight—again for that sense of hope and to give a greater contrast with the rest of the film. In general we tried to shoot the exteriors with soft gray light, but there were exceptions, and sometimes we had no choice but to shoot in sunlight. That's the reality of such a shoot.

—Roger Deakins

Roger Deakins, Shawshank's Oscar-nominated cinematographer, explains his color choices:

> It was, I feel, a pretty obvious choice to go for the soft gray/blue palette for *Shawshank*. I wanted the audience to feel just that they were there and to experience the feeling that Tim's character, Andy, was feeling. That demands naturalism but also a little more than that. The feeling of the dark interior and the strength of the light from outside, which was being left behind, is naturalistic but heightened also. As you note, I did vary the colors a little in the library, for instance, and during the opera sequence when there was a moment of hope, but for the most part I wanted to convey a sense of the omnipotence of the place, which dwarfs the humanity of the individual. I also wanted a sense of timelessness—the feeling of one day blending into another without relief—monotony and claustrophobia.

Under the stewardship of the sadistic and greedy warden Norton, however, Shawshank is a place of cruelty beyond belief. Norton murders, cheats, lies, and threatens. He is the consummate bully. Because most of these actions take place in a cool gray-blue light, his cold, uncaring nature becomes even more pronounced. Bullying is an aggressive signal sent by red, not blue. Norton exhibits cruelty without passion. The audience has been surrounded by gray-blueness throughout the film, and our explorations have shown that blue can effect feelings of powerlessness. When we see horrible actions taking place in a blue atmosphere, we can identify with the helplessness of the victims. This is important. The gray-blue not only describes the prisoners' lives, it also psychologically puts us in a place where we can empathize with them. This layers our experience.

One day in the yard, Andy tells Red about Zijuatenejo, an unknown place on the Pacific coast of Mexico, and adds that Mexicans call the Pacific a "place with no memory." He says, "That's where I want to live for the rest of my life . . . a little hotel on a beach . . . fix up an old boat and take guests fishing." For Andy, it comes down to a simple choice. "Get busy living or get busy dying." When he stands up, there is blue sky behind him, as the sun angles over the yard.

Andy gives Red directions to a specific hayfield, stone wall, and an oak tree and tells him something is buried for him there. Red

promises he'll look for it if he ever gets out. Soon after, Andy accomplishes the most creative prison escape in the history of prison-break movies. (There will be no revelation of how he did it here.)

Red is finally paroled after forty years. He is so terribly ill-prepared and lonely, he even thinks about how he can break parole and go back to Shawshank. In one of the most affecting moments in the film, there is a shot that is pure Edward Hopper. Red sits, slouching in an armchair, hands on his knees. A cold light filters in from a curtained window, but he doesn't look out. His eyes are downcast, seeing only inward—into his own prison. He is cast in deep shadow. You feel the heaviness of his very soul.

Inevitably, Red remembers the promise he made to Andy and goes to the hayfield with a stone wall by an oak tree. Shot in the rich warm colors of autumn, the colors reflect a turning point for Red. The cold gray-blue is gone. As he finds the secret, the camera tilts upward toward him and we see fluffy clouds and blue sky. A letter says, "Hope is a good thing . . . I'm hoping this letter finds you and finds you well." There is no signature.

I think the best thing about Shawshank, *in terms of its color, is its consistency. The overall tone creates a sustained "mood" for the picture. When Red gains his freedom, since the audience has been subjected to the barrage of gray and brown for so long, the vibrancy of the green landscapes comes as a shock.*

—Roger Deakins

TURQUOISE: A COLOR WITH NO MEMORY

The camera moves over a wide-open expanse of warm turquoise blue. It is what the Mexicans call "a place with no memory."

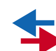
Rosemary's Baby

See "Pale Blue and Powerlessness" on page 69.

Cerebral Blues

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

See "Blue: An Unspoken Melancholy" on page 209.



Malcolm X

See "Blue: Powerless and Cerebral" on page 16.

Blow-Up

1966. David Hemmings, Vanessa Redgrave, Sarah Miles. Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Cinematography: Carlo di Palma; Art Direction: Assheton Gorton.

THE PASSIVE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE AIRPLANE PROPELLER

No matter what anyone tells you, this is not just a movie about swinging London in the sixties. It's about the inability to make choices and connections, between reality and illusion, between art and life, between people. It's about the inability to act. It's script just waiting for blue.

The film begins with a noisy crowd of young people in white-face racing around on a jeep, collecting money from passersby. It is a gray London morning and Thomas (David Hemmings), disheveled and unshaven, is just leaving a shelter for homeless men. A wrinkled paper bag of belongings in hand, he furtively looks around, runs to a black Rolls-Royce convertible, gets in, and drives away. Along the way he drives by two black nuns in white habits and gives the yelling white-faced kids money. Noisy mimes, an indigent who drives a Rolls-Royce, and black nuns in white habits give us clues to the film's recurring theme: things are sometimes the reverse of what they seem, or what we expect them to be. Especially in Antonioni movies.

Still in his clothes from the "doss house," Thomas, in a shirt that is a cross between blue and purple, walks into his studio and begins to work. Work for Thomas is photographing things that capture his interest, and obviously, from looking at his surroundings, pay very well. His subject is Verushka (in reality, a top international model at the time). Pale and mannequin-like, she looks spent and he is exhausted. But, as Thomas gets into what he sees through the camera, he becomes more and more excited, and the scene ends with a hysterical pseudo-sex scene. Trouble is, Thomas treats Verushka (or any other model, for that matter) the same as he treats shooting at the shelter. He's out for a "look." He's not whatsoever involved with his subjects as people.

Thomas's space is very cool—literally. It's done in white and blue-grays. He puts on a pale blue shirt, which is actually a small

blue and white gingham check similar to Dorothy's in ***The Wizard of Oz.*** It's the pale blue of inertia, which is very interesting because on the surface he's compulsive, kicking his heels together in the park or maniacally photographing Verushka. Hemmings has an indolence about him, and the pale blue captures that. He comes alive only through his camera. Outdoors, along with the blue shirt and white pants, Thomas wears a black jacket—an interesting combination since black and white together is often associated with facts, and indeed one of the things Thomas is is a photojournalist. But black and white is also associated with the nuns and the mimes, and this is, after all, an Antonioni movie in which meanings keep morphing into other meanings . . . and "facts" keep changing into other facts.

Because he "can't live without it," Thomas compulsively buys a large wooden airplane propeller from an antique shop that he may (or may not) buy. The unattached propeller tells us a lot about Thomas. A propeller's purpose is to drive forward. Unattached, its purpose becomes unclear. No wonder Thomas chooses it. That, and the pale blue shirt: indeed, the common denominator between wearing a pale blue shirt and buying an airplane propeller when you don't have an airplane is the key to Thomas's passive character. He's unconnected and his actions are often ambiguous. Participants in our investigations into the effects of blue often became lethargic. They even brought pillows with them for Blue Day. Blue is also the color that inspires the intellect. Thomas lives in the world of his mind.

In a park near the shop, Thomas sees a couple laughing and embracing in the distance and becomes fascinated with them. Without their seeing him, he photographs them. The woman (Vanessa Redgrave) suddenly sees him and desperately pleads with him to give her the film. He refuses. She comes to his studio to try to persuade him. Ignoring her plea, he immediately pulls down a roll of purple seamless paper behind her. "You've got it." He tells her. "Show me how you sit." One thing you can say about this guy is he's consistent. Everything he sees is fair game for his lens. If it has "the look," he wants it.

PURPLE: THE CLUE TO WHAT DOESN'T HAPPEN

The woman (Redgrave's character has no name) takes off her shirt. He tells her to put it back on, that he'll cut out the negatives she wants. (See the photo on page 195.) As he slides closed his

darkroom door, the color purple takes over the screen. Surrounded by this purple, she kisses him. He intentionally gives her the wrong negatives. They head for the bedroom. His doorbell rings. His propeller has arrived. She leaves. But before she goes, she intentionally gives him her wrong phone number. Choices made and not made . . . connections made and missed. Purple, the mystical color that signals non-substantiality, is also associated with ambivalence. Blue, because of its passive nature, is associated with ambivalence. Both colors play significant roles in this movie.

The woman's desperation fuels Thomas' interest in developing the photos. He begins to enlarge the images of the two lovers. Through the blow-up, he becomes aware that the woman is staring at something in the bushes off camera and eventually realizes he has photographed what might be a murder. In the yellow light of his darkroom, he becomes obsessed (see Obsessive Yellows on page 52) with blowing up the area of her stare. He pins up print after print of his blow-ups on his studio wall and discovers what may be a face and what is definitely a gun. There may also be, half-hidden, a body lying on the ground. Two giggling groupies with whom he has a roll in the purple paper interrupt his activity. This is an interesting use of the color. Our experiments showed purple to be mystical and not sexual. It's the color of the nonphysical. Remember the pseudo-sex scene with Verushka? It is also interesting that purple is the color of the sliding doors to his darkroom. It is only through his lens and in the darkroom that Thomas connects with the murder. When he does connect with it physically, it's too late.

Under the guise of a lot of activity, Thomas proves over and over he is essentially a passive being. When the reality card is played, he opts for his camera. No matter how obsessed he becomes with "blowing up" his accidental photos of a murder, the closer he gets, the less he sees. Even his action results in inaction. When finally he goes back to the park and does indeed discover a body, he goes to the house next door and stares voyeuristically at his neighbors making love. Thomas is a voyeur with or without his camera. He doesn't get involved. The neighbor (Sarah Miles) comes over and he tells her,

"I saw a man killed this morning."
"Who was he?"
"Someone."
"How did it happen?"

"I don't know. I didn't see."
"You didn't see?"
"No."
"Shouldn't you call the police?"
"That's the body."
Thomas, ignoring her call to action, shows her the blow-up.

At the film's beginning, Thomas drives past us, parallel to the strong bright energies of buildings and buses painted in the primary reds, yellows, and blues. He doesn't connect with them. He is detached, living in a world of shallow space—the world of the photograph.

His black blazer and white pants are like the "facts" of the murder he's trying so desperately to see, but can't see without his camera. Pale blue, the color of the shirt he wears throughout the film, is a color that effects introspection. Thomas is introspective to the point that his very introspection prevents him from achieving that which he is obsessed with finding out. By the time Thomas gets back to the park the next morning, the body is gone.

The last scene is a film classic. Thomas, the propeller buyer with nothing to propel, watches the raucous whiteface revelers play "mime tennis." Thomas' head joins the others, turning from court to court as the virtual ball is hit across the net. The imaginary ball goes out of bounds, and a mime points and looks pleadingly at Thomas to retrieve it and throw it back into play. To pick it up or not to pick it up becomes a major metaphor. When at last he makes his decision, some of the audience cheers. The others sigh. As Thomas watches the phantom match, his expression subtly alters from bemusement to something approaching profound sadness. The camera zooms high overhead. Thomas is alone with his camera.

Warm Blues

Working Girl

See "Popsicle Blue: Back to the Neighborhood" on page 10.

Billy Elliot

See "The Many Personalities of Blue" on page 48.

Chocolat

2000. Juliette Binoche, Judi Dench, Alfred Molina, Johnny Depp, Lena Olin. Directed by Lasse Hallstrom. Cinematography: Roger Pratt; Production Design: David Gropman.

RED: THE REBEL AND THE COUNT

It is a relentless North wind, cold blue and wet. Two forms in red cloaks, one like a miniature of the other, struggle against it. The screen itself becomes agitated with red's intense presence. In a conservative gray village, it is about to become an agent of change. The cloaks belong to Vianne (Juliette Binoche) and her daughter Anouk (Victoire Thivisol), who come to the village to transform an unused pastry shop into a *chocolaterie*. The problem is it's Lent and all the villagers are, or should be, fasting.

We begin to understand why Lasse Hallstrom introduces us to Vianne wearing red. With the exception of violence, although she may indirectly provoke it, Vianne embodies red. She's defiant and romantic, lusty and angry, and she wears red shoes. Hallstrom makes certain we notice this. It's a set-up for what comes later.

The insular provincial town is completely in the grips of a control-freak mayor, Comte de Reynaud (Alfred Molina), who is relentless in his attempt to eradicate any perceived threat to the religious and social order he has designed for its inhabitants. Le Comte perceives his tiny domain in black and white. (He also wears black and white through most of the movie.) Things are either his way or they are against the laws of God. When the wind that announces the arrival of Vianne blows open the doors of the church and lets in the daylight, Le Comte, who has the somber presence of an undertaker, marches authoritatively to the back and closes the doors to the outside.

TURQUOISE: THE EMOTIONAL GULF STREAM

Vianne transforms the dilapidated patisserie into an island of humanism in this ocean of cobblestone grayness. With a grand sweep of a brush full of paint the warm color of the Mayan Caribbean, she activates something that goes far beyond the confines of the walls of the little shop. This blue is warmed with green and its warmth makes it appear to come forward. (In our explo-

Turquoise insinuates itself into the lives of the villagers like an emotional gulf stream.

rations of the color blue, the students often specifically chose blue-green. Initially, the results were surprising. Instead of becoming passive as they did with pale blues, they became extremely talkative and sociable.) Hallstrom's exotic turquoise color insinuates itself into the lives of the villagers like an emotional gulf stream. Vianne becomes a purveyor of chocolate made from a two-thousand-year-old recipe laced with exotic ingredients, particularly chili. Actually, Vianne is dispensing ancient Mayan remedies that awaken hidden yearnings, particularly of the heart.

As Vianne's bright and positive influence spreads throughout the village, the turquoise color of the *chocolaterie* appears more and more on the screen. (Actually, the walls of the old patisserie were a faded blue-green, so, like the Huguenots, turquoise was part of the town's history.) As the villagers start to respond to her compassionate nature, they begin to wear it. Even the curmudgeon Armande (Judi Dench) wears it. She is so enamored with Vianne's chili-laced hot chocolate that she asks, "Sure you didn't put booze in there?" As the story develops and Vianne begins to really create

value in this little place, an interesting thing begins to happen. The reds she wears begin to deepen to the color of her chili-chocolate, and villagers begin to wear the color of the Caribbean.

Josephine (Lena Olin), reduced to a hopeless, frazzled craziness by a constricting marriage to the boorish café owner, steals, almost to prove she's alive. Appropriate for a thief, she wears neutral colors that blend into the background. As she and Vianne become friends, however, her wardrobe gradually mirrors her independence, and she emerges from the background and wears the color that is synonymous with the shop. Josephine looks vibrant in Mayan turquoise. When her husband, Serge (a great name, given his suit plays an important role in this key scene), ostensibly comes to apologize, each of them wears a blue that is a direct translation of who they are. His is ice cold and uninviting. Hers is warm and expansive.

Sensing a threat to his control, Le Comte imperiously dismisses Vianne (who is a non-Catholic single parent) as an immoral influence. He tells her, "Let me try to put this into perspective for you. The first Comte de Reynaud expelled all the radical Huguenots from this village. You and your truffles present a far lesser challenge." Big Mistake. When he takes on the lady in the red shoes, he unwittingly takes on something long lying in wait in the village. It has to do with Vianne's chocolate and everything her particular "brand" of chocolate represents. Le Comte's methods become more devious. He stops at the beauty shop and fakes concern over Vianne's poor "illegitimate child." Anouk comes home crying and shouts, "Why can't you wear black shoes like other mothers?"

One day a band of gypsies sails up the river and docks near the village. Le Comte sees it is as an opportunity to get rid of both them and Vianne. He organizes a "Boycott Immorality" campaign, which, of course, throws Vianne and Roux (Johnny Depp), the gypsies', leader, into an alliance. This is a match made in rebel heaven. When Vianne first sees Roux, the scene is shot through the flames of a campfire. (Earlier in a flashback, we saw Vianne's Mayan mother introduce her French father to chili-laced chocolate through a campfire.) Although sparks do indeed fly between these two free spirits, the seeds of bigotry so insidiously cultivated by Le Comte result in a conflagration that becomes a profound agent of change in the lives of the villagers.

Roux reluctantly leaves. Vianne, emotionally undone, decides she and Anouk must go with the North wind that blew them into

the village earlier. When they once more put on their cloaks, it is as if we have gone visually backwards. The screen is again charged with red's agitating energy. But as soon as Vianne opens the door to the kitchen, her pain is visually drowned out by what she sees. It is her influence become manifest.

A room full of villagers wearing turquoise is in a flurry. Bowls are being stirred . . . almonds are being chopped . . . molds are being poured. There is a coming together of new lovers and old enemies. At the Chocolate Festival that afternoon, even Le Comte has cast off his tie and buttoned-up vest and opted for an open shirt and ascot. He sees Vianne across the town square, takes a bite of mousse, and smiles.

In the end it is the South wind, warm like the color of turquoise, which sails up the river and brings Roux back to the village. As they greet each other, Vianne wears burgundy and Roux, purple—two colors whose taste, our experiments revealed, is associated with chocolate.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Hallstrom, as in ***The Shipping News*** and ***What's Eating Gilbert Grape***, once more uses the elements as agents of change. Vianne is brought to the village by wind; Roux, by water. They are tested by fire. Inevitably, they are brought together by chocolate, grown in, and the color of, the earth.

Melancholy, Cold, and Passive Blues

Melancholy Blues

The Shipping News

2001. Kevin Spacey, Judi Dench, Julianne Moore, Cate Blanchett. Directed by Lasse Hallstrom. Cinematography: Oliver Stapleton; Production Design: David Gropman.

FLUTES, CABLES, AND KNOTTED ROPES

In my seminars in Visual Storytelling, we spend a good amount of time studying opening sequences and how they often give clues and establish themes in regard to both character and story. The opening sequence of ***The Shipping News*** not only gives us a visceral sense of place but establishes visual metaphors for history and family as well.

A HERITAGE OF FLUTES, DRUMS, AND KNOTS

Accompanied by tribal cadences of Celtic flutes and drums, in extreme close-up, hands knot strands of weathered ropes. Snow, the kind that stings and sticks to everything, blows relentlessly. Intercut with this are the title and credits, all on a ground of the palest of blues. We cut to a young boy, a nonswimmer, pushed by his father into brownish water. The boy does nothing. He simply sinks. "It was the first of many failures," Quoyle's voiceover says. Nearly drowning in this water, the boy morphs into Kevin Spacey, as the adult Quoyle. This begins our understanding of his mumbled litany throughout the film, "I'm not a water person."

THE TRANSFORMATION

The first time we see Quoyle head-on is through the windshield of his car. Ironically, a heavy blue-gray rain falls monotonously, accompanied by the steady "thud-swooish-thud" of the windshield

wipers. The weakness of the blue visually defines his passivity. (Our studies have shown this to be the blue that inspires inactivity.) Even his puffy face has a dazed expression of perpetual surprise over each breath he takes. This is a perfect introduction to Quoyle. He often wears a dark blue that affects a feeling of melancholy, and in the film it rarely leaves his side. At his job as an ink man for the *Poughkeepsie News*, he sits, dozing, earplugs in, cut off from life, as presses for the local gazette speed print the news of the day. Quoyle is a man perpetually out of place.

Due to sudden deaths in his family, Quoyle finds himself and his daughter Bunny collected by his Aunt Agnis Hamm (Judi Dench) and displaced to his family home on the coast of Newfoundland. As the steel blue hull of a boat cuts through what might be one of the coldest seas (other than ***Titanic***) in the history of film, we see a barren black craggy rock, not softened by a dusting of snow. This is a cold and barren place, one that breeds a tenacious and superstitious breed of inhabitants. Agnis says, "The people who came here, came by accident. Those people who stayed, learned that strange things can happen—omens, restless spirits . . . magic." All of these will manifest themselves before the end of the movie.

The gray-blue station wagon they drive is at home in this place. The gray-blue sky gives a heaviness to the very air. Even the dilapidated family house seems to be hunched over and pulled inward against the elements. Surrounded by howling winds, it sits alone and isolated, grounded by cables that creak and groan in some kind of a remembered ancestral struggle to pull free. Blue rain falls. Everything is cold. Bunny observes, "The house is sad. We should let it loose." Bunny is what the Newfoundlanders call "sensitive." She "knows" things. One day, out of the blue, she says, "They dragged it here."

A MELANCHOLY PLACE

Hallstrom's Newfoundland is a melancholy place, and he shoots it permeated with its natural blue palette. The question is: what does this do to this already dismal mix? Think about this: After sitting for twenty minutes in this wet and heavy blueness, *your* responses will slow down. (See page 82.) Unconsciously you can identify with Quoyle on a visceral level. When the atmosphere begins to visually warm up, you feel that on a nonverbal level as well. These visceral responses burrow into your memory. The film

may not be your cup of tea, but you'll remember it because you feel the cold and the wetness physically, and it's the pervasive blue that effects your response.

Quoyle is told that a long time ago, on a nearby island, the old Quoyles "couldn't make a go of it," and so they lashed the house to logs and dragged it across the ice clear to the mainland. Later, he learns that they were, in fact, pirates who guided ships aground so they could attack and plunder them. He also learns that they did something horrible and were consequently banished.

Agnis, Quoyle, and Bunny fix up the house and actually transform the kitchen into a bright (as bright as possible in this godforsaken place) blue-green and white room. The atmosphere begins very gradually to become warmer. One day, Quoyle finds a knotted string by the front door. Bunny tells him that "the ghost brought it."

Quoyle is (by accident, as it were), hired as a reporter for the local paper. He begins to practice writing headlines and actually becomes a fair journalist. He also buys a boat that his colleagues say would "sink in a bathtub." Quoyle indeed capsizes and sinks. A turning point in the film is captured in a shot that shows Quoyle, completely isolated, clinging to a floating Coleman cooler, completely surrounded by gray-blue water.

Quoyle begins to make friends, among them Wavey Prowse (Julianne Moore), an attractive young widow with a sweet young son, Herry, rendered mentally challenged by an accident at birth. As he does, the atmosphere continues to lighten up, literally. A little sunlight begins to shine through and warmer colors appear. Wavey wears a warm blue-green. So does Bunny.

One night, Quoyle sees a white-haired man and a white dog run from the house, and he follows them to a hut on the beach. The old man tells him that he tied magic in the knots in the rope to protect him from the house. "No good ever come from that place. Never," he continues. "Tell Agnis hello from cousin Nolan. . . . Do you know why Agnis come back? To show she ain't afraid of the place no more."

But places carry memories even when moved, and Nolan's tiny magic knots were not tied to hold the house in place. Rather, they had the power to set the Quoyles free. There are also the larger knots we saw in the opening sequence—knots that metaphorically bind people together. Even those people who are out of place. Even a man who is not a water person who lives on an island.

THE OPEN SPACE

Another night, in a violent windstorm accompanied once more by the sound of ancient tribal drums, the cables snap, the shingles rip off, the doors and windows blow out, and the very foundation cracks. The house of horrible secrets disappears from the scene. But it disappears horizontally, leaving the screen blank. It is as if something was somehow wiped clean. Agnis says, "Maybe someday we'll build a summer house out here." "Do they have summer here?" Bunny asks. In a bright warm blue jacket, she runs happily along the crest of the cliff.

In the end, Quoyle, the journalist, says, "If a piece of knotted string can unleash the wind . . . then I believe a broken man can heal." In the end, it is almost sunny.

About Schmidt

2002. Jack Nicholson, Kathy Bates, Hope Davis. Directed by Alexander Payne. Cinematography: James Glennon; Production Design: Jane Ann Stewart.

A DEFINING SPACE

Warren Schmidt sits alone in his office, waiting. In a few seconds, his round blue wall clock will reach five o'clock for the final time. He will get up, turn out the light, and close the door, thus ending the final chapter of his life as Assistant Vice President and Actuary of the Woodmen of the World Insurance Company. (See the Blue Home Page photo on page 81.)

Some people have defining moments. Schmidt has a defining space. The design of this sequence visually reveals who this man is, and, quite literally, what he's about. All forty years of his professional life are stored in those few neatly stacked cartons. Going by the book, he waits, wedged between his cleared desk and the blank wall. Not a curious man, he sits with his back to the view of the gray Omaha skyline. A pale blue permeates his atmosphere. Indeed, blue's melancholy energy is the controlling psychological influence in this character's life. Like the proverbial rain cloud, pale blue seems to follow Schmidt wherever he goes. The color never leaves his side. Even in his sleep, he wears blue pajamas and lies on blue sheets.

In a few weeks, a warm-hearted woman in a Winnebago will tell him that he is a sad, sad man.

The Sixth Sense

See "Blue: The Turning Point" on page 21.

Snow Falling on Cedars

1999. Ethan Hawke, Youki Kudoh, Rick Yune, Max von Sydow. Directed by Scott Hicks. Cinematography: Robert Richardson; Production Design: Jeannine Oppewall.

THE UNSEEN BOUNDARY

One of the themes of this story is the making, blurring, and breaking down of boundaries. It is World War II and we have Japanese Americans who fight Germans, Americans who fight Japanese and Germans, and German-American landowners who renege on agreements made with Japanese Americans. And then we have a love between a Japanese girl, Hatsue (Youki Kudoh), and an American boy, Ishmael (Ethan Hawke), who, because of these boundaries and blurrings, suffer and are separated.

If ever there was a movie with a sense of place, this is it. The blinding snow from the largest storm in the Puget Sound's history becomes a metaphor for the blurring not only of boundaries but of the truth itself. This is one of the coldest snows in the history of cinema. The film is deliberately underexposed so that all the colors appear to be heavier. It is dark and ominous and it covers the green cedar forest where the boy and girl had met and found refuge in their childhood. The atmosphere is gray-blue. It is a coldhearted blue that permeates the very pores of this island world.

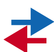
To show a color and then take it away has a profound emotional effect on an audience. It is precisely that we've seen this greenness intimately in close-up that we feel its loss viscerally. It's as if we have smelled the mossy wetness. We have been in the secret hiding place of the young Hatsue and Ishmael. We have seen the tall, thin trees rise up from velvety beds of moss and delicate ferns. We have seen rivulets of water roll down the paths in the bark. This is the place where the boy and girl had felt safe. It is place of both sen-

suality and innocence. Now it has disappeared under a cold and heavy grayness. If we had not seen and experienced this greenness, we would not feel the profound sense of loss of the freshness and innocence of youth. The snow becomes a metaphor for what the townspeople choose to ignore—the ability to not see the boundaries.

RED: THE UNDERCURRENT

Because it is the only hot color in this leaden blue-gray film, red becomes the visual magnet. It is the anomaly and the central core at the same time. Actually, it is red's presence that becomes the subject around which everything in the story revolves. Indeed, without what red symbolizes in this movie, there would be no story. Post-WWII anti-Japanese sentiment is alive and well and hardly hidden in this small island. Either a murder or an accident has taken place. This psychological framework surrounds what is basically a story of love and loss, forgiveness and redemption. One man is on trial for murder. Another has the power to free him. They both are in love with the same woman. She, unwittingly, is the character who is defined by red. Indeed, red *is* Hatsue. She is a strawberry festival, bright red lipstick, and even the rising sun. She unwittingly embodies red's power, anxiety, and lust. The heightened red of her mouth, shown in close-up repeatedly, is the visual translation of the unspoken passion and remembered lust that propel the film. It becomes the motivating energy that somehow exists in this heavy, wet blueness. Red's supporting players visually are the neutrals and cold colors of a Puget Sound winter. They allow us to feel the reds so strongly. They allow us to feel what Ishmael feels. In the long run, it is, after all, his story. When he and Hatsue finally embrace, it is an embrace of not just her forgiveness. The streetlights illuminate the falling snow as he walks away alone into the blueness of the night. The red is gone. Perhaps Ishmael has finally forgiven himself.

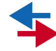
Originally, this film's reviews suffered by comparison to Guterson's novel. See it now and judge for yourself. It's a visual gem. And besides, it's one of Max von Sydow's finest hours.



Romeo + Juliet

See "Blue: The Capulet Color" on page 31.

American Beauty



See "Passive Blues" on page 27.

The Cider House Rules

1999. Tobey Maguire, Charlize Theron, Michael Caine. Directed by Lasse Hallstrom. Director of Photography Cinematography; Production Designer: David Gropman.

DOING NOTHING

Sure there are those Northeastern autumnal warm reds. Barn reds, brick reds, and (of course), apple reds all read "home" in this beautifully orchestrated sense of place. But look more carefully for the blues. They're almost hidden and definitely subtle and they're what lock you in emotionally to what's really going on. Check out both the interiors and the exteriors. You'll find them. Those blues echo an underlying theme that is brilliantly articulated by the normally verbally spare Homer (Tobey Maguire). Never has a more blue sentence been uttered in cinema than when Homer says, "To do nothing is a great idea. Maybe if I just wait and see long enough I won't have to do anything . . . or decide anything. . . . Maybe if I'm lucky enough, someone else will decide and choose and do things for me." Essentially it is one of the major themes of the movie: what happens will happen if we just wait and see; and blue, almost subliminally, provides its psychological underpinning.

If you look really carefully, you'll see a blue underpainting on the interior walls of the orphanage. It's enough to give a cool, rather than cold, ambience, and it really works as a foil to the love and affection found among the inhabitants. But there is always the undercurrent of being abandoned, and it's the blue that effects that subliminally. The light that comes in the windows at night is blue. The light that washes over Candy (Charlize Theron) and Homer, as they sit in front of a blank drive-in screen, is blue. This scene deserves to be cited as one of the most exceptional visual metaphors of the movie. Here sit two people. Their relationship, which was always unformed, is being formed by impersonal forces of an unseen war. They sit in front of a blank movie screen, whose purpose is to reflect specific images of a narrative story. But this

screen has nothing but blue shadows, which resemble the wind-blown surface of the water, where the two sat on the rain-soaked dock and Homer uttered his blue sentence. As they sit, Homer says, "At least there's no more waiting and seeing." It is a perfect bookend to the blueness—to the melancholic nothingness on the movie screen.

RED: APPLES AND ORPHANS

Hallstrom has a special gift with red. He understands its many personalities and uses them to visually layer his stories. In the opening sequence of ***Chocolat***, against a pale blue-gray wind, he uses bright red as a defiant presence. In the opening scene of ***The Cider House Rules***, as the train pulls away and reveals the weathered deep red station house, we have a warm sense of place right away.

When the camera pans up to St. Cloud's Orphanage on the hill above, we see it's another aged red building. It looks like it simply belongs there, as if it grew many years ago on the hilltop. We know this is an environment that's been aged—that's been there awhile—a place that's seasoned and has traditions. They may not be the traditions that automatically come to mind, but they are traditions nevertheless—traditions with a heart and a wise soul. The color is comfortable, worn, deep, and warm, like the cover of a favorite Dickens novel, the kind favored by Dr. Larch (Michael Caine) and Homer Wells.

New England winters are harsh, like the world outside. It's as if the orphanage chose this remote spot to protect itself from the "Rules" of the world at large. The warm, deep red belongs there like apples in an orchard. So does Homer. We, like Homer, respond to this red and know these things intuitively because of these signals it sends. This red is not a flashy red. It is mature, and in this context, it is safe.

When Homer leaves St. Cloud's to make his way in the world outside, he leaves in a convertible (how's that for a metaphor?) that has a deep red interior. He goes to work in "the apple business." As Homer finds his way in the outside world, this protective color remains near him. The apples he picks are deep red. Candy often wears sweaters of deep apple red. Although he tries to hide it, Homer's mentor at St. Cloud's, Dr. Larch, loves the boy like a father and misses him terribly. A lampshade in his office glows red. Subliminally, when we see it, we, like Homer, feel the warmth of home.

In the end, after learning the "Rules" of the outside world, Homer returns to St. Cloud's. As he travels home, the interior of the train is a deep red. When he arrives, once more we see the deep red of the train station and the orphanage on the hill. That simple visual bookend lets us feel what Homer feels. Throughout the film, deep red has been a recognition, a reference to "Home." It's no accident his name is Homer.

Orange
The Sweet and Sour Color

4

The colors of mangoes and curries welcome the guests . . . and the rains.

range manifests its influence in a different way from the other colors. While red says "I'm here!," yellow is exuberant, and blue is laid-back, our research revealed that orange is generically "nice". Actually, of all our investigations, opaque orange was the most upbeat and least dramatic of the colors. There were no flare-ups, no surprises. There were no in-depth insights at the critiques. The color simply supported a warm and welcoming congeniality. (Real estate agents suggest planting orange marigolds in the front yard in order to sell a house faster.) Orange, rarely absent in Gregory Nava's ***My Family/Mi Familia***, for example, becomes the visual translation of the emotional glue that holds the generations together (See page 118).

As light, however, orange has a double-edged quality. How we feel at sunset is not just a romanticized cliché. Something actually happens to us physically when we watch the intense brightness of the near-white sun transform itself into a glowing rich orange in the sky. Glowing orange light (and its associations with the sun) can take us on a visceral ride that warms and expands our emotional field.

There are other kinds of orange skies, however, that come at a time of day when the sun is higher in the sky. They are the skies of ***Blade Runner*** and ***Gattaca***. Their light signals air poisoned by pollutants. The sky on page 114 is an example of an atmosphere not created for a film. It was taken at 1:00 p.m. during the Los Angeles fires of 2003.

Orange light in an interior, on the other hand, can read as romantic. Annie Savoy (Susan Sarandon) throws orange scarves over the lamps in her bedroom to create a romantic atmosphere in ***Bull Durham***.

Orange is also a color that celebrates the working class. Think of how often we see it in inexpensive restaurants and movie motels. Watch for how many versions of orange you'll find in ***Thelma & Louise*** (see page 129). Variations of orange even manifest in the rich terra-cotta colors of the earth along their route through the American Southwest.

Although earth colors are not spectrum colors, they are included here because they have a familial relationship with orange. Terra-cottas, siennas, ochres, and umbers have a kind of primal influence in how we

react to them. We respond positively to the colors of the earth. We feel familiar with Clint Eastwood's tiny adobe house in ***Unforgiven***, for example. This is a place where mud is a daily part of living. It is as if this home grew out of the ground on which it sits, and Eastwood takes time to idle on the adobe walls so they register in our senses. Look carefully inside and you can see how the house tells the history of the man (see page 153).

Versatile orange can also read as exotic. Think of the luxuriant silks of both ***Monsoon Wedding*** and ***Bend It Like Beckham***. Actually, Alfonso Cuaron used lush saffron and oranges brilliantly in ***A Little Princess*** to define the young heroine and contrast her character with that of the muddy greens worn by the headmistress of a repressive school for girls.

The film ***Elizabeth*** offers an opportunity to see the color as a character arc: if you fast-forward through the film, you will visually be able to follow orange's role in the queen's rise to power. From the first time you see her as an adolescent to her becoming one of the most powerful monarchs in history, watch for the orange that defines her to evolve from sherbet to blood (see page 123).

After more than twenty years of color investigations, my students and I have concluded that we do not expect orange to stimulate analytical activity. If Thelma and Louise had only known . . .

Think About This:

Orange in an orange is healthy.
Orange in an afternoon sky is not.*

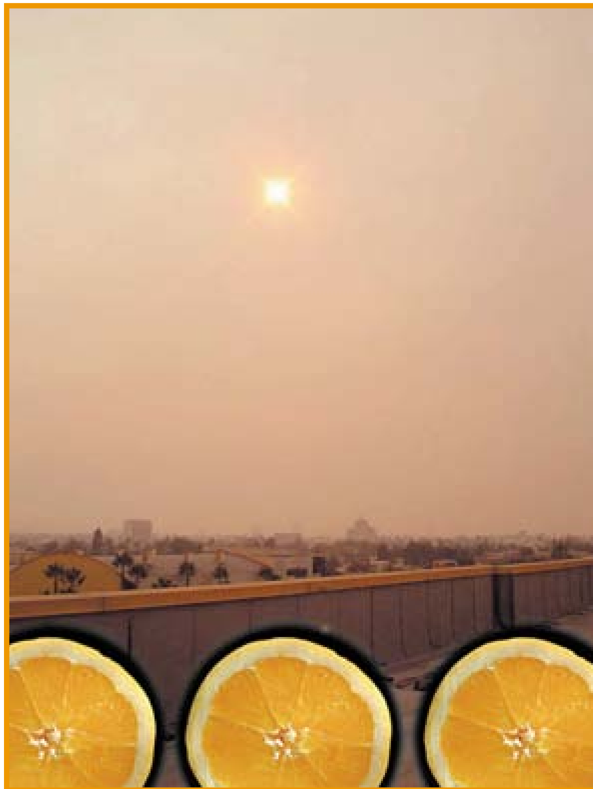


*Photo taken mid-afternoon during Los Angeles Fires, October, 2003.

Warm, Naïve, and Romantic Oranges

Warm Oranges

The Godfather

1972. Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, James Caan, Robert Duvall, John Cazale, Diane Keaton. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Cinematography: Gordon Willis; Production Design: Dean Tavoularis.

A DICHOTOMY

Visceral control over an audience doesn't get better than in the opening sequence of ***The Godfather***. There is a mystical quality to orange/amber light, and we are under its spell from the first moment we see the color illuminating the heavy velvet blackness in the Don's study. The look is ominous, but it is deep and rich and the almost religious illumination makes it all the more intimidating—and, perhaps, inviting. We are in the presence of a malevolent but romantic power. The color concept itself ironically mirrors the romantic fascination we have with the workings of the underworld, and with this movie.

The color of amber is a cross between yellow and orange. Used in a story like ***Don Juan de Marco*** or ***Il Postino***, in which dark colors are not dominant, amber light is quintessentially romantic. In combination with the dark, dark shadows of the Coreleone family, we perceive it as foreboding. Orange and black have deep associations with the dark underbelly of Halloween.

Connie's wedding is a pastel extravaganza, and to have it just outside the walls of the Don's dark study is a stroke of manipulative brilliance. We desperately want to keep this illusion that everything *va bene* in this family. We like them. If the Sinatra-like character Johnny Fontaine (in this context) sings at this orange

sherbet confection, then what could be so bad? Pastel orange can, after all, be the color of child-like innocence. The bloodied black head of a murdered racehorse hasn't appeared yet.

There is a weight to the warm ambers and velvety blacks of the Don's study. Serious business is conducted within these walls. The pale sherbet color outside is a lightweight color: not mature, not serious, and not powerful. Like Connie. (We have to wait for ***The Godfather, Part III*** to see her scary, powerful, red and black side surface.) Even the reds in this film have an orange cast, which makes us respond to them more intensely. Luca Brasi is murdered with an intense red orange wall behind him. As Michael sits in the Italian restaurant waiting to blow away Sollozzo and Captain McCluskey, a red-orange neon sign vibrates behind him. When we first meet sophisticated Kay at the wedding and later when Michael asks her to marry him, she dresses in a red-orange. The closer orange is to red, our experiments repeatedly showed, the more powerful our reaction is to the color.

Try this: screen the opening sequence with the sound off. Let yourself visually drift between the pale peach satins of the outdoor wedding celebration and the interior amber and velvet darkness of the Don's study and get in touch with how you feel physically and emotionally. See for yourself whether you're being viscerally "controlled."

The color flow in this film is exquisite. Never has a church been as dark for a baptism as in the baptism/slaughter sequence. As Michael, his godfather, renounces Satan for his newborn nephew, we are taken back and forth between the warm amber-lit ritual of the church and the cold blue grayness of the assassinations. It is important to see how these color contrasts are layering what is happening in the story. Watch this sequence again and *feel* how these colors are affecting you.

Ultimately we are taken back to colors of the Don's office. Kay, no longer in strong warm reds, is dressed in a powerless beige. As she looks toward his office, her back to the window, she sees the door to Michael's darkness shut in front of her.

My Family (Mi Familia)

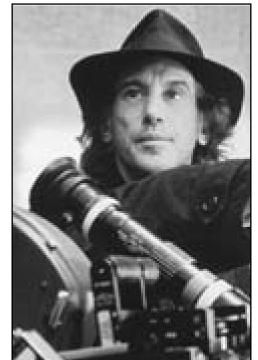
1995. Jimmy Smits, Edward James Olmos, Esai Morales, Jenny Gago, Eduardo Lopez Rojas. Directed by Gregory Nava. Cinematography: Edward Lachman; Production Design: Barry Robison.

THE TINY HOUSE AND THE IMPOSING BRIDGE

The title, ***My Family***, appears over an urban river. The camera pans over a large bridge and stops at a tiny house nestled beneath it. An orange glow colors the entire opening sequence. This is not just establishing a sense of place for the film. These are powerful visual metaphors for bloodline connections made (or missed), and for the history of the Sanchez family itself. This is their memoir, told by Paco (Edward James Olmos), who chronicles four generations of this extraordinarily warm and loving group of individuals who comprise a unit that embraces life with unshakable belief in (and tolerance for) each other. Orange is never far from them whenever they are together.

It all begins in the twenties. Jose, after a year's journey on foot from Michuacan, arrives at a tiny one-room plank and adobe house owned by his only relative, "El Californio." When the house was built, we are told, the land was still Mexico, and the plot still preserves the natural rhythms of the earth, where traditions of the ancestors still run deep, like the river. At the back of the house is a tiny cornfield where the old corn is broken up and put back into the earth to feed the new. This is the belief system of the Sanchez family. They live in this house of the earth and keep the traditions of the earth, buttressed by a religion of the earth under the strange, sometimes dark, and often very funny guise of Mexican Catholicism.

The house is nestled under an enormous steel and concrete bridge, which at once dwarfs and protects it. From a distance, it becomes the literal bridge between two very different worlds: the world of the Mexican laborers who travel westward to garden and care for the families in Los Angeles, and those who rarely, if ever, travel to East L.A., the barrio whose customs and colors are a world apart. The traffic, as Paco observes, is "one way." Shot in close-up, the bridge becomes a series of dark arches reminiscent of Gothic vaults. Under these concrete girders, we will discover, a mystical bird will sit waiting and a young virile man will be murdered.



EDWARD LACHMAN

The decision to shoot the opening sequence in that orange light is partly because it was the L.A. smog. But the film also reflects what you said so clearly about the warmth of the family—the Mexican tradition. I looked at the great Mexican muralists—Jose Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera—because they were representing the dignity and social struggle of the working class, and that's what we were also trying to approach. Gregory Nava did a very interesting thing. He had a Latina artist actually paint some of the scenes from the script so it allowed me to approach the film more like a painting. The colors in the house were joyful, as you said. It was very important to show that even though they were poor, they had a rich life, and those colors not only represented their joy but also their hope.

—Edward Lachman

And so begin the metaphors central to the story: the river, the tiny house, and the imposing bridge. They will all evolve and expand their meaning as three generations are born, grow, love, lose, and die.

THE EMOTIONAL HEARTBEAT

Color becomes the emotional heartbeat of this irresistible memoir. It begins and ends bathed in orange light. Like the family it defines, the orange is warm and welcoming. "In our family, the difference between a family emergency and a family party wasn't that big," Paco writes. Follow the look of the house and you'll see the evolving emotional journeys of the Sanchez's as their conceptions of their world shatter and reform almost daily. Our narrator continues, "The house just grew and grew with the family and the rooms weren't planned much more than the kids were." El Californio is buried along with the corn in the back. The nanny and the gardener wed and create a new household and a growing family. The earth tones begin to take on a homey warmth, and as the family grows, the colors in the interior exude a joyful fantasy-like quality: reds, oranges, yellows, magentas, and turquoise. The house becomes a visual fiesta. And the children grow: a writer, a nun, a restaurant owner, a *pachuco*, a lawyer, and one whose childhood trauma fills him with rage; and it was he who, according to Paco, was the heart of the family.

THE OUTSTANDING DEBT

Jimmy's trauma sprang from his witnessing the payment of a debt, a debt owed to a spirit of a river in Mexico many years before. During the Depression and pregnant with Chucho, Maria was rounded up, along with hundreds of other legal Mexicans, and deported back to Mexico. In her obsession with returning to Los Angeles and Jose, she unknowingly made a bargain with a raging river spirit who was "evil and powerful," who "wanted her baby," and who took the form of a white owl.

The first time we see the white owl, it is in the daytime, an unnatural time for nocturnal creatures. It sits near a rope bridge that cannot withstand the furies of the water that Maria and her baby Chucho must cross. They are swept away but spared, owing a profound debt to be paid back on a future night under another bridge—the bridge that shelters the little house. The white owl will come to collect his due in the cold blue light of a sequence that is one of the most powerful of the movie.

Chucho (Esai Morales) for whom the owl waited, became one of the baddest *pachucos* on the whole Eastside. Like a Sonny Coreleone of the barrio (there is an homage to Sonny in a sequence in a parking lot for a wedding), he had a short fuse. He wheeled and dealed, drove a bright red car, and taught the neighborhood kids to mambo. And Jimmy, the youngest, adored him.

A POLITICAL UNDERCURRENT

During a macho gang scuffle, Chucho is mistakenly accused of a murder. As the cops single-mindedly begin to hunt him down in the cold blue light of the night, he hides under the cover of the protective shadows of the bridge. Intercut with this, the family, watching television in their shrimp-colored living room, laugh at Lucy and Desi's shenanigans, and the cold blue outside becomes even colder as the hunt intensifies. It is an emotional roller-coaster ride that allows us to identify with the character of Jimmy. It is ten-year-old Jimmy, who had innocently run after a baseball, who comes upon Chucho by accident. He stares at his brother like a deer in the headlights and alone witnesses a police bullet splatter blood from his head.

How the filmmakers design the underpinnings for this climatic scene is visually and psychologically brilliant. As the search for Chucho intensifies, as if calling him, the rhythms of indigenous Mexican flutes begin. The atmosphere becomes a steely cold blue. From an unknown source, shafts of white light beam down, illuminating Chucho's red shirt. It becomes an iconic Christian/pagan fusion with Chucho as martyr. (Chucho's given name is Jesus.) The white owl appears, as if summoning him. Chucho stares directly at him. The owl hoots and flies away. Alerted by the sound, a cop takes aim and shoots. Under the arches of the concrete bridge, a red police light illuminates the cold blue light of the night. The white owl has gone. We are left with a memory of red, white, and blue.

The bridge is a symbol for what connects the two worlds of East L.A. and Los Angeles, but it also had an architectural design that was oppressive. I tried to use the red and the green to represent the Mexican flag, but when we got into the 80s, I went more with the red, white, and blue to indicate they have lost their Mexican heritage or tradition and now they have become more a part of what the American idiom is.

—Edward Lachman

Paco continues: "Everyone said the police killed Chucho, but my mother never believed that. She knew Chucho was meant to die at the river. Chucho's whole life had been on borrowed time. But you cannot cheat fate forever. The spirit of the river had come back to claim what was rightfully his." Chucho's body is wheeled away on a blue gurney, his red shirt partially covered by a white sheet. Jimmy is left with an anger that will define much of his adult life. While Chucho's anger was always obvious, Jimmy's was always just beneath the surface and it ripped him apart.

BLUE: A CONTRARY DYNAMIC

The film cuts to twenty years later. In a blue light of a cold interior, we see a tall, lanky man with attitude walk down a prison corridor. Jimmy, now played by Jimmy Smits, was in for armed robbery, but even seen from the sunny outside of the house, he's shot sitting, looking out through bars on the windows. It is Jimmy who Paco tells us ". . . carried a lot of s*** for the rest of us . . . hate, rage, injustice. If it wasn't for him, we couldn't go on and do all the things we did . . . writing, politics . . . law. . . .

Jimmy and Isabel aren't able to show their emotions, so even though there is this passion between them, they are caught in this coolness that they are trying to hide behind. So again, in this way you can use color in an emotional and a psychological context, rather than color used as a purely pictorial element.

—Edward Lachman

Through a series of complex, often funny incidents, Jimmy meets Isabel (Elpidia Carrillo), a Salvadorian political refugee who becomes his wife. She, too, has seen her family gunned down by soldiers; it is through her Jimmy begins to open up and release the rage that paralyzes him emotionally. In a haunting scene that is at once beautiful, erotic, and wrenching, he tells her "The f***ing anger just kind of fills me up. On the inside, I feel like I'm burning. Outside, I'm just like a stone. . . . I don't give a s*** about nothing. It's like I'm still in prison." Isabel understands this, and a powerful bond is forged between them. The scene is highly charged emotionally, but it is shot in a cold blue light. It is a brilliant example of how color can layer our movie experience. The color sends one signal, the words send another. We, like the characters, are left in a confusing place.

Jimmy and Isabel have a son, and once more a horrific tragedy revisits Jimmy's life. Blinded with rage, he deliberately commits a crime so he can retreat to the familiar blueness of prison. He tells Paco, "Tell my son his father's dead." When Jimmy finally sees his four-year-old, however, those long-buried powerful emotions rise to the surface. But Carlitos is his father's son and is torn by his own anger at being abandoned. For weeks he refuses to let Jimmy come into his life. In a rage, Carlitos takes a toy machete and furiously hacks away at the corn stalks in the family's garden. If anyone understands this kind of rage, it is Jimmy. As Jimmy explains to his son the family ritual of chopping the old corn to feed the new, tears finally stream down his face. Jimmy has at last, in the garden of the little house where the old corn feeds the new, found a bridge back to his bloodline.

In the last scene with the colors of the Mexican flag surrounding them, the father and the mother still try to hold on to and reintroduce what their tradition and values are.

—Edward Lachman

BRIDGES CROSSED

There are many bridges built and crossed in this movie. The nun marries a priest, the lawyer marries a wasp from Bel Air, and

a convicted felon begins a new generation. All of them will always return to the orange glow of the little house nestled under the big bridge, where Maria (Jenny Gago) and Jose (Eduardo Lopez Rojas) sit with their *café con leche* amidst the spirits that reside in the empty chairs. The wall is red, the tablecloths are white and green: the colors of the Mexican flag.

Visual storytelling doesn't get better than this.

The Big Easy

1987. Dennis Quaid, Ellen Barkin, Ned Beatty. Directed by Jim McBride. Cinematography: Affonso Beato; Production Design: Jeannine Claudia Oppewall.

OPPOSING CURRENTS

It's night in New Orleans and wiseguy Freddie Angelo lies face down in the fountain of the Piazza d'Italia. Detective Remy McSwain (Dennis Quaid) turns toward us and says, "Where're you at?"—a good question in this town. New Orleans is a place where not everything is what or where you think it is. There are a lot of opposing currents at work in this port on the Mississippi.

Orange and blue are opposite from each other on the color wheel, and that means they intensify each other. Throughout the film, these colors vibrate with opposing energies that mirror the character's personalities: righteous/corrupt, outsider/native, reticent/lusty, to name a few. There is something about New Orleans that orders up orange on a blue plate.

Remy's from a long line of Cajun cops who, in keeping with tradition, are on the dole in "itty, bitty ways," like free dinners at Paul Prudhomme's and cash payouts from the "Widows and Orphans Fund." (Remy uses his share to send his brother to college.) As Remy sees it, they're all part of the perks. People in the Big Easy have "their own way of doing things."

Enter Anne Osborne (Ellen Barkin), an Assistant D.A. on a special task force investigating police corruption. Anne is as uptight as Remy is loose. To Remy, it's very simple: "There are good guys and bad guys." And as he says to Anne, "We're all that stand between you and them, Sugar." But sparks indeed do fly between these two adversaries. They're opposites irresistibly attracted to each other, and the design of the lighting in this film is constantly amplifying this fact.

In Remy's apartment, Anne is reading his police report on Freddie's murder. (She believes he has some connection to police corruption.) Remy is dying for them to go to hear the Neville Brothers at popular Tipitina's. As she reads the report, the light flooding the wall behind her is blue. The ambient light behind Remy is orange. These two color opposites, one cold and the other warm, become their visual theme song, capturing the chemistry between the Yankee and the Cajun and leaving the audience in a constant state of expectation.

What follows is one of the sexiest scenes burned onto film. When Remy once again says, "Relax darlin', this is the Big Easy. Folks have a certain way of doing things down here," it has an entirely new meaning. It's a good thing the orange light on one wall is tempered by the blue on the other or the screen would have been hotter than Remy's Aunt Emmaline's gumbo. The next morning Anne wakes up, wrapped in Remy's sheets, the color of police blue. Remy may bend the rules, but underneath all his charm, he's always a cop.

Being a cop, however, has another meaning in the McSwain clan. Like his daddy before him, Remy is on the pad and, through a fluke, gets caught making a pickup from a bar on Bourbon Street. The attorney prosecuting the case is a very ticked-off Anne. Key evidence somehow disappears, Remy is exonerated, and the family celebrates in true Cajun style with Zydeco and barbeque. One of Remy's uncles "arrests" Anne and drives her to the party, and Anne rips into Remy. "Why don't you just face it, Remy, you're not one of the good guys anymore."

Remy asks to be taken off the "Widows and Orphans" fund and begins to investigate recent alleged drug war murders on his own. After another murder during the investigation, for which Remy is nearly run down by what he knows to be an unmarked police car, he and Anne join forces and the truth begins to unravel quickly. As Anne and Remy sift through police documents in Remy's apartment, something different begins to happen with the light. This time, the lighting is reversed. Remy, the reformed cop, is in blue light and Anne, the woman with newfound passion, is in orange. Together they sleep on blue sheets with a spread the color of paprika.

The truth they discover together, however, will affect the McSwain clan for a long time. Remy says, "You figure it's the

system—that it's not going to make a difference if you take a few hundred here and there—you tell yourself you can be just as good a cop, but you can't."

THE FUSION OF OPPOSITES

In the end, like the facts, it's black and white. He's in black and she's in white. They dance through a door onto a balcony into the sunlight.

Naïve Oranges

Elizabeth

1998. Cate Blanchett, Joseph Fiennes, Geoffrey Rush, Christopher Eccleston, Richard Attenborough. Directed by Shekhar Kapur. Cinematography: Remi Adefarasin; Production Design: John Myhre.

FROM INNOCENCE TO POWER

Her name emerges out of a red-purple haze filled with black crosses that swirl slowly until only two are left. Like England's religion, the two crosses are divided by a space between them. Visually, there are many clues that psychologically layer this story, and color is not the least of them. The colors Elizabeth wears silently mirror her life arc from an innocent dreamy-eyed romantic to a reluctantly ruthless and steel-willed ruler and, most cleverly, to an icon whose very name defined the idea of a monarch.

When we first see Elizabeth (Cate Blanchett), she is twirling on a green lawn, her orange hair haloed in the golden light. A coral-colored sash is caught up in a fan-like bow. She looks over it and beams like the light at Robert Dudley (Joseph Fiennes). This is an open and exuberant young woman in love. The camera reciprocates. Bathed in magic hour light, the two dance slowly, erotically, exquisitely. The chemistry between them eats up the screen.

Their ardor is interrupted by soldiers shouting "Elizabeth!" Elizabeth is a Protestant and they have come to arrest her on false charges of conspiring against the Catholic queen. Robert whispers to her softly, "Remember who you are," an admonition that is prophetic for both of them. Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry VIII, dressed in white, is interrogated in a dark stone room lit by light

rays passing through small windows in the shape of crosses. The camera moves around her so the crosses form a visual cadence that quickens as the interrogators become more intense, until finally she is captured, framed by a narrow cross-shaped opening. It is a brilliant abstract visualization of the religious conflicts and intrigues that transformed the course of British history.

Elizabeth does indeed become queen and immediately is plunged into the machinations of a male-dominated court: the Duke of Norfolk (Christopher Eccleston), who secretly warns that Catholics will murder Protestants; Sir Francis Walsingham (Geoffrey Rush), a Machiavellian Catholic; and Sir William Cecil (Richard Attenborough), a wise counsel who wants to ensure her ascendance to the throne. In meetings with these men, Elizabeth, not yet queen, wears autumnal orange—a color that, like the season, implies maturity. Along with her political innocence, the playful coral-colored sash is gone.

Her coral-colored sash visually captures the spirit of an innocent young woman in love.

In ermine and gold, Elizabeth is crowned Queen of England, Ireland, and France. The steps on which she ascends to her throne

are carpeted in the same red worn by the influential courtiers who surround her. The red is not bright; it is deep and rich and carries with it an aura of power. England, however, is a country that is poor, depressed, and vulnerable. Norfolk covets the throne. Sir William councils her to secure her country through marriage and appoints Walsingham (who always seems to be lurking in shadows) to watch over her person. When asking her handmaidens to bring him her bed linens for inspection, Sir William says, "Her majesty's body and person are no longer her own property. They belong to the state." Elizabeth, however, has other ideas of her own. Backlit by soft amber light, she and Robert make love silhouetted through a haze of gauzy drapes. The drapes undulate slowly and reveal a very subtle (and visually witty) pattern of large eyes.

FROM DIPLOMAT TO VIRGIN

It seems France is going to attack while Elizabeth's reign is still uncertain. For the first time as queen, Elizabeth meets with her advisors. Wearing a dress the color of blood, she grabs of goblet of wine, drinks, and considers the men's counsel. "I do not like wars," she says, "They have uncertain outcomes." England is unprepared and this war definitely has a certain outcome. Rivers run red with blood; muddy banks sprawl with dead young bodies.

Walsingham tells her, "The bishops spoke against you from their pulpits. They do not expect you to survive." Sir William again counsels her to marry and produce an heir. She agrees to meet the duc d'Anjou, the nephew of Mary of Guise of France.

In a scene that visually captures the political gamesmanship going on, Elizabeth meets with her advisors. The large black mitered hats of the all-male court surround her, pen her in, and dwarf her in size. The powerful red she wears, however, energizes the space she does occupy, and the color dominates the room. She talks to them, one moment like a man, another like a coquette. In the end, in a steady low voice, she says, "Remember this: In your hands lies the future happiness of my people and the peace of this realm. Let that be on your conscience. . . ." With help from Sir William, Elizabeth wins their support.

Ostensibly to honor the incredibly foolish French suitor, the Thames has been filled with glittering barges lit by fireworks and festooned with lanterns and exotic silks. Elizabeth and Robert lie languidly on pillows as sounds of lutes and recorders weave around them. He recites silly love poetry to her and she, dressed in a

mixture of tangerine and rust (one youthful, the other mature), giggles like a schoolgirl.

"Marry me," he says. "Could any woman say no?" she answers. "On a night like this, could a *queen* say no?" he asks. In a great marriage of script and art direction, gauzy curtains sprinkled with sparkling stars enclose them as she says, "Does not a queen sit under the same stars as any other woman?" They are young and in love and their laughter mingles with the rhythms of the oars dipping in and out of the river. It is their swan song, and it is an important visual turning point in the film. From nowhere, arrows suddenly shoot through the night. Elizabeth narrowly escapes.

As Elizabeth is rushed away to safety, her ladies-in-waiting (always dressed in orange) surround her. In the design of the shot, however, it is orange that envelops her. Orange, the color that has defined her openness thus far, will not for long be in her presence. When the gentle Sir William chastises her relationship with Robert, she protests, "Yes, Sir William, I live my life in the open." With difficulty, Sir William tells her, "You cannot marry Lord Robert. . . . He's already married!" This is the one moment in the film where something in Elizabeth goes blank. She hides it well, but the next day in court is the one time in the movie she wears blue.

After an absurd episode with the *duc*, Elizabeth, wearing black, commands, "There will be no more talk of marriage!" At the ball, Elizabeth orders a dance she and Robert favor. He whispers to her, "You are still my Elizabeth." In a deep and unwavering voice, she replies, "I am no man's Elizabeth. . . . I will have one mistress here and no master."

It seems everyone in a position of power in this high-stakes game is either trying to marry or murder her. Even the Pope issues an edict that states, "Any man who undertakes her assassination will be welcomed by angels into the kingdom of heaven."

Clearly, the pressure on the young queen demands both wisdom and cunning. Walsingham (dressed in purple), who has both, urges Elizabeth to strike first against her adversaries. Treasonous letters implicating Robert are uncovered. Norfolk is found guilty of treason. Elizabeth orders his execution along with formerly trusted allies at court. As she makes these decisions, Elizabeth wears white. There will be no more warm orange in her reign.

There is still the decision of what to do about Robert. She finds him drunk, waiting to be taken to the Tower. "Just tell me why?" she

demands. "Is it not plain enough to you?" he says, "It is no easy thing to be loved by the queen. . . . It would corrupt the soul of any man." He begs her, "For God's sake, kill me." "No. I think rather to let you live," she says coldly. To Walsingham, she says, "I will make an example of him. He shall be kept alive . . . to always remind me of how close I came to danger." Her countenance is steely white and her dress is cold silver. She turns abruptly and leaves.

From above the white arches of a cathedral, Elizabeth's voice says, "I have rid England of her enemies. What do I do now? Am I to be made of stone? Must I be touched by nothing?" Seeing her frustration, Walsingham, the great insinuator, tells her, "To reign supreme, all men need something greater than themselves to look up to and worship. . . . They must be able to touch the divine here on earth." As he says this, Elizabeth, in purple, kneels beneath a white marble statue of the Virgin. "She had such power over men's hearts. They died for her," she says. The clever Walsingham again hints, "They have found nothing to replace her."

THE ICON

In a brilliant visual exposition, the camera tilts down from a close-up of the statue's head to a close-up of Elizabeth's head rising upwards. It signals the beginning of a historic fusion. A ritual, almost religious in its exposition, begins: we see a tearful lady-in-waiting cut off handfuls of Elizabeth's golden-red hair. As strands of the long waves fall softly to the floor, sounds of a choir rise dramatically in volume. Hands mix a thick white substance with mortar and pestle. As before a death, images from her life flash across the screen. Hands rub the white makeup on Elizabeth's hands. This is a ritual of an idol in the making. Elizabeth, shorn and a face scrubbed clean, says, "I have become a virgin."

The screen fades to white, and from it emerges a figure, more icon than human. The choral music crescendos. The camera pans over the court. As if for a wedding, ladies-in-waiting kneel in white gowns and veils. Sir Robert, his eyes glued upon her, is in white. Elizabeth stops, holds her hand out to Sir William, and says in a commanding voice, "Observe, Lord Burleigh, I am married . . . to England."

It is a transformation forged by pure will. The Virgin Queen incarnate, white of face, gown, and body, pearls gleaming in her red wig, stands before us. She ascends stairs to the throne on a carpet

the color of both blood and power, turns her marble-white countenance toward us, and stares directly ahead.

In the end, it is she who became the cleverest of all.

On screen appears:

"Elizabeth reigned another forty years. By the time of her death, England was the richest and most powerful country in Europe. She never married and never saw Dudley again. On her deathbed she was said to have whispered his name."

Thelma & Louise

1991. Susan Sarandon, Geena Davis, Harvey Keitel, Brad Pitt, Michael Madsen. Directed by Ridley Scott. Cinematography: Adrian Biddle; Production Design: Norris Spencer.

THE PREVIEW

The black of the title sequence slowly dissolves into a black and white image of what could be a Great American Back Roads calendar. Very slowly it saturates to full color—blue sky, fluffy clouds, green fields. An enticing dirt road beckons us through green fields and disappears into a faraway mountain. It's a romantic cliché and for a moment we revel in its kodachrome-like beauty. Slowly the image fades back to total blackness. We don't know that we've just seen an abstract preview of the movie we're about to see.

Black and white are not colors, they're neutrals. In many ways Thelma and Louise's lives are in neutral. The perception of them, particularly by the men in their lives, seems to be fixed. Daryl treats Thelma as a nonentity. Jimmy can't commit to his relationship to Louise. For one brief intense moment, their lives peak with intensity. They become active forces: creative, courageous, and without limits. This transition from black and white to color affects us emotionally and sets us up for what is to come. This is not an arbitrary landscape image. We will see that mountain again. It's the last image just before the macho posse guys gang-drive Thelma and Louise to the Edge.

AN "UNCOMPLICATED" SETUP

Sometimes a film looks and feels so real, it's hard to imagine it's been designed. It becomes difficult to see a color's influence.

They are two highly intelligent and complex women capable of creative problem solving. Unfortunately, orange is not a color that stimulates rational thinking.

That's the time to look for the color to show up in other incarnations. Thelma (Geena Davis) and Louise (Susan Sarandon) are defined by orange. Between them, their hair is the color of honey and marmalade and it's lit so it often glows. Their orange blush is intentionally obvious. Scott shows them in close-up putting on their orange lipstick. They travel in a world permeated by orange. It's a world full of cheap coffee shops and motels on the turnpikes and highways across the Southwest's red rock country.

Orange is uncomplicated, welcoming, and warm. It's the perfect color for a rest stop. Unfortunately for their situation, it's not a color that stimulates analytical and objective thinking. It becomes, therefore, the perfect color from which the complexities of these characters can spring. These are two highly intelligent and complicated women, capable of creative problem solving. It's just that the data they use is emotional. No matter how crucial it is for them to escape quickly to Mexico, because of a profound emotional wound, Louise refuses to go through Texas. Thelma has absolutely no judgment when it comes to men and yet can orchestrate the most complicated series of illegal actions that makes complete sense. This

is not the acrid orange atmospheres of **Gattaca** or **Blade Runner**. This is the orange found in everyday reality. We are at home with these things and can identify with these women. We know they mean no harm and their hearts are in the right place. When Louise's bullet sets off that big orange explosion, we all cheer.

ORANGE: THE CONSEQUENCES

When they begin their nighttime drive through the bizarre earth monuments of the Arizona Red Rock Country, we know the final drama has begun. Scott lights the forms theatrically so the environment seems alien. They are alone in the darkness. In the intimacy of this blue-black night, these two powerful actors are lit with an orange glow that supports a silent moment of exquisite pain and tenderness. Somehow, Louise *knows*, on a primal level, she has always known. As the drama builds, ironically the space in the frame gradually opens up more and more until Thelma and Louse are at the edge, literally. It's as if their stakes have been upped metaphorically. The orange of magic hour light glows on their faces. Talk about a final frontier. Whether you agree with the ending or not, their space is now limitless.

American Graffiti

See "The Orange That Gave It the Syntax" on page 46.

Romantic Oranges

Bull Durham

1988. Kevin Costner, Susan Sarandon, Tim Robbins. Directed by Ron Shelton. Cinematography: Bobby Byrne; Production Design: Armin Ganz.

THE HEART VS. THE BRAIN

The film opens with sepia photos of the saints of baseball: back lot players, the Babe, Pete Rose, women's teams. Annie's voiceover tells us, "I believe in the Church of Baseball. . . . It's the only church that feeds the soul day in and day out." The camera pulls back and reveals a wall papered with orange flowers and even more shots of great moments of the game. It continues panning by Annie's bedroom of pale blue and white lace—another shrine (of sorts) of

Annie's. "There's never been a ballplayer who's slept with me who hasn't had the best season of his career," she says proudly.

There is something quintessentially orange about Susan Sarandon. The working class heroines she plays, whether it's Louise in ***Thelma & Louise***, the waitress in ***White Palace***, or Annie Savoy in this film, are bright women who have deceptively simple goals and who find themselves in complicated situations. They are romantics who try hard to be realists and they are women who deeply care. Orange is their perfect visual translation. It's warm and open. It resonates with the heart, but not the brain. (See the Orange Home Page on page 112.) Annie is really intelligent, but her romantic nature dominates.

Annie both sleeps with and expands the mind of the most promising ballplayer of each baseball season. (Sometimes she reads Walt Whitman to them all night long.) She is monogamous to a fault. Without guile, Annie says, "I make them feel confident, they make me feel safe . . . and . . . pretty." Orange is everywhere in her house. Her couch is a light orange, the scarf she drapes over the lampshade in her bedroom is orange, even her cat is orange.

Although initially her season pick for a bed-partner is the not-too-swift young stud pitcher Ebby Calvin LaLoosh (Tim Robbins), we never see him enveloped by Annie's orange in the way that the complex catcher Crash Davis (Kevin Costner) is. Crash has been brought to the club to groom Ebby for the majors. He is also an intellectual match for Annie (who teaches English Lit at a local junior college), but when the two first meet (with an orange light behind them) in the local hangout, their libidos intensify.

Obviously, when Ebby and Crash (two alpha males if there ever were two) meet in the bar, we know they're going to square off in the alley to fight over who's going to dance with Annie. The orange light of the bar interior lets us know not to take the fight (which is hysterically funny) seriously.

Annie tells Ebby, who has a "million dollar arm and a five cent head," he's a regular nuclear meltdown, christens him "Nuke," and the name sticks. When Annie explains to the two men her tradition of selecting one lover a season, Crash says, "After twelve years in the minor leagues, I don't try out" and leaves.

As time goes on, however, Crash can't get Annie out of his head. Even traveling on the team bus, he wears an orange shirt. It drives Crash crazy that Nuke "has a gift, but he doesn't give a damn"; but

along with his guidance and Annie's very funny and very original teaching techniques, Nuke's 95 mile-per-hour pitching becomes more disciplined, and the Durham Bulls begin to win. As Annie observes, "They began to play with joy and verve and poetry."

Of course, predictable things follow and we love every one of them. Orange has kept *us* feeling good, accepting, and nonjudgmental. After all, color's influence doesn't just emotionally support the story, it influences the audience psychologically as well. We revel in the honeyed candlelight as Crash paints Annie's toenails as she lies underneath a cover of white crocheted lace. As they boogie amidst a cathedral of candles illuminating Annie's orange living room, her faith in the Church of Baseball takes on a new meaning.

Far from Heaven

2001 Julianne Moore, Dennis Quaid, Dennis Haysbert, Patricia Clarkson. Directed by Todd Haynes. Cinematography: Edward Lachman; Production Design: Mark Friedberg.

Cinematographer Edward Lachman explains this film's stylistic roots:

> In ***Far from Heaven*** we created an homage to Douglas Sirk and his 1950s Hollywood melodramas. Sirk was among the many filmmakers who chose to emigrate from Germany before the Second World War when he was at the height of his career. His roots were in German theater and he used Brechtian techniques of gesture, light, and color to create a world of artifice. He felt that creating this deliberately artificial world allowed people to reach to their own emotions.
>
> Sirk developed a theatrical visual style that conveyed political and social criticism of the status quo and he translated these ideas into Hollywood creations designed for the mass audience. They were the "chickflicks" of their day. He illuminated the social, racial, and sexual tensions that defined post-war American life.

A "PERFECT" WORLD

A still frame of bright red-orange maple leaves fills the screen as the title sequence begins. As the camera pans slowly over the span of one block, the leaves begin to flutter imperceptibly and

they gradually become brown. By the end of the block, the leaves disappear completely and the trees are left bare. In less than sixty seconds, in pure visual language, we have just seen a perfect synopsis of the story.

The pan ends at the Hartford, Connecticut, train station, where bright red, yellow, and green cabs look as if they were placed in a model of a model town. A perfect 1950s pastel blue and cream wagon drives a mother and daughter to a perfect upper-middle class house with a lawn that looks as if the leaves have been placed for a *Better Homes & Gardens* shoot. We hear a boy with Bryll-Creamed hair say "Aw shucks," and realize we're trapped in a *Father Knows Best* mid-century timeline. The dialogue is stilted and the characters are ultra polite. But there is something about the colors that signal an undercurrent. They're just a little too saturated, as if they are trying too hard to be what they're supposed to be.

EDWARD LACHMAN

Sirk was always exploring the idea of repression through beauty. In ***Far from Heaven****, the surface beauty of the characters' world becomes its betrayal. It's a beauty that they can never be part of. Ironically, they are seduced by what keeps them from their desire. The beauty points to something it denies. Kathy is always moving through all these different worlds in her picture-perfect environment, but somehow never obtaining the emotional stability of what middle-class life is supposed to reward you with.*

—Edward Lachman

Perfectly coifed Kathy Whitaker (Julianne Moore), the paradigm of suburban motherhood, is cinched and petticoated into an ideal 1950s silhouette. With bright red-orange gloves that perfectly match her coat, she lifts bags of groceries from the wagon. Eleanor (Patricia Clarkson), Kathy's best friend, arrives in a shrimp-colored two-tone sedan and the two croon over color samples ("The aqua trim! Isn't that smart?") for a Magna-Tec '57 annual fete they are hosting. These are very busy women living in a perfect pastel world where everything is in its place. Or so it seems.

The phone rings. It's the police department. It seems there's been a "big mix-up." Kathy's husband, Frank (Dennis Quaid), has been arrested for being intoxicated and for loitering. In a great moment of character exposition, the camera shoots Frank from behind so we see what he sees. He's sitting in the police station looking into a corner. The walls are an intense lime green. Something about the color is unpleasant. It's like a pond where you can't see what's underneath the surface. Everything about Frank's life is mirrored in that shot. He's a man whose identity is in question, cornered by what he perceives to be the unspeakable.

Lachman speaks about his color concepts for supporting and layering the story:

> Frank's world represents the perception of an aberration or a distortion of what nature's primary colors are. In the 50s, homosexuality was considered an aberration and so I wanted to show colors that were not as pleasing to the eye but were more caustic,

Through movement of the camera (or lack of it), the mood of the lighting and the use of color, I'm always looking for ways to enter the interior world of the characters. Color can be represented through pictorial means, symbolic or psychological interpretations. I've always been more interested in the use of symbolic and psychological means as a way to communicate stories.

—Ed Lachman

to show societal attitudes as well as Frank's self image. Frank's world was one of secondary colors: lime greens and magentas. The police station was a lime green, his office was lime green. Even the coffee mug into which he pours from a flask is a lighter version of the color.

Warm colors (orange to yellow) are Kathy's world. When she tries to make love to him, he tells her, "I'm so tired." "Of course you are," she says and tucks him in and turns out the light. And so begin the revelations of a world in denial in a bedroom lit by an icy blue.

The next day, a society page photo shoot is interrupted when Kathy sees a strange man in her backyard.

"Who are you?" she demands.

COLORS OF THE EARTH

It seems he's the son of her recently deceased gardener. Raymond Deagan (Dennis Haysbert) has skin the color of black walnuts and wears shirts in the plaid of fall's colors and slacks the color of caramel. He's surrounded by leaves and flowers in the warm rich earth colors of autumn. Raymond is everything Frank is not—in many ways. The colors that surround each of these men have already begun to mold our reactions to them long before we know any specifics of their lives.

GREEN: A TAINTED MINDSET

Frank's office at Magna-Tec is the same saturated lime green of the police station. Indeed, green seems to follow Frank around. After a late meeting, he walks under a movie marquee featuring the multiple personality disorder classic ***Three Faces of Eve***. He hesitates and then walks in and stands at the back of the theater. In a scene that could have been staged by Edward Hopper, a lone young man leans casually against a maroon wall of a stairway that leads to the balcony. The young man turns and walks up into the same lime green light. Another man follows.

As he leaves the theater, Frank sees two men laughing on the street and follows them. They walk through a door in a dark alleyway. Frank continues, looking back cautiously. There's a great shot facing toward him as he enters. It's a sliver of a doorway. A bright red exit sign glows in the dark and a bright lime green light illuminates Frank from above, casting shadows on his face that hide his identity. He pauses and then walks in. The place is filled with

men and with an eerie lime-green light emanating from the bar. Lachman lit a maroon wall with magenta "to create a feeling of emotional loneliness in this 50s Technicolor world."

A greeter in an ascot asks him for an ID. A bartender with a goatee and a red jacket with a black collar asks for his order. Frank orders a scotch neat. A handsome man steps up to the bar and says, "One more of the same." They exchange looks and the scene fades to black.

A NAIVE FANTASY

We cut to a gaggle of Kathy's friends surrounding her, all dressed in autumnal colors, reading an article on Kathy in the society page. It mentions she's "kind to negroes." An unexpected gust of wind blows the pale purple scarf Kathy is wearing into the air and over the top of the house. Later, as the ladies in orange depart, Kathy walks toward the back of the house and her scarf enters the screen in close-up. Raymond is holding it. "I had a feeling it might be yours. . . . the color . . . it just seemed right." Little did he know how right it was. The illusory nature of purple will underlie and layer the development of their relationship.

Both of them are wearing a red-orange. Kathy's is just a little too bright and Raymond's more muted, and with his olive jacket and carmel-colored slacks, rich and earthy, like the color of his skin, it seems to mirror a harmony within him. As Kathy walks away, the purple scarf in her hand somehow defines her apart from her environment. Her world, already in denial, is about to become taken over by fantasy. Purple, the color often associated in our studies with the ethereal domain, visually supports the idea of illusion.

That evening Kathy discovers Frank embracing another man. As Frank tells Kathy that his problem makes him feel "despicable," a bluish purple light of the fall evening filters through the window. Indeed, purplish blue begins to appear more and more in their environment.

Kathy and Raymond are becoming friends and she confides in him that she and Frank are having troubles. "Sometimes it's the people outside our world we confide in best," Raymond tells her. "Once you do confide, they're no longer really outside, are they?" Kathy asks. She recalls seeing him at an art exhibition and tells Raymond how she wonders what it must be like to be "the only one in a room . . . how that might possibly feel."

Raymond takes her to one of his favorite spots in his neighborhood. As they walk in, the lighting is nearly identical to the gay bar in Hartford. There is an orange-red neon beer logo and forest green recessed lighting. Raymond offers a toast, "Here's to being the only one," he says. Kathy asks him to ask her to dance. And on a darkened dance floor, at least for a while, neither of them is the only one.

Unfortunately the town gossip sees them go into the restaurant, and society's vicious rumor mill threatens to destroy both Kathy's and Frank's positions in their world. But for Raymond, as a black man, it's devastating.

Lachman explains his color choices in terms of defining the characters, emotions, and conflicts in the story:

> The scenes in ***Far from Heaven*** have a palette in which contrasting warm and cool colors interact. If a scene is predominantly cool, for example, then it has warm highlights, or if it is warm, of course, the reverse. These interactions are subtle and complex in the same way that the character's emotions are complex. I use combinations of advancing and receding colors to suggest the interplay of a character's emotions, and use cool colors against warm colors to establish the character's conflicts with themselves and their environments. There are two bar scenes that illustrate this: one is the gay bar and the other is the bar on the African-American side of town. We used different greens and warm colors in both settings, but to a very different effect. One scene has a disturbing quality to it and the other is the film's peak romantic moment.
>
> We wanted to show that the African-American bar was closer to nature's colors—the colors represented by Raymond, the gardener—whereas the gay bar was viewed at that time as an aberration. The same colors in different chromas and hues create the character's emotional space. The gay bar is done in secondary colors of lime green and magenta. The African-American bar is done in primary colors of nature: forest green and the yellow-orange of the sun.

To try to reconcile, Kathy and Frank go on a vacation to Florida. Their room is a soft, pastel salmon color. Frank sees a man standing in the doorway and falls hopelessly in love with him. Frank's belief that his homosexuality is a sickness has kept him buried in

self-loathing. For this pivotal scene, Lachman chose "the pastel salmon pink to represent the emerging feminine side of his world."

PURPLE: THE COLOR OF LOSS

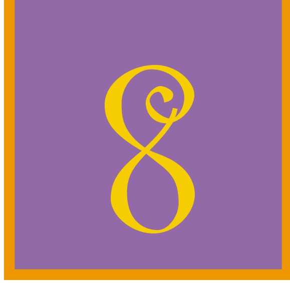
Kathy, hearing that Raymond's daughter had been attacked by white boys, goes to his house. He tells her that rocks thrown by "coloreds" come through the windows every night. "Seems to be the one place where whites and coloreds are in full harmony," he says. He tells her he and his daughter are moving to Baltimore. Kathy fantasizes that she perhaps could come and visit . . . that nobody would know them there.

"I've learned my lesson about mixing in other worlds," Raymond replies. "I've seen sparks fly . . . all kinds. . . ." He kisses the back of her hand. "Good-bye, Kathy," he says gently. Later that evening as she lies sobbing on an empty mattress in her empty bedroom, like a shroud, a purplish-blue light of spring covers her. Put this scene on pause and really allow yourself to react to the color of that light. You'll see how it amplifies her feeling of loss.

They each signal a silent good-bye as his train moves away from the station: he in earth tones and she in her autumnal red orange. She leaves, goes to her powder blue and cream station wagon, and drives away. The camera pans up to where it began, but this time, there are the new white blossoms of spring.

***Far from Heaven** takes place over different seasons, which are a metaphor for what's happening to the characters emotionally. To suggest the emotional arc of the story, as the seasons changed, the night becomes an emotional texture for Frank and Kathy's world coming apart. The fall night is more of purplish blue in transition to winter. As their relationship disintegrates and winter comes, it became more of a greenish blue—more of an acerbic night depicting the character's isolation. As spring begins, the light becomes a purplish blue once more. It is a new beginning.*

—Edward Lachman



Exotic, Toxic, and Natural Earth Oranges

Exotic Oranges

A Little Princess

See "Orange: The Land of Visual Spices" on page 175.

Monsoon Wedding

2002. Naseeruddin Shah, Vasundhara Das, Vijay Raaz. Directed by Mira Nair. Cinematography: Declan Quinn; Production Design: Stephanie Carroll.

THE LANGUAGE OF MARIGOLDS

A loud, joyous, and boisterous celebration explodes on the screen in a flurry of hot color. It is visual cacophony. But on the periphery, in the soft shadows, there is a gentle love story unfolding. And it is exquisitely told in golden orange marigolds.

On a mango-colored screen, the title appears in blue (orange's opposite energy), setting up a dynamic of clashes. Dubey (Vijay Raaz), the sly wheeler-dealer wedding planner, responds disingenuously to deadline queries with a confident "Exactly. . . Approximately!" Lalit Verma (Naseeruddin Shah), the bride's father, yells at Dubey. Dubey yells at his workers, who yell at each other in a riotous domino effect. Continually softening the visual and verbal dissonance throughout the movie, yellow-orange marigold petals flutter down from above.

This is not the typical cliché of a traditional Indian wedding. A plump preteen boy takes notes from the Food Channel. Multiple cellphones ring. The bride (Vasundhara Das) watches her married lover host a talk show whose guest is a woman who supplies the voiceover in porno films. Alice (Tilotama Shome), the maid, stops and picks up a fallen marigold blossom and instinctively puts it behind her ear, revealing a profile Gauguin would have lusted after.

Dubey continually deals on his cellphone as marigolds keep falling around him. He picks one out of his pocket and instinctively puts it in his mouth.

Thus, the marigold connection begins: the shy beauty who uses them to adorn herself and the funny-looking awkward guy who loves to eat them. Interrupting a vulgar, curse-laden conversation between Dubey and his workmen, Alice softly asks an unnecessarily complex question about Dubey's preferences for water. At last, Dubey finally *sees* her and his whispered "thank you" tells us he's a goner. This was definitely going to happen. The marigolds were the visual clue. This is a different way to see a movie. One tiny element becomes like the narrator telling a story without words.

As numbers of guests grow, singing and dancing, hugging and animated conversations begin to fill the space. Colors of mango, curry, grape, and pomegranate vibrate on the screen. Alice walks through the dark, humming, picking up the orange marigold blossoms, sprinkling their petals on the ground, and eating their center.

As the bright red-orange colors of the wedding tent go up, the predictable rains begin. The father worries about the cost, the mother worries about how to look good, and all the bride wants to do is sleep.

All the while, the colorful cacophony continues as more and more guests arrive. Through a misunderstanding, Alice thinks Dubey thinks she's a thief. Hurt, Alice watches the celebrations, sadly pulling off chrysanthemum petals. Dubey says he's ill and goes home. In the meantime, the bride and groom, who have just met (and who really like each other), try to deal with some very real problems. The drinking and dancing continue as the Punjabis playfully tell the Bengalis they are ostentatious and pretentious. Young guests who are strangers tease and flirt and fall for each other.

But upstairs, apart from the din, an exquisitely tender marriage proposal is taking place. The lonely, foul mouthed, odd-looking wedding planner kneels, surrounded by candles, and silently gives a heart made of golden marigolds to Alice, the beautiful, marigold-eating maid.

The musicians begin to energetically play. The rain, like liquid confetti, pours down throughout the night and colors riot as everyone abandoning umbrellas begins to run. Through the deluge, the handsome groom (Parvin Dabas) arrives on an elegant white horse, his head covered in garlands of marigolds.

In a gentler, softer rain, a flute plays in the shadows. Backlit by a golden light on an arched bridge, Alice, in a yellow-orange sari, and Dubey, holding an umbrella of marigolds, are quietly married. He gives her a necklace and she gives him a single marigold, which he tenderly eats. Friends cast orange petals over them, activating the screen with the color that makes us *feel* the love radiating around them.

The raucous wedding explodes with energy. Hot colors dance in the downpour. The bride, unconcerned, in her elegant gown, walks through the mud to the festivities. New people meet and hints of new loves peer through the rain at each other. Mr. and Mrs. Verma invite "Mr. and Mrs. Dubey" into the papaya-colored tent that Dubey built, and the maid and the wedding planner celebrate both weddings in a rain that joyfully soaks everyone equally. (See Orange Home Page image on page 111.)

It also feeds the marigolds.

Toxic Oranges

Blade Runner

1982. DVD Director's Cut: 1999. Harrison Ford, Sean Young, Rutger Hauer, Edward James Olmos. Directed by Ridley Scott. Cinematography: Jordan Cronenweth; Production Design: Lawrence G. Paull.

A WORLD PUT TOGETHER BY SCAVENGERS

Toward a glowing blood-red horizon, we zoom slowly in from the air. It is a dark city, punctuated by thin black turrets belching yellow gas flames into a wet and steamy sky. Red lights from flying cars whoosh by, headed for two huge buildings that rise up out of the dank urban core. These are structures of power, temple-like, echoing the sacrificial pyramid tombs that rose out of the Mayan jungles. This is the Tyrell Corporation. Its director, Dr. Tyrell, is the creator of *replicants*. *Replicants*, used as slave labor on "Off World" colonies, are virtually identical to human beings, with one exception: they have a four-year life expectancy. And they don't like it. Four of them are here to meet their "Maker" and to see what they can do about that.

LARRY PAULL

The visual imagery, like the hard neon colors, the signage, and the basic forms, was meant to really hit people in their gut.
—*Larry* Paull

Production designer Larry Paull explains how the visual concept for the film was born:

> Ridley felt ***Blade Runner*** was a futuristic version of film noir. The city had to be very dark and dank. We lit it with neon, not only because it was an artificial color, but because it was a visual throwback to the thirties. One of the major concepts was that we had to visually figure out how the city functions. Then we asked ourselves, "Who would inhabit this inner-city?"
>
> We wanted the look to be of a city that was improperly maintained because the people who could maintain the city had left for "Off World" colonies, and the people who lived there were trying to subsist on a minimal level. They didn't have the skills to repair things like vehicles or air-conditioning systems. What they had to do basically, instead of going internally and repairing something, was to "retro-fit" or apply elements to the surfaces of existing structures. So what they would do is go to a utility company and get a huge compressor or some piece of machinery that worked and put it on the side of a building or in the street and attach it to a building. Consequently you'd have all these hoses and pipes connecting and going into the buildings.

Powerful beams of light shoot up into the smog, visually announcing these monuments to arrogance. Revealing an acid orange haze behind them, the camera approaches from below, making them appear even more intimidating. As we get closer, a pattern to the design of the city emerges. The exterior of the Tyrell corporation building looks as if a deco designer had a head-on collision with a great pyramid outside of Mexico City. This is urban design at its swap-meet best. The movie is a monument to urban archeology. Throughout the film, in terms of time and place, we never quite know where we are. It is a polluted world put together by scavengers.

We zoom closer still and we're in a blue smoke-filled room with a ceiling fan turning slowly, noir-like, as an examiner interrogates a suspected *replicant* in custody. The examiner asks a suspect a question about his mother. "Let me tell you about my mother," the man replies. He stands up and shoots the examiner dead. Welcome to Los Angeles in 2019, the City from Hell. We were warned in the opening shot by that blood-red horizon. Red and black registers deep in our unconscious as evil. Think of all those devils on Halloween.

The orange atmosphere tells us about the air quality at first glance.

We cut to the street. The city is tall and densely packed. In a downpour, people with umbrellas push their way through the cramped and steamy canyons. Digital images hawking "Off World" adventures glide by on cables above the street. A blue neon Chinese dragon leers from the roof of a low building, its red tongue flicking out as if to catch something below. The only saturated colors in this place are neon. Everything else is damp and dark. None of the imagery is natural. If nature is there at all, it's in rats running around in the darkness. This is an alien place.

Across the street, a man sits solemnly, smoking, reading a newspaper. This is Deckard (Harrison Ford), the policeman Blade Runner: the killer of *replicants*. His job is to "retire" the four fugitives who are suspected of trying to infiltrate the Tyrell Corporation. Deckard does not want this job, and as his Captain (E. Emmet Walsh) puts the pressure on, we see his sidekick, Lieutenant Gaff (Edward James Olmos), who speaks in a mélange of Chinese, Spanish, and English, pick up a gum wrapper, make an origami chicken, and leave it on a desk where we see it in close-up. This is

not an insignificant gesture. We will see Gaff's origami again. Through these tiny figures, Gaff reveals vital clues to Deckard. Clues to who he really is (or might be).

Production designer Larry Paull continues:

> Tyrell is a man who is manipulating mankind on earth as we know it. One reason why we put him inside a pyramid is he's like a pharaoh. Once we got inside, the design had to do with a futuristic influence of neo-Nazi architecture. We created that huge monolithic room that said who Tyrell was. The crest in the interior is derived from the imagery used by both Caesar and Hitler. These same images re-made were visually saying the same thing about who's in power.

Suddenly, we're inside the Tyrell Corporation. Like Gaff's language, it is a mixture of styles: late Romanesque, early Gothic, with a touch of Byzantine and deco (even a little Gaudi) on the side. It's like a sepia translation of a 1940s film-noir. Deckard is greeted by Rachael (Sean Young), a Joan Crawford-straight-out-of-***Mildred Pierce*** look-alike. From inside this vaulted interior, the smog-filtered sun glows a romantic orange-gold, backlighting Deckard and Rachel as they meet. From the exterior, this same color reads as an acrid atmosphere—interesting as a visual underpinning for their love story. When you know orange has this mutant ability to alter its meaning depending on the context, you can, as Scott does here, use it to psychologically layer a story.

In talking of Rachael's character, Paull explains:

> Rachael's whole look was basically a throwback to the late 30s, early 40s. Part of it had to do with the fact that wardrobe also recycles itself just as the buildings are recycled.

Rachael asks Deckard if he has ever "retired" a human by mistake. Deckard answers, "No." It seems Deckard has a machine that can test and recognize a replicant. The great Dr. Tyrell enters and asks Deckard to test his machine on Rachael. After the test is complete, Deckard is convinced that Rachael is a replicant but doesn't know it. The great Dr. Tyrell explains that in order to "cushion" emotions that accumulate in their short four-year life span, they have "gifted" *replicants* with a past. They provide them with memories that take the form of family photos and memorabilia. We cut to Deckard searching drawers in a suspect's apartment and finding family photos. Lieutenant Gaff appears and leaves an origami man on a table. Clue number two.

Paull continues:

> The orange sky from outside is acid, from the inside with Deckard and Rachael [it] is much softer and romantic. For Deckard's apartment, I got permission to cast decorative blocks from Frank Lloyd Wright's Ennis-Brown house here in Los Angles. The set, metaphorically, was a cave, because he was one of the few, even though he wanted to get out, who is still living on earth. His whole backstory is that his wife and child had left him to live in "Off World" colonies. So, for the cave-like feel I took the concrete castings, staggered them, and made vaulting out of them. It gave this very low, claustrophobic kind of look. Everything in Deckard's apartment had all warm tones, while the Tyrell Corporation was done in cold tones. It's as simplistic as the bad guys have cool colors and the good guys all have warm tones. The warm tones influence us to have empathy for Deckard. That was one of the big problems with the character. He didn't evoke a lot of sympathy. He came off as a real cold person. Deckard had that sullen, detached attitude Bogart always had whether he was playing Sam Spade or Philip Marlow.

Deckard, clearly, is not a warm and cuddly man. His personal space is covered with cast concrete designs that echo early Greek and Mexican Olmec glyphs. But there's a hint of warmth in their deep sepia color. Rachael follows him there and shows him her childhood photos to prove to him she's not a replicant. He tells her that they are implants and not her memories, then tries to recant. But it's too late. She leaves. As Deckard stands on his balcony, the warm brown concrete is lit by a cold neon blue, amplifying his emotional state. He is, most definitely, a man in conflict: out of place and out of time, like his apartment.

Later, in the darkness, Deckard, hunched over, plays his piano with one finger. Family photos along with sheet music are on the piano. As he plays, the camera dissolves to a soft, dream-like image of a unicorn galloping slowly in a circular path through a warm, misty woods. Its path brings it toward us, curving at the last moment, twisting its head so its mane waves gracefully in the air just as it dissolves back to Deckard's finger on the piano. The camera cuts to the family photos on the piano. It's a visual nonsequitur and a huge clue simultaneously.

Deckard resumes his hunt for the four fugitives. Through them, we see the cruelty of Tyrell in gifting them with emotions and memories and then giving them only four years to live. We see

the rage of those rendered powerless by arrogance. In the end, there are none of the four left. And yet, there are, maybe, two. The unicorn is the key.

Deckard calls Rachael to come meet him for a drink. She hangs up but goes to where he is and inevitably, in a high-collared coat of Persian lamb, looking very noir, saves his life. They go to Deckard's apartment, which has a searchlight casting long blue shadows through the requisite noir Venetian blinds. Rachael asks Deckard if he has ever taken the diagnostic *replicant* test himself. She finally undoes the Joan Crawford hairdo and her hair, freed, is wavy and natural. Her identity, visually, is no longer as a noir-clone conceived by Tyrell.

In the meantime, Roy (Rutger Hauer), a violent and strangely sympathetic character and the leader of the fugitives, meets his Maker, his adversary, and his fate. With the blood of his lover, drawn like warpaint on his face, he howls a primal howl that resonates in our very core. When he talks about the wonderful things he has seen, he's in a pale blue light, and rain streaming down his face he says, "all those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain." We understand the rage of a man who is powerless over of his destiny. Pale blue is the quintessential color for powerlessness.

THE UNICORN'S CLUE

As I look back, I think Ridley threw out a lot of red herrings to provoke the audience into thinking. Is he a replicant or is he not a replicant?

—Larry Paull

In the end, Gaff appears and says, "Too bad she won't live. But, then again, who does?" Exhausted from the struggle with Roy, Deckard desperately looks for and finds Rachael. As they walk toward the elevator in his apartment and her heel steps on something on the floor, we see a tiny silver object. Deckard picks it up and holds it toward us so we see it clearly. It's an origami unicorn. He almost smiles, nods, and puts it in his pocket. Gaff's voice echoes, "Too bad she won't live. But then again, who does?" It is Deckard's final clue. The elevator door closes to his earth-toned concrete apartment and the screen goes to black.

Well, what do you think? Is he a replicant or isn't he?

In thinking back to 1975, production designer Paull concludes:

> I've never been on a production before or since that has had that much creative energy brought to a film from every department, both in front of and behind the camera. In many ways, this film was way, way ahead of its time.

Apocalypse Now Redux

2000. Martin Sheen, Marlon Brando, Robert Duvall. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Cinematography: Vittorio Storaro; Production Design: Dean Tavoularis.

THE COLOR OF NAPALM AND AGENT ORANGE

This orange atmosphere surely isn't the opaque bright orange of ***American Graffiti***. It is the orange exhaust from hell, and it permeates the movie visually. It's that famous shot of the helicopters, backlit by a sky that's a color only seen when the poisons in the air are at their densest. This is a new color for the 20th century. It's napalm and Agent Orange. And it's accompanied bizarrely by speakers blaring the music of Wagner.

The color of this air is born from new pollutants that envelop everyone and everything without prejudice. An assassin (Captain Willard/Martin Sheen) travels by boat deep into a Cambodian jungle to find and kill a murderer (Colonel Kurtz/Marlon Brando). Both of them are bathed in orange light.

PURPLE AS AN OMEN

From the first scene, the jungle is seen through the orange smoke of napalm fires. In reality, colors from smoke grenades acted as ground markers for the position of the wounded for the evacuation helicopters. They begin as green and yellow, but in the film, almost unnoticed, the colored smoke begins to take on otherworldly and more ominous meanings. Appearing as a visual non-sequitur, bright red-orange (as from the bowels of the earth) shoots geyser-like out of the jungle: a warning without warning coming from the darkness. A bright magenta flare in the hand of a dancing stoned surfer-soldier acts as a target for the enemy. Purple smoke from nowhere appears at the river's edge. And when it does, men begin to die. Arrows and spears (the weapons used regress on the evolutionary timeline) rain out of the dampness, killing two of the crew as the boat goes deeper into the jungle carrying the assassin of the madman-cum-god.

CHANGES WITHOUT WARNING

A master at manipulation, Francis Ford Coppola took great care to establish very specific meanings for the colored smoke early in the film in order to have the audience accept it as reality based. As

Colored smoke becomes an element of a nightmare—an ominous warning of horrors to come.

the film progresses, the smoke, now subliminally identified by the audience, becomes an element of a nightmare—an ominous warning of horrors to come.

Changing visual meanings without warning, thereby placing the viewer in a kind of psychological limbo that mirrors the experience of the film's characters at exactly that moment, is a stroke of brilliance. And it was the language of color that takes us to that place.

Dominating the river's edge, as Willard arrives, is an all-white temple encircled with crucifixions. Human heads mounted on stairways become a macabre greeting party in this domain of the mad monarch. Slow-moving red smoke half-envelops a Cambodian temple, half-eaten by the insatiable green of the jungle. Willard is imprisoned in a cage where he's taunted by a drug-addled ex-photojournalist (Dennis Hopper). As the harangue goes on, like an amorphous serpent, a nightmarish purple smoke floats in from nowhere. We know from our research that purple is associated with death and ritual, but in this context, it reads as incense come to rest on a sacrificial altar where the assassin and the victim become one. It is the ritual characteristic of purple that sends out the

ominous warning. We are about to witness a ritual slaughter. And a murder.

In its final appearance, the color of the smoke we see is a grayish-white. It, like Kurtz, has been neutralized.

Gattaca

1997. Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, Jude Law, Alan Arkin. Directed by Andrew Niccol. Cinematography: Slawomir Idziak; Production Design: Jan Roelfs.

BLUE: THE CLUE TO THE ENDING (OR THE BEGINNING)

The entire screen is a close-up in antiseptic blue. Objects fall and bounce to the bottom with loud thuds. Something resembling snow falls, and strands of something else follow. We see Vincent (Ethan Hawke) shaving, scrubbing, and showering. He sets fire to something behind a grate on a blue cylinder. He goes to the fridge and takes out plastic sacs of what look like urine and tapes one to his leg. Then he injects blood into a clear shell-like shape that he adheres to his fingertip. Visually this describes his daily ritual. It is a ritual of a determined man shot in a monumental scale in the color of impartial logic. One either performs the ritual or one doesn't. For Vincent, the very survival of his dream depends on it.

ATMOSPHERE AS METAPHOR

As he leaves his highly designed apartment compound we see the atmosphere is a pervasive orange. It is not a welcoming orange, nor is it the romantic orange of a sunset. It is the kind of orange through which the light has to struggle to be seen. Psychologically, it signals something toxic. Maybe literally. Certainly metaphorically. Never underestimate the power of an orange haze in the atmosphere to make you feel something isn't right. This film uses the color to visually define an ethos where discrimination is not only encouraged, it is refined down to a science.

Vincent drives to a long low building with arched windows. Cathedral-like in its appearance, there is a dome and a steeple at one end. It is Gattaca: the elite training ground for the Chosen. Those who leave here are the best that best can be, and there is an elaborate system in place to see that nothing interferes with that. The graduates of Gattaca, after all, are the explorers of the universe.

As uniformly dressed men and women file through the entrance, they place their index fingers into a device that extracts a drop of blood. This is the key to their history, to every organ in their body. Each day, urine is checked. There are routine inspections of the workspaces to reveal any irregularities in hair strands or eyelashes. A single strand of hair can give complete biological data that can even be used (surreptitiously) by women seeking a perfect mate. Each person in the orange atmosphere of Gattaca has been biologically designed to be perfect. Except one.

Vincent is a "faith-birth," conceived in the back seat of a car. His classmates, however, were chosen carefully from statistics on a computer screen. Vincent has to be diligent at every moment to protect his invalid identity. We see him take a vile hidden in his shirt cuff and sprinkle something brought from home over his keyboard. He takes a hair from his pocket and puts it into his comb. He urinates through the tube taped to his leg. An ID of VALID comes up on the inspection screen. We're beginning to understand that the ritual performed earlier exfoliated his identity and supplied him with these keys to a new one. This is a film about a commitment—a commitment to a dream. Director Josef (Gore Vidal) says to Vincent, "It's right that someone like you is taking us to Titan." A statement more ironic would be hard to find in this context.

The use of color to set the psychological stage for the story is visually subtle. From outdoors, the atmosphere reads orange, but when Vincent looks up through an arched skylight from inside Gattaca and sees a rocket zoom across the sky, the sky is blue, like his dream. Vincent wants to travel to the stars.

The drama that propels the story of how Vincent got to and remains in Gattaca all revolves around Jerome Morrow (Jude Law, in his first movie appearance). Jerome's selection to Gattaca was "virtually guaranteed at birth. He's blessed with all the gifts required . . . a genetic quotient second to none." Except Jerome has had an accident that has left him paralyzed. He and Vincent make a deal. Vincent will pay the rent and Jerome will supply the bodily fluids, as well as incidental pieces of hair and eyelashes, for the daily inspections. Vincent, who has poor eyesight and a bad heart, becomes Jerome Morrow, superbly designed human.

GREEN LIGHT AS CHARACTER EXPOSITION

Our visual introduction to the real Jerome Morrow is a masterful piece of character exposition. Law wheels himself around a

corner to greet Vincent, a cigarette dangling from his mouth. Eerily backlit by a green light, the smoke surrounds his face like poisonous vapors. His walls are a moldy green and the dropped ceiling echoes with a green glow.

When Vincent remarks that he and Jerome don't look anything alike, the identity broker says, "It's close enough. When was the last time anyone looked at a photograph?" It is a chilling reference to the loss of human identity that underlies this story. The green light amplifies this with its signal that there is something intrinsically unhealthy about Jerome.

Jerome, "engineered with everything he needed" to get into Gattaca, had no desire to do so. He shows Vincent an Olympic silver medal and says, "With all I had going for me, I was still second best. So how do *you* expect to pull this off?" The key, ironically, is Vincent's heart, and not the biological one. As Jerome (when he's not drinking) prepares his samples, Vincent goes through incredible rigors, some very painful, in his process of becoming Jerome. His voiceover explains, "Each day I would dispose of as much loose skin, fingernails, and hair as possible to limit how much of my INVALID self I would leave in the VALID world. At the same time, Jerome would prepare samples of his own superior body matter so I might pass for him."

Gattaca's Mission Director is murdered, and through a discovery of an INVALID eyelash, Vincent becomes a suspect. The lead detective is Anton Freeman (Loren Dean), Vincent's biologically superior brother. The battle between biological superiority and powerful determination becomes the core around which the story is framed. It becomes more and more about the power of a dream. The ending will not be revealed here.

On the eve of Vincent's departure, Jerome presents him with enough blood and urine sample to last "two lifetimes." When Vincent asks him why he has done this, Jerome replies, "So Jerome will always be here when you need him."

Something has changed in Jerome, and green has disappeared from his environment. Vincent says, "I don't know how to thank you." Jerome replies, "I got the better end of the deal. I only lent you my body. You lent me your dream."

As Vincent boards the spacecraft, we see Jerome hoist himself into the same blue cylinder we saw at the beginning. He closes the

door. The door slides shut behind Vincent. Flames fill the screen and propel them both.

The screen fills with stars.

Natural Earth Oranges

Unforgiven

1992. Clint Eastwood, Gene Hackman, Jaimz Woolvett, Morgan Freeman, Frances Fisher, Richard Harris. Directed by Clint Eastwood. Cinematography: Jack N. Green; Production Design: Henry Bumstead.

A RIFF ON A GREAT AMERICAN LEGEND

Backlit by a glowing orange sky, we see a lone house, a lone hitching post, a lone tree, and a lone figure digging a grave. It is the visual stuff of great romantic legends. It is also the beginning of a mighty sneaky revisionist western. The characters are the opposite from what we expect. The hero is a killer. The sheriff is a sadist. The outlaw-kid is so near-sighted he can't hit the side of a barn with a gun. It's a great setup.

The first time we see William Munny (Clint Eastwood), he's wrestling unsuccessfully not with steers, but with enormous pigs. (Munny doesn't have good karma getting animals to do his bidding.) When the Kid (Jaimz Woolvett), who's looking for a killing partner, comes to call, he sees Munny covered in pig slop and says, "You don't look like no rootin-tootin-son-of-a-bitch-of-a-cold-blooded-assassin." And damned Munny he's not right. It seems that if has evolved from a really dirty business to a clean dirty business. Reformed by his late wife, he refuses the Kid's request and watches him ride off toward the horizon. Framed by the pigpen, the Kid disappears into the vast green fields that meet the pale gray winter sky. There is a tremendous sense of place in this movie. We are consistently reminded that we are in the incredibly beautiful American West, a place where grudges run deep. The sheer beauty of the place itself becomes visually ironic.

Munny does, however, change his mind. There's a thousand-dollar reward for killing a cowboy who slashed the face of a whore. He wants a better future for his two young children, so he has to dip into his killer past to hone his skills for a new tomorrow. He is

a deeply conflicted man who honestly believes, "I'm just a fella now. I ain't no different from anyone else no more."

Munny's admirable goal, however, doesn't keep Eastwood from reminding us that there is a satirical undercurrent at work here. He keeps up a just-this-side-of-slapstick humor by having the ex-outlaw repeatedly fall off his horse as he tries to get into killer shape, and the humor works because both the character and the place are so visually believable. He joins the Kid, and for support picks up his old partner Ned Logan (Morgan Freeman) along the way. Ned discovers that the Kid, the would-be killer hero, can't see past 50 feet, which considerably limits his accuracy with a gun. Another hole blown in the outlaw-kid legend mystique.

To see a fierce Western legend like Eastwood slip and fall repeatedly in brown dung-filled mud is a reality-grounding device, but to have him ride off toward the horizon, past his outhouse, is the essence of sardonic visual humor. Sure, this is a parody, but it is a parody grounded in a visual reality you can virtually smell.

THE HOUSE THAT DEFINES THE MAN

HENRY BUMSTEAD

I try and do sets that look like the people who live there and it's paid off. I've worked steady for sixty-seven years.

—Henry Bumstead

The look of Munny 's tiny house on the Kansas prairie is a masterwork of character exposition. It very subtly creates a sense of person and place. There is an artfulness to designing something so real that it puts you physically into a place without your noticing it. It's in the small details. And the color. When we see the gray-brown adobe bricks that form the house, we know without thinking that they've come from the ground on which the house sits. (We've seen the dried mud on Munny's body and it's the same color.) Munny and his environment are one and we sense a history of their collaboration. It comes from how the camera shows the house to us, almost lovingly, in detail. In the interior, we can feel the cool of the bricks and the splinters in the hand-split wood; we smell the oil in the soot-covered lamps and sense the heaviness of the cast-iron pans on the walls. It's a palette of naturals. It's as if the filmmakers had just stumbled onto this old adobe cabin, found these objects, and dressed the set with them. Nothing here is out of rhythm with the land.

This is a life and a place where mud is a daily part of living. We respond positively to the colors of the earth. It's as if it's built into our cellular memory. Eastwood takes time to idle on the outside walls so they register in our senses. We see the individual charac-

ter of the irregular packed-earth bricks and the rough-hewn door jams. It is a simple home made with precision and care. A visual scent of a female presence still lingers in the textured interior. The sympathy we feel for William Munny begins with this house.

Production designer Henry Bumstead describes the process of creating the look of Munny's adobe home:

> Those bricks are cast adobe with straw added. Then they put real grout in. They did it real fast and it looks wonderful because I had a good ager. Good agers are hard to find these days. I always told my students at AFI [The American Film Institute], when I taught there, to be aware of aging. I was at a film festival recently and they showed ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** (for which Bumstead won his first Oscar). I had kids come up to me and say, "The aging on the doors was great!" That's what happens when people put their handprints on the door jams or scuffmarks at the bottom of the doors where it's been kicked. I think a lot of younger art directors aren't aware of good aging. In the interior walls of Munny's house, there are what looks like mineral deposits. You glaze the walls and let the other colors bleed through. That's good aging. I learned that as an art director at Paramount years ago during the studio system. They don't have the old-time talented art directors to teach you anymore, and it's too bad. All this learning is lost.
>
> I have two color books I got together at Universal years ago. One is adobe colors and then in the other book there are lots of old fashioned colors . . . greens and browns, and so forth, like colors we used in ***The Sting*** (Bumstead's second Oscar). For most pictures, I use these adobe colors almost exclusively because I like the color in the sets to come out in the set dressing and the costumes. I used that theory for years. The interior of Munny's adobe house shows that a woman once lived there—the patterns on the bed covers and the way the cast iron pans are hung on the walls—the set decorator on ***Unforgiven***, Janice Blackie-Goodine, did a wonderful job!

The only real color we see comes from the dramatic landscape, and Eastwood delights us with those moments when nature provides us with the light and the shadows on its own. The art lies in the decision of when to use these elements in service of the story. As Munny and Ned ride on their journey, we see a warm, golden wheat field spreading back into gentle curves that meet a cold and

heavy gray blue sky. The field is shot in a long lens that lets us see the bearded grains of the wheat in close-up so we sense that we can touch them. (Wheat has always signaled a beginning of civilization. What kind of civilization is another question entirely, and Munny seems to be caught in between a vengeful and a compassionate one.) These dramatic earth and sky shots may be just a function of the landscape, but the decision to show them consistently throughout the film reminds us that we are in a real environment where the winds (and fortunes) can shift, literally or metaphorically, at any time.

THE MACHO BLIND SPOT

Big Whiskey, Wyoming, where most of the story takes place, is a dusty town at the beginning of foothills of the Rockies (shot near Calgary). With the snow-dusted mountains beyond, it's a town built on a hill so you could photograph 360 degrees. The wood frame houses near the stagecoach-stop where the whores lived are the color of dust, and their yard is dirt. As they stand outside in their beige dresses, they blend collectively into the environment. Theirs is an undervalued position in an all-male town seething with rage and fueled by delusion. It is a town without compassion, except for the women who, because they blend in, have more power and wisdom than any of the testosterone-fueled men realize; and it is this that is the driving point of the movie. This is a brilliant example of a character-driven color concept in service of the story. Its anti-hero-hero may be male, but its driving forces are the women who fade into the background and keep their wisdom a secret.

As Munny comes face-to-face with the reality of his decision, the film becomes darker, wetter, and more miserable. Munny is sick as he and Ned ride into Big Whiskey at night in a downpour. In the darkened local saloon/whorehouse, he sits alone. His body language tells us exactly what's going on inside him. He is chilled and huddled into himself, collar up, hat pulled down. Everything about him is coiled inward. He pushes the whiskey bottle away and faces the wall, waiting. Enter Little Bill (Gene Hackman), a sadistic son-of-a-bitch antihero if there ever was one. This guy is about as duplicitous as you can get. He is also the sheriff. He beats Munny close to senseless and delights like a kid on Christmas as the ex-gunman drags himself across the floor. The fact that this kind of brutality takes place in a room of warm browns and lit by golden

I told Clint we didn't have time for Victorian Gingerbread design on Big Whiskey, so we'd have to keep the set very simple. He liked that idea, so that's what we did. With Canadian help, we built the set in forty-three days.

I designed Big Whiskey in Hollywood and took the drawings to Canada with my painter, Doug Wilson. I bought the wallpapers in Canada and coordinated my colors with the Canadian decorator and costume person there. We kept the sets very simple: no big nude photo behind the bar—just a mirror. Every building was finished on four sides and waterproofed. One building was for the camera department, another was for props, etc. We hid an army of trailers and trucks out of sight below the hill. It was like a studio.

—Henry Bumstead

When killing takes place in a room of comfortable warm browns and golden light, it places us in a weird emotional limbo.

light places us in a weird emotional limbo. We're repelled by the violence, but emotionally we respond positively to the romantic amber lighting. It's as if our emotions are in conflict with one another, and this feeling is happening in our gut, where we have no control.

On top of a cold and windblown hill, the Kid muses on how it didn't seem real, how his victim "ain't never going to breathe again. Ever." As he says this, the camera cuts to an asymmetrical close-up of William Munny against nothing but a cold and heavy gray blue sky. "It's a helluva thing killing a man," Munny says, "You take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have." It's as if the pressure of the nothingness of the sky itself had pushed him into the far-left corner of the screen. According to how we read in Western culture, the left is perceived as the past. There's a lot of undefined space available on the right for Munny's future, at least in the context of this movie.

When Munny discovers Ned has been brutally murdered by Little Bill and has been placed on display in a casket leaning against the porch of the saloon, he takes the bottle of booze from

the Kid and starts drinking. (We have learned earlier in the film that when William Munny drinks, he kills.) He says to the Kid, "You're the only friend I have. Take your share of the money and take the rest to my kids and tell them I'll be home in a week."

THE REVISIONIST HERO'S WARNING

Determined to avenge Ned's death, he rides into the town and exacts payback by killing the sadistic sheriff. Torches flicker over the display of Ned's dead body as Munny shouts at the hiding townspeople, "You better bury Ned right . . . You better not cut up or otherwise harm no whores." With the American flag behind him in the flickering light, Munny continues . . . "or I'll come back and kill everyone of you sons-a-bitches."

The women silently appear out of the driving rain and stand like a vigil as Munny/Eastwood rides past the coffin and disappears into the darkness.

In the end, an epilogue scrolls over the opening shot of the glowing orange sky explaining how Munny's mother-in-law later visited his wife's grave: "And there was nothing on the marker to explain . . . why her only daughter had married a known thief and murderer, a man of notoriously vicious and intemperate disposition."

Maybe true. But the women in the audience understand why she married him, and the warm tones of wood and earth have played a supporting role in forming their opinion.

Thelma & Louise

See "Oranges: The Consequences" on page 130.

Green
The Split Personality Color

5

Like a badly painted copy of a Lautrec come to life, Nora Driggers Dinsmore hisses, "Chick-a-boom!"

Green is really a dichotomous color. It's the color of fresh vegetables and spoiled meat. Perhaps its duplicity comes from our earliest times on this planet when green signaled both food and danger. It is a simple fact that green, in its plant manifestation, signals life itself. Green in the atmosphere, however, can signal a low-pressure system that can spawn a tornado, and "Beware of the green water" is a sailor's warning. So green can signal health and vitality or danger and decay.

Precisely because of its positive associations in the plant kingdom, green can be used as a powerful tool for irony. In ***The Thin Red Line*** when murdered young men disappear into a sea of exquisitely alive undulating grasses, it is the very freshness of those grasses that moves us to remember that moments ago they were alive. **In *Saving Private Ryan*** it is a quieter, contemplative irony when we see the hundreds of gravestones marking the dead underneath a sea of vibrant green grass. In both instances it is the color that provides the visual context within which the story takes on a fuller emotional meaning.

Our association with green in slime-covered swamps filled with snakes and alligators, however, has given birth to the look of dragons, demons, and monsters. It may also play a role in our aversion to green in liquid form. It's obviously impossible that David Hand, the director of ***Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*** (1937); Sofia Coppola, director of ***The Virgin Suicides*** (2000), and Kasi Lemmons, director of ***The Caveman's Valentine*** (2001) met and decided unanimously to choose green liquid as a metaphor for poison. But choose it they did. Liquid green poison infused the apple in ***Snow White***. Green became a metaphor for a corrupt and literally poisoned society in the asphyxiation party drinks in ***The Virgin Suicides*** and in the lime rickeys in ***The Caveman's Valentine***. Try drinking a clear green liquid (other than beer on St. Patrick's Day) and see for yourself that there is something about green drinks that you'd rather stay away from.

When associated with the human body, green's clue is often illness or evil. How often have you heard, "Are you okay? You look green." When we first see the Wicked Witch of the West as Miss Gulch in ***The Wizard of***

Oz, she is in black and white. We know she's bad, but when the film turns to color and we see her in green, she becomes virulent.

Because of green's ambivalent nature, it is important to base your decision on which green to use in a particular scene on how the audience is going to respond to it. It is crucial to have a very clear vision of what it is you want and even then, to test it on a potential audience.

Think About This:

The grass is green. Would you hesitate to sit in it?
The liquid is green. Would you hesitate to drink it?

Healthy, Ambivalent, and Vital Greens

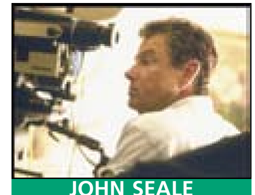
Healthy Greens

Witness

1985. Harrison Ford, Kelly McGillis, Lucas Haas, Alexander Godunov. Directed by Peter Weir. Cinematography: John Seale; Production Design: Stan Jolly.

A SENSE OF PLACE AND BELIEF

We see director Peter Weir's and cinematographer John Seale's collaborative process come to life as the film opens. He places us on the ground, so from our vantage point the billowing green wheat fields fill up half the screen. It is as if the greenness itself is the subject. Weir keeps us there so we barely see the Amish families above the grass. The farmers walk toward the left. (As noted earlier, in cultures like ours, where we read from left to right, we associate moving/looking to the left as toward the past). Their horse and buggies are seen moving to the right (or to the present/future). It is these vehicles from another time that transport the Amish who venture into and abide by the rules of the outside world.


JOHN SEALE

First Peter runs the movie in his head and asks, "Why are these people here? What do they do? How can I represent them?" This is where I began to learn how to always make the visual count.

—John Seale

By showing the Amish to us in this way, he allows us to subliminally absorb that this is a culture that both keeps the traditions of the past and pragmatically moves into the "English" world when it is important to sustain itself. But, because he has these people move parallel to us initially, we haven't really been introduced to them. Yet.

And then it happens. As if the very greenness is giving birth to them, the Amish farmers emerge slowly upward out of those waves of green wheat and walk toward us. With this single establishing sequence, we know at once that the Amish and the fields they walk through are one. We know from their horse-drawn buggies that

their idea of time and of priorities is different from ours. We learn that the farmers are going to a funeral today. The fields, however, born under the farmers' stewardship, will live for generations to come. The pervasive greenness in this sequence subliminally lets us know that the color has been there for a long time and that it has defined a sense of place, of continuity, and of belief.

Monet would have loved these wheat fields. Throughout the film their greenness billows, undulates, and shines like silk. The green is a natural green; it is well cared for and where it belongs. It is a calm place for a wounded urban cop to heal and become renewed.

RED: THE EMOTIONAL UNDERCURRENT

The use of red in just one scene is so good that it can't go unmentioned. It's also a scene that is such quintessential Harrison Ford that it was one of those selected for screening at his AFI Life Achievement Award celebration.

We wanted to show there's a bit of danger here for Harrison and this woman, so I intensified the red.
—John Seale

Rachel Lapp (Kelly McGillis), the Amish widow, is innocent and inexperienced. John Book (Harrison Ford) is not. They are alone in the dark barn. As he tinkers, trying to fix his dead car, the taillights unexpectedly come on, and everything around them glows with an intense romantic red. The car radio crackles on and we hear Sam Cooke's rock 'n roll classic "What a Wonderful World This Would Be." Suddenly John scoops up Rachel and spins her around in the redness. Sparks fly. The two dancing in that moment are like the song. It's a pure and innocent 1950's moment. . . . "But I do know that I love you and if you say you would love me too, what a wonderful world this would be." It is the first time they have touched, and the glowing red signals just about every imaginable physical sensation that is happening inside of them. They laugh. The red feels compulsive, exciting, and dangerous. Outside, Grandfather Lapp calls, "Rachel!" and whatever was going to happen stops. And we have been left with what the characters feel. The source of the redness is irrelevant. What's important is that it was there and it told us what was not said.

We know it's the taillights from the get-go. The red light in this scene is grounded in this fact. But once this is established, Weir lets it go and allows it to take over the entire screen behind Ford and McGillis. It takes us over in the process. And just as suddenly, it is gone. The red has vibrated in our gut and allowed us to fly and hope and lust with them so briefly. We feel the loss of this moment. We don't see red anymore when Rachel leaves the barn.

Gorillas in the Mist

1988. Sigourney Weaver, Bryan Brown. Directed by Michael Apted. Cinematography: John Seale; Production Design: John Graysmark.

Motivated by her love for animals, Dian Fossey came to Africa initially to take a census of a species of mountain gorillas that were threatened with extinction. Local poachers had nearly decimated the population by killing these animals to traffic their body parts to the tourist trade. With the imprimatur of famed anthropologist Louis Leakey, she became an expert on, and fierce advocate for,

these magnificent creatures, clearly making enemies of those involved with the illegal killings of the animals. In 1985, she was found murdered in her camp.

"All Dian saw was the beauty of the gorillas and the beauty of the place and she loved it."
—John Seale

John Seale, who had photographed what he portrayed as a "dirty, greasy" jungle in ***The Mosquito Coast*** two years before,

JOHN SEALE

Sigourney was in her element. She just loved the gorillas. In fact, one guide who knew Dian Fossey and had witnessed her relationship with the gorillas felt that when Sigourney arrived, dressed in a similar wardrobe with a camera around her neck, the gorillas actually stirred. It was as if Dian had come back. It was quite a moment.
—John Seale

describes a very different visual process at work in conceptualizing the jungle for the Dian Fossey picture:

> We quickly decided that *her* jungle was absolutely magnificent and that everybody would love it and say, "I want to go there." Her whole life was beautiful. All she saw was the beauty of the gorillas and the beauty of the place and she loved it. So we opted to make it a very appealing jungle. I used an Agfa negative, which loved yellows and greens. The jungle looked so much prettier and it's nothing to do with filters or anything. The film created the filter and gave us the greens we wanted. This was a much prettier jungle than that of ***The Mosquito Coast***. Even in the rain, it was beautiful. The mists that pervaded through the Burunga mountains and the Burunga volcanoes were so beautiful. So we used everything we could get our hands on. We'd be walking up a hill with our porters and cameras and suddenly the mist would clear and you'd see a mountain and have the porter throw the camera down so we could start shooting.

Perhaps influenced by Peter Weir, where he "began to learn how to always make the visual count," Seale is always on a visual alert for the unexpected.

Ambivalent Greens

The Mosquito Coast

1986. Harrison Ford, Helen Mirren, River Phoenix. Directed by Peter Weir. Cinematography: John Seale; Production Design: John Stoddart.

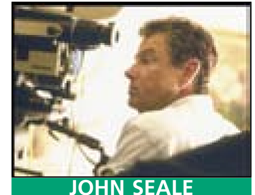
HERO OR EGOMANIAC?

Allie Fox (Harrison Ford), an obsessed, pontificating, know-it-all inventor, disgusted with western civilization, buys a Central American town called Geronimo and moves his family (Helen Mirren, River Phoenix, and Martha Plimpton) deep into a tropical jungle. Sure, he's an egomaniac, but Allie's also a creative genius. He literally has a gift for building something from nothing, and soon the little village thrives. "God left the world incomplete. It's man's job to finish it," Allie says. Clearly, Allie believes that it's his.

ONE MAN'S VISION

Cinematographer John Seale explains the conceptual process for the look of Allie's jungle:

> In preproduction it was decided that the film would be shot like a documentary. Peter wanted grain, as if it were shot on a 16-mm camera and blown up. We tested all three negatives available at that time and found that Agfa loved yellows and greens and made the jungle look beautiful. Kodak was good. But the best one, because Peter wanted grain, was a Fuji stock, which also was a dirty sort of green. So, we opted for Fuji and when we tested it through six to seven generations to the release print stage, we found a little bit of grain and that *it didn't like green*. It made the jungle look olivey green and drab. This was perfect because the visual side of it was that Peter wanted Allie to be the only one to see the beauty. He wanted everybody else to see this drab, olivey green, dirty jungle with greasy black shadows . . . A "What was the noise in that shadow?" kind of shadow. The rest of the family would not enjoy it. (See next page).


JOHN SEALE

The only person who could see the beauty of where he was going was Allie. It was (visually) piped into the audience so the audience would just sit there and say, "I'm damned sure I wouldn't go in there either." That's the vision Peter (Weir) wanted to portray.

—John Seale

In looking for one film characteristic (grain), Weir discovered another (drab green) that he wanted anyway. The moral for filmmakers, especially with green, is to test, test, and test.

YELLOW AS OBSESSIVE AND CAUTIONARY

At the start of the family trip to their new home, the only person who wears yellow is Allie. As the family and the natives build a unique pseudo-Utopian enclave, Mr. Haddy, Allie's indigenous assistant, arrives with a bolt of bright yellow cloth. "I sure do like this color," he says. Mother (Mirren) is soon busy sewing, and gradually everyone in the village is wearing yellow.

The color yellow spreads as the inventor-cum-god takes over the primal environment. As Allie constructs his dream invention, it becomes a major metaphor for what he's *really* doing to the jungle. In the cosmic scheme of things, yellow is a natural presence in the tropics. Also, in the cosmic scheme of things, it has both a positive and negative side. It's the color of hibiscus flowers and poisonous frogs. The significance of the spread of yellow throughout the jungle village is not to be taken lightly.

At the river's edge, under Allie's direction, a monolithic structure begins to rise out of the jungle. Allie tells the natives he's

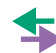
Peter Weir wanted everybody to see this drab, olivey green, dirty jungle.

building a monster. "I'm Dr. Frankenstein," he boasts. A man dressed in yellow silently pad-dles by this monument as if in tribute to the great self-appointed savior Allie has come to save the jungle and make "ice from fire." "That's why I came!" he pro-claims. That's why I'm here."

Like a carpet, a bright yellow runner unrolls into the river from the air-conditioned "ice house." But then it dramatically inflates like a huge serpent—a giant yellow "snake." Allie may think it creates a Utopian dream, but in reality, it is bringing the poison of civilization to the jungle. Allie's ego, however, is sufficiently powerful enough to ensure he doesn't perceive this. The shape is also a har-binger of things to come. When escaped convicts threaten all he has built, Allie intentionally traps them in the ice-making shed. "They'll be frozen solid," he says. The fugitives' gunshots, however, ignite an explosion, and the temple to the great leader is blown up and, because of the combination of chemical gases, the river is poi-soned for eternity.

In the jungle, it all began and ended with yellow. In the end, it is only Allie who wears a tattered yellow shirt—the last vestiges of the blind hubris of a true colonialist. Allie envisioned himself as a Utopian futurist and inevitably sent what he touched back into a time of darkness, where the yellow that is the sun can't penetrate.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon



See "Green: The Battle of Contradictions" on page 213.

Vital Greens

Saving Private Ryan

1998. Tom Hanks, Edward Burns, Tom Sizemore, Jeremy Davies, Giovanni Ribisi, Matt Damon. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Cinematography: Janusz Kaminski; Production Design: Tom Sanders.

AN ESSENTIAL POLARITY

The green that happens in late spring covers the manicured burial lawns of Omaha Beach. The color of the sky is not unlike the day of the Normandy Invasion. This green is essential to layering the emotional moment. It is a message sent by contrast. The grass is the green that signals the beginning of the end of the deadness of winter. The stark white stone of the grave markers is a cold reminder that the young who lie here will have no more springs. It is the essential polarity of this place.

Steven Speilberg has a profound understanding of how to visually translate what it means to be human. With the use of opposing visual images, he keeps our sense of humanity intact by giving us, in the midst of the most intimate close-ups of the horrors of young men forced by circumstance to murder one another in the mud, scenes of equally charged intimate glimpses of natural beauty. An exquisite shot of the first drops of a rainfall fall slowly with luxurious grace into a puddle of muddy water. It's all there in that shot: the freshness, the fleeting instant and exquisite splendor of a single moment. Without the understanding of the necessity of these images that echo what it is to be whole, we would be left with nothing other than the darkest possibilities of our nature. This image takes this moment out of the intellectual. We *see* it. We *feel* it. It is the visual that supports the script's gift of hope.

The Thin Red Line

1998. Jim Caviezel, Sean Penn, Nick Nolte, Elias Koteas, Ben Chaplin, Adrien Brody, John Cusack. Directed by Terrence Malick. Cinematography: John Toll; Production Design: Jack Fisk.

This film, like all of Terrence Malick's films, falls into a context of its own making. Green here will not be analyzed as a color flow or character definer. Green becomes the pervasive visual syntax for what is going on underneath the interweaving stories. Green, because of its ability to stimulate responses of both the positive and the negative, becomes the central metaphor for the duality of existence itself. (One minute we marvel over the sheer beauty of the tropical flora and the next we see men fall dead into it.) Its presence dominates throughout much of the movie.

THE CROCODILE'S OMEN

As the camera pans, a crocodile slides slowly into a green swamp. Beams from an unseen sun silently explode through jungle steam, while snake-like vines vie with writhing trees for survival. Aged dead roots form a natural architecture, like a ruined cathedral created by an alien and ancient god. Native voices sing faded unknown hymns softly in the background. We hear a gentle male voice ask, "What's this war in the heart of nature?"

What war? We've seen no war. We see Melanesian youngsters seated in a circle playing a game in unison. We see the children silently swimming gracefully together underwater. What is going on here?

Actually, these first few minutes visually capture the essential message of the film. Think of what you've just seen as a metaphor: a ferocious creature from a primal time submerges, leaving a swirl of lacey green floating in its wake. There, under this delicate veil, it will remain, in the darkness, waiting until the conditions are right to attack. Healthy-looking algae float deceptively on water that is stagnant. Young men fall dead in lush tropical grasses. These images form the duality that is at the core of this movie, and green is its metaphor: beautiful and deadly. Like the war in paradise, the film has two realities: one that we see and one that is just under the surface.

When we see the person behind the voice, he is alone, peacefully paddling a canoe, smiling at the natives who glide happily by. Witt (Jim Caviezel) is on this idyllic island because he's AWOL and it is he, the enigmatic gentle soul, who becomes the conscience of the movie.

THE GENTLE SOUL AND THE HARDENED CYNIC

First Sergeant Welsh (Sean Penn), on the other hand, is a seasoned hard-ass. It is he and Witt who form the yin and yang dynamic of the story. There is something about Witt that the cynical Welsh is both drawn to and disturbed by, something that keeps him fixated. He admonishes Witt with, "In this world a man himself is nothin'. And there ain't no world but this one." Witt calmly disagrees: "You're wrong there, Top. I've seen another world." And so begins their battle in a very green world. In fact, Witt and Welsh have a lot in common with the color green.

Malick's talent for setting us up emotionally is both sneaky and visual. As the Americans land on Guadalcanal, no enemy is visible. They walk inland. No one. A small, dark native walks by through the tall grass and gives no notice of them. It is as if they weren't there, as if they were in parallel realities. The men walk toward a tropical landscape Gauguin would have loved, past thick green forests of bamboo with exotic red, yellow, and blue birds. Beams of steamy light pierce the dense jungle overhead. Surrounded by this incredibly beautiful reality, these young men seem not only isolated, but also very, very vulnerable.

MURDER IN PARADISE

Because of what we see, green pushes how we feel about them, particularly in the next few minutes. Their company begins to snake slowly through high green grasses that blanket and soften the mountain, concealing its cruelty. We marvel at the lushness of this island, at the sun and shadow playing over the hill of grasses waving calmly, like a gentle sea. It is the look of nature content with itself. Without warning, the camera speeds. Gunfire sounds. Other young men, camouflaged by this very lushness, have been silently waiting. Like the crocodile. And so murder begins in Paradise. Soldiers disappear into the gently waving sea, and green, the color of life, becomes an ironic presence. For years to come, these grasses will blow in the wind on this island. The boys will remain dead forever.

In a now-famous shot, Malick chooses to place Witt and Welsh on the ground, engulfed by the grasses. (It is not just the green that affects you. Don't underestimate how it's shot, how his keeping you on the ground manipulates your involvement in the story, and with the characters.) Welsh continues his consistent pounding, "What difference do you think you can make . . . ? If you die, it's gonna be for nothin'. There's not some other world out there where everything's gonna be OK. There's just this one." Witt gazes calmly overhead. There's a beautiful moon framed by palm trees against a cerulean sky. In the midst of the color that says "life," with death waiting at any moment, the two opposing sides continue their battle. By the film's end, one of them will die.

THE CROCODILE'S OMEN REDUX

Near the end, while walking through a native village, Witt holds out his hand to a child. The child doesn't take it. We hear natives argue with each other. We see children with scabs all over their backs. Skulls line shelves in the huts. Witt asks, "How'd it break up and come apart . . . so that now we're turned against each other, each standing in each other's light . . . ?" In a film that is visually stunning, Malick often shows us those things war takes away from us. He shows us the causes of the wounds that cannot be seen. He creates a counterpoint to the visual beauty with Witt's soft voice, which both underscores and challenges what we see. Witt provides the observer's dispassionate questioning. His voice is the benevolent undercurrent.

As the soldiers depart from the island, a voice still struggling with the duality says, "Darkness and light, strife and love, are they the workings of one mind . . . features of the same face?" We see islanders peacefully paddling a canoe in a calm lagoon. Brilliantly colored tropical birds peck each other playfully, and a fallen coconut lies in the lapping waves, new green life sprouting from its shell. The image fades to black. Native children sing a hymn in the background. Maybe the crocodile will not win after all. But under that fragile green veil, he will always wait.

Poisonous, Ominous, and Corrupt Greens

Poisonous Greens

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

1937. Directed by Maxwell Morgan. Realized by many animators.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Quite probably in 1937, these color choices were made intuitively. It's inspiring to see how nearly perfect they are. Nearly seventy years later, it's a different world—one that sometimes needs a jog to our intuitive side. (See Backstory.) Don't underestimate the effect of the color choices in this movie.

THE POISONED MIND

Of course, this tale is about the healing power of love, but it's also about the poisoning effects of jealousy. We have known that ever since "Mirror, mirror on the wall" was uttered back in 1937. The use of color is as simple as the story itself. Nevertheless, it reflects the emotional undercurrents that lie beneath the surface of the narrative.

Like an omen, a purple mist clouds over the face as the mirror says, "Alas! Snow White is more fair than thee." The story is also about attempted murder, and someone is indeed going to die.

When the queen sees the prince with Snow White, she orders her kindly huntsman to kill her. The huntsman tries to obey his queen (a vile green even flashes in his eyes as he tries to kill her), but as we know, he warns her to run away and never return. In her rite of passage, Snow White runs through dark, monster-infested swamps and falls down a tunnel filled with terrifying green-eyed demons. She lands, however, in a very different place, and we know right away that she is safe. This world is filled with gentle pastels, green meadows, and sweet forest creatures. These greens have a softer energy that is a far cry from the aggressive yellow-greens of

the demon eyes and the saturated greens of the poison cauldrons we are about to encounter.

A GENTLER PLACE

The little animals take her to a tiny unkempt house inhabited by seven untidy little men. Hoping they will ask her to stay, Snow White and company "whistle while they work" through the place, tidying up. When the dwarfs return home there is a very funny sequence where they all get to know one another and they agree to let Snow White stay.

THE POISON POTIONS

In the meantime, the green face in the misty purple mirror tells the queen where Snow White is. Even more furious, the queen concocts an opaque green brew that virtually bubbles with malevolence. She pours the liquid into a wineglass, offers a toast to her hate, and drinks. A huge vortex swirls, her hands deform into arthritic claws, and the green bubbling potion fills the screen. No one has to tell us this is toxic stuff. Our aversion is visceral.

The queen transforms into a humpback crone replete with the requisite wart. She now mixes a new recipe, one for a poisoned apple that will cause a sleeping death. She dips the apple into a bubbling dark green liquid, and as she removes it, the syrupy runoff from the apple transforms first into a leering green skull and ultimately into a radiant red apple that is temptation incarnate.

The only antidote for this poison is love's first kiss. In a classic example of an obsessive-compulsive's blind spot, the queen believes there to be no chance of that. (The prince will think she's dead.) The deluded hag/queen goes off into the night.

In the morning, as tiny birds furiously attack her, the crone appears at Snow White's kitchen window and convinces her to try a magic wishing apple, "One bite and all your dreams come true." As we all know, Snow White bites. We also know what she wishes for.

PURPLE: THE COLOR OF TRANSFORMATION

The dwarfs couldn't bury Snow White. They crafted a glass coffin, encircled it with delicate purple flowers, and kept eternal vigil by her side. The prince, hearing of the beautiful maiden who sleeps in the crystal coffin, arrives, and the rest is a fairy tale history of the riding into the sunset kind.

The Wizard of Oz

See "Green: The Mean Old Lady and the Evil Witch" on page 6.

The Caveman's Valentine

See "Green: Lime Rickeys and Z-Rays" on page 71.

Gattaca

See "Green Light as Character Exposition" on page 150.

A Little Princess

1995. Liesel Matthews, Eleanor Bron, Liam Cunningham. Directed by Alfonso Cuaron. Cinematography: Emmanuel Lubezki; Production Design: Bo Welsh.

ORANGE: THE LAND OF VISUAL SPICES

This is a film where the use of color is obvious and subliminal at the same time. Two parallel stories are told: one from an ancient Indian epic, the other from the time of World War I. Color brilliantly defines the sense of place for each. One is a golden fantasy, warm and magical; the other is a stark, decaying atmosphere devoid of light. We are aware that these environments are designed. But even as we watch, color is influencing our attitudes and our opinions of the characters. We are completely under its control.

The title, ***A Little Princess*** (as opposed to *The Little Princess*), implies the heroine is one of many. This is not a film made just for children. The film is about the power of the imagination to effect transformation, and the power belief to sustain it.

It begins as if we are looking through a spyglass. A tiny circle on the screen gradually enlarges and reveals an enchanted marmalade-colored world. A blue-skinned prince stands on one leg and plays a flute. Mists float over a stream that curves through golden sand, and peacocks roam surrounded by mango trees and birds of paradise. This is the enchanted world of the Sanskrit epic *The Ramayana*, the story which Sara (Liesel Matthews) narrates that will parallel her own. The princess' love, handsome prince Rama, leaves her to help a wounded deer in the forest. Before he goes, he draws a protective circle in the sand around her and admonishes her not to leave it. When she hears a cry for help and thinks it's the prince, however, she leaves the circle. Both the color and imagery in the environment signal a subtle warning as she runs past malformed

green plants covered with thorns. There she finds an old beggar man who suddenly shape-shifts into the terrifying ten-headed green demon Ravana who imprisons her in a green tower covered with spikes. We will soon learn that these images foreshadow events that will happen to Sara. She will soon be taken from her orange-colored enchanted world and be placed in a very different kind of tower.

The location transforms and we see Sara with an Indian playmate, climbing over a giant head of a Buddha while a baby elephant exuberantly sprays himself with water from a golden pond. It is a land of magic, filled with immense waterfalls, gentle rivers, and sunsets framed by filigreed arches. It is a place where Sara's nanny tells her, "All women are princesses. It is our right." It is, however, a place Sara must leave. It is 1914 and Sara's widowed father, like Prince Rama, must go off and leave her and fight. For her protection, he takes her to New York to her mother's alma mater, Miss Minchon's Seminary for Girls. Before he goes, he gives her a doll dressed in the curried colors of India. Orange has become the conduit between Sara and her father. He tells her, "You can be anything you want to be, my love . . . as long as you believe . . . I believe you are and always will be my little princess."

GREEN: THE SCHOOL DEPRIVED OF LIGHT

Miss Minchon's, however, is anything but a protective circle for Sara. It is a damp and dreary winter in New York. The leafless trees are without any sign of the green that signals spring. As soon as her carriage turns the corner and the school appears, there is a sense of foreboding. The building is a moldy green, the kind of green that looks as if it has been deprived of fresh air. Its tower is pointed, not unlike the thorns of Ravana's castle. As Sara looks up, the camera frames the building from below, making the school look even more imposing. In a perfect character exposition, Miss Minchon (Eleanor Bron) descends a stairway from above, in a dress the color of bile. Whatever was fresh and alive when Sara's mother was a student here is long gone. This is a green that has been without sun for a long time. Minchon's stifling influence permeates everything; the walls, the faculty, and the school uniforms are all this color that gives off a visual stench.

In a film that is a masterpiece of visual storytelling, Sara arrives dressed in pure white. In the presence of this decaying atmosphere,

she becomes light incarnate. One of the first people Sara notices is a young black girl mopping the floor. Soon Sara learns this is the servant girl Becky (Vanessa Lee), and she is informed the girls are not allowed to speak to the servants.

The school has arranged Sara's room with her belongings from India and the effect of the difference is staggering. Rich golden and spice colors vibrate with even more warmth in this poisoned environment. Sara begins to reach out to girls who are suffering (including Becky), and soon her room is full of them listening to her exotic stories. This, of course, does not please Miss Minchon (a perfect manifestation of green as jealousy), who forbids "any more make-believe in this school." The girls, however, still sneak into Sara's room for enchanting tales of beautiful princesses and handsome princes. Prince Rama is wounded by an arrow, which is intercut with scenes of her father running through the trenches in France as clouds of poison gas advance.

Suddenly and without warning, Sara receives shocking news. She is stripped of her beautiful things, plummeted to orphan status, and sent to the moldy green attic to live with Becky. Frightened, with a tiny piece of chalk, Sara draws a protective circle around herself.

In a gray and stormy day, when Sara, dressed in rags, is out marketing, her shawl is ripped off and blows away in the wind. A turbaned man dressed in the color of saffron with a monkey in a curry-colored jacket on his shoulder watches. Even through she is starving, Sara gives a sweet bun away to little girls who are hungrier than she. Grateful, they give her a golden yellow flower in return. "For the princess," they say. Sara greets the man with the turban who cares for an old man next door (See page 178). The man has lost a son in the war. Sara puts the yellow rose in the door for him as the Indian man watches from a window above.

ORANGE, INDIA, AND THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION

Discouraged and on the verge of giving up, Sara clings to her imagination. When their attic room is freezing, Sara tells Becky that the air in India is "so hot, you can taste it." The power of her ability to visualize transports the girls from the freezing, moldy green attic to the warm orange light of India, where they, elegantly dressed, stand atop the head of the Buddha as the baby elephant plays in the water below.

On a windy Manhattan street, orphaned Sara, in moldy green, and mystic Ram Dass, in the color of cardamom, recognize a connection to each other.

In reality, however, there is a blizzard raging in New York, and as Sara sleeps, the wind blows open the window in her attic room. The room, constructed in forced perspective, is full of multiple angles of rays of light. As snowflakes flutter in the light, Sara is drawn to the window. Almost as if waiting for her, the turbaned man smiles from his window across the courtyard. He raises his hands in a greeting of praise to her. She smiles and returns the gesture and spins and twirls happily in the dancing powder. He bows to her and she to him as the light and the snowflakes dance.

It is as if this encounter with Ram Dass (Errol Sitahal) creates a new magic. His monkey in the orange jacket ambles daily over the rooftop and comes to visit her, and they form a mystical conduit. Sara becomes stronger and more defiant toward Miss Minchon. The girls sneak up to the attic when the "Demon Minchon" is asleep, as Sara continues the tale of Prince Rama. The deer has given his life to Rama, and he races to the monster's palace to rescue the princess from the bile-colored land of thorns. A terrifying thorny Revana roars.

As Miss Minchon discovers Sara still telling her stories, she demands Sara give up her fixation that all girls are princesses and punishes both girls with double work and no food for the following day. Sara encourages Becky to try to believe that their table is groaning with muffins and sausages and that they're wearing elegant clothes. Sara dreams the prince kills Revana and rescues the princess from the tower.

In the morning the girls awake to a manifestation of the power of belief. The table is indeed filled with muffins and sausages and everything they desired. The girls adorn themselves in elegant robes and slippers that are waiting for them. Orange curtains and tablecloths and pillows of silk glow with golden marmalade-colored light. The power of Sara's imagination is so strong that this magnificent transformation is real. We know because even the Demon Minchon sees it, and it is her jealous rage that sets in motion a series of dramatic, finger-biting events that lead to the climax of the story.

Prince Rama kills the demon and frees the princess dressed in orange from the thorn-covered green castle tower. As the parallel story to the Ramayana nears its end, Sara too is freed from the green tower, and the green begins to disappear from the story. The tale ends visually as it began. A small circle around a princess and her prince. This is no longer a legend. It has indeed become real.

Sara's is not the orange light from ***Blade Runner*** or ***Gattaca***. This is a honeyed-orange that comes from the sun and from the dyes from plants that grow in the light. The orange atmosphere in the two science-fiction films does not come from natural light, but a light that is filtered through an ether filled with toxins.

Corrupt Greens

The Virgin Suicides

2000. Kathleen Turner, James Woods, Kristin Dunst, Josh Hartnett. Directed by Sofia Coppola. Cinematography: Edward Lachman; Production Design: Jasna Stefanovic.

A HOUSE WITH NO LIGHT

The living room of the Lisbon house is permeated by a sickly yellowish green, the kind of green that comes from not being exposed to enough light. In essence, it is a guardhouse of five vir-

ginal, about-to-bloom young sisters. The house becomes a metaphor for the parents' obsession with not allowing any light to come inside. The film is very much about not seeing.

TREES AND CONSEQUENCES

Cecilia, whose rug is the color of mold, is the "first to go." She jumps out the window onto a railing below during one of those awkward first parties for young adolescents. (It had been suggested by a psychologist.) In response, the parents (Kathleen Turner and James Woods) strip the house of the railing and eventually the yard of anything that might be considered dangerous. Eventually, only stumps are left as monuments to the obsessions that propel the story.

Green pamphlets on suicide are given out in school. "We thought green was cheerful, but not too cheerful. Certainly better than red," a clueless voice says. The brochures alert students to the danger signals of potential suicides. Among them are lost interest in activities and withdrawing from peers. The director, Sofia Coppola, shows us the sisters in an eerily detached composition sitting in the lime-green girl's bathroom. The sisters always stay together. They don't really *see* anyone else.

We hear (and see) the story through the eyes and the memories of four boys whose narrator is simply called "We." Early on, "We" says, "They knew everything about us and we couldn't fathom them at all." The boys don't see that that which obsessed them was what prevented them from seeing the signals.

LUX'S CARDINAL SIN

But Lux (Kirsten Dunst) saw Trip (Josh Hartnett), the school Lothario. He made sure of that. In a great audio-visual riff, Trip slides into the empty seat next to Lux during a school film on hurricanes. A voiceover talks about high-pressure and low-pressure masses coming in contact with one another. "One mass is warm, the other, cold. Low pressure slides down the sides of the high pressure. They swirl in around one another, creating the beginnings of the storm." As Trip slides his fingers in between Lux's, he tells her he's coming over to the house. Aside from her beauty, much of what attracts Trip to Lux is what he perceives as her lack of interest in him. She becomes the challenge. In essence, the reality is that Lux (whose name means "light") is also light deprived. She can't feel much of anything. Yet.

Coppola shows us a portrait of the family dynamic when Trip comes to visit Lux. There they are, in front of the sick yellow-green living room wall, with Mrs. Lisbon (Kathleen Turner) planted between them. Trip leaves without kissing Lux goodnight. But as he sits in his bright red car outside the house, Lux, in a peach-colored nightie, dashes into the car, kisses him madly, and speeds back to the house before bed check. Lux, the light of the house, begins her clandestine quest to feel alive.

Trip convinces Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon to allow all the girls to go to the prom with him and his friends (the "We" of the story's narrator), and Lux, the virgin, and Trip, the pothead, are voted King and Queen of the prom. The sisters and their dates drink, hidden under the bandstand, while the poisonous yellows and greens of the atmosphere await them beyond. Later that night Lux loses her virginity to Trip and wakes up alone on the football field. The camera shows us Lux lying alone from far above. She is surrounded by the cool blue-greenness of the early morning.

BLUE: THE SUBLIMINAL MESSAGE

It's important to be aware of the subtle, almost subliminal influence of pale blues and pastel pinks in the film. The first shot we see is of a teenage girl's vanity tabletop filled with bottles of exotic perfumes. It is subtly lit by a pale blue exterior light that permeates the atmosphere. If you look carefully, you will see blue light showing through from the outside in nearly all of the interiors, including the psychiatrist's office. Notice the pastel pale blues and pinks in the girl's room, particularly after the girls are punished for Lux's not making curfew. The girls, in pink nighties and surrounded by pink stuffed animals, are made even more poignant against the melancholy blue of the light.

Cinematographer Ed Lachman explains:

> In the girl's room, I was trying to create a preadolescent girl's world in baby blues and pinks. But also the perception of the boys of the girls—that there was a certain innocence. I wanted the colors to have a certain child-like feel to them. I played with color temperature of the film using daylight film indoors so that the practical lights would feel warmer. I tried to create a homogenized, pastel suburban world that imprisoned them in this cool bluish light, which became a metaphor for a form of oppression.

EDWARD LACHMAN

With the blue light I wanted to create the feeling that the exterior world was trying to seep through into their interior world. It was a world that they weren't allowed to be part of, but it encompassed them. In essence, they were imprisoned by the exterior. Things happen in suburbia behind the niceties. In a way, it's like ***Far from Heaven****—it's about illusions, appearances, desires, and repression.*

—Edward Lachman

What I was trying to create was this adolescent female world as seen through the eyes of the boys in their fantasies. What they were perceiving was an illusion of what these girls were, as well as their dreams about them.

—Edward Lachman

Lux's cardinal sin of staying out all night sets the Lisbon's resolve in stone. The girls are taken out of school and kept in maximum security in their house, which is virtually shut down. Lux is even forced to destroy her rock 'n roll records. On the roof, Lux begins a series of clandestine assignations with many different boys. Barred from being with the girls, the boys take to watching them through a telescope. They devise a plan where they order the same travel brochures the girls order and fantasize that they are with them: "Cecelia hadn't died. She was a bride in Calcutta."

Inevitably, however, "We" observes: "These excursions scarred us forever, making us happier with dreams than with wives." We begin to understand whose story this really is.

RED: THE WARNING SIGNAL

The girls contact the boys with a signal from a red light. The boys then call them and they play music back and forth. We see the girls in languid positions, again on a sick green and bluish background. One day, the boys get no answer. Instead a note arrives, "Tomorrow at midnight. Wait for our signal." When the boys arrive, the girls are dead.

The Lisbon parents leave town and the boys steal family photos put out with the trash. "In the end we had pieces of the puzzle, but no matter how we put them together, gaps remained, like an oddly shaped emptiness mapped by what surrounded them . . . like countries we couldn't name."

A SICK GREEN JOKE

"We's" voiceover says, "It was over a year since Cecelia slit her wrists, spreading poison in the air. A spill at the plant increased phosphates in the lake and produced a scum of algae so thick that a swamp smell filled the air. Debutantes cried over the season of the bad smell."

A coming out party's theme was "asphyxiation." As green smoky light permeates the atmosphere, guests whose families built buildings at Yale are dressed in sequined green gas masks. They laugh and consume green cocktails, champagne, and desserts, all in an eerily surreal gathering around a green pool. A town is poisoned by the very industries that bring its families their wealth.

Ed Lachman talks about how the idea of a lime-green party came about:

> In Jeffrey Eugenides' book *The Virgin Suicides*, he writes about this asphyxiation party where the well-heeled guests wear green-sequined gas masks. I wanted the audience to feel that these people were suffocating in their own toxic-chemical world. I chose lime-green as an industrial kind of color—almost like a poison. At the end of the film, as the adolescents were losing their innocence and their dreams, the community was suffocating in its own self-created world.

THE LISBON LEGACY

What remained in the end were an empty house and some tree stumps. They had removed everything external they could. We are left with "We's" voice:

"It didn't matter that they were girls but only that we loved them and they hadn't heard us calling . . . still do not hear us calling them out of those rooms where they went to be alone for all time. . . . and where we will never find the pieces to put them back together."

The girls, in their lime-green prison, inspired the adolescent longing that remains indelible. The debutantes and their families will probably tell the tale of the strange Lisbon girls, but "We" and his friends will live and relive those days forever.

Cabaret

See "Green as Decadence" on page 197.

Great Expectations

1998. Ethan Hawke, Gywneth Paltrow, Anne Bancroft, Robert De Niro. Directed by Alfonso Cuaron. Cinematographer: Emmanuel Lubezki; Production Designer: Tony Burrough.

A GREEN MEMORY

So obvious in its use of the color, this film is jokingly called "Green Expectations" by many filmmakers. Yet no major critic at

the time mentioned the color's significance. Interesting in light of the fact that painter Finnegan Bell (Ethan Hawke) in the opening voiceover declares color to be a metaphor for subjective memory.

"There either is or is not a way things are. . . . The color of the day . . . the way it felt to be a child. . . . sometimes the water is yellow . . . sometimes it's red . . . but what color it is depends on the day. I'm not going to tell the story the way that it happened. I'm going to tell it the way I remember it."

Finn definitely remembers it in green. And that makes all the difference in how we respond psychologically to his narrative. The omnipresence of green influences, supports, and sustains our reactions to the characters and the story. To have this much green in this many places sends contradicting signals from fertile to poisonous, and when you receive them all at once, indoors as well as outside, it puts you in an unnatural place. Maybe critics didn't mention green because once you acknowledge its presence you need a syntax to place it in and that syntax is visceral and intuitive. It's clearly a stylization with no reference except to itself.

We first see young Finn, alone with his sketchbook, steering his small outboard toward the shore. It is here, through a terrifying encounter with a violent escaped convict (Robert De Niro), that we see two of Finn's characteristics that propel his story forward: a sweet naiveté and a stubborn loyalty to people who he perceives to have power over him.

PARADISO PERDUTO

Finn is a poor kid who is being raised by Joe (Chris Cooper), who wears a green shirt and is a gardener who drives a green truck in this very green and very fecund world of the Florida Gulf Coast. When Joe gets a job at the decaying estate of Paradiso Perduto (Lost Paradise) owned by the richest lady in the Gulf, Finn's green world becomes even greener and more bizarre. Jilted at the altar years earlier, Nora Driggers Dinsmore (Anne Bancroft) lives in an overgrown monument to her lust for revenge. As the camera pans over the twisted greenness in the place, we see banquet tables still laden with silver reminders of an uneaten feast. This is a jungle green that chokes all light in its obsession to perpetuate itself. Like Ms. Dinsmore's obsession with destroying men.

Shot with a long lens, Finn is framed by a soft green, into which appears the young and very beautiful Estella, Ms. Dinsmore's niece.

She wears a dress that is just a whisper of green, a color that sends out a deceptively soft energy. She turns, walks away, and looks back as if expecting him to follow. And so begins their dynamic, cruelly orchestrated by Ms. Dinsmore, who sees Finn as a vehicle for her to extract her revenge on all men and who has trained Estella as the means to accomplish it. As the story unfolds, green will become an oppressive presence that mirrors the corrupt longings of a sick and bitter woman.

Finn is summoned to Paradiso Perduto to become a companion to Estella. As if participating as a player in an unknown game, he wears a green shirt and tie for his arrival. Like a precocious docent, Estella greets him in a yellow-green frock and gives him a tour of the mansion. As she does, the adult Finn's voiceover observes, "It smelled like dead flowers and cat piss."

A green parrot squawks Finn's arrival and Ms. Dinsmore turns around abruptly. In bejeweled green palazzo pajamas, like a badly painted copy of a Lautrec come to life, she hisses, "Chick-a-boom!" (See the photo on the Green Home Page, page 159.)

Grabbing Finn and spinning him around to "Besame Mucho," she demands that he entertain her. But Finn can't dance. What he can do is draw. Dramatically, Ms. Dinsmore rips a piece of wallpaper from her decaying wall and summons Estella to sit for a portrait. As Finn draws, she whispers insidiously in his ear. "You think she's beautiful?" It is a remarkable portrait, which Estella cruelly tosses away. Only later will she tell him how beautiful it was.

On the way out, Estella invites Finn to drink from an exquisitely backlit fountain. As he does, she drinks too, in what becomes their first (and very sensual) kiss. A fleeting (and very knowing) smile crosses her face, which almost immediately resumes its customary cold haughtiness. And so begins their dynamic, nourished by the seeds of poison sown here, in this very green and very decadent world.

And so each Saturday, Finn visits Ms. Dinsmore and she teaches the two young people to dance. As they twirl, they transform into young adults (Ethan Hawke and Gwyneth Paltrow). She, again in a pale, deceptively innocent green, continues her sexual seduction. They have one passionate but nonconsummated encounter and she abruptly departs for two years of schooling abroad.

THE MYSTERIOUS PATRON

Out of nowhere, a representative of a mysterious client appears. It seems this client wants to bring Finn to New York to have a show in a major gallery. Suspecting right away it is she, Finn goes to see Ms. Dinsmore and she tells him Estella is in New York. Of course, Finn goes to New York, and even there, at least at first, green prevails. The subway seats are green, the subway station globes are green, the interior of his gallery is green. One day in Central Park, Finn, with a soft rich green again behind him, drinks from a fountain and another mouth seductively joins his. And there she is, in an elegant olive green. "And here we are," she says, "I have to run."

AN AMBIVALENT DYNAMIC

Finn tells her he'd like to paint her and she appears one morning, unannounced, and wakes him up. She models for him as if she's been posing for artists for years, disrobing seductively, haloed in golden sunlight, smoking. He draws and the drawings capture a longing, even a nostalgia, that goes beyond her physical beauty. "I have to go," she says. Finn chases after her and screams, "What's it like not to feel anything?" Estella replies, "What if a little girl were taught to fear daylight . . . was taught it was her enemy . . . that it would hurt her. And then, one day, you ask her to go out and play and she won't." Finn counters, "I knew that little girl and I saw that light in her eyes, and that's still what I see." "We are what we are," Estella replies. "People don't change." There is no green in this scene.

Finn gets a postcard from Ms. Dinsmore, asking, "How's my little mouse doing?"

As he rides upward to his loft in the dull green freight elevator, he wonders aloud what Ms. Dinsmore's plans were for him. Why she was protecting and promoting him and what her reason could be if not to make him equal to Estella?

Estella, however, tells him her boyfriend has asked her to marry him and wants to know if he has anything to say. "Congratulations! Sounds wonderful! I gotta go," Finn replies. His voiceover says, "She told me so I'd stop her, so I didn't."

So, of course, he pursues her and they inevitably make love. The scene fades to white light, a subtle hint of what's to come. Finn wakes up on khaki-green sheets.

Finn lives in a spacious loft, his paints and living expenses are paid for, and the curator of the Whitney Museum stops by. He, by

his own admission, has it all. The night of his opening, he leaves his gallery with green walls and walks in the rain, backlit by the high-fashion shop windows of SoHo. The windows are rimmed with green borders as if giving him a route to follow. Obviously, they lead him to Estella. Finn stands beneath her window and screams, "I did it! I am a wild success! . . . Are we happy now? . . . Everything I do, I do it for you. Anything that might be special in me is you."

Estella marries another man.

Apparently, it is Ms. Dinsmore who succeeds. And green is her visual metaphor. The film's surprise climax (if you haven't read Dickens) will not be betrayed here.

Finn tells us at the beginning that what color a story is in memory depends on the day. The color of Finn's story up until now has been green. Until the last sequence. On this day, as he and Estella, surrounded by brilliant white light that blocks out all green, look out over the Gulf, Finn wears a sophisticated olive green shirt covered with a white linen jacket as he says, "It was as if it had never been. It was just my memory of it."

Perhaps now, as adults, they can begin to dance.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

When we see green in its natural state in the movie, it is decaying and overrun. When it permeates, indeed dominates, the urban manmade environments, it becomes an artifice. This overuse of the color turns the association with healthy and abundant on its ear and becomes visually ironic. We're so busy *knowing* it's green, however, we may be unaware of how the color is affecting us. Watch the film on fast-forward and get in contact with how you feel physically. Alfonso Cuaron did much the same thing in his ***A Little Princess*** in 1995 (see page 175), where green was used as a metaphor for the poisonous effect of restrictions and prejudice. Both stories ended with new beginnings. Both films, in their endings, used white to cover over the green.

Purple
The Beyond-the-Body Color

6

"In this town, murder's a form of entertainment."

—Matron "Mama" Morton

There have been times, particularly in romantic tales and poetry, when purple has been associated with sensuality. I suspect that may be because of the color's association with imbibing the grape. However, during our more than twenty years of research into the effects of color on behavior, purple was not once associated with sensuality. In fact, there seemed to be no real evidence of purple's having an effect in the physical realm at all. The color did, however, hold a powerful sway in the realm of the noncorporal, the mystical, and even the paranormal.

A complete description of our color experiments appears in the Backstory on page xxiii. But to review our project briefly, during a period of twenty-plus years, roughly two-thousand students were involved with designing "environments" that explored color, its associations with the senses, and its effect on behavior. Every semester, at least one class chose purple and the color resonated with the students in ways that were consistent. The designs for their environments often dealt with ritual, magic, and the spiritual. Each year at least one group built an altar.

I had expected interpretations of "royal" and was ready to talk about why that was an intellectual and not a visceral response to a color. I was surprised, however, by the lack of royal references to purple. Actually, royal interpretations of the color were outpaced roughly ten-to-one by its associations with the spiritual and mystical. Occasionally there were thrones in the environments, but the association with the royal and regal comes from the fact that violet is the most difficult color to come by in nature. Its very scarcity associates it with the rare trappings of emperors, kings, and queens.

But altars are in a different genre altogether. Altars are in the province of something beyond the material. The altars the students designed often used religious associations as a springboard. There were altars to chocolate (a taste often associated with the color) and to the smells of lavender. There were psychics, fortune-tellers, and *brujas*. Often, there were vigils, wakes, and funerals. One funeral was complete with a tombstone for each member of the class.

What is significant is there was absolutely no discussion about purple or the signals it sends before the students designed their environments. In fact, they were forbidden to tell anyone outside of their group what

they were doing for the project. The students simply were responding intuitively to the color. And for more than twenty years, the results were virtually without deviation.

We found purple is a color that inspires associations with the nonphysical. It sends a signal that someone or something is going to be transformed. For example, in ***West Side Story***, Bernardo, his purple shirt as intense as his attitude, mambos with Anita, not knowing that in twenty-four hours he will be dead. In ***The Sixth Sense***, dressed in elegant iridescent violet, Anna goes to the wine cellar only to return and within minutes see her husband murdered. In ***Gladiator***, Marcus Aurelius, his silver hair shrouded by a violet hood, watches his legions demolish the barbarians. Visually, he is the regal grim reaper incarnate. Within the next half-hour of movie time, he, too, will die.

The death may not always be literal. It may not always be *someone* but some*thing* that will die or be lost when purple appears onscreen. It might be love or youth or dream or illusion. Max Fisher, the adolescent rogue in ***Rushmore***, climbs a ladder to the purple bedroom of his teacher, only to lose his delusion that he will sleep with her. In ***Eyes Wide Shut,*** the young prostitute wears purple. Not only doesn't she sleep with Tom Cruise, she is also HIV-positive.

And in ***Chicago***, where purple light is a consistent presence, murder itself becomes a satirical song-and-dance act.

Think About This:

If it's purple, someone's (or something's) going to die (or be transformed).

11

Asexual, Illusory, and Fantastic Purples

Asexual Purples

Eyes Wide Shut

1999. Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Production Design: Les Tomkins and Roy Walker.

WHAT YOU SEE AND WHAT YOU *SEE*

Dr. Bill Harford (Tom Cruise) walks the winter streets of New York alone. A beautiful young woman, with the kind of long straight blond hair that belongs to the girl next door, approaches him, points to a very red set of doors, and invites him upstairs to her apartment to "have a little fun." She wears a fuzzy, fake fur hat and coat, which is not quite in rhythm with her natural uncluttered beauty. In fact, nothing quite fits in this scenario. He reluctantly follows her though the red doors to her apartment, which glows playfully with magenta, orange, and red Christmas tree lights. Purple, red, and white bras dangle like laundry over the kitchen sink. She removes her fake fur coat, revealing a purple halter so rich in color it would not be out of place in a religious ritual. Stanley Kubrick is playing with duplicity here, and color plays a role in clueing us in to his deceit. The carnal ritual doesn't take place, but an ambiguous ritual does. "What do you want to do?" she asks. As if to a waitress, "What do you recommend?" he answers. "I'd rather not put it into words," she replies. "Shall we?" she says. His cellphone rings. We cut to his wife (Nicole Kidman) dressed in a passion-free pale blue robe in a pale blue kitchen. She asks when he's coming home. "It's difficult to talk right now," he says. "It could be a while." The young girl looks at him and says, "Do you have to go?" "I have to go," he replies. "I want to pay you anyway," he says. Nothing sexual has happened. Purple has played its role well. Not only does Cruise not sleep with her, we learn later she is HIV-positive.

This film is not about the coming together that we expect. Perhaps it is the playing around with the pairing of opposites.

RED: A VISUAL NONSEQUITUR

We're conditioned to think of pool tables as green, and maybe that's the point.

Kubrick chose a red pool table to be a central clue in really seeing ***Eyes Wide Shut***. Michael Herr in a *Vanity Fair* article said he didn't understand the pool table scene and that maybe it was simply about the red pool table. Whether we understand it or not, the approach is pure Kubrick. ***Eyes Wide Shut*** is often about things being the opposite of what we believe to be true.

The title of the film comes into play here. Both the title and the pool table are all about what we see (and what we don't). People who are color-blind are often red/green color-blind. The color red is the opposite from green on the color wheel. The color choice could be intentional. If it wasn't, Kubrick probably would have loved this theory: What you see is the opposite of what you *see*.

Blow-Up

See "Purple: The Clue to What Doesn't Happen" on page 93, Photo on next Page.

Illusory Purples

Rushmore

1998. Jason Schwartzman, Bill Murray, Olivia Williams. Directed by Wes Anderson. Cinematography: Robert Yeoman; Production Design: David Wasco.

TOUGH LUCK, MAX

This film is the jewel that gave Bill Murray a slew of nominations for Best Supporting Actor and birth to the lovable teen lothario Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman). Interestingly enough, purple plays a key role in the character of the teacher, played by the same actress (Olivia Williams) who wore the purple dress that signaled Bruce Willis' demise in ***The Sixth Sense***. This time,

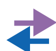
however, purple signals the death of an illusion. It seems fifteen-year-old Max is obsessed with the idea that he will sleep with her.

A sometimes adorable, sometimes obnoxious, always hysterically funny rogue, Max uses every ruse in the book to seduce Ms. Cross (Williams). Ultimately, when he climbs up a ladder to her bedroom, feigning a head wound from a phony bike accident, and we see the purple walls of Ms. Cross's room, we know absolutely that there is no chance that a seduction is going to happen. What makes this really work is the fact that the choice of purple is reality-based. Ms. Cross is a widow and is living in her drowned husband's old room, which has become a kind of posthumous tribute to him (or to her memory of him). She is in mourning.

In *Blow-Up*, the woman takes off her shirt. He tells her to put it back on, that he'll cut out the negative she wants. Then he gives her the wrong negatives. Purple supports ambivalence. So does Antonioni.

Because purple is a color that inspires illusion (and in Max's case, *delusion*) and the spiritual, it doesn't hold a lot of sway in the carnal realm. The signal it sends to our young lothario is, "Tough luck, Max. It's not going to happen."

Purple is the clue to a delusional identity in *Dick Tracy*.



Tootsie

See "Purple: The Death of Dorothy" on page 85.

Dick Tracy

See "Purple: The Tip-Off to the Surprise Ending" on page 60.

Far from Heaven

See "Purple: The Color of Loss" on page 137.

Cabaret

1972. Liza Minnelli, Joel Grey, Michael York. Directed by Bob Fosse. Cinematography: Geoffrey Unsworth; Production Design: Rolf Zehetbauer.

PURPLE AS AN OMEN

It's Berlin in the early 1930s and Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli), a tacky cabaret star wannabe, beckons us to "Come hear the music play." All around her, in plain sight, "unacceptable" people are dragged on the streets and beaten by men in brown shirts. But Sally, with green-painted fingernails and dressed in a just-this-side-of-slutty purple halter-dress, tries to sell us on the idea that "Life Is a Cabaret."

"Come taste the wine . . . Come hear the band," she teases. Sally even fantasizes herself looking great in a coffin. Like her old friend Elsie, the hooker from Chelsea, Sally has made up her mind that she will be a happy corpse.

It's brilliantly ironic to have Sally dressed in purple for the final scene. The world is about to collapse around her and she invites us to follow her. Don't underestimate the role purple subliminally plays in this scenario. It is the color that supplies the irony to all of this phony enthusiasm. It's the color of mourning. "Come to the Cabaret . . . Come with me and play," Sally beckons. Come with me and die.

The bizarre-looking audience is straight out of a George Grosz caricature. The performers are even more grotesque; buxom banjo players and voluptuous mud wrestlers provide the backdrop for the bizarre character of the Master of Ceremonies (Joel Grey), who prophetically tells us "goodbye" in many languages.

Through a mottled glass partition, the camera pans across the audience. We see everything in distortion. It becomes a mirror of the horrors that have only just begun. There are elements, however, that stand out in repetition. They are insignias of a black on white twisted cross on a red ground.

GREEN AS DECADENT

Sally, as she holds up her green-painted fingernails, says it herself: "Divine decadence darling!" The green fingernails are an

archetypal cliché. Green as mold. Green as decay. It's brilliant in its minimalism. There is nothing alive about this green. It is dark and ominous. With Sally's manic hand gestures and long cigarette holder, the camera sees to it that we see green long enough for it to register and affect us. It's a brilliant tactic. What could be more mundane than nail polish? It signals an acceptance of a decadent color by the middle-class patrons of the cabaret who are the cornerstone of the new social order. The color of Sally's "divinely decadent" nails mirrors her audience back to itself.

Chicago

2002. Catherine Zeta-Jones, Renee Zellweger, Richard Gere, Queen Latifah. Directed by Rob Marshall. Cinematography: Dion Beebe with James Chressanthis; Production Design: John Myhre.

THE MURDERING CELEBS

The camera zooms into the pupil of an eye. A band plays. Velma Kelly (Catherine Zeta-Jones) rises up out of the stage floor and sings a sister act alone. Purple light spots the piano player. Roxy Hart (Renee Zellweger), she of the aperture eye, stands awestruck in the audience. Suddenly Roxy's the one on stage, and she even completes a line from Velmas' song. We're beginning to get that we're seeing through Roxy's eyes, and what a stagestruck vision it is.

Chicago is a highly original combination of history, reality, and fantasy. Actually, Roxy and Velma have a lot in common. They've both gunned down duplicitous lovers (and, in Velma's case, a sister too). And they're both remanded to Murderer's Row. This is not such a bad time to be a murdering moll in Chicago. As Mama (Queen Latifah) says, "In this town, murder's a form of entertainment." Both of these toughies become instant celebs through the sleazy marketing of Billy Flynn (Richard Gere), a criminal lawyer who knows how to "razzle-dazzle" both the press and the jury.

This, however, is anything but a linear story, at least visually. Color becomes part of the glue that connects the disparate elements together. Purple light has been onstage as a supporting color from the beginning, but after Roxy plugs her lying lover, it becomes more obvious. She's talked her sweet but dim-witted husband Amos (John C. Reilly) into confessing to shooting "a

burglar," and while he is talking to the cops, Roxy, in tacky shrimp-colored satin, sees herself singing a song to Amos. The piano player (Taye Diggs), who is a connecting link between the girls and their dream, is dressed in a purple suit and fedora, and both he and Roxy are lit by a purple light. Purple, in one form or another, will stay with this story through the end. The story is, after all, about the glamorizing of murderers (and sleazy lawyers). It's also about the blurring of boundaries between criminal behavior and celebrity. The choice of purple, a color that has so many associations with death and delusion (see the Purple Home Page on page 189), to be a supporting color in what basically is a musical satire, is perfect. There is something about the presence of this deep purple while singers sing and dancers dance that makes the message more serious. Rich purple is a heavy color visually. Because it is dark, it is perceived as having weight. Underneath it all is a serious issue. Purple reinforces this.

When I asked a colleague what he thought was the major theme in ***Chicago***, he replied, "The death of innocence."

12

Mystical, Ominous, Ethereal Purples

Mystical Purples

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

See "Purple: The Color of Transformation" on page 174.

Eve's Bayou

1997. Jurnee Smollett, Meagan Good, Samuel L. Jackson, Lynn Whitfield, Debbi Morgan. Directed by Kasi Lemmons. Cinematography: Amy Vincent; Production Design: Jeff Howard.

THE DOMAIN OF THE UNSEEN

Purple is not a simple color. The more we investigated its influence, the more enigmatic it became (see the Purple Home Page on page 189). It inspired interpretations of things that are not seen (e.g., fortune-tellers and voodoo rituals); things that are in a domain of the spirit; things that, because they are not seen, are often ambiguous—things that happen in ***Eve's Bayou***.

The mists of the Louisiana bayou obscure the boundaries between truth and illusion, memories and dreams, and maybe between good and evil. Things are not often what they appear to be. Perceptions are confused, and purple becomes the channel for information that will reveal the secrets of the cursed and gifted Batiste family.

The color does not appear often, yet it carries with it clues to the inevitable events known to us from the very first words we hear: "Memory is a selection of images . . . some illusive, others printed indelibly on the brain. The summer I killed my father, I was ten years old."

By the end of the film, we learn even those words may not really be the truth.

The first Eve Batiste was a slave whose "powerful medicine" delivered Colonel Jean Paul Batiste from cholera. In gratitude, he freed her and gave her land on the edge of a Louisiana bayou, and she in turn bore him sixteen children. Ten-year-old Eve (Jurnee Smollett), her descendent, has inherited this powerful medicine but not yet the wisdom to know its consequences. When purple appears on screen, watch for what consequences follow.

Harbingers begin at a Batiste family party when a guest dressed in purple gossips and we learn for the first time of the liaison between Eve's father, Louis (Samuel L. Jackson), and Mattie Monroe (Lisa Nicole Carson)—the affair that will ultimately result in his death.

At the party, Eve's grandmother, in a purple dress, scornfully voices her disapproval of Mrs. Monroe's ever-so-obvious sexuality. Both women will be in mourning before the summer is over.

Eve carries a basket of purple irises to the family cemetery and lays the flowers on the graves. On the way home, as if it were a coffin, she lays an iris on the net-shrouded bed of sleeping Aunt Mozelle (Debbi Morgan). Mozelle, who counsels her clients in a room tinged with purple, is a psychic who herself is a victim of a curse. She has just become widowed for the third time. The three graves are for her husbands.

THE INDELIBLE OMEN

Wearing a purple dress, Roz Batiste (Lynn Whitfield), Eve's mother, goes to the market and is drawn toward Elzora (Diahann Carroll), a fortune-telling voodoo priestess. Elzora, her violet candle burning, gives Roz the strange and enigmatic warning, "Look to your children."

Cisely (Meagan Good), Eve's fourteen-year-old sister, romanticizes about becoming a woman. But when her first period arrives, she is embarrassed, frightened, and withdrawn. When she tries to console her, Roz wears purple.

There are many kinds of mourning in this film, and purple foreshadows all of them.

When Cisely tells Eve of the unspeakable advances from their father, and Eve reads their father's letter relating the advances of Cisely towards him, the truth, inevitably, is still obscured.

But between those two revelations, Eve sets in motion a chain of events that will lead to a tragic reality her gift was not mature enough to understand.

The bayou is not shot in a purple light. That would be too specific for a color that thrives on ambiguity. Instead, purple has signaled clues to what might or might not have happened. Besides, the ambiguous nature of purple has a kinship to the mists of the bayou, and the spirit of *Rashomon* hovers within them. Much of what activates the story has been whispered visually. And, if you allow yourself to, you'll hear it.

AN ADVISORY

The beginning voiceover is repeated at the end, with the exception of one very important change that is crucial to the entire movie. Don't miss it.

Ominous Purples

Gladiator

2000. Russell Crowe, Joaquin Phoenix, Connie Nielson, Oliver Reed, Djimon Hounsou. Directed by Ridley Scott. Cinematography: John Mathieson; Production Design: Arthur Max.

GOLDEN YELLOW: A FARMER'S DREAM

Shot in soft focus in an amber light, a strong thick hand caresses the beards of gently swaying wheat. This man, who wears the leather wrist guard of a Roman soldier, clearly loves the feel of wheat.

We cut to the cold blue light of Germania and we see his face. It is a grave, intelligent face, furrowed by heavy responsibility. He bends down, instinctively picks up a handful of earth, smells it, mounts his horse and commands his troops with, "At my signal, unleash hell." In less than a minute, Scott has shown us two sides of this complex man. He is able to make cold, calculating orders for the destruction of his enemies. He is also a man who has no desire for power. At heart, he is of the earth, a simple man who loves completely and is incapable of betrayal. He is a man who can hold onto a dream and a memory. The golden wheat field was a

memory, one that will sustain him throughout the movie. Golden light can visually take us to a place of longing.

This man is Roman General Maximus (Russell Crowe), who believes that in three weeks he will be harvesting the crops he so dearly loves. He will be back with his wife whose hair is the color of the fertile earth. He will be with his young son. He will be on his farm made of pink stones that warm in the sun, enjoying the aroma of herbs in the day and jasmine in the evening. The amber color of the light supports our belief that a farmer/warrior can have these needs. It allows us to *see* the emotional softness inside that powerful body, and feel what is at the core of Maximus. Without it, we would perceive him as a very different kind of man.

When Caesar Marcus Aurelius (Richard Harris) asks how he can reward him, Maximus replies, "Let me go home."

Caesar has other things in mind. He says to Maximus, "There was once a dream that was Rome . . ." He continues, "I want you to become the protector of Rome . . . to give power back to the people of Rome and end the corruption that has crippled it. Will you accept this great honor . . . ?"

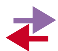
"With all my heart, no," Maximus replies.

"That is why it must be you," Caesar answers.

Marcus Aurelius is a man who holds on to a dream of a greater Rome. Maximus is a man who has held on to the dream of returning to his farm. These memories have sustained them. The golden light allows us to know that on a visceral level.

A PURPLE OMEN

As Marcus Aurelius, flying white hair protected by a purple hood, watches his well-trained legions demolish the barbarous Germanians, he visually becomes the royal harbinger of death: the regal grim reaper incarnate. Really *see* the underlying design of this image—particularly the silhouette of the purple hood. It could be the ultimate visual translation of this book's title. Within the next half-hour of movie time, Marcus Aurelius will die.



The Sixth Sense

See The Purple Omen on page 21.

Apocalypse Now Redux

See Purple as an Omen on page 147.

Far from Heaven

See "Purple: The Color of Loss" on page 137.

Ethereal Purples

Déjà Vu

1997. Stephan Dillane, Victoria Foyt, Vanessa Redgrave. Directed by Henry Jaglom. Cinematography: Hanania Baer; Art Direction: Helen Scott.

It is fitting that this story begins in Jerusalem, a place whose ambiance seems to straddle time. This story is about straddling time. It is about unseen forces that work in the service of the heart. Purple is the perfect vehicle for the unseen, and in this film, it is used subtly and wisely.

Dana (Victoria Foyt) is an American who journeyed here to find wares for her shop in a restored mansion in Los Angeles. As she walks through the age-old bazaars, young children, as they have for centuries, trot by on a camel. Street musicians play in front of a Pepsi sign.

The ancient Citadel of David commands the hillside, and she stops for a drink at a café beneath it. An elegant blonde woman wearing a dress the color of French lilacs asks if she may join her and they fall easily into conversation. The woman tells Dana she comes to Jerusalem every year but stays in a hotel in Tel Aviv because "the nights are too holy to sleep here." She notices Dana's ring and says, "Engaged, I see." "Yes, I suppose I am," Dana replies. Dana has been engaged for six years.

Dana admires an unusual jeweled clip the woman wears. It seems familiar to her somehow. The woman tells her it was made especially for her as an engagement present many years before and insists Dana put it on. "Voila! I knew it would suit you," she says. She tells Dana it was part of a pair. "It was after the war when everything seemed possible again," she begins. They were young; she a

French Jewish shop girl and he an American from an old wealthy family. "We were like soul mates, interchangeable, like twins," she says. "He was the love of my life." He went on ahead to explain it to his fiancée and family and said he would send for her. "Don't worry. We'll always be together," he told her. She gave him the other clip from the pair and told him she would only wear them together when they were reunited. "It's the old story," she says. "You know the rest. He sent me one last letter with a photo of this beautiful baby." She never saw him again.

"Maybe he tried to reach you and the mail got lost," Dana tries. "I never moved," she says. She lived in Montmartre in Paris and eventually married too. "Life got hold of us . . . So we each lived out our destiny, but nothing seemed so real ever again. In fact, all my life since then has seemed like a dream." She fights back tears and excuses herself to the powder room.

She never returns.

So begins a strange story about coincidence and destiny, doubt and certainty, and illusion and love. This is a film where the resonance of purple supports the ambiguities experienced by the characters, particularly Dana.

Worried about the valuable clip, Dana takes a cab to the hotel where the woman was staying and discovers that it had been torn down years ago. She flies to Paris, goes to the woman's neighborhood, looking for a jeweler who may recognize the clip. She finds the old man who crafted it and asks if he'll put it in his window so that the woman might find it. She also leaves her engagement ring with him to be sized properly. She looks outside, glimpses a man through the window, and forgetting her ring, compulsively runs out only to lose sight of him. Under her black suit she wears a sweater the exact pale purple color the woman in Jerusalem wore. Subtly, we sense there is a connection, not to just the woman in lilac, but perhaps to the half-seen man, as well.

She boards the train for London where she is to meet her fiancé, but after hearing a woman on the train humming the 1940s hit, "The White Cliffs of Dover," she compulsively gets off at the Dover station. Something about the song's theme of hope and renewal has lodged inside her. As she walks along the top of the cliffs, she sees a man painting and walks toward him. "Have we met before?" she asks. "I was wondering that," he responds. As with the woman in Jerusalem, the two fall into a conversation that repeats

and repeats an endless theme between them. She: “Suddenly, you’re in a place where you don’t belong and you feel everything clicks . . .” He: “You see someone and you can’t live without them . . .” “Do you think that person exists?” she asks. “More and more . . . Every minute,” Sean (Stephen Dillane) replies. He drives her to London, where she and Alex (her fiancé) are staying with friends. He switches on the radio. “White Cliffs of Dover” is playing. They laugh.

He takes her to his studio, where an unfinished portrait sits on an easel. “Who’s that?” Dana asks. “Dunno,” Sean replies, “I’m not sure who it is yet.” Dana is drawn to a small painting of a couple in silhouette looking toward to Eiffel Tower. “I just knew that’s the one you’d be drawn to,” he says and gives it to her. Tentatively they begin to make love and as he takes off her jacket, the lilac of her sweater becomes a dominant visual chord. “I can’t do this,” she says and leaves. Our research has shown time and again that purple inspires the mystical or spiritual, but not the carnal.

Alex (Michael Brandon), Dana’s fiancé, is waiting at their friend’s house and he wants to make love. She, still wearing purple, doesn’t. Dana and Alex are compatible superficially, but they are on parallel tracks in how they perceive practically everything. She tells him about the woman’s emotional attachments to the clip. He wants to know what the clip is worth. “She seemed to have something to tell me. Alex, when we met, did you feel connected to me . . . as if you knew me?” “How could I feel connected?” he says, “I didn’t know you.”

A beautiful young woman, Claire (Glynis Barber) knocks on their door to introduce herself. She and her husband, who’s designing an extension to the house, are also guests this weekend. Dana goes out for a walk alone and runs into Sean. For what seem like endless moments of incredulity, each of them repeats, “What are you doing here? . . . Why are you here?”

Sean is the architect and the beautiful Claire is his wife. Theirs is not an unhappy relationship.

That night, all the guests in the London house sit around the fire telling stories. All the stories somehow relate to missed connections or opportunities lost. The host’s sister Skelly (Vanessa Redgrave) tells a childhood story about a young girl in a hospital during the war who kept up hope that “things would be all right” by singing “The White Cliffs of Dover.” Dana’s mouth drops and she shakes her head incredulously. Sean buries his head in his hands.

Like some kind of a cosmic thread, Dana is again wearing the color of French lilacs.

Later that evening, Skelly and Sean talk alone. Sean tells her about what's happening and says, "What I can't decide is how much of it is an illusion." In reply, Skelly, in what might be the best line in this movie, says, "An illusion must be the scent of what's real coming close."

Sean goes upstairs and asks Claire, "What do you think of our marriage so far?"

"So far, so good," she says. Sean can't sleep and goes downstairs and runs into Dana. He tells her he thinks that what this is is a test for their marriages. Inside, Dana feels both helpless and furious. "I just don't know what to do with this feeling—I don't know where to put it," she says, crying. The red of her bathrobe underscores a real anger and becomes a visual turning point for their relationship. The illusory nature of purple is no longer an influence. She goes upstairs.

The next day, Alex and Dana are at an antiques market and have a huge fight over style and meaning. Dana walks away and, of course, runs into Sean. (One of the things Henry Jaglom does is keep the story just this side of the possible. This is not as incredible as it might seem, given their interests. She's designing a new shop. He's looking for ideas for his architecture.) They go to his studio (this time, she wears a red sweater) and finally make love that is not just physical. There has always been a spiritual quality (reflected by the purple) to their being together. Each of them tells their partner about their relationship.

As she talks with her fiancé, Dana takes off a red sweater and puts on a white one. This is not insignificant. Up until now, the color purple has been her link to an unseen connection. It was as if the woman in Jerusalem had left visual crumbs on a trail for her to follow. Pale purple has visually supported Dana's dream of her and Sean being together. Here, we *see* her change the color of her sweater. Jaglom didn't have to show us that unless it had some meaning for the story. Dana has gone from wearing purple to red to white. They met on the white cliffs. And, the song, as Skelly said, "kept up hope that 'things would be all right.'" White is also a clean slate.

Although it turns out to be a false alarm, Dana is suddenly summoned home because her father has had a heart attack. It is as if

some kind of unseen force conspired to get her there to finally put all the pieces of what's been happening together. Incredibly, what she learns ties together the woman in lilac, the clip, Sean, and the small painting of the two people in front of the Eiffel Tower.

It could only have happened through her returning home. And it is as real as the cliffs where they met at Dover. And, as the dream that began in Jerusalem.

Purple, a color associated with the ethereal, leaves us clues from the very beginning.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon

2000. Chow Yun Fat, Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi, Chang Chen. Directed by Ang Lee. Cinematography: Peter Pau; Production Designer: Tim Yip.

Blending into the earth colors of a village busying itself with the daily rituals of morning, the legendary hero Lee Mu Bai (Chow Yun Fat) arrives quietly and at a distance. He is part of this whole. He is also a warrior knight in the Wudan tradition—a way that teaches that inner spiritual strength and the "crouching tiger" ready to leap are integral parts of harmonious living. Balanced, these virtues serve to maintain the values of honor and justice.

Here is a world where a pervasive duality interweaves throughout—youth and maturity, body and spirit, love and vengeance, yearning and duty. Subtly underscoring this dynamic, director Ang Lee's choice of color not only defines a sense of place, but also influences us to form opinions, anticipate actions, and identify with or reject the characters we see on screen. Pay attention, for example, to how you're being emotionally controlled by the long sequences of pale cool colors, and how your body immediately reacts to the entrance of the hot reds. The green, as we shall see, has its own duality. Purple is the color least noticed and, perhaps, most controlling.

BLUE: AN UNSPOKEN MELANCHOLY

Pale blue is a quiet color, and much of this movie seems to be encrypted in it. It's a blue-gray, really. Aside from those obvious shifts to red, detached blue and mystical purple are never far from our visual field.

This environment is a perfect reflection of Shu Lien's (Michelle Yeoh's) and Li Mu Bai's emotionally repressed world. As she hears of Li Mu Bai's arrival, a fleeting look of what might be guarded excitement crosses Shu Lien's face. It hardly has a chance to register because it's as if the minute it occurs, her discipline as a Wudan warrior holds it in check.

Li Mu Bai tells Shu Lien that during his meditations at Wudan mountain, he did not feel the bliss of enlightenment. He tells her he was surrounded by an endless sorrow. "There was something pulling me back," he says. When she asks him what it was, a slight flicker barely registers on her face. "Something I can't let go of," he answers, and changes the subject. The pervasive blue-grayness of the interior (most of their conversations are in an enclosed space) also amplifies the unspoken melancholy that exists between them. It permeates both the words and the silences. Particularly the silences. Often their dialogues are shot in close-up, which gives their melancholy a kind of intimacy with the audience.

Later, Sir Te, a trusted friend, observes, "All these years, it's a shame neither of you is brave enough to admit the truth to the other. . . . When it comes to emotions, even great heroes can be idiots."

Lee Mu Bai has come to turn in his sword, "Green Destiny." When Shu Lien reminds him he has used it justly, he replies, "It only looks pure because blood washes so easily from its blade." However, first he must avenge the murder of his master by an evil outlaw called Jade Fox. This quest to leave his warrior days behind and begin anew becomes a personal crisis of critical proportions. The sword is only a symbol. And it's interesting that its name includes the word "Destiny" and a color that is associated with duality. Lee Mu Bai desires to give the Green Destiny to Sir Te. But almost as soon as he leaves it in Sir Te's house, it is stolen.

The Governor and his family are also guests in Sir Te's house. They are there for the wedding of Jen, their young, very spoiled, and very beautiful daughter.

RED: THE DANGEROUS ROMANTIC

Red arrives when Jen (Zhang Zi Yi) arrives. The color visually excites the screen. We see it first in the large flowers in her hair. In the presence of the blue-gray and purple (Shu Lien wears a subtle

purple throughout), it becomes a harbinger of the hot-blooded young woman she will reveal herself to be. Jen is a thrill-seeker with a lust for outlaw living that makes her very dangerous. She's an irresponsible romantic, blinded to reality and its consequences. She rebels in order to be free. But freedom to Jen doesn't included consequences. In an effort to mitigate Jen's rampant romanticizing of the warrior way, Shu Lien tells her that once she was engaged and that he was a brother in oath to Li Mu Bai. Although he was killed by Li Mu Bai's enemy, they couldn't dishonor his memory. The code of the warrior requires extreme personal sacrifice, something Jen is not at all interested in.

The location changes to the courtyard. The blue-gray of the space becomes deeper with the night. A small lithe figure in a black mask steals Green Destiny and effortlessly flies with it over the rooftops. As a drum beats out an intense rhythm in a breathtaking sequence, Shu Lien and the intruder fight, punch, and then fly as if swimming through the air: scaling, leaping, twirling, and spinning. Suddenly the intruder is gone. Something about his moves leads Shu Lien to believe the thief has been trained at Wudan.

VIOLENT ACTION AND PASSIVE RESTRAINT

We see punching and swordplay in a soft blue moonlight. We see Shu Lien in pale purple. These nonviolent and mystical colors, coupled with the violent actions and the sounds of intense drum pounding, produce multilayered responses in the audience. The blue is often buried in a gray and its effect is like the color—it lulls us into a place where passive restraint prevails. When the balletic battles do begin, we don't shudder and scrunch down in our seats. Rather, we revel in their virtuosity and lyricism. Lee allows us the gift of not being terrified. We are thrilled instead. Blue does not leave us in suspense. It suspends us and that is the difference.

Don't underestimate the controlling effect of the detached blue and mystical purple in these fight scenes. This is a war between the wise and the foolish, the calm and the impetuous, it is a war of ideas, of beliefs, and the detached influence of blue puts us in a place where we can subliminally know that.

Eventually, we discover that Jen is the thief and that she has learned her skills from Jade Fox. They are superficial skills, however—all technique with no understanding. To her, it is "playing around." To Li Mu Bai, it is a way of life, and he wants to teach the talented young woman because he fears she will become "a poison dragon."

When they're not fighting, Jen and Lo make love surrounded by hot and earthy reds.

When they fight, however, it is thrilling. They soar over the rooftops and dance over the water. But they fight surrounded by the darkness of night. As they spar, he says to her, "I've always wanted a disciple worthy of Wudan's secrets . . . I can teach you to fight with the Green Destiny, but first you must learn to hold its stillness."

RED: THE LUSTY BANDIT AND THE SPOILED BRAT

A young man in a fur hat enters Jen's room and they kiss passionately. "Come back with me to the desert. You'll be free there," he says. We flashback to a caravan moving across a dry open plain of golden brown earth. Straight out of a swashbuckler, Dark Cloud (Chang Chen), the bandit of the Gobi, enters swinging his sword and sending his henchmen swarming around the caravan and looting its wagons. Jen is transfixed by him. He rides to her window, snatches a pearl comb from her hand, winks at her, and impishly rides on. Furious, Jen, in keeping with the brat she is, leaps out of the wagon, jumps on a horse, pursues the bandit, and begins shooting arrows at him. She pulls his purple cloak from him, revealing a rich earth red robe underneath. (How's that for symbolism?) He taunts her and rides off. She pursues him. "Give me back my

comb," she demands. "Come and get it," he answers. And thus they bond, beginning a passionate relationship that propels the story.

Lo (the bandit's real name) is really a sweet guy with a developed esthetic sense. Filled with his bounty, his cave luxuriates with lush earth reds and golds, exotic textures, and especially a hot steamy bath made by dropping hot stones into a large tub of water brought bucket by bucket up the mountain. It serves both as a place to calm Jen down and to gear up for their next round of wooing and warring. And do they woo! The reds of the cave glow and steam and seduce us like exotic oils, and we catch their scent visually.

Sometimes color absolutely defines a character or the pairing of characters. The heroic Li Mu Bai, of Wudan Mountain, and Dark Cloud, the bandit of the Gobi Desert, are the cool, passive, and warm active energies that reflect each of their personalities. Red defines Jen's character. She's a vixen. She's arrogant, stubborn, compulsive, and powerful. Both Jen and Lo vibrate in hot and earthy reds. Both Li Mu Bai and Shu Lien, in restrained blue and spiritual purple, are visually calm and contemplative.

However, as both Jen and Lo, dressed in red, stand together overlooking the desert plain, they know her powerful family is looking for her and that this means real trouble. Lo tells Jen of a legend: Anyone who dares to jump from a mountain . . . God will grant his wish. . . . A faithful heart makes wishes come true.

Jen gives Lo her comb. "Return it to me when we are together again."

"I will," he says.

It happens sooner than she thinks. During her wedding procession, Lo does come back to spirit her away. His plan is foiled, however, and Li Mu Bai counsels him to go to Wudan and wait for instructions. Still in possession of Green Destiny, Jen masquerades as a young man "looking for action," but it is clearly action that is self-serving and heedless of consequences that are to come.

GREEN: THE BATTLE OF CONTRADICTIONS

In the meantime, Li Mu Bai and Shu Lien meet in a place where color signals a change in their relationship. They sit in an interior space, but this time one with an opening: a horizontal window (the passive dynamic between these two could never be a vertical one) that opens onto the outside world of a green bamboo forest. This is a green that is vital and alive, and it activates a whole new phys-

ical potential for them. He takes her hand, puts it against his face and holds it there.

He tells her, "My master would say, 'There is nothing we can hold onto in this world . . .' " Shu Lien replies, "Not everything is an illusion. . . . My hand, wasn't that real?"

"All this time I've never had the courage to touch it," he finally admits . . . "I don't know what to do. I want to be with you . . . just like this. It gives me a sense of peace." Mists soften the folds of the green-covered mountains.

After having decimated a gang of warriors with Green Destiny, Jen appears. Shu Lien has finally had it with Jen's cavalier behavior. This time when they battle, their sword fight is deadly. With her sword to her throat Shu Lien spares Jen and Jen responds by wounding her. From nowhere, Li Mu Bai jumps down and reprimands Jen and tells her she doesn't deserve the sword. Stubbornly, Jen flies up and over rooftops, over water, touching only to glide upwards again and finally into the vibrant green of the bamboo forest. The two fly, hover and soar, surrounded by green. Weaving slowly back and forth in visual counterpoint, theirs is a strange ritual, both graceful and deadly. They skim over water the color of emeralds. He, with the enigmatic smile of a Buddha, and she, filled with adolescent rage. The trees bend and sway, mirroring what is going on between the potential master and student. He wants to teach her the philosophy of no growth without assistance, no action without reaction, and no desire without restraint. "I can teach you to fight with the Green Destiny. But first, you must learn to hold its stillness," he tells her.

The oppositional nature of green plays a significant part in the story. The sword's name is "Green Destiny," and the villain's name is Jade Fox. Li Mu Bai's concern that Jen can become a poison dragon is his primary motivation in wanting to teach her. (see green's association with poison on page 160). When Li Mu Bai and Jen battle, bend, and sway, it is in a green that is alive but so saturated that we sense that a greater kind of life is at stake. It isn't just a physical life-or-death battle. It is a battle for a soul. It is a battle against Jen's evil potential. When she dives into the water to fetch the Green Destiny Li hurls into the lake, she swims into green water. Jen disappears into the green forest and we cut to Jade Fox making her poison darts.

From the place of intense greenness, we cut to a dark place in the night rain. It is a cavern in a canyon of ruins, backlit by a light

with no source. Jen lies drugged on the cave's floor. Suddenly poison darts fly. With brilliant circular moves with their swords, Li Mu Bai and Shu Lien deflect them. Jade Fox shrieks and shoots like an arrow toward Li Mu Bai. In an incredible feat of digital technology, her eye zooms at us, turns green, with the reflection of Li Mu Bai deflecting the poison with his sword. The warrior hero and the evil demon, however, are both mortally wounded.

There is an absence of all color as the atmosphere darkens. Li Mu Bai tells Shu Lien, "I have wasted my whole life . . . I want to tell you with my last breath I have always loved you. I would rather be a ghost drifting by your side as a condemned soul than enter heaven without you. Because of your love, I will never be a lonely spirit."

Two figures in white embrace in the darkness, duplicated in mirror image in the water: one living and one dead, in an all-encompassing duality.

THE WISHING BRIDGE

Shu Lien asks Jen to promise her what she herself did not understand until it was too late: that whatever path takes her in this life, she will be true to herself. She sends Jen to Wudan Mountain where Lo is waiting.

As we see them together, it is clear that red is no longer present in their lives. Each wears mature colors. Lo, a deep blue, and Jen, a subdued purple. They make love and when Lo awakes, he finds Jen's pearl comb is next to him. He runs to find her. Standing on a bridge, she asks him, "Do you remember the legend of the young man?" "A faithful heart makes wishes come true," he answers. "Make a wish, Lo." "To be back in the desert together again," he replies.

Silently, she leaps into the air and flies into the Wudan mists. She floats past us, her purple robes billowing behind her.

EPILOGUE

Does she die?

We are left without an answer. Purple is the color associated with the noncorporal. It is the color of the spirit . . . of the ideal. It is also the color associated with death of a person or an ideal or a dream.

This movie explores the ideals of love and honor and the evils of revenge and betrayal. In this subtle blue and violet world of Li

Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien, profound emotions between them are hidden, like identities and loyalties and longing. Their warrior training on Wudan Mountain is, for them, a spiritual bond. They are mates of the soul.

Throughout the story, purple has been a consistent yet very subtle presence. Each of the couples ultimately is not synchronous. Purple is the color of the place beyond the body where they may ultimately meet.

Color and Culture

With their large pools of international students, the School of Visual Arts in New York, California State University at Los Angeles, and the American Film Institute in Los Angeles afforded me, as a faculty member, the opportunity to explore cultural similarities and differences in response to color. I discovered that while students' individual stylistic approaches to color might indeed be different in character, their primary response was instinctual and similar. That is to say, the students tended to choose the same kinds of colors to express the same emotions.

To verify this, I recently invited former students of mine from different countries to participate in this experiment. First, by a vote, the participants selected two different emotional states. They were asked to recall an experience with those emotions that left a lasting impression in their memory. These students visualized not what the external experience looked like (they were instructed to put their left brains on "quit"), but rather, what their inner visceral response looked like. What, for example, were the feeling's colors, direction, size, and texture? They selected Tranquility and Rage.

Paints in the six major spectrum colors plus black and white were set out for their selection. The first three participants painted in Los Angeles at the same place at the same time.[1] As they began to paint, the students became so concentrated that the stillness in the room was palpable. No one knew which emotion the others were interpreting. They completed the paintings in less than an hour.

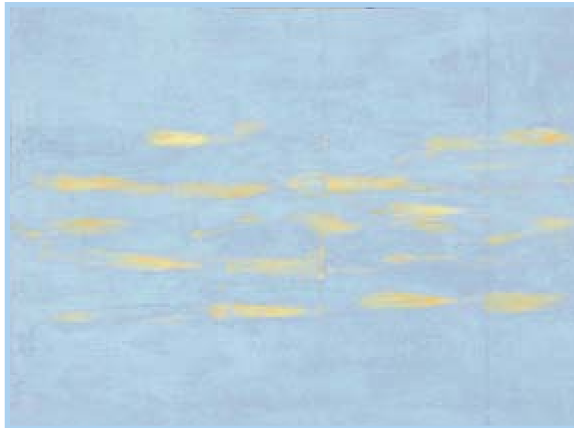
[1] The fourth student painted in the same place on another time by himself. The student from Singapore painted alone in New Jersey and the Mexican student painted alone in Davis, California. All participants had the same exact colors available to them. Many of them painted on brown paper grocery bags.

Here are the results along with the students' comments on their experience:

TRANQUILITY:

Juey Chong Ong
Singapore

I live on the Hudson River waterfront, and whenever I'm in a state of unease, walking by the river always makes me feel better, especially during sunset. The flowing water seems to wash away the stress and the negative feelings and the warmth of the glow from the setting sun is comforting. When I thought of a tranquil moment, I thought of water flowing past my fingers, and of a certain warmth.



Anna Vogt
Berlin, Germany

For me, tranquility is this feeling of calmness deep inside of myself. I always experience a feeling of warmth when I am calm. I guess that's why this tone of peach and pale rose arose within me. When I painted, I got calm myself and almost fell asleep.

Kaido Yamada
Tokyo, Japan

I have no "reason" how and why I picked these colors for "tranquility," they just came to my head. I knew I wanted a lighter color for the center. I felt there was something missing in my painting and this shape came into mind. It's not a tree or smoke. I don't know what it is. I picked up a different brush to do it. It was a brush for Japanese calligraphy. (Author's note This was not Yamada's brush. It was part of a selection of brushes set out by the author.)

Ilya Noe
Mexico City, Mexico

I proceeded to lie down flat on my belly. It was quite obvious to me that I was not going to need any "prosthetics." My hands sufficed. My movements were liquid, flowing smoothly and continuously for more than 13 minutes. I had at least one hand in contact with the paper at all times. I breathed gently.

Samuel Cordoba
Bogota, Colombia

I envisioned tranquility as a white, smooth color. At first, I filled the paper only with white, but it made me realize that pure white was so overwhelming that it could almost change this feeling to its opposite. Fear of emptiness. So, I just added a little bit of green and black, very much mixed with the white in a very smooth and soft way.

Christiane Benzonelli
Albertville, France

Two things that make me relaxed are the sea and the sky. When I painted the blues of the sea and the sky, I felt the calm in me so strong. It was like my heart was beating with a lightly waving emotion. I felt so relaxed doing it.

Samuel
Bogata, Colombia

Rage is an explosion coming from black. I was actually astonished that as I evoked this emotion, I saw a lot of green in it. Green mixed with black and on top, the furious red.

Kaido
Tokyo Japan

Again, I have no reasons why I picked black, red, and yellow. I painted spontaneously with no vertical or horizontal lines. I put some pattern in based on my feelings.

Ilya
Mexico City, Mexico

The painting was done standing up and in 4 minutes at the most. A spatula, a pair of scissors, and a utility blade were the tools I chose to extend my body. My strokes were forceful sharp and spastic. I scraped and injured the paper with blacks and different shades of reds. My heartbeat sped up and my breathing became agitated.

Anna
Berlin, Germany

It is almost like an explosion for me coming from the lower parts of my body, moving up. Red came up immediately to me, but also black and yellow.

Christiane
Albertville, France

On a sunny day (which is why I use the yellow), something explodes in my heart for a moment. I bleed (red). I hurt deeply (black).

Juey
Singapore

There was a time in my life when I had a hot temper. I remembered the times when I felt so angry that I lost control and became more physical than I should. At those moments, I just blew up. It felt irrational, out of control, explosive. The end result wasn't pretty. Today, I painted an ugly red and repeatedly pounded my fist dipped in black at the paper.

My seven-year-old noticed "Rage" when I was packing the paintings to bring to the FedEx office. In two seconds, she stunned me by saying, "That looks like mad." I hadn't told her what I was painting. She just knew.

It is important to remember that none of the participants knew what choices the others made for their interpretations. Note how red is included for the expression of "Rage" in all of the pieces. Red may be the celebratory color of weddings in India or the color worn by neighborhood vigilantes in New York. Whatever emotion this color affects, however, whether it's rage, fear, or euphoria, it is a powerful and passionate response. And there is no doubt, as these pieces (and many others) show, that tranquility is a horizontal state of mind.

So in the end, we find that the more we experience color a s it finds expression in all cultures, the more we can be able to find our visual expression more finely tuned within ourselves.

Art director and workshop participant Anna Vogt, from Berlin, made this extraordinary observation:

> *Going through that experiment and realizing that these basic emotions are felt if not in the same, then in a similar way, is exiting. In times where solitude has become the basic condition of all of us, this experience gives comfort because it creates a sense of community—a community not based on external confessions or regulations but on the inner condition of each individual.*

WHY NOT TRY THIS EXPERIMENT YOURSELVES?

Simply buy inexpensive red, yellow, blue, black, and white tempera paint and one inexpensive one-inch brush from your local art store. Have the bottles open and the brush ready to use. Use brown grocery bags as your paper. (This eliminates the cost intimidation factor, as well as the fear of the blank white page.) Like a frame, tape off an area on your paper with one-inch masking tape. Use a plate or cookie tray as a palette for your paint.

You are going to recall an emotional experience that left an indelible imprint on you. Feel it in your body. Is it warm or cold, vertical or horizontal, fast or slow, narrow or wide, etc.? Stay there in that place and let the memory of that emotion guide what colors you choose and how you move your painting implement. You don't have to use a brush; you can use a knife, fork, and spoon if you want to. Anything that will put paint on paper will do. First, pick a color (you will automatically know which one to choose), and paint a base coat on the paper. Immediately begin to put other colors down, either mixing them into the first coat or placing them on top of it. Your painting is a direct translation of your physical and emotional experience. You will know what to do. You will know when you are finished.

You can do this in a group or by yourself. However you do this experiment, it will affect your awareness of how color and emotion are inextricably bound, no matter where you are or where you come from. With what you learned from this experience, you have the information to be able to take charge of the emotions generated in your environment, whether on or off screen. You have the proof that it works. The rest is up to you.

—*Patti Bellantoni*

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