

National College of Art & Design
Department of Design for Body and the Environment

SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Vivid Language: Exploring the Role of Colour Through
Fashion

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Petty Officer First Class Shane T. McCoy, c. 2002, shows the first 20 prisoners at Guantanamo Bay soon after their arrival. U.S Navy (Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/10/us/politics/guantanamo-photos-prisoners.html>)

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Introduction

“[Dye] is unnecessary for health, afflicts greedy eyes, and moreover, it is false, for God would have made the sheep purple if He had wished the woollen clothes to be purple.” - Commodianus, 3rd Century A.D.

What does the colour of the clothes you are wearing say about you? Do they represent who you are, how you think or are you even conscious of the decision to wear the colours that you do? This research essay will explore the relationship between colour, clothing and the wearer. Michel Patoureau is a leading authority on medieval heraldry and the history and meaning of colour. His book, *The Devil's Cloth*, explores the use of two toned or striped fabric as an identifier of deviation in Medieval society. This study of the symbolism of colour in fabric has informed and inspired my research for this essay.

“Colour is like a key, a code for expressing the things we cannot always create with language or pictures.”(Kirchner,2009,p.50) Andrea Kirchner describes colour as almost like a sound or vibration.(2009,p.51) Can colour in fashion be considered a form of communication? Malcolm Barnard discusses in depth the complexity of clothing as a communicator. Communication through fashion is not the “simple sending of messages”, the garment becomes a medium by which one person sends a message to another, however, it is not always the wearer who chooses the message and the sender cannot always control how it is perceived.(Barnard,2002,p.56)

There are challenges in the discussion of colour and clothing. Colour association may give unintentional meanings to a garment, for example, a person's experience of a colour could place a negative or positive association on a garment.(DeLong, 2010) Colour, in particular, has the ability to be associated with specific cultures, people or historic periods.(DeLong, 2010) The socially constructed meanings behind many colours are multifaceted and vary in different cultures or parts of the world. For example, while black is the traditional mourning colour in Western society, in Taiwan, mourning dress has many different colours based on the wearer's level of kinship.(Cheng and Su,2010,p.286) These colours range from "...yellow cloth for great-great- grandsons and their peers, red cloth is for sons of lineal great-great-grandsons", and white is worn by the deceased's peers and in-laws.(2010,p.285) As a result of this complexity, for the purpose of this research essay, the case studies that are discussed in relation to colour focus on Europe and North America, where attitudes are culturally familiar.

Chapter 1 looks at the production of coloured textiles before the discovery of aniline dyes in the 1850s. In Medieval Europe, the wearing of colour was controlled through the use of sumptuary laws, which recognised that colour communicates the social and economic status of the wearer. Chapter 2 analyses how colour is deliberately used to convey group identity either through choice or through enforcement. It focuses on the use of colour in American prisoner uniforms and its deployment by the Suffragette movement in the early 20th century. The final chapter explores the role of colour trend forecasting in the fashion industry and asks whether the individual chooses colour or if the fashion industry dictates our clothing palette via the 'trickle-down effect'.

In my studio practice, as a BA Fashion Design student, the colour of textiles is of great importance and interest to me. This research topic will enrich the value of my design work and give greater meaning to my studio practice. It will inform what I am trying to say as a designer and give me a deeper sense of how to use colour to communicate my ideas.

Chapter 1: The Materiality of Colour

Historically, coloured textiles were an important commodity and played critical societal roles. As described by Jennifer Craik, all civilisations worldwide had managed to live in colour long before the invention of synthetic dyes.(Craik, 2009, p. 34) Until the 19th Century, dyes were created using natural ingredients from plants and animals. In Ancient Egypt, some of the first examples of dyestuffs can be seen. The madder plant was used from about 1500 BC and fabric stained with the plant's root was found in Tutankhamun's tomb.(St Clair, 2016, p.152) Textiles also had a profound religious significance, and as a result were used to wrap mummified bodies of importance.(St.Clair, 2016) In Medieval society, social order was created in the assignment of elaborate or rich garments.(Rocamora and Smelik, 2016, p. 221) There was great value placed on fabric dyeing as there was economic, social and aesthetic significance associated with the colour of fabric in early modern society. Hayward explains how reds, purples and blacks were more valuable because of the way in which they were produced. It was also at this time that dyeing became a skilled profession, reflecting its importance.(Hayward, 2017, p. 19-36)

Michel Pastoureau discusses how in German law, during the Middle Ages, two colour or striped garments were imposed or reserved for certain members of society such as bastards, serfs or the condemned. Pastoureau describes how the structural, visual nature of the stripe makes the wearer more pronounced when it is on a garment.(Pastoureau,2001,p.14) The nature of the two-coloured fabric makes the wearer stand out in a crowd and can therefore be identified as an outsider in society. The Council of Vienne in 1311 highlighted the societal opinion on two coloured

fabrics by forbidding clerics to wear such garments and breaking these rules came with severe penalties.(2001,p.13) In lay society, customs and laws required outcasts to wear two coloured clothes, imposing an identity on them. Similarly, in southern Europe, it was prostitutes, clowns and hangmen who were required to wear striped clothing “Everywhere, it is a matter of imposing a visual sign so that those who practice such trades not be confused with honest citizens.”(Pastoureau,2001,p.12-13) This method of imposing wearers with garments of two colours communicated to observers their function in society.

The Middle Ages saw the introduction of sumptuary laws which give historians detailed information on who wore what from different parts of society.(Hunt, 2010, p.48) These laws were found nearly everywhere in Europe between the mid-twelfth and eighteenth centuries.(Riello and McNeill, 2010,p.22)Their function was to reinforce the hierarchy of social relations in a community, often through dress. This allowed a person’s rank, profession or sex to be easily identified and colour was a significant indicator of status. Peasants were required to wear garments of one colour, usually black or grey, as Pastoureau describes the goal being that “...peasants should know their place and should be provided with regular reminders of it.”(2010,p.45) In cities, these laws were also introduced against the conspicuous display of “frivolous fashion [that] had led to envy, greed and sexual license.(Craig,2009,p.38) Among these frivolities was the wearing of bright colours. The ban on colour was driven by moral concerns but also because the materials used in the dying process were precious. Jennifer Craig notes an outcome of this involving unmarried women who were permitted to wear more colours than wives or widows.(2009, p.38-39) The colour of a garment therefore had the ability to

communicate status or wealth as it relied so directly on the cost of the method of production. Sumptuary laws were applied mostly in relation to 'sumptuous' or excessive consumption. They were not restricted to clothing and were also introduced in relation to spending on weddings, funerals and other ceremonies.(Lurie, 1981,p.22) It is difficult to relate these laws to modern society, however, one possible example is the imposing of black burqa gowns on Afghan women.

In the 15th century, the colour black in garments carried an idea of sophistication. The expensive production of black cloth made it "impracticable for the poor, and a mark therefore of social distinction."(Harvey, 1995, p.55) Harvey explains that the process of dying fabric black was arduous, it involved "... superimposing colour on colour till colour was killed..."(Harvey, 1995) While black garments were seen as sophisticated and smart, black was the traditional colour of mourning. Mourning dress became a specialist form of fashion (Craik, 2009) and in the 1800s, textile manufacturers saw the opportunity of commercialising the market for black mourning fabric, known as Borada crape.(Wilson and Taylor, 1989, p.27) The price of black fabric made it challenging for the poor to mourn with dignity as to not wear black when in mourning was the ultimate shame and disgrace in society.(1989, p.27) The wearing of black when mourning continued into the Victorian era, in some cases being worn for many years at a time following a death. While men's clothes already consisted of a majority of black garments, for women it involved a large and expensive adjustment.(1989,p.190)

The Industrial Revolution saw urbanisation and mechanisation which enabled an

increased production of clothes and textiles. As a result, luxury materials and dyes, previously only available to the elite, became available to the masses.(1981,p. 221)

A breakthrough in the history of the dyeing process came with the ability to use chemical substitutes. The earliest examples can be seen in 1702 with Prussian blue being created using potash and iron salt followed by the discovery of chemical aniline dyes in the 1850s.(Craik, 2009, p.39) The latter owes much to the work of William Perkin. While looking for a cure to save British soldiers from dying of malaria, Perkin accidentally created a substance with the ability to dye cloth a shade of mauve. Perkin stained his shirt a vivid shade of the purple colour, which was particularly significant as previously this shade could only be obtained by using Mediterranean shellfish.(Garfield, 2000, Ch. 3) Other colours soon followed and the coal tar-derived aniline dye drove the development of synthetic dyes across the UK, Germany and Switzerland.(Li, 2020) However, the dye was expensive to make and not popular at first. The fashionable Empress Eugenie (1826-1920) greatly influenced the wearing of mauve. The 1850s saw the expansion of popular women's fashion magazines devoted to clothes. Her fondness for the colour was first noted in *Illustrated London News*. Possibly influenced by this, Queen Victoria wore a 'rich mauve [dress]' to her daughter's marriage to Prince Frederik William, in January 1858. (St Clair, 2018, p. 170) As a result, 'London was in the grip of the mauve measles', described *Punch* magazine in 1859, and Perkin's method of production soon became popular.(2018, p.170) This development in textile dyeing dramatically brightened the appearance of the Victorian lady who began wearing a medley of colours all at once.(Wilson and Taylor, 1989, p. 21) However, this also led to an acceleration of the global climate crisis. Perkin's dye factory in Wembley famously turned London waterways the colours purple, green, violet and red.(Li,

2020) Garfield notes however, that there were many medical benefits of this discovery, including the use of dyes in photodynamic cancer treatment. (Garfield, 2000, Ch.3)

The method by which colour is produced impacts on the status of the wearer. In order to understand the importance of colour in garments it is essential to be aware of the historical elements of the dyeing process. Historically there were many social or financial associations with the colour of a garment. New methods of manufacturing coloured textiles blurred the social meaning behind certain colours. The next stage considers the symbolic and psychological role of colour in conveying group identity.

Chapter 2: Colour and Group Identity

Historian Valerie Steele quotes Michel Pastoureau when he says, “It is society that ‘makes’ colour, defines it, gives it meaning.”(Steele, 2018) When you give a fixed meaning to a colour it can be used as a tool for communication. In this chapter I will look at two specific examples of organisations using colour in clothing to communicate an idea about a group of people. Firstly, the use of colour in prisoner uniforms in the United States of America. In particular, focusing on the orange jumpsuit, made famous by images of detainees at Guantanamo Bay in the early 2000s. In contrast to this example, this chapter will also look at the use of colour by the Suffragette Movement at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Prison clothing was first introduced in the United States and Europe in the nineteenth century.(Kawamura, 2010) Juliet Ash, author of *Dress Behind Bars: Prison Clothing as Criminality* explains that “In State prisons the classification of prisoners is largely through colour coding of clothing.”(Ash, 2010, p.153) As looked at in Chapter 1, two-toned or striped fabric was used in Medieval times to identify ‘deviant’ members of society, including criminals.(Pastoureau, 2001, p.12-13) Modern day prison uniforms fulfil a similar function as they have become, “... iconic signifiers of criminality for the public spectator.”(Ash,2010, p.51)

The orange jumpsuit is commonly worn by male or female prisoners in American prisons. It is often used in high security facilities, when a person is on death row or in a publicly visible situation such as when a prisoner has a visitor.(Ash, 2010, p.156) Anna Watkins Fisher discusses the important use of the colour orange in these

settings, stating that it was chosen for its visual nature and "... effectiveness in setting objects apart from their natural environment."(Fisher,2021,p.3) 'Safety Orange' is the name given to the particular shade used in American prison uniforms, first emerging in the US in the 1950s as a bureaucratic colour standard.(2021,p.3) Watkins Fisher explains that in society, orange functions as a warning and grabs our attention, as can be seen in "... the contexts of traffic control, work safety, and mass incarceration."(2021,p.3)

The orange jumpsuit was made famous when detainees at Guantanamo Bay in south east Cuba were photographed dressed in it. Guantanamo has functioned as a interment facility for Muslim militants since 2002, following the US campaign in Afghanistan and Iraq.(Britannica, 2011) The use of a piece of clothing, usually worn internally by American prisoners, now being placed on foreign inmates in a legal no man's land, became "... symbolic of American global power." (Ash, 2010, p.159) Carol Rosenberg's article in *The New York Times* discusses the photograph of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, released by the Defence Department of America in January 2002. In the photograph, shown below (Fig,1) detained prisoners can be seen wearing orange jumpsuits. Rosenberg described the image as "... one of the most enduring, damning photos of U.S detention policy in the 21st century."(Rosenberg, 2022) How we perceive this photograph relies on "your politics, your awareness of Guantanamo and what went on there – on your capacity for empathy, whether or not anybody in your family has ever been in prison." (Rosenberg, 2022) Fisher looks at the cultural use of orange in terms of communicating ideas of fear and panic about a group of people. "Safety orange designates certain bodies for protection and others as threats."(Fisher,2021,p.4) In

the context of America in 2002, a year after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the use of a colour commonly associated with danger and warning placed on the bodies of accused assailants, has the power to portray them negatively.



Fig.1 Petty Officer First Class Shane T. McCoy/ U.S Navy c. 2002, shows the first 20 prisoners at Guantanamo Bay soon after their arrival.

The trials at Guantanamo are described as unfair and that “The proceedings did not meet fair trial standards.”(Amnesty International UK,2020) One detainee, Binyam Mohammad, spent eighteen months of torture in a prison in Morocco and two years at Guantanamo Bay.(Ash, 2010, p.159) The American military had wanted those on trial to wear civilian clothing in order to make their prison regime appear more humane, however, Mohammad chose to wear a traditional Muslim shirt dyed prisoner orange, in defiance of military rules.(Ash, 2010, p.159) His reason was that he had spent years “shackled” and in the orange jumpsuit, and he would not comply

with military ruling to make their regime appear humane.(2010, p.159) In this case the colour orange has held more symbolic power than the actual prison garment, "... a form of dress that visually replaces the body of the prisoners as criminal in the public imagination."(Ash, 2010, p.4)

The function of the prison uniform is to suppress the individuality and uniqueness of a person.(Kawamura, 2010) As they are worn when incarcerated, one must consider it to be a form of punishment. The use of one comprehensive design and colour for all also raises issues around race and gender. When the jumpsuit is worn with handcuffs, it makes it impossible for a female wearer to use the toilet. In the case of Muslim women, it is against their faith to wear trousers and it becomes an assault on their identity.(Ash, 2010, p.156) "It appears that prison clothing is both about control as well as an ongoing means to humiliate the wearer."(Lennon, Johnson, Rudd, 2017, p.306) Interestingly, following the release of the popular Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black*, in which many of the characters wear an orange jumpsuit, the fashion became popular with women viewers. According to Kawamura, a prison in Michigan found this concerning and changed its orange uniform to black and white.(Kawamura, 2010)

In the 19th century the Suffragette movement campaigned for women's right to vote. Suffragettes in England and the United states realised that visual symbolism was an effective method of communicating their ideas.(Blakemore,2021) The aim was "...to help the public envision a world in which women could participate in the political process".(2021) The use of colour in particular played an integral role in the British Suffragette movement, and deliberate decisions were made on what colours would

be used by their members.(Wahl, 2018, p.21) Women's rights activist Emmeline Pethick Lawrence devised the colour scheme for the movement in 1908.(Parkins, 2002, p.97) The Women's Social and Political Union(WSPU), the largest militant Suffragette organisation in Britain chose white, purple and green as their official colours.(2002, p.97) The colours were loosely symbolic of white for purity, green for hope and purple for dignity.(Tickner, 1987, p.93) In 1909, Lawrence described how, "The colours have now become to those who belong to this Movement a new language of which the words are so simple that their meaning can be understood by the most uninstructed and most idle of passers-by in the street."(2002, p.97) In Britain these colours took the form of banners for political marches or ribbons and sashes.(Wahl,2018) The colours became fashionable in dress at that time and department stores such as Selfridge's devoted whole window displays to them.(Parkins, 2002, p.100) This is described by Rose Lamartine Yates as "... the epidemic of purple, white and green.." (2002, p. 98) Yates describes how "Through the use of fashion and specific colours the Suffragettes forged a public identity for themselves in the public spaces of the cities..."(2002, p.99) The development of department stores, public transport and public facilities for women in city centres, allowed middle-class women to no longer be confined to domesticity.(2002, p.99) As a result, the garments, and colours that women wore became more impactful and unity was created through the use of colour in social settings.

White became one of the most important colours of the Suffragette movement.(Blakemore,2021) In America, the US National Women's party, inspired by the WSPU, chose white, purple and yellow as their colours.(Blakemore,2021) Kimberly Wahl explores the colour white and "examines its strategic use in first-wave

feminism to communicate a range of cultural meanings.”(2018, p.21) The decision to use white was both “performative and strategic”.(Wahl,2018p.22) Common associations with the colour white at the time included purity, innocence or feminine delicacy embedded in the white wedding dress, a popular fashion since the late 18th century, making it an interesting choice for the movement.(2018,p.22) However, the Suffragettes were complicating and challenging this view of femininity. There were also practical reasons behind this choice, as Gordon explains the white cotton dresses were “... consistently in style, relatively inexpensive, and easy to maintain.”(Gordon,2020) A further benefit of the white dress in the movement is the ability for them to stand out against the dark male fashions of the time, making them both distinctly feminine and visually effective in large groups.(Wahl,2019) “In massive Suffrage parades, white-clad women contrasted with the crowds of darkly dressed men.”(Blakemore,2021) This can be seen in Figure 2, an image of the funeral of Emily Davidson, 1913. The wearing of white became a uniform of sorts for women involved in the Suffragist movement, a white Edwardian summer dress with a quasi-military sash in WSPU colours.(Parkins,2002, p.106) Parkins describes how this contrast formed a new kind of political subject, the woman citizen.(2002, p.106)



Fig. 2 Crowds lined the streets of Morpeth as the coffin passed, escorted by suffragettes wearing white for “purity of intention”

Today, the value of the colour white was seen when the Democratic Women of Congress chose to dress in white at the State of Union address in Washington DC in 2020. The action was to show unity and commitment to defending the rights of women in disenfranchised groups. This sartorial statement had also taken place during the 2019 State of the Union address and in 2017 during a presidential address to Congress. It is noted that the decision to wear white was “... a homage to the white often worn by suffragists during their fight to get women’s votes recognized.”(Lang,2020) In addition, the white of the outfits stands out strongly against the dark suits worn by the other members, in similar effect as the Suffragettes.

While the two examples discussed in this chapter are from different standpoints, they both demonstrate the ability for colour in clothing to be deliberately used by

organisations to communicate an idea. This chapter focused on group identity, the use of colour by the individual will be looked at next.

Chapter 3: Colour Trends and Consumerism

Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Ben Wubs pose the question, is fashion a spontaneous process, or is it calculated and prefabricated by a small group of experts who decide on colours, materials, shapes and styles?(Blaszczyk and Wubs,2018,p.7) This chapter will explore the role of colour trend forecasting in the fashion industry, from its beginning to current day. Carolyn Mair looks at human behaviour and the expression of who we are through clothing, a form of nonverbal communication as she describes it.(Mair,2018,p.91) Mair notes that there are numerous factors behind our decisions to wear the clothes that we do and the colours we choose, including personality, mood, emotions and context.(2018,p.91) Fashion has become an identifier of individual 'lifestyles' as opposed to social class.(Mair,2018,p.61) The ubiquity of colour in fashion has removed many of the direct connotations associated with different colours in pre-industrial times. This chapter will explore whether colour trend forecasting impacts the decisions of the individual and challenges the role of colour as a communicator in fashion.

Colour is crucial to fashion and trend forecasting of colour is a central facet of the industry. Colour is one of the main determinants of what is considered to be fashionable.(Guy,Green,Banim,2002,p.33) Colour shade cards date back to the late 19th century when the Parisien firm of J. Claude Freres & cie collected shade cards from dye houses in Lyon, a major centre of textile production. "Flowery prose about French taste", was added and the reports were sold around the world, mainly to textile mills, garment makers, and fabric retailers.(Blaszczyk and Wubs,2018,p.1) An example of a French shade card, dating from 1919 is shown below.(Figure 3)

Historians are unsure as to who at the French dye house had the responsibility for creating the cards. However, evidence suggests that sales staff compiled the information. Their research was led by recent best selling shades and observations of the preferences of consumers and dominant colour choices seen at fashionable resorts.(Blaszczyk,2018,p.39) It is no coincidence that the development of colour forecasting coincided with profound changes in society and in the production of clothing as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Consumers were becoming more prosperous and demanding a wider range of clothing.(Wilson,2003,p.77) City life sped up and there were “new forms of rapid communication.”(2003,p.26) These included railways, telephones and the mass circulation of images through newspapers and magazines.(2003,p.26) This had a dramatic impact on the spread of styles and fashions. With the world now dominated by machines and capitalism, “It was during the period from 1890 to 1910 that the mass produced clothing industry took off, both in Britain and in America”.(Wilson,2003,p.76) This led to ready-to-wear clothing and the expansion of the fashion industry.

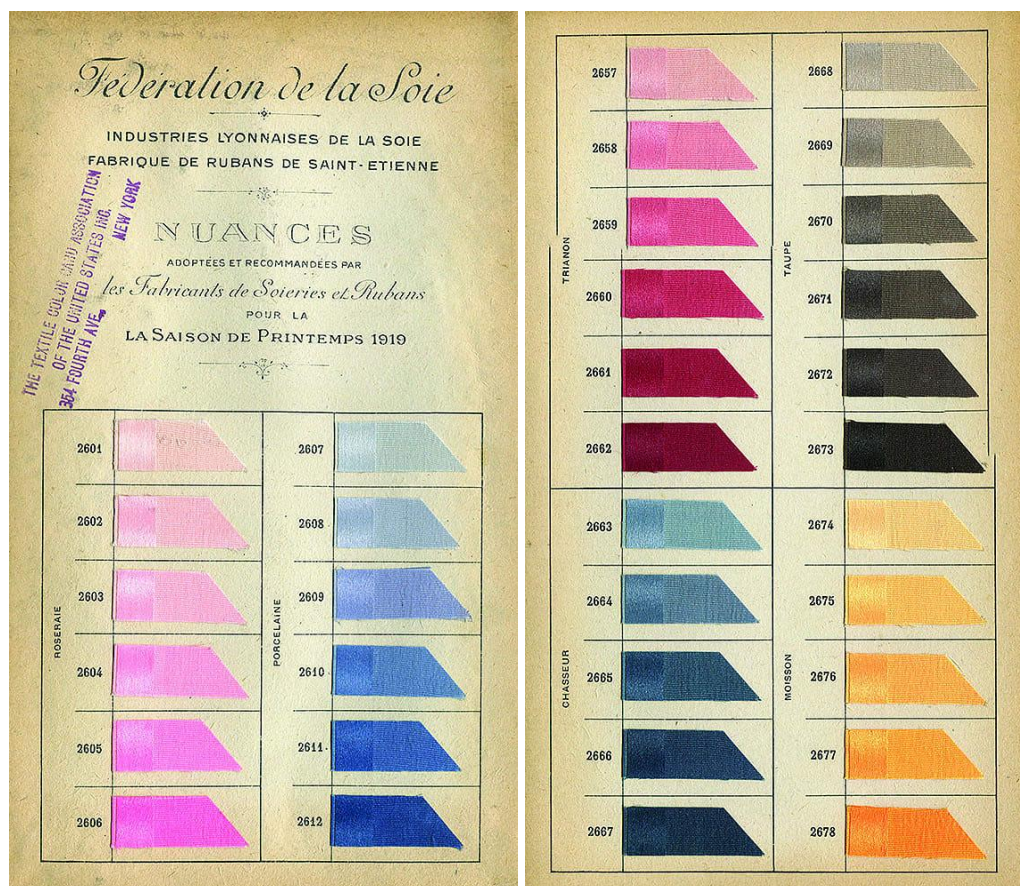


Fig.3 Fédération de la soie, *Nuances asoptees et recommandees par les Fabricants de Soieries et Rubans pur la Saison de Printemps 1919.*

The European chemical industry had been developing production methods of textile dyes in a limitless selection of hues since the mid 19th century. "... The creative industry grappled with the challenge of how to manage the extensive, and somewhat unwieldy palette", according to Blaszczyk.(Blaszczyk,2018,p.38-39) In the 1930s, the idea of colour forecasting was seen as an important aspect of the fashion industry in Britain. In 1930 the prominent British journalist Holbrok Jackson discussed the role of "Colour Forecasts", while addressing the Royal Society of Arts in London.(Blaszczyk,2018,p.35) Jackson had given significant thought to colour and commerce, acknowledging that colour has artistic and economic significance.(2018, p.35) "The objective of colour prediction... is to provide the fashion trades with

information sufficiently in advance of a season for them to prepare for demand.”- (Jackson, quoted in 2018,p.35) In 1931 the British Colour Council was set up in response to the challenge that Jackson had highlighted, with the belief being that a more regulated approach to colour would remove commercial risks taken by “Novelty businesses”.(2018,p.35) Many of the colour forecasts were imported from abroad, including shade cards from Lyon.(2018,p.35) The colour forecast tool informed textile mills, manufacturers and retailers of what was likely to be trendy in the upcoming season.(2018,p.35) “Profits depended on shopper satisfaction”, if a business was to order a large quantity of fabric for the upcoming season, it needed to know what exact shade was likely to be popular, or customers would shop elsewhere.(2018,p.39)

Colour forecasting was also becoming central to the fashion industry in the United States, where European colour predictions were widely used. The First World War cut off America’s supply of French colour cards and German dyestuffs, causing worry on the effects of the economy.(Blaszczyk,2018,p.39) In response to this, the Textile Color Card Association was set up by Frederik Bode in 1914.(2018,p.40) The company had an additional goal of breaking away from French colour dictates and to create a “distinctively American Palette”, their slogan being, “American color for the American people”.(2018,p.40) TCCA members from millinery companies, textile mills and retail firms collaborated to create the “Standard Color Card of America”.(2018,p.40) These came in the form of colour shade cards known as “The Standard”, which were fold out books, showing the basic colours that were needed to make apparel that would sell at a good price in the US market.(2018, p.40)

The role of colour forecasting in the fashion industry continues to develop today. Colour plays a key role in textiles trade fairs such as Premiere Vision, held in the outskirts of Paris. In 2019, more than sixty thousand apparel trade professionals attended, to shop textiles, leather, accessories and manufacturing innovations for the coming season.(Thomas,2019,p.16) Pantone, a colour standardising company was also in attendance. Pantone was originally set up as a printing company in the 1960s and soon realised that it was challenging for designers, agencies and printers to communicate exact colours with each other, often resulting in mistakes.(Budds,2015) The role of the company is to provide a “vocabulary” through codes and swatches, allowing for businesses to create an accurate hue anywhere in the world.(Maritz,2011,Podcast) Specifically in the fashion industry with the production of textiles and garments now a global process, companies need to accurately translate colour from the designers all the way down the production chain.(2011,Podcast)

In 2000 Pantone began announcing the Pantone Colour of the Year. This selection process involves the gathering of creative directors from a variety of industries in a room painted white to discuss colour.(2011,Podcast) The room is painted white so that everyone can objectively look at the colourful objects brought in.(2011,Podcast) The process also involves looking at the world currently, including film, new technologies, art or socio economic conditions, in order to find new colour influences.(Pantone,2022) The 2022 colour of the year, ‘Very Peri’, is described as symbolic “of the global zeitgeist of the moment and the transition we are going through.”(Pantone,2022) The shade, shown below (Fig.4) is a periwinkle blue with a violet red undertone, inspired by the merging of digital and physical worlds, describes researchers at Pantone.(Pantone,2022) Michelle Ogundehin, magazine

editor and creative consultant believes that it is a possible marketing exercise by Pantone, as the colour purple is a particularly divisive colour as a result of its historical associations with wealth and spirituality.(BBC Podcast) As I have discussed in chapter 1, pre-industrialisation, shades of purple were created using Mediterranean shellfish, making the process an expensive and laborious process.(Fenwick,BBC Podcast, 2022)(Garfield,2000,Ch3) Fullerton describes how the 'trickle down effect' will impact on the wider use of this shade. Now that we have been made aware of this colour we will notice it more in what we buy and what we wear.(Fenwick,BBC Podcast, 2022) Interestingly, since I began researching this topic, I have noticed an increase in shades of purple in the clothing and objects of the people around me.

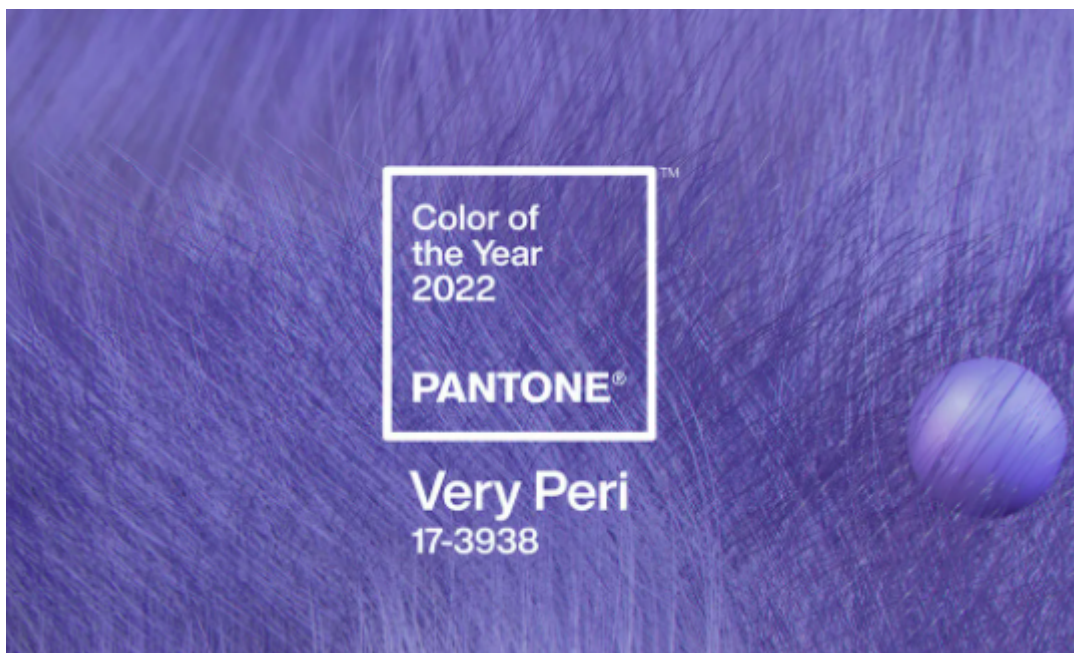


Fig. 4 Introducing 17-3938 Very Peri: Pantone Color Of The Year 2022

Carolyn Mair discusses the influence of culture on our colour choices. When the film *La La Land* was released in 2016, with brightly coloured costumes many fashion brands began promoting similarly bright colours on the catwalk.(Mair,2018,p.95)

Following this, stores filled with yellow clothing and “customers were told that wearing yellow would make them happy”.(2018,p.95) At the time, Donald Trump was becoming president of the United States of America, following a divisive election campaign and tensions were running high in the country. It is possible to argue that the increase of seemingly “happy” colours was a reflection of the times. However, Mair explains that the meaning of colour is socially and culturally constructed, therefore making ones perceptions of a colour subjective.(2018,p.95) As a result, the symbolic meaning of the yellow clothing could potentially lift the mood of the wearer but “... the wearer has to believe in this.”(Mair,2018,p.95)

The ‘trickle down effect’ is described in its simplest form as a hierarchical process whereby individuals with high status establish fashion trends which are then imitated by lower status individuals in cheaper materials.(Kaiser,2010,p.689) However, it is important to note that the development of fashion styles cannot be explained so simply as many influences have developed from working class fashions or more complex versions of the ‘trickle down effect’.(2010,p.690) The “cerulean blue jumper” scene in the film *The Devil Wears Prada* demonstrates the ‘trickle down effect’. In this scene, high fashion magazine editor, Miranda Priestly describes to her new assistant the relationship that her garment choices have with the fashion industry. In particular, making reference to her blue jumper, noting that it is not just “... blue, it's not turquoise, it's not lapis, it's actually cerulean...”(*The Devil Wears Prada*, 2006) Miranda describes how the colour cerulean was used in numerous high fashion shows by famous designers, before it trickled down to a more affordable price. She notes, “...that that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs...”(*The Devil Wears Prada*, 2006) However, most importantly, she says “... you think you have

made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when in fact you're wearing a sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room..."(*The Devil Wears Prada*, 2006) While the references made to the fashion industry in this scene are not factual,(Wilkinson,2018) it demonstrates that our clothing choices are influenced by many factors and challenges the idea that the colours we wear are direct representations of ourselves.

This chapter exposes the depth of colour trend forecasting and the 'trickle-down effect' from the fashion industry. It is clear that the garments we are exposed to are part of a complex system and it is therefore hard to decipher how unique our clothing choices are.

Conclusion

The relationship between colour, clothing and the wearer is powerful yet complex, however, coloured textiles have always played a role in society. Colour can be divisive. When imposed on the wearer it has the ability to change how others see them and even to incite anger. It can also become a powerful tool for unity and change. It can reflect the world around us or be used to spark joy in others. Colour is an unspoken form of language, and while there can be many interpretations of the meaning of a colour, much of our understanding comes from society's construction of what a colour means.

This essay has shown that colour is inextricably linked to the wider social and cultural contexts in which it is worn and displayed. In particular, how and what colour communicates is directly related to the costs of its production. As we saw in Chapter 1, in the Medieval period, technology and methods of production impacted on the way colour was seen as symbolic of wealth or vanity. The poorest wore the least colourful because they could not afford brighter shades but also because duller tones were deemed suitable to their low social status.

The research has also highlighted the extent to which political and state organisations construct social meanings for specific colours and manipulate our understanding of them. This is evident in the Suffragette movement's selection of white as a defining colour. This transformed the meaning of the colour from purity to one associated with female activism, as seen at the wearing of it by leading female Democratic politicians in recent years in the United States. In the case of the use of

'Safety Orange' at Guantanamo, a socially constructed colour was imposed onto the bodies of detainees. This vivid colour came to represent danger, and influenced how we perceive its wearer and how they feel about themselves was directly affected.

Thirdly, this research has exposed the extent to which colour is in itself commercially valuable. Colour trend forecasting has been an integral part of the fashion industry since the 1850s and companies such as Pantone are influential on our colour choices each year, thus, affecting the meaning behind the colour we choose to wear. Colour and culture are closely linked and companies like Pantone take inspiration from what is happening in the world. When there is social unrest, bright colours such as yellow with connotations of happiness become popular as seen with the release of the film *La La Land*. While we are constantly over exposed by colour choices, in fact trend forecasting regulates colour options. Looking into the future of colour in fashion, one must question what and who will decide what hues we wear.

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