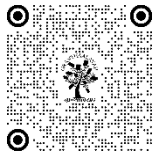


CHROMATIC NARRATIVES: THE SEMIOTIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL USE OF COLOUR IN ART AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the application of colour in fine art and graphic media, including an analysis of its symbolic, psychological, and narrative roles in different art forms. A comparative analysis of renowned artworks such as Pablo Picasso's Blue Period, Paul Gauguin's Vision after the Sermon, Georges Seurat's A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, and Joe Shuster's Superman comics investigates how artists use colour to elicit emotional reactions and communicate profound themes. Furthermore, the analysis explores the function of monochrome in artworks like Käthe Kollwitz's The Widow and Batman, where black and white act as potent juxtapositions representing life, death, and ethical uncertainty. This paper offers a detailed analysis of the dynamic interplay of colour in literary works such as Mark Rothko's Orange and Yellow and the children's graphic novel Otto's Orange Day. It highlights the psychological influence of both vivid and muted shades. Through a comparison of colour usage in "high art" and "low art," this study reveals the shared approaches in how colour influences visual narrative, connecting different cultures and historical periods. In conclusion, the research emphasises the widespread importance of colour as a means of evoking emotions and conveying symbolic messages, irrespective of the medium or cultural hierarchy in which it is used.

Keywords: Colour Theory, Art, Paintings, Comics, Graphic Novel



1. INTRODUCTION

"A work of art is not identifiable, as psychological aesthetics would like to think it is, with the state of mind and spirit of its creator or with any of the possible states of mind and spirit induced in its perceivers." --(Jan Mukařovsky n.p.)

Colour: an essential part of our lives that we often overlook. Not only do people like certain colours, but colour also affects our experiences and communication. It conveys knowledge, creates identities, uses symbolic imagery, and has metaphorical meaning. Colour semiotics examines how colour conveys meaning through symbolic, iconic, and indexical structures. Colour semiotics deciphers the complex meaning behind viewers' visual perceptions of specific colours.

Colour observation is active and always elicits emotional and instinctual responses. Emotions bring colour psychology, semantics, and physics into play. Simply put, colour affects our physiological state in subtle but powerful ways. Due to its association with strength and energy, many gyms and fitness centres use red. Both inherent and acquired

cultural connections affect our visceral colour responses. Yellow draws attention faster than other colours when contrasted with black, as in cautionary signs. Strangely, wasps, hornets, and the Speckled King Snake exhibit cautionary behaviours that match this juxtaposition.

Colour is often overlooked despite its prevalence. With one click, we can access an infinite range of colours in the digital age. However, careful colour use, especially from a semiotic perspective, can improve a design's effectiveness and message clarity. Designers and artists can use colour to evoke emotions, structure symbolism, and create more powerful visual experiences by understanding their connotations. Charles Sanders Peirce's landmark semiotics model divides signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. Icons closely resemble the object they represent. However, indexes, like smoke as an index of fire, are natural indicators that directly affect the object. Symbols are linked to the concept or object they represent through cultural conventions and learnt associations, not inherent links. Peirce's semiotic theory seamlessly supports colour theory, especially in art and design. Colour, like signs, can evoke emotions, change perceptions, and create meaning. Beyond visual pleasure, it has many meanings and connotations. Graphic designers use colour to affect viewers' emotions. Design colours are carefully chosen to influence the audience's emotional and cognitive responses, changing how they perceive the message.

In more practical terms, I have identified three core applications of color in graphic media, each reflecting how colors can affect both meaning and perception:

- 1) **Conveying the Artist's Emotions:** One primary function of color in artistic media, particularly in graphic design and comic art, is to express the creator's emotions or dispositions. Since graphic arts often lack the ability to communicate directly through words or dialogue, color becomes the vehicle for emotional expression. In the context of comics and graphic novels, color is strategically used to deepen the audience's understanding of the mood or atmosphere in particular scenes. For instance, darker tones might suggest foreboding or sadness, while bright, vibrant hues evoke joy or excitement. The combination of color and dialogue serves to enhance the audience's comprehension of the intended emotional undercurrents.
- 2) **Symbolism and Abstract Ideas:** Another critical application of color is its role in symbolism, where objects or scenes within the art represent more abstract or complex concepts. Symbolism often varies according to context, meaning that the same object or color can convey different ideas depending on the circumstances or cultural references. This is particularly evident in the case of specific colors. For example, yellow can symbolize warmth, energy, and positivity in one context but can also represent fear, caution, or even madness in another. The power of color lies in its ability to evoke multiple interpretations depending on its context.
- 3) **Drawing Attention and Directing Focus:** The third important use of color in graphic media is its capacity to guide the viewer's attention and direct their focus towards significant elements of the composition. By using color strategically, designers can highlight key symbols or ideas that might otherwise go unnoticed. For instance, bold or contrasting colors can be used to pull the viewer's eye towards important details, ensuring that they don't miss out on the symbolism or message the artist seeks to convey. This method works particularly well when an exclusive focus strategy is applied, using specific colors to make certain elements stand out in a cluttered visual environment

2. DISCUSSION

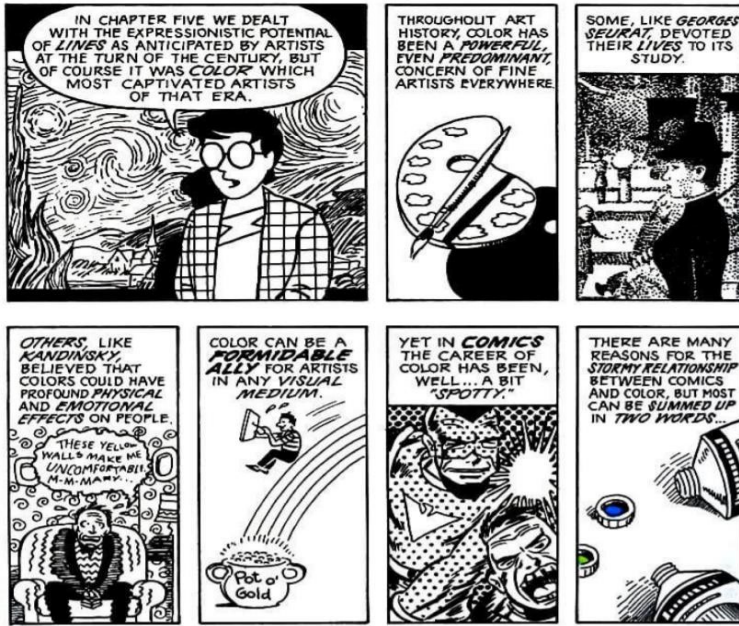


Figure 1: McCloud, S. (1993). Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art

Celebrated throughout the animation and comic industry by such influential figures as Art Spiegelman, Matt Groening, and Will Eisner, Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1994) stands as a seminal work in the study of comic art. McCloud offers a comprehensive exploration of comics, delving into their rich history, technical intricacies, and profound cultural significance. His analysis invites readers to explore the hidden world that exists between the panels, beneath the lines, and within the symbols of this extraordinary yet often misunderstood art form. In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud highlights numerous artists who dedicated their careers to the study of color in comics, demonstrating how color can influence mood, symbolism, and narrative. Color becomes more than a visual embellishment; it is an essential storytelling tool that shapes the emotional landscape of the reader's experience. McCloud's work reinforces the idea that comics, though sometimes dismissed as "low" art, contain depth and complexity on par with the so-called "high" arts.

In my own analysis, I aim to draw contrasts and, in some cases, complementary relationships between renowned pieces of fine art—often labelled as "high" art—and comic books and strips, which have traditionally been seen as "low" art. By examining both art forms side by side, I hope to illuminate the shared techniques, particularly in the use of color, that transcend cultural hierarchies and challenge the conventional distinction between high and low art.

Let us observe a few:

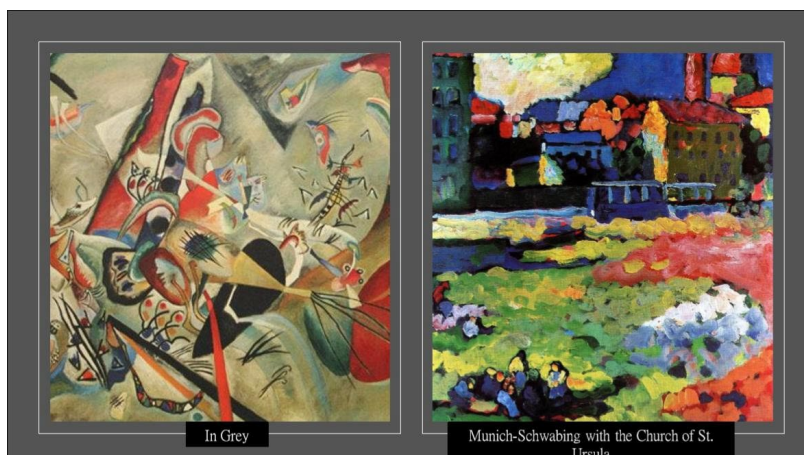


Figure 2: Kandinsky, W. (Year). In Grey & Munich-Schwabing with the Church of St. Ursula, Paintings

The renowned Russian painter and art theorist, Wassily Wassilyevich Kandinsky, held a profound conviction in the psychological and emotional potency of colour. Kandinsky posited that the colours present on a painter's palette serve a purpose beyond mere visual satisfaction, as they elicit a dual reaction. Initially, there is a physiological response, a sensory gratification akin to the sheer joy felt while enjoying a culinary masterpiece. Furthermore, underlying this superficial pleasure is a far more profound resonance, which Kandinsky referred to as a "inner vibration" or a spiritual influence. He held the belief that colour possessed the capacity to evoke deep emotional reactions that surpass mere visual viewing, so resonating with the soul.

The paintings of Kandinsky frequently present difficulties in terms of literal interpretation, as they transcend the conventional limitations of identifiable forms or figures. Viewers may endeavour to discern patterns or phenomena derived from their own recollections, but Kandinsky's purpose was not to generate readily interpretable visual representations. Instead, he concentrated on the unrefined, free-form potency of colour. The artist deliberately refrained from limiting colours to particular forms or boxes, as this would divert observers from fully perceiving the inherent intensity of the colour. Kandinsky aimed to emancipate colour from its physical structure in order to fully engage the viewer in its liveliness and purity, so promoting their assimilation of its emotional core rather than becoming unduly focused on the object it may symbolise.

In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky articulated the following analogy: "Colour serves as the keyboard, the eyes function as the hammers, and the soul represents the piano with many strings." The artist is the manual instrument that manipulates the keys, selectively striking them, to evoke vibrations within the soul. This metaphor exemplifies his conviction that the artist, by meticulous control of colour, can elicit particular emotions and spiritual reactions in the observer, so akin to a musician playing a musical instrument to elicit emotional reactions from their audience.

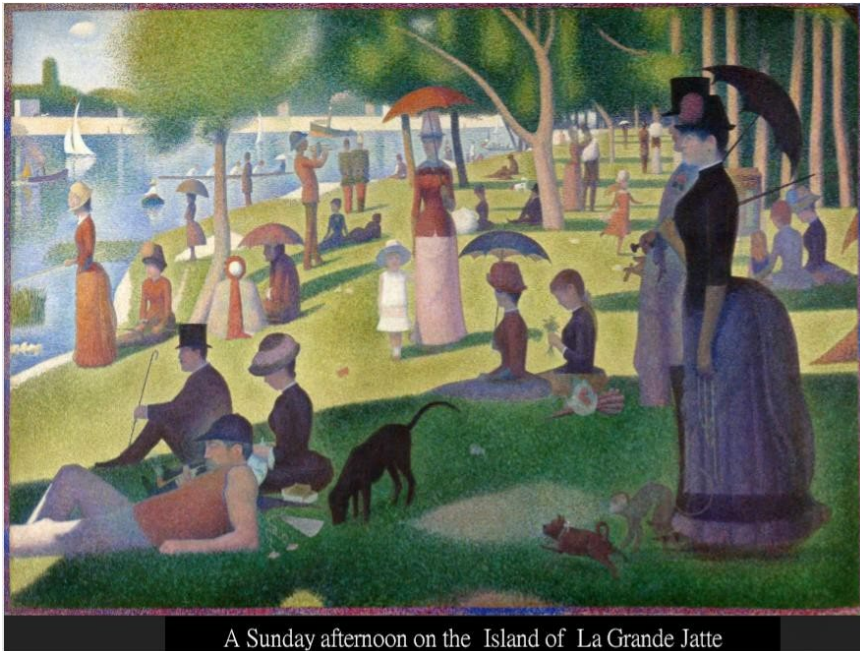


Figure 3: Seurat, G. (1884–1886). A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte

Georges Seurat's most renowned masterpiece, "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte," published in French as *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte*, was produced from 1884 to 1886. This monumental artwork exemplifies the pointillist technique, a method that Seurat innovatively developed. The artwork depicts a tranquil scene of Parisians congregating in a park adjacent to the River Seine, epitomising the leisurely lifestyle of late 19th-century city dwellers. Seurat is renowned for his development of two groundbreaking artistic methods: chromoluminarism, which emphasises the differentiation of colours, and pointillism, which involves the application of discreet, individual colour dots in patterns to create an image. One notable aspect of Seurat's technique is his skilful integration of apparently opposing characteristics: a sophisticated awareness of the emotional and visual nuances of colour, together with an almost methodical accuracy in his implementation. His deep interest in the methodical examination of colour and light,

similar to the work in neuroscience and optics, introduced a degree of accuracy and intellectual rigour that was groundbreaking during his day.

The completion of *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* required Seurat two years, not only because of its expansive scale, but also because of the meticulous craftsmanship involved. Departing from conventional brushwork, the entire composition consists of precisely positioned dots of different hues. Rather than being mixed on the palette, these dots are positioned adjacent to each other, depending on the viewer's eye to optically blend them. This technique, referred to as optical mixing, enables a vivid interaction of colours that creates a more lively and dynamic effect compared to conventional painting methods. Seurat's scrupulous focus on this technique not only demonstrates the human eye's intuitive ability to interpret these numerous colour dots but also expands the limits of our art perception and experience. *La Grande Jatte* by Seurat is widely regarded as a pivotal moment in modern art, signifying the emergence of Neo-Impressionism and exerting influence on subsequent generations of artists who aimed to combine scientific accuracy with creative inventiveness.

Color Palettes



Figure 4: Superhero color palettes

Going back to the world of comics, the medium has been shaped not only by the creative vision of its creators but also by the limitations imposed by commerce and technology since its inception. Historically, comic artists have had to be cognisant of financial constraints, especially in terms of colour usage, since including a diverse range of colours would greatly increase the overall printing expenses. In order to tackle this issue, the industry extensively embraced the four-color printing technique, which subsequently became the prevailing method in American comic book manufacturing. The technique employed a restricted colour palette, namely cyan, magenta, yellow, and black (CMYK), to generate a spectrum of hues.

By repeatedly employing this restricted chromatic range, the colours themselves acquired symbolic significance. Particular colour combinations became definitively linked to specific characters, solidifying their presence in the minds of readers. Superman's distinctive blue, red, and yellow colour scheme, as well as Batman's darker black and grey hues, quickly gained recognition and became deeply embedded in popular culture. The simplicity of this method was essential because of production constraints, but it developed into a type of visual shorthand—these colours took on the role of symbolising the characters themselves, surpassing their intended practical purpose. Colour in comics assumes a role beyond mere aesthetic preference; it serves as a symbol, a concise representation of the character's identity and thematic components. Over time, certain colours and combinations established themselves as symbolic representations of particular character traits or emotional states, similar to how symbols in other art forms convey more general concepts.

Now, let us analyse the main colours that appear repeatedly in graphic novels and how they correspond to their use in renowned works of classic art.

Blue



PABLO PICASSO (1881-1873)
'The Tragedy', 1903



Figure 5: Picasso, P. (1903). The Tragedy (left) & Maroh, J. (2010). Body Music & Blue Angel (right)

The adept use of emotive colour is prominently demonstrated in the artworks of Pablo Picasso, especially during his acclaimed "Blue Period." An exemplary illustration of this is his artwork titled The Tragedy (1903), wherein a man in his middle age, a woman, and a young boy are depicted standing grievously on a barren beach. Pablo Picasso's use of sombre, monochromatic shades of dark blue effectively elicits a profound feeling of sadness and despair, which prevails in a significant portion of his artwork during this era. The cool, subdued blues create an almost suffocating ambience, highlighting the profound emotional burden and seclusion experienced by the figures in the artwork.

This specific selection of colour was not a mere happenstance. The "Blue Period" undertaken by Picasso was a manifestation of his personal psychological condition during that period, which was profoundly shaped by the untimely demise of his intimate companion, the Spanish artist Carlos Casagemas. The suicide of Casagemas, prompted by his unreciprocated affection for a model named Germaine Pichot, had a profound impact on Picasso. The profound emotional anguish Picasso endured during this period was evident in his artwork, as he resorted to various hues of blue to represent sorrow, sadness, and profound hopelessness.

In The Tragedy, Picasso skillfully employs various hues of blue not only to produce a remarkable visual impact, but also to access the profound psychological intensity of grief. The icy hue, lacking warmth or optimism, emphasizes the sorrowful essence of the human experience, a motif that pervades his work from this era. The use of colour by Picasso in this painting functions not only as a background, but also as an emotional language that effectively communicates the inner conflict and distress experienced by both the artist and the subjects themselves.



Figure 6: Maroh, J. (2010). Body Music & Blue Angel

Julia Maroh's novel *Blue Angel* explores the theme of loss and introspection through the character of Emma, who experiences grief after the passing of her lover, Clémentine. Following the death of Clémentine, Emma, as instructed in Clémentine's will, pays a visit to the residence of Clémentine's parents, Daniel and Fabienne, in order to seek permission to access her personal diary. The narrative thereafter commences from the perspective of this diary, as Emma peruses the whole trajectory of their relationship, encompassing Clémentine's adolescent years, her initial meeting with Emma, and ultimately her premature demise.

The colour blue assumes a symbolic function throughout the story, serving as a recurring motif that mirrors the themes of regret and melancholy. The colour blue exerts a strong influence on both the visual and emotional aspects of the narrative, reflecting the profound sorrow experienced by both characters. The colour functions not only as a background but also as a central emotional element, accentuating Clémentine's internal conflict and underscoring the profound sense of grief that pervades the story. The introduction of the colour blue, which is also prominently featured in Clémentine's diary, serves to strengthen the gloomy atmosphere of the narrative and the permanent influence of her death on Emma's existence.

Yellow



Figure 7: Van Gogh, V. (1888). Sunflowers (left) & Shuster, J. (1938). Action Comics #1, Superman #1. DC Comics (right)

The colour yellow, represented by the sun and symbolising life, has traditionally been linked to vigour, energy, joy, optimism, and sagacity. The prominent use of yellow in Vincent van Gogh's renowned painting *Sunflowers* symbolises the life-affirming attributes of the subject. The artwork, currently exhibited at the National Gallery, is widely replicated in popular culture, being featured on a wide range of items including postcards, posters, mugs, and stationery. Furthermore, Van Gogh himself derived great satisfaction from having created this artwork.

The painting was produced during a short-lived era of hope into Van Gogh's life. Moving to Arles in the South of France, Van Gogh envisioned creating an artistic community where fellow artists could collaborate harmoniously. His express intention was to extend a warm welcome to his long-time friend and mentor, Paul Gauguin, within this community, which he affectionately called the "Yellow House." The painting of sunflowers was created as a symbolic act of hospitality and friendship, with the purpose of embellishing Gauguin's room upon his imminent arrival.

The remarkable aspect of *Sunflowers* is in Van Gogh's adept use of yellow without any shadows, resulting in a radiant quality that effectively captures the warmth and luminosity of the sun. Van Gogh's emphasis on vivid yellow not only captures the intricate realism of the flowers but also evokes an emotional response characterised by hope, joy, and anticipation. The lack of shadows amplifies this phenomenon, enabling the colour to assume the role of a representation of illumination, vitality, and interconnection. Yellow in this painting transcends its role as a mere colour and assumes a potent symbol associated with hope, renewal, and friendship. It serves as a reflection of Van Gogh's emotional condition at that period, a unique instance of hope and enthusiasm as he anticipated Gauguin's arrival.

Green



Figure 8: Cézanne, P. (1879). *The Bridge at Maincy* (left) & Watterson, B. (1985–1995). *Calvin and Hobbes* (right)

Typically linked to vegetation and grass, green is conventionally regarded as the hue of nature, representing vitality, development, and rejuvenation. Nevertheless, this hue imparts several implications, occasionally symbolising more unfavourable characteristics such as jealousy, lack of experience, or immaturity. This duality of green symbolism is evident in several artistic representations.

With Paul Cézanne's departure from Impressionism, his treatment of light and colour underwent a transformation, resulting in a scarcity of his later works that exhibited the pronounced lighting characteristic of his earlier works. In his subsequent paintings, the artist skilfully generates a palpable sense of airflow within the enclosed areas, while the water gleams with an abundance of multifaceted reflections. In these final works, his brushstrokes, which are frequently long and deliberate, bear resemblance to crosshatching in a drawing and elicit a feeling of poetic enlightenment. The wide, square, and oblong brushstrokes possess a mosaic-like quality, which creates a perception of incompleteness that encourages the observer to interact more actively with the artwork.

A comparison with Bill Watterson's renowned comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* reveals that the symbolic use of green is particularly prominent. Calvin, being youthful and lacking accumulated experience, epitomises the process of

development and acquisition of knowledge that accompanies youth. It is his limitless vitality and occasionally illogical conduct that mirror the impulsive essence of childhood. Within a single comic strip, Hobbes pauses impassively on the verdant lawn while deliberating. Hobbes, as a product of Calvin's imagination, functions as a manifestation of Calvin's own ideas. The backdrop of green grass emphasises Calvin's lack of maturity, symbolically representing his youth and relative lack of experience in life. In both Cézanne's artwork and Calvin and Hobbes, the colour green functions as a symbol of development—whether it is the intellectual development represented by Cézanne's deliberate brushstrokes or the youthful lack of experience depicted in Calvin's excursions. Every instance of the colour green, whether in the refined sophistication of Cézanne's artwork or the straightforwardness of a comic strip, conveys the timeless concepts of progress and the contrasting aspects of nature's enduring and capricious characteristics.

Red

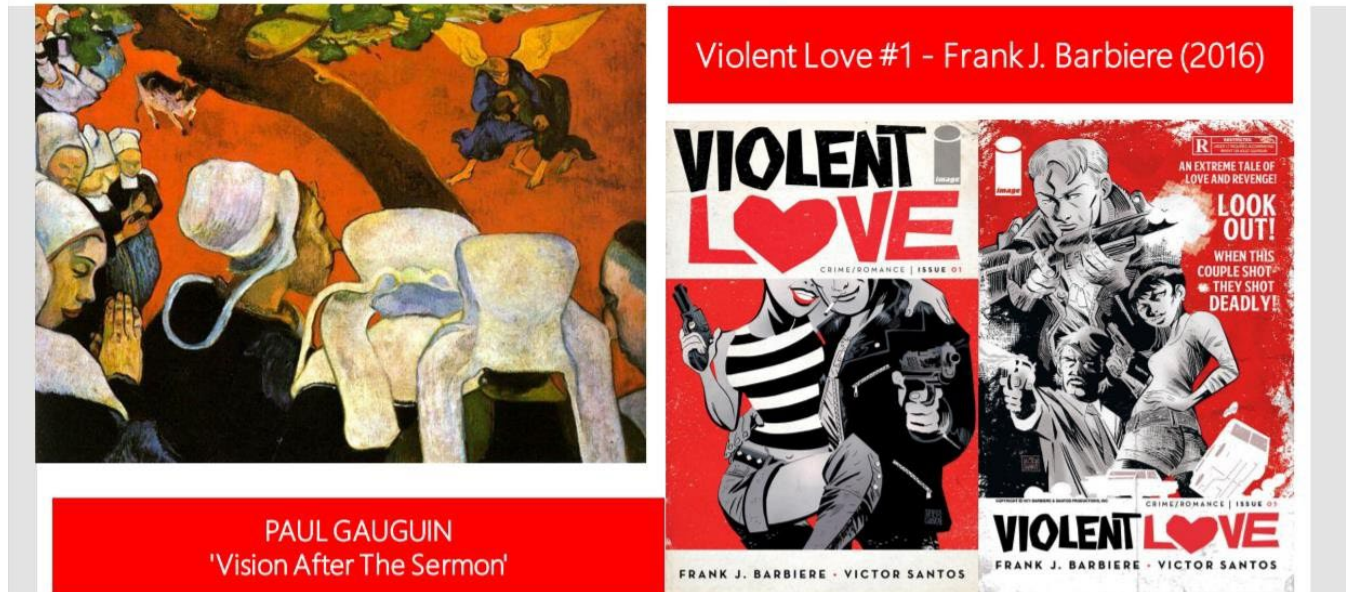


Figure 9: Gauguin, P. (1888). *Vision After the Sermon* (left) & Barbiere, F. J., & Santos, V. (2016). *Violent Love #1* (right)

Red, through its deep associations with fire and blood, has long been used to symbolize danger, anger, and violence. Yet, paradoxically, it is also tied to the most intimate emotions—love and passion—due to its vibrant, intense nature. This dual symbolism of red is often employed in both fine art and literature to convey the emotional spectrum, ranging from the destructive to the deeply affectionate.

A powerful example of red's multifaceted use can be found in Paul Gauguin's *Vision after the Sermon* (1888), where the color plays a critical role in defining the emotional and spiritual tone of the painting. In this work, Jacob is depicted wrestling with an angel in a stark, blood-red field. This fiery red serves as a metaphor for the intense, internal spiritual battle Jacob faces. The scene is symbolic of Jacob's passionate struggle against the will of God, his steadfastness rooted in his own convictions. The blood-red ground reinforces the violence and intensity of this battle, making the viewer feel the heat of the conflict—both physical and emotional.

In the background of the painting, two figures are also seen wrestling, underscoring the broader theme of struggle. The pervasive redness of the ground amplifies the sense of bloodshed and turmoil, heightening the emotional stakes. This use of red creates a vivid contrast between the spiritual conflict in the painting and the peaceful act of prayer in the foreground, where the figures are kneeling, as if disconnected from the violence they are witnessing. Through Gauguin's use of red, *Vision after the Sermon* exemplifies how a single color can represent both the violence of conflict and the passion of belief, blurring the lines between physical struggle and emotional turmoil.

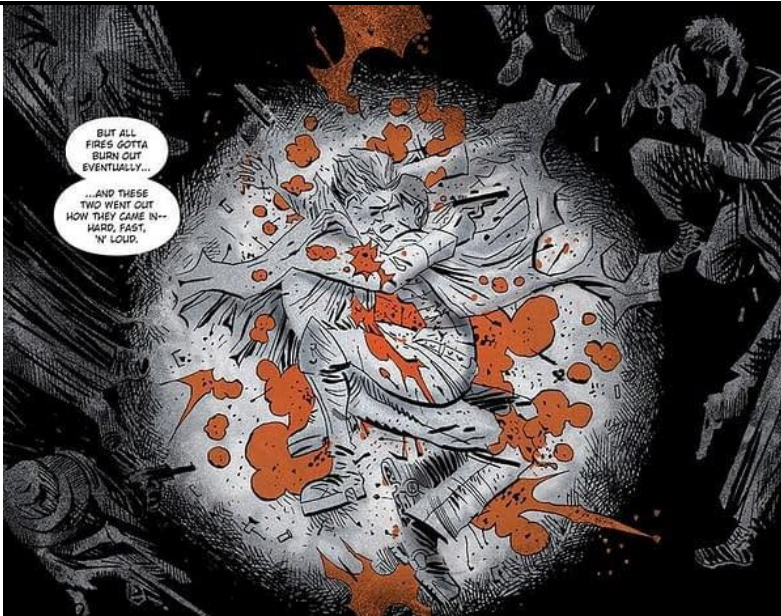


Figure 10: Barbieri, F. J., & Santos, V. (2016). Violent Love #1

Two of the most notorious bank robbers in the American Southwest, Daisy Jane and Rock Bradley, led a life characterised by violence, criminality, and disorder. Yet, amidst the violence and peril, they discovered love. This duality is succinctly depicted in their representation, where the colour red assumes a potent symbolism in the illustrations of their narrative. The deep, intense reds elicit the violence and brutality inherent in their criminal existence—bloodshed, gunfights, and the perpetual threat of mortality. Concurrently, the colour red also idealises their intense and all-encompassing romantic relationship, so introducing an additional level of intricacy to their bond. Within this contemporary portrayal of the notorious outlaw duo Bonnie and Clyde, the colour red fulfils a twofold function: it represents both the physical brutality of their criminal acts and the profound emotional bond they share. The decision to use the colour red serves to emphasise the inherent conflict between love and violence, so highlighting the resilience of their relationship amidst a state of disorder. The color's concomitant portrayal of violence and love reflects the paradoxes in their lives—tangled between a criminal lifestyle and the profound connection they had.

Through the strategic use of red as a focal point, the artwork not only depicts their tumultuous adventures but also enhances the intensity of their love story, rendering it both perilous and sorrowfully romantic.

Orange

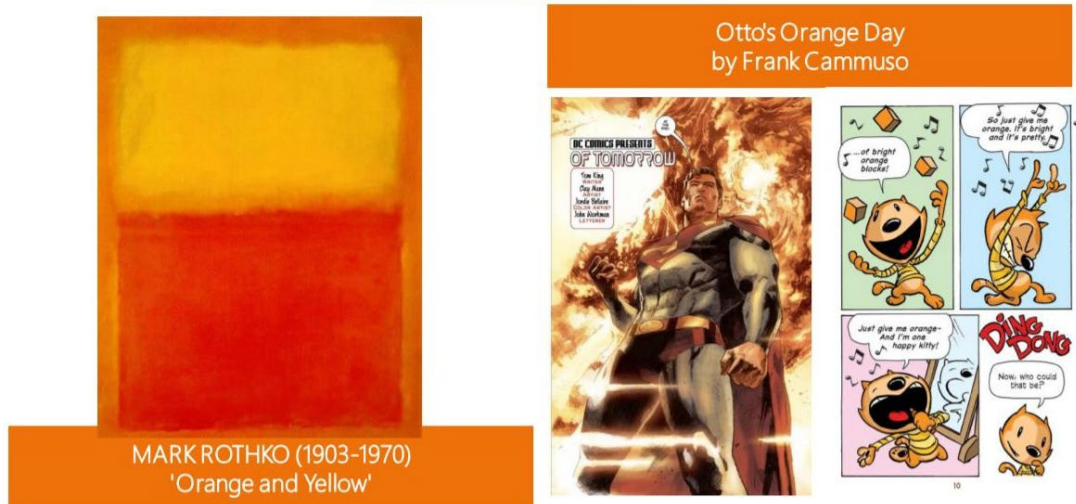


Figure 11: Rothko, M. (1956). Orange and Yellow (left) & Cammuso, F. (2003). Otto's Orange Day (right)

The colour orange, known for its vividness and dynamism, represents creativity, transformation, vitality, and resilience. Moreover, it is the hue most closely linked to the autumn season, symbolising metamorphosis and the progression of time. Within the domain of abstract expressionism, Mark Rothko, the prominent American artist, employed the colour orange to elicit profound emotional and spiritual reactions from observers. Rothko urged spectators to engage in close proximity to his expansive artworks, so enabling them to experience complete immersion in the luminous multicoloured fields. Rothko utilises thin layers of paint on unprimed canvas in his artwork *Orange and Yellow*, resulting in a striking and almost otherworldly luminous effect. The strata of semitransparent hues illuminate the surface, enticing the observer into what Rothko referred to as "a profound connection with rudimentary and ancient art." The pronounced orange hue in this artwork conveys liveliness and a strong emotional impact, creating an invitation for viewers to establish a profound, almost instinctive connection.

In contrast, the colour orange assumes a more fanciful function in *Otto's Orange Day*, a graphic novel targeted towards children, authored by Frank Cammuso and Jay Lynch. A magical genie grants Otto, a young boy, a wish in the story. Otto, who has a strong affinity for the colour orange, spontaneously desires for the entire world to undergo a metamorphosis into his preferred shade. Initially, Otto derives pleasure from witnessing the transformation of everything in his surroundings into orange. However, as the initial excitement diminishes, he promptly becomes aware of the perils associated with a world devoid of colour. The road signs become indistinguishable, and even his meals lose their intrinsic allure. The journey undertaken by Otto is a creative examination of the repercussions of uncontrolled cravings, underscoring the need of equilibrium and variety.

The artworks "*Orange and Yellow*" by Rothko and "*Orange Day*" by Otto exemplify the ability of the colour orange to symbolise highly distinct ideas. Rothko's oeuvre embodies a gateway to profound spiritual and emotional depth, whereas Otto's narrative functions as a light-hearted yet admonitory examination of ingenuity and the unanticipated consequences of transformation.

White



Figure 12: Malevich, K. (1918). *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (left) & Kwitney, A., & Willingham, B. (2011). *A Flight of Angels* (right)

The colour white, commonly linked to illumination, historically represents tranquilly, purity, and virtue. Within art and culture, the colour white is often employed to symbolise principles of ethics, spiritual lucidity, and purity. The symbolic significance of the colour white is evident in many artistic manifestations, notably in the creations of Russian artist Kazimir Malevich, who, in 1915, pioneered a geometric style of abstract art called Suprematism. Malevich held the belief that pure abstract form had a spiritual potency, capable of transcending the material world and engaging the viewer's cognitive faculties. He underscored white as the paramount hue for communicating these spiritual principles, characterising it as a means of articulating "the dominance of unadulterated intuition." Malevich's iconic artwork, *White on White* (1918), exemplifies his use of white in a minimalist composition that encourages the viewer to reflect on the

limitless nature of the colour, devoid of any distracting elements related to representation. According to Malevich, the colour white transcended physical appearance and had the capacity to elicit a direct emotional and spiritual reaction.

Furthermore, the panel by Alisa Kwitney effectively illustrates the symbolism of white by showing a character who, following the death of her lover, witnesses his reappearance as an angel. He is attired in pristine white, adorned with white wings, so strengthening the symbolism of white with sanctity, purity, and transcendence. The imagery of his elevated position above the earth, gazing downwards at her, implies that the colour white symbolises not just virtue but also a kind of spiritual excellence or increased capacity. In this context, white is a colour that symbolically represents the highest level of purity and divine connection, positioning it metaphorically "above" all other colours.

Nevertheless, this association of the colour white with purity and virtue has also been accompanied with significant historical and social consequences. Over successive generations, instances of racial prejudice and extermination have exposed how society's preference for the colour white, and its perceived purity, has played a role in the development of detrimental beliefs and institutionalised racism. The sombre dimension of white's symbolism underscores the notion that even colours can be appropriated to strengthen cultural hierarchies and sustain injustice.

Black



Figure 13: Kollwitz, K. (1922). The Widow (left) & Hurwitz, G. (2013). Batman: The Dark Knight, Vol. 2: Cycle of Violence (right)

The colour black, traditionally linked to obscurity, is frequently employed to represent mortality, malevolence, dread, sorcery, and grief. An evocative portrayal of this connection can be seen in Käthe Kollwitz's *The Widow*, a piece from her *Krieg (War)* collection, which delves into the devastating human toll of World War I. Within this barren composition, a bereaved widow tightly holds onto the recollection of her late husband, engulfed by a deep feeling of bereavement and hopelessness. The use of black as the sole colour in this composition emphasises the melancholic and mournful atmosphere of the scene. Kollwitz's unadorned use of black intensifies the emotional resonance, as no other colour could so aptly communicate the profoundness of her grief. The desolation of the picture reflects the void created by war.

Furthermore, the colour black assumes a pivotal position in the depiction of Batman, a highly renowned figure within the DC Comics multiverse. Batman is a melancholic character, perpetually grappling with his internal struggles while striving to quell criminal activity in the bleak and monochromatic environs of Gotham City. Following the tragic murder of his parents in a dimly lit alley during his childhood, Batman's existence is permanently enveloped in grief and intense anger. The visual reinforcement of his transition into a vigilante is achieved through the use of dark armoured suits and capes, enabling him to integrate effortlessly into the dimly lit streets of Gotham. In addition to reflecting his personal sorrow, the colour black also represents the moral ambiguity he encounters in his pursuit of justice. An exemplary cover, featuring Batman in a zombified state, establishes an instant gothic ambiance, as the extensive use of black intensifies the unsettling, nearly otherworldly aspects of his persona.

Although many graphic novels and comic strips employ vivid colours to enhance their emotional or narrative effect, certain works have the greatest impact when reproduced in monochrome. The use of black and white contrasts can sometimes convey the starkness of a subject or emotion more efficiently than a range of colours. In both Kollwitz's prints and Batman's iconic portrayal, the lack of colour compels the observer to concentrate on the unfiltered emotional intensity of the imagery.

Black and White



Figure 14: Thompson, C. (2011). *Habibi*

Black and white, two of the most important colours in visual symbolism, represent opposing but interconnected forces. We associate white with clarity, purity, and potential. It symbolises a profound, complete silence with creation potential. Black symbolises darkness, mortality, and emptiness—a perpetual silence without hope. Black and white create a strong contrast, with each colour emphasising the other. Black represents completion, while white represents beginning. In art and storytelling, these two colours often represent the delicate balance between life, death, lucidity, and ambiguity. Black-white contrast is visually and thematically significant in Craig Thompson's graphic novel *Habibi*. Arabic calligraphy enhances the novel's lush pages, which explore illumination and obscurity. Calligraphy adds visual and textual elements to the graphic novel, expanding its artistic potential. Thompson uses calligraphy to express wisdom, identity, and the divine.

Thompson uses the story of Dodola, a young girl forced to marry a calligrapher, to explore symbols and language's spiritual power. As the reader and Dodola learn to interpret the geometric and numeric patterns, the story becomes mythical. Thompson's thoughts on Arabic calligraphy are crucial: "It is preferable to appreciate words solely for their visual aesthetic without the interference of their meaning, rather than perceiving them visually and cognitively." This statement emphasises the conflict between admiring an unfamiliar writing system's aesthetics and deciphering its message.

This tension reflects the conflict between physical appearance and essential nature, darkness and light, and visual representation and written language in *Habibi*, a graphic novel. If you don't speak the language, calligraphy is just decoration. However, those with linguistic understanding may find the script's profound meaning hinders their aesthetic appreciation. This duality represents black and white, two opposing forces that strongly interact, creating multiple layers of meaning that are both simple and deep.

Grey



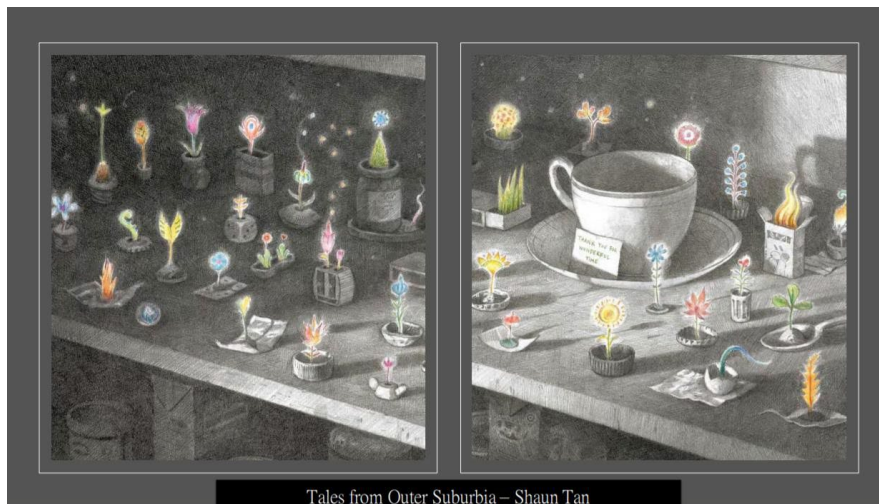
Shaun Tan- Tales from Outer Suburbia

Figure 15: Tan, S. (2008). Tales from Outer Suburbia

Grey, a colour formed by blending white and black, holds a unique place within the spectrum of colours. This colour exhibits a diminished vibrancy compared to its original shades, resulting in a neutral tone that is commonly associated with passivity or a lack of vitality. The colour grey elicits a sense of stillness and melancholy, leaning towards desolation when it deepens, yet offering a glimmer of optimism when it lightens. It exists in a state of ambiguity, representing neither the clarity of white nor the darkness of black, but rather a compromised position of uncertainty.

In the realm of art, the colour grey often conveys a sense of freezing a particular moment in time, akin to a photograph, while also imbuing it with a sense of detachment and lack of emotion. However, a significant transformation occurs when an artist begins to investigate composition and the deliberate integration of colour into a predominantly monochromatic image. The addition of a delicate hue amidst a predominantly monochromatic backdrop has the power to entirely transform the perception of the artwork, captivating the viewer's focus and imbuing it with a renewed sense of energy and attentiveness. The interplay between shades of grey and other colours amplifies the sense of depth and energy, underscoring the importance of strategic colour placement in visual storytelling.

Artists often use the colour grey as a means to express complex emotional depth. While it serves as a symbol of desolation, it also acts as a backdrop for vivid bursts of colour that symbolise hope, clarity, or transformation. The juxtaposition of monochromatic and coloured elements prompts the viewer to explore the emotional and narrative layers within the artwork, demonstrating how even a subtle change in colour can significantly impact the atmosphere and communication.



Tales from Outer Suburbia – Shaun Tan

Figure 16: Tan, S. (2008). Tales from Outer Suburbia

Shaun Tan's use of diverse artistic techniques allows him to explore a broad range of visual styles, resulting in the creation of distinctive and memorable imagery in his literary works. In *The Nameless Holiday*, Tan utilises a woodblock and scratchboard technique to create illustrations that possess a raw and textured quality. This technique evokes a sense of nostalgia and preserves traditional values. Nevertheless, the utilisation of various artistic materials and graphite in *The Amnesia Machine* creates a striking juxtaposition, embodying the surreal and introspective ambiance often associated with Chris Van Allsburg's artworks. Tan's artistic versatility is showcased in *Broken Toys*, where he employs a Japanese-influenced painting technique that emphasises meticulous brushwork and subtle emotional expression.

Tan uses bold and vibrant colours in *Alert but Not Alarmed* to portray the strong and bright light of midday, thereby emphasising moments of intensity. The deliberate manipulation of colour is a distinctive feature of his artistic methodology, which is most apparent in his graphic novel *Tales from Outer Suburbia*. While most of the novel is presented in black and white, the final page showcases Tan's impressive skill in manipulating colour. The author captivates the reader by introducing sudden and vivid splashes of colour to ordinary objects, collected by a student participating in a foreign exchange program. The strategically placed bursts of colour on these simple items captivate the reader's attention, prompting them to pause and reflect, ensuring that these details are not overlooked. Tan's utilisation of colour in this artwork creates a powerful emotional contrast, captivating the viewer's focus and imbuing the image with a sense of wonder and significance.

The Red Coat



Steven Spielberg- Schindler's list

Figure 17 : Spielberg, S. (Director). (1993). *Schindler's List*

Colour can convey deep symbolic meaning not only through written and visual mediums, as demonstrated in a particularly memorable scene from Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993). In the mostly black and white film, there is a significant scene where Oskar Schindler (played by Liam Neeson) sees a young girl wearing a bright red coat while Jews are being forcibly removed from the Kraków ghetto. The intentional and impactful utilisation of colour in this predominantly black and white film serves to focus the viewer's gaze on the girl amidst the unfolding turmoil and aggression. The red coat carries significant symbolism. From a subjective perspective, Schindler's encounter with this child dressed in red represents a crucial moment in his ethical principles, prompting him to take action in order to save as many Jews as possible. The presence of the woman motivates Schindler to make the famous "list," which ultimately saves the lives of 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust. In addition, aside from its significance in Schindler's individual growth, the red coat holds broader social and historical connotations. The colour red is often associated with danger, urgency, and a plea for help, symbolising the desperate situation faced by the Jewish community. In this context, the girl's red coat can be interpreted as a conspicuous "warning signal," symbolising the pleas for help that were largely ignored by the Allied military forces during World War II. Despite her lack of visible injuries, the young girl appears as a disturbing representation of innocence caught up in the midst of atrocious acts.

Later in the film, Schindler comes across the same girl, who is now lifeless, lying on a cart surrounded by a pile of dead bodies. The vivid crimson coat she wears serves as a powerful symbol, representing not only the harsh conditions of her life, but also the broader decline of innocence and humanity during the Holocaust. The utilisation of colour enhances the emotional and moral weight of the image, thereby intensifying the poignant nature of her tragic fate. The red coat functions as a potent visual emblem representing the loss of innocence during a profoundly savage period in history.

3. CONCLUSION

Empirical evidence and its evaluation can facilitate our comprehension of colour in art. Colour is employed by artists and designers to convey emotions, mirror individual viewpoints, and underscore symbolic significance. Colour plays a crucial role in attracting attention and enhancing the visual impact of artwork. The strategic use of colour can elicit specific psychological and emotional reactions from the audience, whether through subtle variations or striking, contrasting hues. An intriguing discovery is that both "high art" (paintings) and "low art" (comic books and graphic novels) exhibit similar patterns in their use of colour over a period of time. Irrespective of their cultural standing or medium, both art forms employ colour to express mood, character, and theme. The emotional and symbolic power of colour influences both the creation of a gallery masterpiece and a mass-market comic strip. The psychological impacts of colour have been thoroughly examined and discussed. Art can be interpreted differently by various cultures and individuals, but the perception and experience of art are significantly influenced by colour. Artists employ various hues and tones to augment their narrative, regardless of whether it is a high-value masterpiece or an inexpensive graphic novel. The profound emotional impact of the colour red, the soothing influence of blue, and the symbolic significance of black and white serve as a connection between both sophisticated and accessible forms of art, thereby demonstrating the universal significance of colour in human expression.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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