

The Use of Color
in
History, Politics, and Art

Edited by Sungshin Kim

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Metachromatics: The Historical Division Between Color and Line/Form as Analytic

Robert Machado

[The role of color] is to tell us what agitates the heart, while drawing shows us what passes in the mind...Color is a mobile, vague, intangible element, while form...is precise, limited, palpable, and constant...Drawing is [thus] the masculine side of art, color the feminine.¹

Color is enslaved by the line that becomes writing.²

Since as early as Book Six of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which regards color as a superfluous and potentially insidious element of imaging, systems of representation have theorized color use and methods for its interpretation by differentiating a hermeneutics of color from one of line and form.³ Despite historical shifts in modes of representation and valuation, this notion of chromatics as a discourse separate and opposite from line and form has remained durable across the arts, both fine and applied, visual and verbal. Its relations thus constitute a range of symbolic and socioeconomic antagonisms, accommodations, and displaced desires, all within a broad scope of cultural productions, which are both generative and symptomatic.

Through this classical binarization of elements, aesthetic traditions have identified and reinscribed in line and form the authority and privilege that accompany the control of boundaries, definition, and narrative. Within this binary, and according to this logic, color typically has been consigned to a deferential position, adding and circulating "intangibles" such as vitality and allure within

1 Charles Blanc, *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, trans. Kate Newell Doggett (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1874), 146.

2 Yves Klein, "The Evolution of Art towards the Immaterial," in *Colour*, ed. David Batchelor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1954] 2008), 119.

3 For example, as Aristotle explains, "...the first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is Plot... Compare the parallel in painting, where the most beautiful colors laid on without order will not give one the same pleasure as a simple black-and-white sketch of a portrait." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater (Digireads.com Publishing, [350 BCE] 2005), 29.

media (including sculpture, etching, drawing, painting, prints, photography, cinema, and verbal description) whose ontologies line and form most frequently have been used to essentialize. This dualistic structure of relations, which offers a pretense of rhetorical balance, stability, and harmony to contrasted and ranked terms, has invited similarly articulated social relationships and cultural values to be reinforced or contested by aesthetic analogy.

Charles Blanc's influential nineteenth-century aesthetic primer (above), designed to equip art's practitioners and audiences with a "grammar" for production and "appreciation," provides a salient example from the history of art and visibility of the susceptibilities of this model to ideology. Yves Klein's martialization of the model's terms nearly a century later suggests, in stark relief, broader implications, and the transmedial dynamics of this enduring formalism and its contentious meta-relations. It is, for example, in part how social critics such as Nisard were able to link "over-attention" to color with privileging imagination over reason (a symptom of decadence);⁴ why Adorno regarded color as escapist spectacle or "mere" folk expression;⁵ why Le Corbusier and Ozenfant experienced color as destabilizing volume;⁶ and why color throughout history has been the site of so many "chromophobic" displacements, described by David Batchelor,⁷ as well as utopian idealizations.

The historical effectiveness with which this binary has been used to enlist normalized relations from disparate fields to reinscribe power relations, essentialist constructions of identity and experience, and the epistemological presumptions of binarism itself within critical methodology suggests the value of investigating its structural dynamics—and its ruptures—within and between modes of representation more broadly.

This chapter will seek to provide a framework through which to identify and recuperate such dynamics and sites of exchange. To accomplish this goal, it will adapt a variety of recent strategies within visual culture studies, philosophies of color, inter-art analysis, transmedial narratology, and a strain of "activist" new formalism that, in making a continuum with new historicism,⁸ has called for renewed attention to "the processes and structures of mediation through which particular discourses and whole classes of discourses... come to represent the real... [at] the eclipse or exclusion of other contenders for that title."⁹ As a working definition, "metachromatics" names this approach, which investigates a historical "aboutness" of color co-constituted through its opposition to line/form (hereafter color-line/form).

4 Désiré Nisard, *Études de mœurs et de critique sur les poètes Latins de la décadence* (Paris: Gosselin, 1834).

5 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York: Continuum International, [1970] 1997); *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London; New York: Verso, 1978).

6 C.E. Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) and Amédée Ozenfant, "Purism," in *Modern Artists on Art: Ten Unabridged Essays*, ed. and trans. Robert L. Herbert (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, [1920] 1965), 70–72.

7 David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2000).

8 Historicism here recognizes a process, following Armstrong and others, which allows for the articulation of "different diachronicities and synchronicities." Carol Armstrong, "All-Time Favorites," *Art Forum* (Summer, 2011): 88.

9 Marjorie Levinson, "What is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (2007): 561.

Method

Generally speaking, methodologies for investigating relations between verbal and visual artifacts often involve comparisons of objects which bear related subject matter, or that appear to tell similar stories. In this case, we can consider specific cinematic adaptations of novels and paintings, pictorial versions of poems, and poetic/ekphrastic versions of pictures.¹⁰ Broader interart comparisons also have provided significant historical and generic insight into the mutual reinforcement or antagonism of "sister arts," understood by scholars such as Mitchell as a struggle for dominance between images and words,¹¹ or by Gaudreault and Philippe as a historiographical process by which new media come into being.¹²

Other foundational approaches, however, have sought to problematize the nature of media itself by locating common structural ground between them. Studies such as Frank's idea of "spatial form" in modern literature;¹³ Steiner's likening of painting to literature;¹⁴ Mitchell's theory of the transmedial mobile image;¹⁵ and more recently, postclassical narratology's transmediation of description and the relocation of narrativity from artifact to "cognitive frame,"¹⁶ invite audiences to "view" verbal texts spatially, to "read" pictorial elements as grammatically articulated verbal signs,¹⁷ or to follow disembodied images across artifacts that they inhabit as "triggers" of the mind.¹⁸ These approaches contest the notion of

10 "Ekphrasis" here refers to its narrower usage within twentieth-century analyses of verbal representation and painting employed by scholars such as Dubois, Heffernan, and Hollander. As Webb explains, however, ekphrasis within classical rhetoric and for most of history has been used to refer to any vivid description of visual impressions. Page DuBois, *History, Rhetorical Description and the Epic from Homer to Spenser* (Totowa, NJ: Biblio Distribution Services, 1982); James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); John Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Ruth Webb, "Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre," *Word & Image* 15, no. 1 (1999): 5–33.

11 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

12 André Gaudreault and Marion Philippe, "A Medium is Always Born Twice," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 3, no. 1 (2005): 3–15. Refer also to Hagstrum's landmark study on literary pictorialism. Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

13 Frank's essay most often is cited as beginning this discussion within literature. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, [1945] 1991).

14 Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation Between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

15 W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

16 Werner Wolf, "Narratology and Media(lity): The Transmedial Expansion of a Literary Discipline and Possible Consequences," in *Current Trends in Narratology*, ed. Greta Olson (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2011), 145–80; Ansgar Nünning, "Towards a Typology, Poetics and History of Description in Fiction," in *Description in Literature and Other Media*, eds. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 91–125.

17 For an early narratological demonstration of this approach, see: Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

18 Transmediality here refers to the essential media independence of narrative and its discursive formations. Werner Wolf, "Pictorial Narrativity," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, eds. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 431. For more on contemporary methods within transmedial studies, see for example Ryan; and Wolf and Bernhart. For an earlier iteration of the concept of transmediality within the context of structuralism, see for example Barthes. Marie-Laure Ryan, "On the Theoretical Foundations of Transmedial Narratology," in *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality, Disciplinary, eds. Jan Christoph Meister, Tom Kindt, and Wilhelm Schernus* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 1–23; Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart, *Description*; Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

essential medial difference now commonly traced to Lessing's eighteenth century revisionist aesthetics.¹⁹

My interest here is not to privilege any one of these approaches, to diminish or reassert material differences between media, or to reclaim objects for any particular discipline; rather, it is to suggest a mechanism that might be deployed as an application within any number of approaches and fields that investigate the production, distribution, reception, and use of representation—broadly construed—and the discourses that maintain or disrupt them.

Mary Louise Pratt's post-colonial concept of the "contact zone" serves as a useful model for consideration within this context.²⁰ Pratt is especially interested in colonial frontiers: specifically, the co-constitution of colonizing and colonized subjects through their various forms of contact—their interactions, mutual understandings, practices, etc.—which, in her study, can be located within modes of European travel writing. For Pratt, the process of subject formation within these transactional spaces is determined not by a separateness of colonizer and colonized, nor by unidirectional flows of power, but by their articulations—the ways in which subjects absorb, repel, and use each other.

Without suggesting a moral or formal equality of terms between, for example, pictorial uses of color and actual colonized subjects, the investigation of color across disciplines benefits from recognition of a similar historical "zone" of contact between color and iterations of line and form—one that continues to influence determinations of identity, intelligibility, socio-cultural associations and value, theoretical engagement as well as normative reading/reception patterns, and even spheres of labor (both metaphorical and literal). This flux of absorption, resistance, and mutual reinforcement—and possibilities for the (re)configuration of identities and relations of power in light of this dynamic—are central to the purposes of this investigation.

A diagram of this zone of contact and of binary relations whose alignments the discourse of color – line/form historically has been used to mediate, offers here a schematic that might add clarification, facilitate elaboration, and encourage conceptual permutation within the study of color (Figure 7.1). Neither comprehensive nor fixed in its terms, it provides a system through which to chart and to compare sets of concepts and relations to power, whose mediation by color – line/form can be understood ultimately as "eventful" and "narratable" (an argument discussed more below).²¹

19 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocöon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, [1766] 1984).

20 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2007).

21 As an additional way to flesh out the arbitrariness of this "oppositional" relation and the ontologies that its dynamics help to articulate through the production of associated contraries and implications, see Greimas and his "semiotic square," which provides a constructive framework through which to consider the processes involved in the conceptualization of possibility. A. J. Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

**Systems of harmony,
discord, & the
meta-narratives
governing tellability**

Color	—	Line/Form
perceptual color	micro-/event/storia	color word
explicit description		narrative
static & non-event (spatial)		action & event (temporal)
contemplative		
cinematic "attractions"		cinematic narrative
painting/tinting		photography/drawing
muteness (untellability)		speech (tellability)
pre/extra-lingual		lingual
Lyotardian sublime		
ornament		instrument
immateriality		materiality
metaphysics		science
(innate) artistry		acquired techne
art		intellect
non-normativities		normativities
feminine sphere		masculine sphere
subjectivity		objectivity
primitive		evolved

Figure 7.1 | Metachromatics, and the orientation of concepts according to the mediation of color – line/form. Examples here will be discussed below and throughout.

As a way to begin to discuss this strategy and its promise for addressing problems within color studies broadly across media, this chapter will allow the details and workings of theory to emerge from contexts of possible application. In keeping with one of the critical goals of *The Use of Color in History, Politics, and Art*, instead of undertaking an enhanced treatment of any one area of interest, this approach will seek to advance color as a critical lens by foregrounding ways in which color and line and form, "twin abstractions" assembled by humans, according to Baudelaire,²² often are put to work in the service of other abstractions and the ideologies that give rise to them. Of particular interest will be the relation of the discourse of color – line/form to an often over-looked area of historiography (1839–1935) in which conspicuously colored "black-and-white" photography and cinema existed as a popular iteration of composite representation.²³ "Verbal

22 Charles Baudelaire, "The Life and Work of Eugène Delacroix," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, [1863] 1964), 51.

23 This periodization, founded on the cultural prevalence of this photo-painterly composite, does not ignore monochrome photography's rich conceptual "pre-history," its technological development prior to the announcement of photography by Louis Daguerre in 1839, aesthetic differences between technological iterations, black-and-white photography's continuing cultural presence, or earlier developments of viable (but commercially-limited) "natural" color films, such as Autochrome (photography) and Kinemacolor (cinema) established by 1908. These dates instead intend to add further dimensionality to influential historical accounts of photography, such as Mirzoeff's broader periodization of the Age of Photography (1839–1982), by reflecting a period marked by the realization of two emergent types of indexicality within dominant culture: the presumed objective line/form of monochromatic photography (1839), and the commercial realization of "objective" color cinema through the first feature-length three-strip Technicolor film, *Becky Sharp* (1935). While the realization of three-strip Technicolor feature films did not of course signal the decline of black-and-white cinema, which retained a significant cultural presence until well

coloration,” identified historically as an aspect of description set in subordinate opposition to the “line” of plot and narrative—or as little more than “icing on the narrative cake”²⁴—also will be suggested as a provocative area for analogous reconsideration within contexts such as comparative media studies, the pragmatics of visualization and aesthetic response, and the constitution of narrativity as a category of experience.²⁵

Disegno-colore: Origin Story Points to the Rule

Discussions of the historical division in aesthetics between color and line/form most often begin with accounts of the debate between Venetian and Florentine approaches to painting within the history of Renaissance art. Instances of vibrant and self-referential color within figurative settings are said to have been favored by the so-called colorists of Venice, while Florentines insisted on the primacy of drawing and the tighter restriction of color to mimetic supplementation.²⁶ According to Ball, this competition for the prioritization of *colore* or *disegno* within academies of art generally lasted until the beginning of the seventeenth century. By this time, as Ball recounts, “Vasari and the scholars of Italian academies largely secured the superiority of *disegno* over *colore*...and a muted palette [once spread to France] became the predominant style of European art.”²⁷

Paintings often discussed as representative of this aesthetic divergence during the sixteenth century—such as those by Titian and Michelangelo—do not, however, exactly support such clear delineation. As Ball’s study suggests, sometimes Michelangelo’s use of color, for example, can appear just as bright and self-reflexive as color deployed by Titian. Their mutual attention to drawing and to perspective also challenges claims of their partisanship based on strictly differing approaches to line/form. For Ball, such similarities lend support to the view that the history of this factionalization derives from additional sources, namely, from a problem-

atic historiography. He argues that conceptions of the rivalry in painting between Venice and Florence, construed according to practices that uniformly favored either color or line/form, reflect to an appreciable extent a “nineteenth century fiction,” which originates with Vasari.²⁸

With his *Lives of the Artists*, Vasari promoted the view that the brightened colors of Titian merely compensated for, or distracted from, poor draftsmanship. For Vasari, instances of chromatic conspicuousness within paintings by Titian and others entailed a weak grasp of line/form (among other deficiencies) and the questionable loosening of its authority. Vasari’s recourse to this binary, despite, perhaps, contradictory visual evidence, followed historical precedent. As a Florentine advocating for Florence within an aesthetic-municipal rivalry, Vasari invoked a then familiar bias against color(ation) and its legacy of associations, such as the authority of design over color within academic art theory based on a distinction between “immutable qualities attributed to the mind and the deceptive, transient, changeable body.”²⁹ In doing so, he was able to reinforce the institutional values of the academy and those that it empowered. His treatment of color as a secondary practice (for which, not incidentally, training was limited) also allowed him to identify with a position of power far more symbolically extensive than pictorial aesthetics.

Ball’s critical rereading of this now frequently retold story of origins, just briefly introduced here, highlights the rhetorical utility of this politicized construct and its ability to frame and to institutionalize allegiances in reduced and oppositional terms.³⁰ Without discounting genuine differences represented by, in this case, the aesthetic schools of Venice and Florence and their respective painters, this history underscores color – line/form as a discursive mechanism able to help found and to perpetuate the very notion of opposing “schools,” even despite, if Ball is right, empirical observation that might suggest otherwise. It emphasizes the degree to which perception involves the mediation of values and frameworks for interpretation. It also typifies a process by which aesthetic systems are able to constitute and naturalize values and frameworks diachronically as well as within contemporaneous fields.

Historical arguments describing the perceptual impossibility of even separating line/form from color make this point even more provocative. As the early twentieth-century English art critic Clive Bell explained, “The distinction...is an unreal one; you cannot conceive of a colourless line or a colourless space; neither can you conceive a formless relation of colours”³¹—an observation on which Josef Albers would later elaborate through experiments on the influence of shape, size, and number on chromatic identity and interaction.³² This paradox of common

after WWII, it did, however, popularize a technological achievement that allowed for the appearance of the enhanced mimetic integration of photo-cinematic color and line/form, and thus claims for the fulfillment of a telos that posited an evolution of still and moving photography toward “total” realism. For more on Mirzoeff’s periodization, see: Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 65.

24 Michael Riffaterre, “On the Diegetic Functions of the Descriptive,” *Style* 20, no. 3 (1986): 281.

25 Here and throughout, references to “pragmatics” follow its definition by Archer and Grundy as the study of meaning in context, where context is understood as always both presumptive and emergent. Dawn Archer and Peter Grundy, eds., *The Pragmatics Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 9. Pragmatics, traditionally a branch of linguistics, here suggests a broader or transmedial approach to objects of study based on this heuristic notion of context. For more on this interactive approach to context, see, for example, Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

26 The Venetian faction, led by Titian (c. 1488/1490–1576) and “successors” such as Tintoretto (1518–1594) and Veronese (1528–1588), were inspired by, among other things, colorful Byzantine art brought west from Constantinople following the crusades of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They also were influenced by the introduction of oil painting techniques to Venice by the 1470s through figures such as Giovanni Bellini (1430–1516). Philip Ball, *Bright Earth: Art and the Invention of Color* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 123–124. Venetians were said to prefer applications of bright hues that aroused self-reflexive “detraction” from linear form. Represented by painters such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Raphael (1483–1520), and Michelangelo (1475–1564), the Florentine school, seeking divergence from the flat planes and schematic color codes of medieval artistic orthodoxy, arguably insisted instead on expressions of beauty through the linearity of mathematically-determined *disegno* focused on proportion.

27 Philip Ball, *Bright Earth*, 129. Within the late seventeenth century in French academies, the two sides were represented by the chromatically “sober” Poussinistes (Nicolas Poussin, 1594–1665) and the more florid Rubenistes (Peter Paul Rubens, 1577–1640).

28 Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1568] 1965).

29 Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester, England; New York: Manchester University Press, distributed in the US by St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 4.

30 For a detailed history of the concepts underpinning the division between design and color within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian art and theory, see: Maurice George Poirier, *Studies on the Concepts of “Disegno,” “Invenzione,” and “Colore” in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Italian Art and Theory* (New York: New York University, 1976).

31 Clive Bell, “The Aesthetic Hypothesis,” in *Twentieth Century Theories of Art*, ed. James Matheson Thompson (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, [1914] 1990), 82.

32 Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1920] 2006).

visual experience is just one among many involved in the perception of color, its cognition, and related determinations of cultural value and meaning.

It reminds us, for example, that monochromatic visual arrays, as in “black-and-white” photography and engraving, are able to constitute “achromatic” pictures that might be considered acceptable representations of the world, or even, demonstrative of “a high state of intellectual and aesthetic cultivation.”³³ It also points to several areas of chromatic interest that have occupied the sciences and humanities for millennia. These include questions of where color resides; how it is identified, measured, and represented using languages and systems of harmony and organization; and what it might mean, for whom, and according to which processes of production, reception, and transmission. Factoring into these contexts as well is the history of the discursive application of color – line/form and its uses in representing, rationalizing, and naturalizing other dichotomous notions of inherent difference and relation.

Roger Fry for example, like others before him whose aesthetics responded to the rhetorical effectiveness of this discourse, demonstrated the utility of the binarization of color – line/form within a formalist schema that also reinscribed problematic ideological positions.³⁴ According to his hierarchy of “emotional elements of design,” which implicated earlier aesthetic and philosophical suspicions of color as mere *qualia*,³⁵ color represented “the only element [among line, mass, space, light] not of critical or universal importance to life.” While Fry’s idealization here might at worst seem to exemplify a dated or specious formulation within a circumscribed area of aesthetic history, his familiar assertion of color’s superfluity and line’s authority points to wider political significance. In fact, it exemplifies a broader tradition in aesthetics in which existing social hierarchies and relations of power have been able to appropriate additional cultural influence through favorable codification.

Charles Blanc provides another useful example from this tradition. According to this influential nineteenth-century critic, color was “the peculiar characteristic [only] of the lower forms of nature.” Channeling neoclassical notions of the great chain of being, Blanc explained “the higher we rise in the scale of being... drawing becomes the medium of expression, more and more dominant.” For Blanc, when painting attends to “higher” forms, it can occasionally even “dispense with color” altogether.³⁶ Slippery terms of value such as “high” and “low,” and color as a marker of opprobrium within conceptions of divinity, morality, reason, or even representability itself, lend themselves to other traditions that regard (subjects of) color as base. Nineteenth-century photographic portraiture, for example, and manuals for tinting—which most often assumed the white skin of sitters and provided only rare instruction for photographing or chromatically treating com-

33 Ogden Rood, *Modern Chromatics* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, [1879] 1973), 305.

34 Roger Fry, “An Essay in Aesthetics” [1909], in *Colour*, ed. David Batchelor, 54.

35 Gage explains this philosophical debate as one over the determination of color as either an unreliable attribute of visual phenomena (ancient skeptics or Locke) or perceptual information that mediates our knowledge of the world (Berkeley or Goethe). John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 36.

36 Charles Blanc, *The Grammar*, 4–5.

plexions of color—underscore the vulnerability of aesthetic theory and practice to the politics of identity.

A pattern of similar examples, from across the arts and artistic periods, reflects the prevalence of color’s association with “low” or ignoble constructions/subjects and its subordination to line/form and those identified with it. With this in mind, we can consider other cultural extensions of *disegno e colore* beyond its seventeenth-century “resolution” within Italian academies, especially those whose ubiquity might raise the stakes.

The Chromophobic/Chromophilic Dilemma

Colour is less important than form, but casts over it a peculiar charm. If form is wrongly seen or falsely represented, we feel as though “the foundations were shaken”; if the colour is bad, we are simply disgusted.³⁷

The history of what Batchelor has called “chromophobia”—loosely defined as the fear of, or prejudice against, color and its threats of “corruption”—is extensive.³⁸ Batchelor’s book of the same title offers a variety of examples from across the arts, cinema, literature, and philosophy since Plato, which speaks to this “condition’s” range of influence. For Batchelor, *disegno-colore* plays a critical role in the manifestation of chromophobia and its transmission. Through it, color has come to stand in for, or to be indicative of many motifs, including, the inessential, the subjective, the fleeting, the vulgar, the emotional, the infantile, the primitive, the feminine, the queer, etc.

Especially relevant to my focus here is that the political response to chromophobia, through “chromophilia” (its opposite), rarely gets beyond an affirmation of chromophobic terms, which suggests a chromatic and political bind. In fact, as Batchelor explains, rather than establishing its own terms of value, chromophilia tends to embrace and to concentrate the terms of chromophobia: through it “color remains other; in fact, it often remains more other than before.”³⁹ The implications of this pejorative othering, however, have been left relatively unexplored. The tendency for color to be enlisted as a stand-in for alterity—an “other” *shaped*, muted, and marginalized by centered notions of line/form and its values—suggests a key hegemonic function of the discourse of color – line/form.⁴⁰ Through this, chromophilia risks “absolutization” as other which, as Rancière and others have discussed, can “lead to, or at least feed into, political forms of othering that threaten to achieve the opposite of what they

37 Ogden Rood, *Modern Chromatics*, 306.

38 David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 102.

39 *Ibid.*, 71.

40 Hegemony here is meant in the sense defined by Raymond Williams. He explains that hegemony is “not only the articulate upper level of ‘ideology,’ nor are its forms of control only those seen as ‘manipulation’ or ‘indoctrination.’ It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living; our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves in the world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.” Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110.

have been designed to do.”⁴¹ “Chromatic” associations such as inessentiality, infantilism, and emotionality, for example, are familiar terms of gender-based marginalization found throughout history. The presence of the authority of line/form even within celebrations of color that embrace such qualities suggests its claim on normativity (and reach of power) through determinations of difference that can limit power.

Within eighteenth-century treatises on character, for example, color was understood as more appropriate to the representation of women than the line and form of design prioritized for men because femininity presumed a lack of “interiority” afforded to the “dualistic” male subjectivity.⁴² In keeping with such assumptions, even an empowered or so-called chromophilic “feminine” subjectivity, expressed through fashion, style, etc., seems vulnerable to these and other dominant chromophobic associations. Color in this sense can other, or “out,” as a stain or restrictive mark, and thus jeopardize access to institutions of power.

This chromophobic/philic dilemma suggests real-world limitations that can be compounded by its naturalization.⁴³ The consensus of powerful black or “achromatic” navy suits, for example, which might be said to dominate Wall Street, “Western” courtrooms, stages of political debate, etc., hints at a nexus of authority that (a)chromatic coding can reinforce and perpetuate.⁴⁴ As Baudrillard argued, for example, whatever “registers zero on the color scale (such as white, black, gray)” is “correspondingly paradigmatic of dignity, repression, and moral standing” according to the “traditional” treatment of color, which is perceived as a “threat to inwardness.”⁴⁵ In addition, sartorial preference among the “serious” for dark or achromatic colors has pointed for many to the ink (and perhaps line/form) of literary/literate culture since the printing press, or to other references to modernity.⁴⁶ However, it also suggests a pathway of association through which color can stand in for and conflate illiteracy, frivolity, lawlessness, politi-

41 Thomas Claviez, “Done and Over with—Finally? Otherness, Metonymy, and the Ethics of Comparison,” *PMLA* 128, no. 3 (May, 2013): 608.

42 Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture*, 11.

43 Here I follow Eagleton in understanding naturalization as a process that renders the beliefs of a particular ideology “natural and self-evident,” and that identifies them with “the common sense of a society” such that it becomes difficult to imagine how they might ever be different. It is the process by which an ideology is able to offer itself as an “Of course!” or “That goes without saying.” Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London; New York: Verso, 2007) 58–59.

44 So-called achromatic colors, distinguished by their “desaturation” (or lack of dominant hue, the dominant wavelength in a color), typically include black, white, gray, and brown. Navy in this case, however, is understood as bearing a perceptual nearness to black (and thus to achromaticity) based on its low degree of “brightness”: the amount of light reflected by a color. Hue, saturation, and brightness (value, lightness) are measures of color frequently used to categorize the “three-dimensionality” of color space. Color perception, however, more broadly is an intersection of physics, psychology, linguistics (i.e., color lexia, color naming, color naming systems), philosophy, aesthetics, and cultural experience.

45 Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, [1968] 2005), 31.

46 Woodall, for example, explains the notion of black-and-white as an especially modern aesthetic in part due to its heritage, which involves reference to the utilitarianism of an urban work environment, and a sober disciplined lifestyle. Black-and-white as an aesthetic discourse also refers back to its widespread use within seventeenth-century Dutch Burgher portraiture, in which black-and-white bore connotations of virility. For Woodall, bourgeois identity gains a heritage of community and spiritual uprightness in part through this use of black. Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture*, 5. For more on the history of the color black, see: Michel Pastoureau, *Black: The History of a Color* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

cal marginality, femininity, etc. and other qualities based on heteronormative or related assumptions.

A recent photograph of an advertisement from the New York City subway, featuring a domestic couple “of color,” provides a specific example of this dilemma for consideration (Figure 7.2). In many ways, it might be understood as an allegory or cautionary tale of the chromophobic/philic dilemma in action. It also suggests the continuing relevance of color – line/form to constructions of identity and power, as well as the acceptability of its premises, within everyday public spaces. Preserving the slight obscurity of text within this photograph, which includes a male bystander sitting in front of it, is meant to incorporate a reminder of the situational contingency involved in the production of meaning (in this case, “humorous” comparisons made by subway passengers between the man in the advertisement and the man beneath it helped to reinforce its misogyny).



Figure 7.2 | Advertisement for the AT&T GoPhone. Digital photograph by author from the New York City subway (2012).

The advertisement reads: “You compromised on your Saturday afternoon./ Don’t compromise on your wireless plan./ \$50 Unlimited Talk.” Although the advertisement’s direct address communicates the nature of this compromise only implicitly, it appears to solicit identification with a heteronormative male subject’s chromophobic and domestic suffering (his pink shirt, slack and effete, in this case looks *picked out for* him—and part of the imposition conveyed by his return glance rather than indicating any chromatic complicity). An expressive reading of this collaboration of word and image might be summarized in this way:

You

like the male in this picture: trapped, reduced, and weakened by feminization and domestication (represented here, in part, by a suffocating profusion of color)

compromised

a fool's bargain that showcases your emasculation

on your Saturday afternoon.

Saturday afternoon suggests natural activities outdoors, perhaps with "the guys," not time indoors with your domestic partner, feigning subtle and chromatic discriminations for which you are not naturally equipped as a male. Moreover, "Saturday" afternoon is the only day/time of the week that is really "yours," with Sunday anticipating the work of Monday, and Friday bearing its residue.

Don't

be similarly trapped, reduced, feminized, unnatural, and illogical like this man, and

compromise on your wireless plan.

a compromise, on evidence, that your female partner likely would make.

\$50 Unlimited Talk.

"Fifty" and "unlimited" in their respective lack of decimalization and qualification are decisive and without nuance. Half of \$100, \$50 also suggests a welcome return to (masculine) logic and fairness. Together these signs offer a propitious contract much different from your previous compromise. They also provide an oasis in which to experience autonomy (talking on the phone) without temporal restriction. With "\$50 Unlimited Talk," the GoPhone takes a stand against female domination and its irrational preoccupations: conditions from what your partner "naturally" suffers, and makes you suffer through, when unchecked.

While an alternative argument could be made that signs of domesticity (in the form of nascent home renovation) and consumerism surround the male in the image, and that color perhaps plays little role in the meaning of the ad, a closer look suggests the ways in which the discourse of color – line/form provides a ready structure for the above reading and its problematic assumptions. The female's association with color in the image, and the thrall of this relation, as we know, draws on a long history of chromatic gendering tied to misogynist essentializing. In addition, the very crux of the "pregnant moment," captured here by photography, appears to turn on its representation of the chromophobic/philic dilemma.⁴⁷

The female in this picture faces colored fabric and is photographed mid-speech. This orientation reinforces a sense of her chromophilic "communication" (visual and verbal) with the colored material itself. The male in this scenario, similarly registering a gendered predilection, looks at us ("men") and not the chromatic choices on display (or her). His refusal to respond to her apparent gesture of rhetorical enthusiasm (Isn't it good?) resists both her—and color's—dominance

47 A "pregnant moment" refers to a depicted moment from which a viewer/reader infers a before-and-after. Lessing, for example, sees this moment as one that invokes the imagination of the viewer. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocöon* ([1766] 1984). The concept of the pregnant moment often is associated with a mode of pictorial narrativity activated within single pictures understood to depict a scene of action. For more on this form of narrativity, see, for example, Julia Thomas, *Victorian Narrative Painting* (London: Tate, 2000).

over space and "his" afternoon. It also allows for an interpretation that his response is not required, which reinforces the misogynistic illogic of the compromise.

Although the female might shift her attention from the colorful fabric to his dismissive glance (a possibility that adds narrative/dramatic suspense), naturalized assumptions about her female and chromophilic "nature" make her continued "distraction" more likely. The fixity and apparent endlessness of her (over) attention to a colored textile, compounded through photography's temporal suspension, reinforces this notion. It also allows for, or even promotes, analogical extensions that might reinscribe other typological assumptions, such as she/he/domesticity/"nature" never changes. His similarly unwavering return glance seeks comparable pity for what amounts to this (misogynistic take on) inescapable "reality."

On a variety of levels, color within this picture can be understood as overwhelming a sense of masculine order. For example, colors organized along the walls of the room and protruding into the foreground dominate the image with an uncertain and "alternative" chromatic systemization of space. Ambiguities in the nature of the arrangement of colors within this system may speak to general challenges often involved in chromatic discrimination and vocabulary. However, irregularities within and between color sections along the walls also suggest an order founded only on pretense.

Criteria frequently used to categorize color, such as hue, brightness, and saturation, appear to shift in priority and without justification within this "order." As a result, this "system," aligned with "feminine" proclivity seems unable to make up its mind. Its feminized chromatic grammar "lines" the space to suggest an incomprehensible or capricious (seizure of) authority, which arguably plays on stereotypes of black or African American femininity as "domineering." It also encroaches on viewers to warn of the more general creep of feminization and to suggest the necessity of its regulation: the feminization of your Saturday and of wireless phone plans typifies greater threats to power and order.

These chromophobic assumptions, as with the hierarchies of Fry, Blanc, or even those of later "progressive" aesthetics such as the constructivism of Rodchenko, which upheld "line" as "the path of advancement" and "the first and last thing...in painting and any construction...or organism,"⁴⁸ might seem ambiguous, circumscribed, or harmless enough. They bear meaningfully, however, on constructions of identity and on the structuring of relations between people. Within the advertisement, it is she who selects the tint of drapery for whatever perhaps dismissible reason (aesthetic criteria can appear vague); but his shirt of the same tint also then appears to fall within her sphere of influence. The subtext is that female authority over "trivial" aesthetics can quickly advance to more significant areas of life. This threat of "unnatural" domination and loss of self, an everyman's take on domestication, warns of what happens when women/"others"/chromophilics/colors usurp heteronormative masculine authority. The solution proposed by the ad is to publically underscore male authority over important decisions (such as financial matters) and to sanction the brazen address of only

48 Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Extract from notes for a lecture given at Inkhuk (Institute of Artistic Culture)," in *Rodchenko*, ed. David Elliott (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, [1921] 1979), 128.

a particular masculinist consumer. Unconditioned public sexism, like the blunt terms of the contract, is part of this masculinist relief and return to “order.”

These implicit narratives, which color – line/form helps to organize here within the context of everyday social space and ephemera, suggest the continuing relevance of this discourse to identity, distributions of power, and the processes of naturalization. Such stories also raise questions about the influence of color – line/form within other possible domains or zones of contact. Iterations of classical narrative theory, for example, which draw on metaphor to construe plot as “line” and description as (mere) added “color,” hint at the politics of metanarratives perhaps embedded within dominant theories of telling. As we will see, this thread leads to problems in the conceptualization of narrativity itself, not only within theories of verbal representation, but within visual fields such as cinema, and its origins within nineteenth-century photography.

Narrativity and The (Added) Color Problem in Early Cinema

From 1895–1930 (in particular 1908–1921) it is estimated that 85% of all film is non-black-and-white.⁴⁹

[After watching archived colored nitrate prints for over five years] I could find no recipe, no hidden theory, no codes that applied to all the films I saw. This was very disturbing because we’re always looking for logic, for codes, but I simply couldn’t find any.⁵⁰

Non-photographic color in silent cinema was seldom mentioned in contemporary film reviews, and when color was mentioned, it was seldom discussed beyond general descriptions like “pretty,” “true,” “effective,” and other generalizations.⁵¹

Responding to questions regarding the readability of color in cinema during its first decades, scholars within the last fifteen years have grown increasingly attentive to the problematics of color within cinematic expression, especially as it pertains to narrative. Faced with objects of study and methodologies that have been newly destabilized by missing and perhaps irrecoverable chromatic effects lost in the transitory aniline dyes of early colored films, the possible infidelity (or omission) of color in test prints long held to be reliable “copies” of film “originals,” and challenges to aesthetic restoration such as the obsolescence of early nitrate

film stock and the greater light intensity of early projection apparatuses, film scholars have begun to work through many of the reconfigurations that the color problem poses.⁵²

As the above excerpts taken together suggest, the decoding of color in early cinema is a challenge for a variety of reasons. Usai continues:

Much as we know that a certain color once existed in a silent film, we must also acknowledge that it is now impossible to experience its actual rendering on the screen. As time goes by, the entity slowly mutates into an imaginary object, a creation of the mind. We collect the few surviving fragments, the apparatus, the chemical formulas, the memoirs of the technicians who designed the systems, the opinions of those who saw them at work.⁵³

Likely in part to avoid what Usai fears might be the “empty exercise” or “false consciousness” of extracting meaning from corrupt or unstable prints, not to mention that often different cuts and chromatic treatments of the same film exist, Uricchio’s earlier study of Griffith’s *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), posits a heuristic whereby the instability of early color may be circumvented “by focusing on the discourse *about* color”; that is, on “evidence regarding its reception and promotion.”⁵⁴

However, as Hanssen explains above, accounts of color’s meaning—and the meanings of individual colors—within early cinema thus far have been relatively difficult to locate.⁵⁵ This is true not only of cinema before its institutional expansion during the “nickelodeon boom” in the US (1905–1909),⁵⁶ but even, as Patalas

52 For example, as Fossati, assistant researcher at the Nederlands Filmmuseum archives in 1995, explains, “it’s sometimes impossible to transfer very light pink tinting to acetate stock without unacceptably distorting the color in toned areas; the colors on a safety print are different from those on the nitrate prints; pink colors, for example, disappear, or tinting on the nitrate looks like toning in the acetate. And of course the colors have changed on the nitrate too.” Colors fade, black-and-white images through solarization become “colored,” etc. Giovanna Fossati, “Moderated Discussion,” 14–15. For more on recent treatments of color in early cinema, see: Joshua Yumibe, *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Richard Koszarski, ed., special topic issue: “Color Film,” *Film History* 12, no. 4 (2000): 339–463; Richard Koszarski, ed., “Special Topic Issue: Early Colour,” *Film History* 20, nos. 1–2 (2009): 1–183; Wendy E. Everett, ed., *Questions of Colour in Cinema: From Paintbrush to Pixel* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007); Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Pierce, eds., *Color: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, *Early Discourses*; L. McKernan, ed., special topic issue: “Color,” *Living Pictures: The Journal of the Popular and Projected Image Before 1914* 2, no. 2 (2003); Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema: An Introduction* (London: British Film Institute, 2000); Leonardo Quaresima, *The Tenth Muse: DOMITOR Conference, VII International Film Studies Conference: Proceedings* (Udine: Dipartimento di storia e tutela dei beni culturali, Università degli studi di Udine, 2001); Luciano Berriatua, ed., *All the Colours of the World: Colours in Early Mass Media: 1900–1930* (Reggio Emilia, Italy: Diabasis, 1998); Jacques Aumont, *La couleur en cinéma* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1995); Richard Misk, *Chromatic Cinema*; and Tom Gunning, “Colorful Metaphors: The Attraction of Color in Early Silent Cinema,” in *Il Colore nel Cinema*, eds. Monica Dall’Asta and Guglielmo Pescatore (Bologna: Editrice CLUEB, 1995), 249–55. The valuable contributions of Misk, and Gunning, in particular, will be addressed below.

53 Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema*, 40.

54 William Uricchio, “Color and Dramatic Articulation in *The Lonedale Operator*,” in *Il Colore*, eds. Monica Dall’Asta and Guglielmo Pescatore, 268–72.

55 Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, *Early Discourses*, 13. Such comments can be accessed within any number of early publications on cinema, such as *Variety* or *Moving Picture World* after 1906.

56 References to film periodization here and below follow Brewster’s three-phase model. According to Brewster, the first phase, often referred to within other models as “early cinema,” is the variety-theater/fairground period (until 1906–7). This phase is stylistically dominated by “cinematic attractions” (discussed more below). Phase two (until about 1912) and three (which continues to the present) involve more elaborate film narrative. Ben Brewster,

49 Giovanna Fossati, moderator, “Moderated Discussion Session 1,” in *Disorderly Order: Colours in Silent Film*, eds. Daan Hertogs and Nico De Klerk (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1996), 12. As Misk explains, this “80 to 90 percent” estimate originates from Blair. It is considered accurate for films produced during the 1910s and 1920s; the number might be slightly lower for films produced between the 1890s–1900s. Richard Misk, *Chromatic Cinema: A History of Screen Color* (Chichester, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 18; G. A. Blair, “The Tinting of Motion Picture Film,” *Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 10 (1920): 45.

50 Peter Delpout, contributor, “Moderated Discussion Session 1,” in *Disorderly Order*, eds. Daan Hertogs and Nico De Klerk, 23.

51 Eirik Frisvold Hanssen, *Early Discourses on Colour and Cinema: Origins, Functions, Meanings* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2006), 13.

has noted, during applied color's⁵⁷ "final decade" [in the 1920s] during which it is still "rare to find any reflections on tinting and toning." According to Patalas, even "in the reviews of the twenties color is rarely mentioned at all."⁵⁸

Gunning offers a point of departure that helps to address this bind.⁵⁹ His intervention also perhaps suggests an area for clarification and elaboration within the context of metachromatics.

Color as Attraction

As we watch a film, the continuous act of recognition in which we are involved is like a strip of memory unrolling beneath the image of the film itself, to form the invisible underlayer of an implicit double exposure.⁶⁰

Color within films produced during cinema's first decades, irrespective of coloration process (for the most part), stands in stark relief from the line/form of the black-and-white media to which it was added. As Gunning explains, color "appears as something superadded to the more dominant form of reproduction, an extra-sensual intensity which draws its significance at least in part from its difference to black and white."⁶¹ He contextualizes this observation with other additions of color to black-and-white print media that he locates within popular culture during the last half of the nineteenth century in the US (in comics, pulps, etc.). From these intertexts, he shows that such color mostly "announced sensational content" and "endow[ed]...surplus to...use value" rather than adding in any restrictive metaphorical sense to narrative content.⁶² Color serves as a loose sign, in part of defiance, which "existed in opposition to black and white" (an opposition exemplified for Gunning in later films such as *The Wizard of Oz* [1939]).⁶³ For Gunning, these conditions then absorb color into a broader typology within cinema referred to as the "pure attraction," which in many respects also reflects distinctions borne by historical designations of "description."

Briefly summarized, within the cinematic "attraction," display or "showing" takes precedence over diegetic "telling," temporal progression, and "narrative absorption."⁶⁴ According to this idea, "the desire to display may interact with the

desire to tell a story" but the two remain ontologically separate (Gunning distinguishes, for example, the famous close-up of the outlaw firing a pistol at the camera in *The Great Train Robbery* as essentially non-narrative material within this film).⁶⁵ As "pure presence," "pure curiosity," and "pure instance,"⁶⁶ a strict construction of Gunning's attraction appears to oppose the implicit "impurity" of narrative; it is an opposition that recalls, within the context of narrative/description theory, the "need to define 'the other' of narrative" and "to assign the representation of objects to a distinct mode of writing."⁶⁷ Attention to color given this formulation suggests a problematic alignment that we might articulate this way:

color/formlessness/sensuality/purity/non-narrative showing

vs.

black-and-white/line and form/non-sensuality/impurity/narrative telling

Gunning certainly recognizes that color, within early cinema and its larger cultural contexts, "communicates" to audiences. He also allows that in one sense the cinematic attraction does in fact "speak," but is mostly limited to "here it is, look at it!"⁶⁸ This apparent conceptual dissonance, which seems to diminish from the attraction—and thus color—the politically powerful qualities of legibility, story, voice, etc., through a celebration of the purity and sensuality of display, recalls by now a fraught division.

This model of the attraction, reinforced by contemporary revisions and extensions, has been said to "liberate the analysis of film from the hegemony of narratology...[and] enable us to focus...on *the event* of appearing as itself as a legitimate aesthetic category."⁶⁹ As is evident within other chromatic contexts, however, this articulation invokes problematic terms familiar to the chromophobic/philic dilemma. Røssaak's position against (classical) "narratology" and thus narrative (as if monolithic) also moves us closer to a central difficulty that is in part traceable to notions derived from classical narrative theory.

"Periodization of Early Cinema," in *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, ed. Charlie Keil (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 66–75.

57 Before the institutional dominance of "natural color" processes in cinema, color typically was added to cinema through hand application (freehand or through stencils), the bathing methods of tinting and toning, or combinations of all three. For more on these processes, see: Paolo Cherchi Usai, *Silent Cinema*, 21–43.

58 Enno Patalas, contributor, "Moderated Discussion Session 1," in *Disorderly Order*, eds. Daan Hertogs and Nico De Klerk, 21.

59 Tom Gunning, "Colorful Metaphors."

60 Maya Deren, "Cinematography: The Creative Use of Reality," *Daedalus* 89, no. 1 (January 1, 1960): 153–54.

61 Tom Gunning, "Colorful Metaphors," 250.

62 *Ibid.*, 252.

63 *Ibid.*, 253.

64 Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3–4 (1986): 1–14. Revised in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56–62. Citations refer to the BFI edition. The concept of the cinematic "attraction," adapted and developed in large part by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault from Sergei Eisenstein, applies to the predominant

address of early cinema, or "kine-attractography" (1890–1910) (Gaudreault's formulation), before the rise of longer story films c. 1906–1907. It refers generally to a film segment that seems to prioritize visuality for the audience. From cinema's inception through about 1903, "attractions" consisting of loosely-integrated combinations of single-shot films, slides, stage acts, etc., which foregrounded the appeal of discursive variety, were frequently presented by exhibitors and lecturers. For more on these cinematic programs, see: Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner, 1990). For more on "kine-attractography," see: André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011). For more on the attraction in cinema, refer to: Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of Attractions," in *The Film Factory*, eds. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1923] 1988), 87–88; Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions," in *Selected Works, vol. 1, Writings, 1922–34*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (London: British Film Institute, [1924] 1996), 39–58; Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," *Art and Text* 34 (1989): 31–45; and Wanda Strauven, ed., *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

65 Emphasis mine. Tom Gunning, "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. Lee Grieveson (London; New York: Routledge, [1993] 2004), 43.

66 *Ibid.*, 48.

67 Ruth Ronen, "Description, Narrative and Representation," *Narrative* 5, no. 3 (October, 1997): 283–84.

68 Tom Gunning, "Now You See It," 44.

69 Emphasis mine. Eivind Røssaak, "Figures of Sensation: Between Still and Moving Images," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven, 322.

Classical narrative theory generally reduces narrative to a series of causally- and logically-related events able to be organized into a plot.⁷⁰ According to this theory, the dynamics and distribution of these events, and their states, also generally must follow the pattern of equilibrium, disequilibrium, and equilibrium restored. This determination of narrative, essentialized by a restrictive conceptualization of “event,” obtains even within many recent postclassical revisions.⁷¹

Elements said to be “outside” of the events of narrative, such as description construed as material inassimilable by plot, are generally considered gaps or pauses that “interrupt the line of fabula.”⁷² (Fabula can be understood as the essential constituents of narrative reassembled by readers/audiences from the *sujet*: those constituents assembled by the text in any order.)

Elements extraneous to this “line,” while often considered important to the conveyance of plot or aspects of its motivation, by this understanding are suppressed

The gas lamps had just been lit and the two great red furniture vans with impossible landscapes on their sides rolled and plunged slowly along the street. Each was drawn by four horses, and each almost touched the roaring elevated road above. They were on the uptown track of the surface road — indeed the street was so narrow that they must be on one track or the other.

They tossed and pitched and proceeded slowly, and a horse car with a red light came up behind. The car was red and the bullseye light was red, and the driver's hair was red. He blew his whistle shrilly and slapped the horse's lines impatiently. Then he whistled again. Then he pounded on the red dash board with his car-hook till the red light trembled. Then a car with a green light crept up behind the car with the red light; and the green driver blew his whistle and pounded on his dash board; and the conductor of the red car seized his strap from his position on the rear platform and rung such a rattling tattoo on the gong over the red driver's head that the red driver became frantic and stood up on his toes and puffed out his cheeks as if he were playing the trombone in a German street-band and blew his whistle till an imaginative person could see slivers flying from it, and pounded his red dash board till the metal was dented in and the car-hook was bent. And just as the driver of a newly-come car with a blue light began to blow his whistle and pound his dash board and the green conductor began to ring his bell like a demon which drove the green driver mad and made him rise up and blow and pound as no man ever blew and pounded before, which made the red conductor lose the last vestige of control of himself and caused him to bounce up and down on his bell strap as he grasped it with both hands in a wild, maniacal dance, which of course served to drive uncertain Reason from her tottering throne in the red driver, who dropped his whistle and his hook and began to yell, and ki-yi, and whoop harder than the worst personal devil encountered by the sternest of Scotch Presbyterians ever yelled and ki-yied and whooped on the darkest night after the good man had drunk the most hot Scotch whiskey; just then the left-hand forward wheel on the rear van fell off and the axle went down. The van gave a mighty lurch and then swayed

Figure 7.3 | Anonymous [Stephen Crane], “Travels in New York / The Broken-Down Van,” 1892. In Stallman and Hagemann, *The New York City Sketches*, 3–4. Coloration mine.

70 Gerald Prince, *A Grammar of Stories: An Introduction* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 183. Classical narrative approaches generally are understood as following the work of French Structuralists such as (early) Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Bremond, Greimas, and Genette. Roland Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives” [1966], in *Image, Music, Text*, 79–124; Tzvetan Todorov, “La grammaire du récit,” *Linguages* 12 (1968): 94–102; Claude Bremond, *Logique du récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1973); A. J. Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Danielle McDowell, Ronald Schleifer, and Alan Velie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, [1966] 1983); Gérard Genette, “Frontiers of Narrative,” in *Figures of Literary Discourse*, ed. Marie-Rose Logan and trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, [1966] 1982), 127–46.

71 The term “postclassical narratology” derives from Herman and refers generally to the shift from text-based Structuralist theories of narrative to greater considerations of reading contexts and their socio-cultural influence. Postclassical approaches also integrate thematic emphases, such as feminist, queer, ethnic, postcolonial approaches to narrative. David Herman, *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999). For an introduction to “phase two” of the postclassical approach, see: Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik, eds., *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

72 Emphasis mine. Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, 37.

or marginalized as adjunctive, “supportive,”⁷³ or “relief-giving”:⁷⁴ an ontological function also historically attributed to color. It recalls, for example, a general notion of color as “pure mood” relieving “intellect”;⁷⁵ or, specific to photo-cinematic composites, Talbot's explanation of “a common practice to relieve the monotonous black-and-white by the introduction of colouring effects.”⁷⁶

As Lukács warned (with chromatic flourish), when description, construed as supplement, relief, etc., becomes autonomous from the line/form of plot, “the peripheral begins to bloom everywhere.”⁷⁷ Within the context of metachromatics, this chromatically-charged warning, and narrative “line” posed in opposition to supplemental description, again raises red flags.

As we can see, for example, within a section of text from Stephen Crane's city sketch “Travels in New York” (Figure 7.3)—part of the realist genre of “local color literature”—color's marginalization according to the schema of classical narrative theory cannot effectively account for the experiential “event” of the explicit eruption and interaction of color within the “achromatic” or tacitly-colored spaces of diegesis and discourse, nor the “narrativity” that might accompany its processing. Chromatic addition, in this case, through a profusion of color words, or what H. G. Wells called “chromatic splashes” in Crane's writing,⁷⁸ not only serves to modify or qualify proximal existents (characters and setting) through which actions of plot might be motivated.⁷⁹ As a separate register that oscillates between embodied descriptor and self-referencing material, color on some level resists incorporation and determination by the line/form of existents and plot, and asserts itself as “facture” and within constellations of meaning awaiting narrativization. Such color, as Melville explains within the context of the visual arts, but which can be applied more broadly, “is not only contained [within painting],” but can “assign frames” [of meaning, experience, etc.] even while “conceal[ing] itself within this assignment.”⁸⁰

The explicit “application” of color to an achromatic (or tacitly-colored) and resistant “ground” also promotes the invocation of coloration as a separate discourse, and the narratives, or “micro-events,” and “micro-stories” associated with its labor (to be discussed below).⁸¹ Tacit coloration, on the other hand, might

73 Paul Hopper, “Aspect and Foregrounding in Discourse,” *Syntax and Semantics* 12 (1979): 216.

74 Werner Wolf, “Description as a Transmedial Mode of Representing: General features and Possibilities of Realization in Painting, Fiction and Music,” in *Description in Literature*, eds. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart, 56.

75 Walter Benjamin, “A Child's View of Colour,” trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, vol. 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, [1914–15] 1996), 51.

76 Emphasis mine. Frederick Arthur Ambrose Talbot, *Moving Pictures* (New York: Arno Press, [1912] 1970), 299.

77 Georg Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?” in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin, [1936] 1970), 131.

78 H. G. Wells, “Stephen Crane, from an English Standpoint,” *North American Monthly Review* 171 (August, 1900): 237.

79 For Chatman and Prince, events and existents are the fundamental elements of a story. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1978); Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

80 Stephen Melville, “Color Has Not Yet Been Named: Objectivity in Deconstruction,” in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 45.

81 As Ankersmit explains, “micro-stories” (plural, from the Italian, “storia”) consist of apparently insignificant historical events, which, however, might exemplify “essential tensions, frictions, or conflicts of a period.” Frank

be understood as denoting only the implied presence of color within iterations of line/form whose constitutions may entail or suggest it. For example, just as photo-cinematic media may tacitly signify the brown of a tree that it represents in black-and-white, so may “tree” tacitly implicate brownness within an utterance. The relation of these frames of meaning to concepts of narrative and description, and their inflection of the discourse of color –line/form, is of central concern to metachromatic investigation.⁸²

To return to Crane’s “Travels in New York,” for example, on a diegetic level we can experience a hardly motivated play of color words as colored lights “staged” on a darkened city street. In addition to the possible association of this play with pictorial impressionism⁸³ (a comparison, however, inadequate or aesthetically parodied, especially given the story’s mischievous inclusion of an “unclassified boy” whose finger-“paint” in black automotive grease defaces an “impossible landscape”),⁸⁴ verbal color here also likely invoked other contemporary chromatic entertainments. These included popular serpentine and umbrella dances, such as *Serpentine Dance—Annabelle* (1897) and *Farfale* [sic] (1907) (Figures 7.4 and 7.5), as well as experiments in “naturally” colored (moving) photography based on emergent theories of “additive mixing.”

According to this phenomenon, popularized by James Clerk Maxwell in the mid-1850s, the mixing of red, green, and blue light (additive primaries) produced the “effect” of white light on human vision and thus the illusion of natural color.⁸⁵ Crane’s use of colored lights consisting only of additive primaries that “mix” throughout a single sentence that runs (cinematographically) nearly a page long suggests perhaps an early sensational experiment in photo-cinematic synaesthesia within this pseudo-“travelogue”—a popular genre of early cinema noted for its frequent also use of color. The interlacing of references to sound and color within “Travels” also allows for the invocation of contemporary synaesthetic treatises linking harmony and discord in music to chromatic arrangement, such as Lady Archibald Campbell’s *Rainbow-Music*,⁸⁶ or technologies such as Alexander Wallace Rimington’s *Clavier à Lumières* (or color organ) (1893).

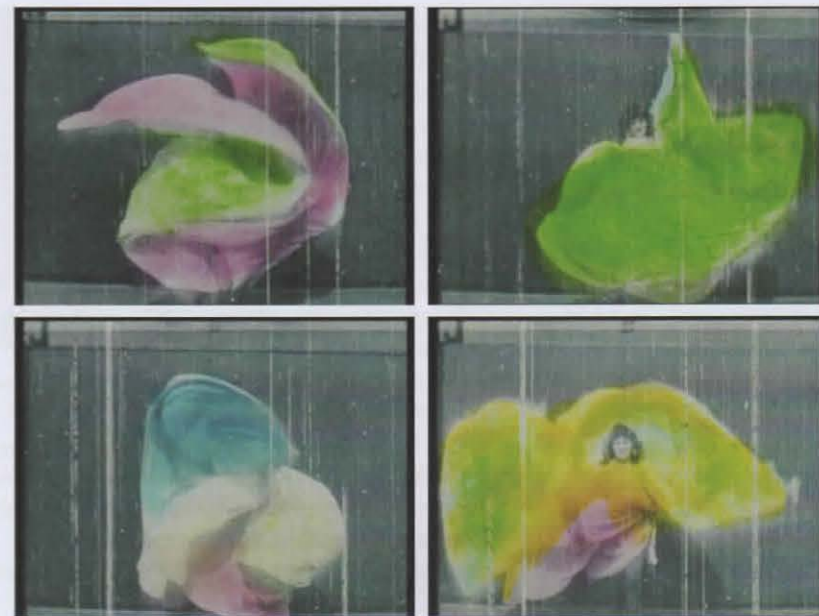


Figure 7.4 | Video stills from Thomas Edison, *Serpentine Dance—Annabelle* (c. 1897; New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2005), DVD. Hand coloration, anonymous.



Figure 7.5 | Video still from Società Italiana Cines, *Farfale* (“Butterflies”) [sic] (1907; Los Angeles: Flicker Alley, 2007), DVD. Hand coloration, anonymous.

Ankersmit, “Micro-storie,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, eds. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, 308. Typically, micro-storie are considered minor, aberrant events. Here, however, the concept of micro-storia can be adapted to encompass the aberrance of explicit and self-reflexive chromatic appearance, the relative historical insignificance of color labor(ers), and color’s broader subordination to line/form.

82 Although a more expansive theoretical treatment of the narrativity of description (forthcoming) is not possible here, this topic is critical to metachromatics and its relation to narrative theory.

83 Gaskill provides perhaps a more apt comparison of Crane’s use of “flat” colors to those popularized by Art Nouveau and the covers of *Harper’s Magazine* (1889–92). Nicholas Gaskill, “Red Cars with Red Lights and Red Drivers: Color, Crane, and Qualia,” *American Literature* 81, no. 4 (December, 2009): 719–45. See also Halliburton, who considers the influence on Crane of the concept of primary colors as articulated by Goethe; and Hough, who also discusses Goethe’s influence. David Halliburton, *The Color of the Sky: A Study of Stephen Crane* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 113; Robert L. Hough, “Crane and Goethe: A Forgotten Relationship,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 17 (September, 1962): 135–48.

84 Stephen Crane, (unsigned), “Travels in New York/The Broken-Down Van,” *New York Tribune* (July 10, 1892), in *The New York City Sketches of Stephen Crane*, eds. R.W. Stallman and E. R. Hagemann (New York: New York University Press, 1962), 3–4.

85 The concept of additive mixing allowed for developments in early “naturally” colored photography, as well as early “naturally” colored moving pictures.

86 Archibald Campbell, *Rainbow-Music; or, The Philosophy of Harmony in Colour-Grouping* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1886).

Moreover, the verbal “switching” of emphasis from events constituted by the “line” of plot, to perceptual “events” of chromatic interaction, also reflected a popular mode of generic alternation familiar from other types of composite entertainment during this period derived from conventions of variety and vaudeville—a mode realized within early cinematic programs and their individual “attractions” as well.⁸⁷ The “flat” application of “primary” or so-called psychologically-unique color words (red, green, and blue) in Crane’s sketch,⁸⁸ which at times “escape” from their roles as (mere) modifiers, also can be contextualized with historically-contemporary avant-garde experiments in poetry—such as Rimbaud’s chromatic alphabet by which vowels irrespective of word were said to bear color—as well as with other aesthetic-scientific ideas about color dynamics filtering throughout culture during this period.⁸⁹

In addition to psychological studies of “the color sense in literature,”⁹⁰ individual colors such as “red” and “yellow,”⁹¹ and color’s interaction with theosophical “thought-forms,”⁹² the phenomenal effects of color become a widespread topic of interest during this era. During this period, experiences attributed to color that suggested shifts in its relation to line/form included: Irradiation: the spreading of color to surrounding spaces (discussed by Helmholtz by 1867 [English trans. 1881] and Sutter in 1880);⁹³ simultaneous contrast: the invocation of complementary colors in the eye (Goethe 1810 [English trans. 1840] through Chevreul 1839 [English trans. 1854]);⁹⁴ luster: the visual dissonance or “flickering effect”⁹⁵ of color within neo-impressionist paintings (c. 1886–1891); and the “fringing” of early cinematic color processes in which conspicuous halos of red and green momentarily disrupt mimetic illusionism—an “escape” of color from line/form that recalled chromatic slips within earlier hand-painted artifacts (Figures 7.6 and 7.7). Crane’s figurative light show here invites further consideration of these shifts within the context of literary expression and perhaps an experience of early “multimedia” by readers.

87 See Allen for more on the relation between vaudeville and film from 1895–1915. Robert C. Allen, *Vaudeville and Film: 1895–1915* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

88 Primary colors are those not able to be derived from the mixing of other colors. Although green can be produced by subtractively mixing yellow and blue, it tends to be considered psychologically “unique” and thus often “primary.”

89 Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*, trans. Delmore Schwartz (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, [1873] 1940). Rimbaud’s chromatic experimentation can be understood within a broader context of interest in color experience within poetry during this period. See, for example, Cronin, for his study of color within nineteenth-century poetry. Richard Cronin, *Colour and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1988).

90 Havelock Ellis, *The Colour-Sense in Literature* (London: The Ulysses Book Shop, [1896] 1931).

91 Havelock Ellis, “The Psychology of Red,” *Popular Science Monthly* 57 (September, 1900): 517–26; Havelock Ellis, “The Psychology of Yellow,” *Popular Science Monthly* 68 (May, 1906): 456–63.

92 Annie Besant, *Thought-Forms* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, [1901] 1971).

93 Hermann von Helmholtz, “On the Relation of Optics to Painting,” in *Popular Lectures on Scientific Subjects*, trans. Edmund Atkinson (New York: Appleton, 1881), 73–138; David Sutter, “The Phenomena of Vision,” *L’art* 6, no. 1 (February–March, 1880).

94 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1810] 1970); Michel Eugène Chevreul, *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors and Their Applications to the Arts*, trans. Charles Martel (New York: Reinhold, [1839] 1967).

95 Ogden Rood, *Modern Chromatics*.



Figure 7.6 | Left: Video still from Thomas Edison and Edwin Porter, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903; New York: Kino International, 2002), DVD. Hand coloration, anonymous.

Figure 7.7 | Right: Video still from *Rive del Nilo* (1911). Kinemacolor. Courtesy of Cineteca del Comune di Bologna, Archivio cinematografico Ansaldo, National Film and Television Archive, and Europafilmtreasures.eu.

Despite color’s capacity to suggest narratives and metanarratives organized by line/form and its own aspects of mediality,⁹⁶ theories of color also have espoused its ability to transcend such signification altogether. The artist Yves Klein once remarked that even the most mimetic uses of color within representational painting “wink” at or mock the dictates of narrative,⁹⁷ a defiance that Kristeva would later articulate within the study of Giotto’s painting as part of the “triple register” of color,⁹⁸ and what Barthes more generally would term as escape from the “obvious meaning” of composition’s perceived intentions.⁹⁹

A similar notion of a sublime escape from narrative within early cinematic attractions, despite perhaps the appeal of its sense of liberation, reinforces the question of further theoretical excavation. Although for Gunning “pure” display or “appearance” to some extent restricts narrativity to “Here it is: look at it!” appearance always happens through *things* and the narratives that they constitute (however prototypical). Even within “prototypical” attractions, for example, such as a single-shot serpentine dance (Figure 7.4), or a strong man flexing before the camera,¹⁰⁰ content is narrativized according to context and the “situation” of its

96 For a recent study of such narratives and metanarratives, see, for example, Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds., *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400–1800* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012).

97 Yves Klein, “Evolution of Art,” in *Colour*, ed. David Batchelor, 121.

98 Julia Kristeva, “Giotto’s Joy,” in *Desire in Language*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, [1972] 1980), 210–36. For Kristeva, color is constituted by an index of value (of a referent), instinctual pressure (cathexis), and a (larger) symbolic order of which it is part. For more on deconstruction and color, see, for example, Derrida and Melville, Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Stephen Melville, “Color Has Not Yet Been Named,” in *Deconstruction*, eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills.

99 Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” in *Image, Music, Text*, 54.

100 Take, for example, Eugen Sandow (in the 1894 Edison film) as he passes through a routine that displays certain parts of his covered and uncovered body from front to back, top to bottom, flexed and released. His gestures and actions interact with cultural expectations for a Prussian + strong + man + “on display”—a performance of normativity that likely invokes and reinforces masculinist, exoticist, and even nationalist narratives (among others). Imagining challenges to such invocations, initiated through “unexpected” costuming, gesture, dance, etc. that violate typological expectation (one can imagine many alternatives), helps to foreground the “constructedness” of identity, whose

processing.¹⁰¹ Within cinema studies, Aumont et al. point to this idea in the explanation that even the simplest display of an object on film inescapably “carries a whole array of values that it [the object] represents and narrates.”¹⁰² According to this more postclassical and “tacit” sense of narrative, “every figuration and representation in film calls forth narration or an embryonic form of it” (through figure-to-ground relations, socio-historical contextualization, generic intertexts, etc.).¹⁰³ Narrative situation in this sense consists of the interactions between framed signs (with framing determined in part by notions of frame, and what is deemed inside/outside of it), embodied viewers/readers situated within historical and social contexts, the pragmatics of goal-driven reading processes and competencies (conscious or not) linked to those contexts, and individual “backstories” that this narrative situation and its elements trigger for processing (which Maya Deren shows vividly through metaphor, above).

This conception of narrativity might productively factor more directly into our understanding of “attractions,” especially in light of the many narratives that (added) color in cinema might be said to call forth. These include those “mute” narratives that seem only to reaffirm normativity as a set of “non-stories” to be taken for granted. In this case, we can consider, for example, stories and assumptions underpinning contexts of labor, which (silently) accompanied experiences of “merely” colorful additions.

The Labor of Color

Røssaak’s evocation of an alternative concept of eventhood within cinematic aesthetics reinforces the need for the re-articulation of “event.”¹⁰⁴ Instead of, however, perhaps reifying what we might experience as “the event” of color’s “appearance,” we can involve in its conceptualization the range of cultural practices involved in color’s application and use. Rather than idealizing,¹⁰⁵ we can pursue, for example, a metachromatic historicization of the idealization of color and its labor.

narratives, to some extent, Sandow performs.

101 For a useful summary of this more pragmatics-centered approach to narrativity, see: Jacob L. Mey, “Pragmatics,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, eds. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, 493–98.

102 Jacques Aumont et al., *Aesthetics of Film*, trans. Richard Neupert (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 69.

103 Musser also clarifies, within the context of attractions, that many early-cinema surprises and displays are in fact functions of narrative or imbricated with narrative. Charles Musser, “Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1994): 203–32.

104 For more on aesthetics within the context of early cinema, see: Joshua Yumibe, “Silent Cinema Colour Aesthetics,” in *Questions of Colour in Cinema: From Paintbrush to Pixel*, ed. Wendy E. Everett (Bern: Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 41–56.

105 The de-contextualization, de-storification, and purification of appearance itself also comprise a narrative whose genealogy might be traced in a variety of ways. It recalls, for example, Heidegger’s notion of a “present-at-hand,” Barthes’s “message without a code,” the aspirations of any number of avant-gardes, and Pater’s assertion of art as always “striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of the responsibilities to its subject or material.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, [1927] 2010); Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image, Music, Text*, 32–52; Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1888), 143. It also may be considered part of the longer history of the desire for energeia and the so-called natural sign. For more on this history, see: Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992).



Figure 7.8 | Pathé coloring lab, Paris (1912). Reproduced from Talbot, *Moving Pictures*, 289.

As Fossati explains, during cinema’s first decades, “hand-painting and later stenciling was almost exclusively a women’s [sic] job.”¹⁰⁶ In fact, color within one of the earliest Kinetoscope films, Thomas Edison’s *Annabelle* (1894), was applied by the wife of an Edison employee (Edmund Kuhn) in the Edison lab in Llewellyn Park, New Jersey.¹⁰⁷ “Ms. Kuhn” [as records describe her] also likely was responsible for the coloration of some of the earliest projected films, such as the “umbrella” and “serpentine” dances shown during the New York debut of Vitascope at Koster & Bial’s Music Hall, on April 23, 1896.¹⁰⁸ By the turn of the twentieth century, the normalization of this gendered practice was institutionalized by cinema through the hands of “color girls” who frequently labored in workshops and factories considered by many to be “sweatshops.”¹⁰⁹ This industry expanded the profitability of cinematic color, as well as other forms of screen media, such as lantern slides. The legacy of this physical touch of color applied by women within cinema, however, also can be considered within much later forms of cinematic productions that featured so-called natural color (i.e., productions in which color was not “added”). For example, the majority of color decisions from 1934 to 1949 even within Technicolor productions, the first “real color” cinema to gain wide market exposure, were supervised (made) by Natalie Kalmus, wife

106 Giovanna Fossati, “When Cinema was Coloured,” in *All the Colours of the World*, ed. Luciano Berriatúa, 122.

107 Ibid., 123.

108 Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 116–17. These and similar dance spectacles were popular within Kinetoscope parlors and later as projections. They were offered by all major production companies in the 1890s following the popularity of Loïe Fuller’s illuminated dance performances in France.

109 Most notable among these was the workshop headed by Elisabeth Thuiller in Paris—now commonly recognized by a picture regularly cited (Figure 7.8). According to her technical guidance and decisions about color, 220 females applied color to films such as Georges Méliès’s *Cendrillon* (1899) and *Jeanne d’Arc* (1900), and films by Pathé. See also commentary on the factory conditions and pay structure of female colorists in “The Wages of Girls who Color Slides,” *Moving Picture World* 4, no. 25 (June, 1909): 830–31.

of Technicolor founder Herbert T. Kalmus.¹¹⁰ This tradition of gendered labor, which informs the contextualization of color within cinema during at least its first half-century, adds new resonance to Gunning's observation that color within early cinema "existed in opposition to black and white."¹¹¹

Richard Misek argues that the combination of color and black-and-white-ness within cinema, on the other hand, represented a new medium.¹¹² He notes that until the late-1920s within cinema, there existed a "visual mismatch between the outlines of objects and their colors" and that "no such cultural construct" had existed before.¹¹³ In this, however, he overlooks the much longer tradition of color – line/form and the history of divided labor that it reinforced. Moreover, for Misek this differential comprised a relation of "cooperative interaction"¹¹⁴ rather than "opposition," which elides historical inequities involved in "cooperation" both symbolically and in terms of actual labor.



Figure 7.9 | Left: Video still from Louis Lumière, *Card Party* (1895; Los Angeles: Flicker Alley, 2007), DVD. Hand coloration, anonymous.

Figure 7.10 | Right: [Three unidentified women in mourning dress reading a letter] (c. 1865). Tintype. 3 x 2 3/8 in. Hand coloration, anonymous. Courtesy of the International Center of Photography, *America and the Tintype* (September 19, 2008–January 14, 2009). Gift of Steven Kasher, 2007.

As the earlier comments on dominant labor practices suggest, broader traditions of labor—among other aspects of culture—should be considered within this or any notion of media specificity. In fact, the very history of photo-indexical monochromality, from which the black-and-white of cinema derives, stems in part from conceptions of the so-called "pencil of nature" and the mediation of its line/form by male operators. A painted version of Lumière's *Card Party* (1895) (Figure 7.9) provides a typical example of the cine-painterly "mismatch" cited by

Misek as specific to cinema. Its longer history, however, is immediately recalled when juxtaposed with forms of painted photography that prefigured moving pictures throughout the nineteenth century (Figures 7.9 and 7.10).¹¹⁵

The concept of the cultural series by Gaudreault and Philippe,¹¹⁶ and Gaudreault's observation that early cinema is not in fact "cinema" as we know it but its own genre linked to moving photography ("kine-attractography" [1890–1910]),¹¹⁷ invite us to trace this "mismatch" of color in cinema, and its relations of gender and labor, more directly to this forbearer in nineteenth-century photography. As Abel reminds us, before 1907, cinema or "moving pictures" often was considered an extension or derivative form of still photography, just as it had been at the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris.¹¹⁸ It also was likened to other forms of optical entertainment, including images within optical view boxes from as early as the eighteenth century—in which colors were made to suddenly change as an attraction—and magic lantern projections, whose colorists, including women, also were among the first to be employed to color films.¹¹⁹

This history can be examined further by recalling that the very year of Daguerre's announcement of photography in 1839 also featured its first successful hand coloration (in the form of painted daguerreotypes).¹²⁰ In fact, without this added color, the monochromatic line/form of early photography for many was said to lack the "feminine side" of art (recall Blanc's primer) required for successful or faithful representation. Added color within early photo-indexical media—static or moving—thus can be understood as bearing meaningful associations with gender, which should be considered within theories of its meaning (or apparent "lack" of meaning). The stakes of this recognition, in fact, become higher as we acknowledge early attempts in photo-cinematography to establish media difference according to masculinist notions of difference, and male claims on empirical reality itself.

Color Girls and Early Photography

Promoted in its earliest stages as the unmediated "light writing" of the "pencil of nature,"¹²¹ the line/form of photography quickly replaced mediated graphic and sculptural representation,¹²² dominant since Antiquity, as the preminent tech-

115 This is not to suggest, however, that the effects of this mismatch within still and moving photography are identical. The ontological difference in temporality between the two media might allow, for example, for a greater sense of color's agency through its sudden appearance and disappearance, movement, transgression or observance of boundaries of line/form, etc.

116 The concept of the cultural series can be understood (briefly) as a medial and generic situation that explains the relation between forms of representation. André Gaudreault and Marion Philippe, "A Medium Is Always Born Twice."

117 André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*.

118 Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: 1907–1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), xv.

119 Giovanna Fossati, "When Cinema was Coloured," in *All the Colours*, ed. Luciano Berriatúa, 122.

120 Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget Ann Henisch, *The Painted Photograph, 1839–1914: Origins, Techniques, Aspirations* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 21.

121 See, for example, William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (New York, Da Capo Press, [1844–6] 1968); and M. A. Root, *The Camera and the Pencil; or, The Heliographic Art* (New York, Appleton, 1864).

122 Trevor Fawcett, "Graphic Versus Photographic in the Nineteenth-Century Reproduction," *Art History* 9, no. 2 (June, 1986): 185–212.

110 As Misek explains, between 1930s–50s, Natalie Kalmus as color consultant for Technicolor productions was responsible for making its color decisions. Richard Misek, *Chromatic Cinema*, 36. For insight into theories of color that informed these decisions, see: N. Kalmus, "Color Consciousness," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 35, no. 2 (1935): 139–47.

111 Tom Gunning, "Colorful Metaphors," 253.

112 Richard Misek, *Chromatic Cinema*, 15.

113 *Ibid.*, 18.

114 *Ibid.*, 24.

nology of realism.¹²³ This invention of an apparently unmediated technology for picturing reality—indexed in “black-and-white” and animated by cinematography toward the end of the century—enhanced previous conceptual divisions between color and line/form and their associations. As an emergent scientific tool, which reproduced reality in monochromatic arrays and was largely handled by men, early photography soon became identified with the masculinized authority and primacy of line/form in its theoretical and institutional situation.¹²⁴ Reacting to the proliferation of this unmediated (“infallible”) imaging—and its emboldened discursive alignment with rationality, masculinity, and patriarchy as a newly-mechanized iteration of empirical truth¹²⁵—theorists of color (detractors and advocates) began to underscore color’s oppositional value and its orientation as a distinctly different semiotic register and practice.

Color within photography, as within painting during this era, offered itself as a symbolic material, which could provide a mediated counterforce to the indifference of the camera, its neutralized (male) “operators,” and the often apparent lifelessness of its machine-made products. In keeping with the history of painting, this touch was able to render the “inner spirit” of subjects by “embodying the insight of the artist.”¹²⁶ These attributes also resonated with a broader experience of industrialization, which, for many, these alienating images were prone to invoke.¹²⁷ As discussed above, enthusiasm for this mechanized transcription of reality was accompanied by frequent expressions of anxiety. Monochrome images ominously appeared to reflect death, or the impassive discourse of science, which deprived the body or nature of spirit and essence. We hear something similar in Gorky’s now often-quoted reaction to early cinema, which for him carried “a warning, fraught with a vague but sinister meaning that makes your heart grow faint.”¹²⁸

According to Kracauer, the so-called reality effect of added color within cinema responded to this warning. In his estimation, in fact, “any color suggests dimensions of total reality ungiven in black-and-white representations” (emphasis mine). He continued, “The addition of color...enlivens images which, victimized and silent, all too easily assumed a ghost-like character. Tinting was a ghost-laying

123 It is important to note, however, that not everyone accepted this notion of technological evolution. As Needham argued, “the camera’s work, perfect and truthful as it is, can [n]ever supplant the nerve line of free-hand drawing.” C. A. Needham, “Picturesque Photography,” *The Photographic Times and American Photographer Journal* 14, no. 158 (New Series 38) (February, 1884): 83. Also involved in the negotiation of realism, graphic art, and emergent photo-cinematic indexicality in the nineteenth century is the legacy of resemblance to prototype as a way to constitute “unmediated” realism. As Woodall explains, for example, within sixteenth-century portraiture, the identity of a sitter was produced through a process of emulation that presumed reference to prototype as a guarantor of realism. Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture*, 3.

124 For more generally on the processes through which media emerge, see: André Gaudreault and Marion Philippe, “A Medium is Always Born Twice.”

125 Debate over photography’s indexical truth value still is prominent within contemporary theory. See, for example, James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory* (New York; London: Routledge, 2007).

126 Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture*, 6.

127 Newhall underscores the historical concern over missing color, which can be found frequently within commentary on early photography. Beaumont Newhall, *The Daguerreotype in America*, 3rd revised edition (New York: Dover, 1961), 96.

128 Quoted in Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), 408.

device.”¹²⁹ Similarly, early inventors of added-color processes within photography, such as Johann Baptist Isenring, regarded the application of paint to daguerreotypes as a corrective to this condition:

an additional invention [that] contributed significantly to the solution of that difficult problem, namely whether and how the (through necessity) cold, dead, and stiff photographic imprint can, through the intervention of free-hand art, and by its help, be somehow transformed into a beautiful artistic entity.¹³⁰

Within early photography, and later cinema, classic binary relations between color and line/form reinforced dominant labor practices according to gender and traditions of domestic work. In fact, the tasking of (generally unattributed) coloration to women within nineteenth-century popular photography to some extent began with the wives of the first photographers and their skill in the painting of miniatures. As a result, hand-applied color within photography (and later cinema) not only could frequently assume color’s familiar symbolic feminization across a classic divide, its facture could inhere a feminine “touch.” This sign could insinuate feminine gesture, authorization, sensuality, mercurialness, morality, domesticity, forms of art and craft, nostalgia for pre-industrial industry labor practices, “life,” etc.¹³¹—an essentialization that recalled assumptions from an earlier tradition within eighteenth-century portraiture by which female painters were assumed capable of rendering the masculinity of sitters as “virtuous.”¹³²

Within photography and cinema, the separate register of this touch was especially apparent in the “mismatch” of dye or paint—most often vibrant and flat—applied over photo-cinematic media. Mid-nineteenth-century photographic painting manuals,¹³³ as well as late-nineteenth-century trade periodicals and critical commentary on cinema, often refer to or imply the “feminine” tactility of color within these media, or added color’s indirect channeling of feminine “energies.” However, the females responsible for the actual additions of color mostly remained anonymous.

A listing from *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* (1884) exemplifies these mostly lost female voices and the contexts of their labor (Figure 7.11). It also problematizes the notion of “cooperative interaction” referenced by

129 Scholarly consensus has now distanced itself from any binding notions of the chromatic consistency of “reality effects” across early cinema, acknowledging the wide-ranging functional contingencies of tint and tone now reflected in the archives. Earlier scholarship, however, such as Kracauer’s, found the signification of color within cinema less problematic, arguing that “shades of red helped to amplify a conflagration or the outbreak of elemental passions, while blue tints were considered a natural for nocturnal scenes involving the secret activities of criminals and lovers.” For Kracauer, hues “established audience moods in keeping with the subject and action.” This generalization, however, does not hold across films. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 136.

130 Quoted in Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget Ann Henisch, *The Painted Photograph*, 22.

131 For more on the politics of this “touch,” see: Robert Machado, “The Politics of Applied Color in Early Photography,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 9, no. 1 (2010).

132 Joanna Woodall, *Portraiture*, 148.

133 See, Snelling, for example, for guidelines on gender-specific color codes in tinting. Henry Hunt Snelling, *The History and Practice of the Art of Photography; or, The Production of Pictures, Through the Agency of Light. Containing All the Instructions Necessary for the Complete Practice of the Daguerrean and Photogenic Art, both on Metallic Plates and on Paper*, 4th edition (New York: G. P. Putnam, [1849] 1853), 137–38.

As Dry Plate Photographer.—Situation wanted by a first-class dry plate photographer, also proficient in any branch. Will give instructions to any photographer to manufacture his own plates. Address Barkman, photographer, box 80, Newton, N. J.

As Colorist.—A young lady, first-class colorist and spotter, also competent to attend reception room, would like a position, city or country. Best city references. Address A. V. B., care of D. Garber, 74 Broadway, New York City.

As Operator.—A first-class operator is desirous of an engagement. Formerly with Rockwood, 17 Union Square, and late with Anderson, 785 Broadway. Thoroughly practical. New York City preferred. J. T. Decker, 91 Water Street, or box 868, Newburgh, N. Y.

As Operator.—A first-class operator and dry plate manipulator desires a position. Address John Carbutt, 629 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

As Retoucher.—Situation wanted by a lady who has had experience as a teacher at Cooper Institute. Address Box C., TIMES Office.

A position in reception room of some good gallery, by a young lady. Can do retouching, printing and toning. Salary moderate at first. Address M. E. P., Box 355, Otsego, Mich.

As Retoucher and Reception-room Lady. Reasonable wages first year. Address Ada E. Starbird, care Mrs. E. N. Lockwood, Ripon, Wis.

Figure 7.11 | "Employment Offered and Wanted," 1884. In Taylor, ed., *The Photographic Times and American Photographer Journal*, 108.

her stake in the business.¹³⁶ Nomenclature within the last item of the listing "Employment Offered," which requests the services of a "Lady Retoucher," underscores a divide that existed across the spectrum of employment.

This listing, which suggests divisions of labor, does not, of course, indicate that photography was beyond the reach of women, especially toward the end of the nineteenth century.¹³⁷ In addition to professional roles within popular photog-

Misek. As this "Employment Offered and Wanted" column demonstrates, women seeking positions as colorists or retouchers announce themselves diminutively by gender and through low salary requirements that they euphemize as "reasonable." Entries by males seeking positions as photographic operators, however, vary significantly in tone. Their gender also is "announced," but only implicitly through omission, which reinforces a sense of masculinist authority.

The entry that cites teaching experience at the Cooper Institute, where the coloration of photographic media often was taught to women, reinforces the extent to which the tradition of (re)touching, and likely its signification, assumed qualities of gender.¹³⁴ As Martha Louise Rayne's *What Can a Woman Do*, a guide to female employment, explains, "it is common circumstance to find the wife or sister of a male photographer employed in the office."¹³⁵ But women, educated or not, requesting photographic positions, still voiced their willingness to attend to (domestic) reception room duties. Even Martha Ewing, business partner of George Harris and co-owner of the famous Washington photography firm Harris & Ewing, Inc. (1905–1945), also served as "his photo colorist and receptionist" until she sold



Figure 7.12 | Left: Kodak, "Take a Kodak with You," 1901. Photograph is color tinted. From Emergence of Advertising in America - Database # K0018, *Ellis Collection of Kodakiana*, a project of the Digital Scriptorium and John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

Figure 7.13 | Right: Detail by author.

raphy held by figures such as Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864–1952), amateur photography offered women creative outlets that were considered by many to be especially appropriate for domestic spheres. Advice to these women, given by women, appeared in journals such as *The Photo-American Series*. Women also were targeted as "Kodak girls" holding flowers (performing femininity) and cameras, in magazines such as *Harper's* (Figures 7.12 and 7.13).

Articles such as "Amateur Photography through Women's Eyes" (1894) by Elizabeth Flint Wade, and the column "Our Women Friends" (1892–1897), edited

BLUES.

"Does your machine only take blue pictures—real photographers make people in black and white," friends naively said to me when first I bought my ten dollar outfit. I paid no heed, and to day, blue grass, not grown in Kentucky, blue cows, blue trees, and blue faces, distinguish my work from that of real photographers.

Supposing Squeer's system to be that of this ANNUAL, I hope readers who learn anything about blues out of this book will promptly "go and do it," and let Bazaars and Christmas gifts show results.

Adelaide Skeel.

Figure 7.14 | Adelaide Skeel, "Blues," 1888. In Canfield, ed., *Photography and Photographic Times: The American Annual of Photography*, 48, 50.

medium." Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers*, 3rd edition (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010), 7. Histories of photography still generally scant "paraphotographic" labor(ers) and their contribution to composite forms of nineteenth-century photography.

138 Elizabeth Flint Wade, "Amateur Photography through Women's Eyes," *The Photo-American Series* 15 (June, 1884): 235; Adelaide Skeel, ed., "Our Women Friends," *The Photo-American Series* (1892–97).

139 Jane C. Gover, *The Positive Image*, 67. See Gover, as well, for more on networks of women communicating through various photographic journals.

134 See, for example, "The Cooper Union," *The Nation* (June 5, 1866).

135 Martha Louise Rayne, *What Can a Woman Do; or, Her Position in the Business and Literary World* (Petersburgh, NY: Eagle, 1893), 128.

136 Kathleen Collins, *Washingtoniana Photographs: Collections in the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress* (Washington: The Library of Congress, 1989), 102.

137 As Gover explains, "photography, a male bastion before 1880, emerged as a career option and avocation for women. By 1900, more than 3500 women worked as professional photographers." Jane C. Gover, *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 17. These women, however, notes Rosenblum, until just recently had been "scanted in the histories of the general histories of the

specific chromatic context germane to this new art form (and to metachromatics) that merits special attention.¹⁴⁰

Skeel's playfully transgressive advice—likely addressed to women—to allow themselves to make and to distribute cyanotype prints of everyday life indicates a bold and perhaps feminist intervention. Her argument that these photographers should “pay no heed” to dominant proscriptions and authorities (most-of-ten male) and to allow such things as “blue cows, blue trees, and blue faces” to distinguish their work from that of “real photographers” suggests an alternative and perhaps gendered tradition of photography in need of further investigation. Alternative/“minor” feminized channels of exhibition and commerce such as the “Bazaars” mentioned by Skeel also suggest valuable research to be done.

The unauthorized blue register of these “unreal photographers,” much like the anonymous chromatic touches of “lady colorists,” “lady retouchers,” and the “events” of narrativity into which they can be drawn, deserve recognition. Skeel's cyanotypes, however, like the rest of her photographs, and the bulk of female vernacular photography during the nineteenth century, have not been institutionally archived.¹⁴¹ This omission exists despite the opinion that the most notable person in the history of cyanotype, male or female, is Anna Atkins (1799-1871), commonly recognized as the first female photographer, suggesting perhaps a relatively overlooked chromatic tradition.¹⁴²

Negative reactions to monochromatic colored photography, such as Henry Peter Emerson's, “No one but a real vandal would print a landscape in red, or in cyanotype” (1890, a year after “Blues”),¹⁴³ recall now-familiar debates over impressionist and post-impressionist painting and color science during this era, in which images by Skeel and other women (such as Johnston, who also often worked in blue) might be situated. Such intersections promote the consideration of these and other “low forms” of popular “blues” and “reds,” and the “amateurs” who made them, within discussions of emergent modernism across media and popular culture, including verbal imagery. These also should be factored into the broader tradition of color as a term of alterity to (black-and-white) line/form.

MetaConclusion

As we have seen, the discursive workings of color – line/form bear significantly on representation, its interpretation and uses, and the stories that shape and are shaped by its processes. The ideological contexts and zones of “contact”

140 Adelaide Skeel, “Blues,” in *Photography and Photographic Times: The American Annual of Photography*, ed. C. W. Canfield (New York: Scovill Manufacturing Company, 1888), 48, 50.

141 *The Photographic Album Collection*, assembled by collector Barbara Levine at the International Center of Photography, New York, is beginning to redress this deficiency. This collection of vernacular photograph albums, dating from 1887–1938, is considered by ICP to be “the most comprehensive collection of photograph albums in the country.” Barbara Levine, collector and assembler, *Photographic Album Collection* (International Center of Photography, New York, 2012).

142 Atkins was among the first to put cyanotype into practice. See Anna Atkins, *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (London: 1843–53). See also Ware for a history of the medium. Mike Ware, *Cyanotype: The History, Science and Art of Photographic Printing in Prussian Blue* (London: Science Museum, 1999).

143 Peter Henry Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, 2nd revised edition (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1890), 196.

into which this binary so frequently has been drawn also suggest these workings' continued relevance to aesthetics as the very terrain of politics in the sense described by Rancière.¹⁴⁴ A (meta-)picture by Johnston, which suggests this terrain again here, concludes this chapter (Figure 7.15). Its female subjects, line/form, and Prussian blue, await metachromatic attention.



Figure 7.15 | Frances Benjamin Johnston, [Female students posing with exercise equipment in a gymnasium, Western High School, Washington, D.C.], c. 1899. Cyanotype. Courtesy of Library of Congress: Frances Benjamin Johnston Collection.

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144 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2009).

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