

X3

Week 8 Discussion: Color and Social or Political Purpose

What did **Matisse** mean by saying: *“When I put a green, it is not grass. When I put a blue, it is not the sky.” Does color have a social or political purpose?*

Please reply to one other student's post as well.

Indeed, color has social and political purposes.

The main purpose of color in politics and social life is to unite people and evoke particular associations, feelings and/or actions. Colors play an important role not only as visual symbols in politics (For ex: flags, ribbons, etc.) but also associated with social movements (For ex: women's movement in the UK - green, white, purple). Powerful usage of colors affects public memory and brings associations. Of course, the political/social meaning and purpose of colors varies across space and time and is culturally contingent.

Here are just some examples from world history:

*Red has historically been associated with socialism or communism.

*Black is primarily associated with anarchism and fascism.

*The color green is often linked to both - environmentalism (Green parties) and Islamic parties.

(Links to an external site.)*Yellow is the color most commonly associated with liberalism.

Elena, I think you really put together a concise and compelling argument for the subject so I won't repeat your points ;). Completely agree about political use of color as a unifier, but also as a flexible entity through history. I think context here is also crucial - I.e. the pink triangle as a Nazi signifier of members of the LGBT community, later on reclaimed, and now also used as an

identifier in the women's movement with pussyhats. Or the color red, historically, and at least in Europe currently, associated with left-leaning parties, vs its use by the GOP in the US.

In terms of Matisse and his use of color, Fauvism as a movement really hinged upon the use of expressionism and a vivid use of color, reacting against representational painting. In a sense they untangled color from its real life associations and used it, as well as a level of abstraction and expressionism, to convey a mood, taking their cue from the earlier work of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Seurat, Cézanne, etc.

Agree with everything said here so far. For social and political purposes, colors are chosen at some point as branding, I think no different from corporate branding in principle except perhaps with more permanence. Colors can be chosen contextually (with existing associations or known psychological reactions) or not, but when used for social or political aims I think - like in corporate branding - they quickly take on the association of their movement, their "brand".

And sometimes chosen practically - the pink triangle that Vladimir brought up as identifiers for the LGBT community in Nazi Germany - like the yellow star for the Jewish communities - was probably chosen because of its contrast, both colors are easy to spot from a distance so used both to separate and shame the wearer. And in the United States, are red and blue the colors of our two current main political parties because they were on our flag? And were the American flag colors chosen maybe in haste at the time because red and blue were readily available or easy to make during the Revolutionary war? Ironically, we chose the exact colors of the British flag (A combination of red for England and blue for Scotland)...did we do this because it was practical to just repurpose their flag at the time? But these associations quickly took a firm hold.

I also find some of the psychological associations in American political clothing fascinating, I think we touched on them earlier. Red to signal dominance, and blue for reliability, trust and authority.

I completely agree with Sharon . . . it seems like social or political movements use colors for branding in the same way that companies do so with their logos. For example, different social causes have picked colors for ribbons to wear to show support . . . breast cancer awareness has pink ribbon, AIDS awareness has red ribbon, etc. I also think of the LBGT rainbow flag is a perfect example of colors having a social purpose. It is fitting that this group would choose a rainbow as it is meant to represent inclusiveness as it includes many different colors together.

In reference to the Matisse quote . . . I suspect that he is saying that his color choice is more than meets the eye . . . that the viewer shouldn't take the colors so literally. Matisse must have been more interested in subjective color than local color. He preferred the creative freedom to use colors as he saw fit rather than exactly as our eyes see things. While I don't have a strong background in art history, I'm not sure that this quote was politically minded - perhaps it was just a commentary on his particular use of color.

Colors are associated with political and social ideologies and are used as a symbol of identity in political parties, flags religious groups, sport teams etc

Colors like red and blue are among the most employ because these are related to the right and left in political parties. It also has an old tradition that was assigned in the French Revolution to designate social status between the opposition of red blood and blue blood.

Matisse thought that color and form could only achieve their full potential when they became independent from the object they represented. Many of his works demonstrated this believe, as expressed by his above statement. As a matter of fact, he was one of the main artists from the movement known as Fauve. During this period, he sought out unique and unnatural color combinations on his paintings, with little regard for the object's natural color. For example, in his 1905 painting "Open Window", you can see what he meant: pink waves, orange masts, a multi-colored sky. The central boat is drawn with only four thick strokes of paint— a sort of whitish pink one, a blue one, more of a salmon one, a dark green one.

In terms of if color is used for social or political purposes, the answer is yes. Humans have always used art to create meaning and to communicate ideas. In the United States, red and blue is deeply associated with political parties, green and red are used in Mexico by most "old school" parties, and yellow for the more modern political parties representing change.

Hi Ludivina!

Interesting to look at more famous artists and their views. I find it fascinating to look at art and think about what was happening in the work during the time it was painted. Its all connected!

I completely agree with Elena and Sharon that the purpose of color is to unite and evoke particular associations, and that color is a branding strategy.

I think color is a form of expression, and it is a tool to create certain associations and evoke certain emotions in order to sell to the audience. I read an interesting article on how politicians dress in certain colors during elections in order to build a certain image to the audience based on the psychological meaning of the color.

<http://thelamp.org/between-the-lines-how-politicians-use-color-psychology-to-win-your-votes/> (Links to an external site.)

As I think more on this question, I start to wonder whether our perceptions of color are affected by our political and social views. To be more specific, do we subconsciously favor one color or dislike a color because of the political and social influences of our upbringing?

Color's use in politics and religion is undeniable. Its the same principles that we have learned in this class regarding companies and branding: colors make you feel a certain way, when colors are combines or marketed they can relay different feelings within the viewer. In politics this is used in America to represent different parties and campaign story telling. If they want the candidate to feel relatable and patriotic they would probably use blue with red and white accents and if he is an army vet they would probably add in some army green. In religion white is used to represent purity and deep reds and blacks are used to represent negative aspects of religion. Some religions use an array of bright colors to represent various gods and their powers.

Hi Nikita, the religious purpose is for sure undeniable. I agree with your point of view. Living in Indonesia I had the change to witness this with even more strength. The Bali Hindu makes usage yellow (turmeric, to represent God Wisnu, the preserver of the universe), white (from wheat flour), gold yellow (even more important in weddings, to evoke prosperity for the couple's future) and the avoidance of black (strongly associated with black magic, evil spirit and peace disturbance).



In Matisse's case, the artist harmonizes colors to express certain feelings. He uses forms that look right, with colors that do not look right. This is because he is personal vision about certain topic, and it is representing his state of mind, such as the example below ("Turning Road at L'Estaque" (oil on canvas, c. 1906).



It is part of the Fauvism movement (modern art), and it means artistic freedom. Colors should represent the artist's feelings - and this can be both, social and political manifestations. The movement basically divorces colors from physical reality. Colors are treated independently from their qualities, fully representing the artist's feelings. "The fauves" translates feelings into color. The subject is still figurative and recognizable, not yet abstract.

Colors are still utilized in politics, to represent parties, for example. However it does not necessarily has the same meaning in different countries. Same for social purposes. Pink October, to generate breast cancer awareness, as another example.