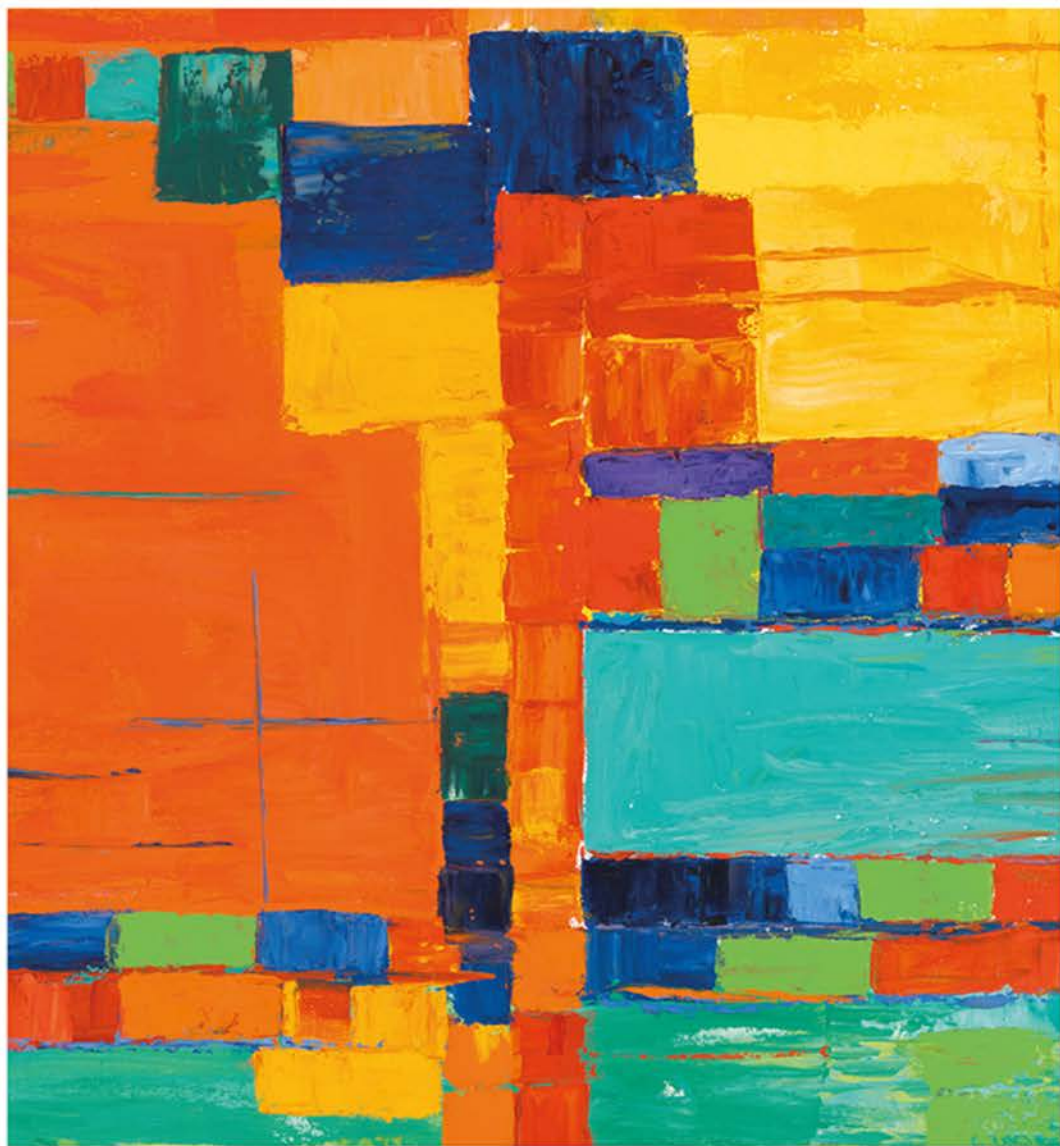


TRACKING COLOR IN CINEMA AND ART

PHILOSOPHY AND AESTHETICS



EDWARD BRANIGAN



TRACKING COLOR IN CINEMA AND ART

Color is one of cinema's most alluring formal systems, building on a range of artistic traditions that orchestrate visual cues to tell stories, stage ideas, and elicit feelings. But what if color is not—or not only—a formal system, but instead a linguistic effect, emerging from the slipstream of our talk and embodiment in a world? This book develops a compelling framework from which to understand the mobility of color in art and mind, where color impressions are seen through, and even governed by, patterns of ordinary language use, schemata, memories, and narrative.

Edward Branigan draws on the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and other philosophers who struggle valiantly with problems of color aesthetics, contemporary theories of film and narrative, and art-historical models of analysis. Examples of a variety of media, from American pop art to contemporary European cinema, illustrate a theory based on a spectator's present-time tracking of temporal patterns that are firmly entwined with language use and social intelligence.

Edward Branigan is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory*; *Narrative Comprehension and Film*; and *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*. With Warren Buckland, he is the editor of *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory*. With Charles Wolfe, he is the general editor of the American Film Institute Film Readers series.



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TRACKING COLOR IN CINEMA AND ART

Philosophy and Aesthetics

EDWARD BRANIGAN

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*For Melinda, who looked after and furthered
my memories now lost of many things,
and for our son, Nicholas.*



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Preface

The phenomena of color pose a special puzzle to philosophers characterizing the mind, the world, and the interaction of the two. In various ways, both subjective and objective, both appearance and reality, color has been the subject of wide disagreement.¹

—Justin Broackes

LANGUAGES

This book examines philosophies of color and their implications for aesthetics and methods of analysis. The book dissects color displays, principally in film, painting, and photography, though a sonnet and short story are also analyzed. Words generate images and images words. Color has no intrinsic meaning; it acquires meaning in human contexts. Many living creatures see colors and shapes, but humans have developed language, culture, and art to create what archaeologists call a “symbolically and conceptually mediated worldview.” I am primarily interested not in the symbolic content of what is being represented, but in the various mental and symbolic schemata that constrain and drive what can be said by perceivers about what is represented. It is often asserted that there exists a color “language” as well as a film “language” that mediates a worldview. What needs to be unpacked in these formulations is the meaning of the word “language.” My assumption is that how we talk about color (and film) is an indication of how we are able to think about color (and film) and our thinking, in turn, influences what we perceive and expect to see. Thus when we encounter an artwork, we may say that it *speaks* to us. But the *speaking* voice is our own since we are imbued with working vocabularies and structures that draw upon powerful memory systems developed by living in a world.

Color is relational. It is not a substance with independent existence nor is it a quality that is static and simply *possessed* by a thing. Sensing the presence of a hue depends on a series of intertwined relationships: the motivated or unmotivated position and quality of a light source in relation to an object in relation to light from nearby colored objects in relation to a perceiver. A hue is perceived relative to the perceptual, cognitive, emotional, intentional, and memory states of a perceiver. Furthermore, a perceiver’s colored mental images are not exclusively internal, but rather they are put in place, and responsive to, community perceptions. It is a mistake to focus exclusively on any one color relation or to imagine an irreversible

perceptual stream traveling from light to object to mind. Color is not a purely objective phenomenon determined by a light meter, but rather the result of many interacting systems.

We must reject the idea that what appears on the screen is possessed by a film and lies somehow *within* the film. To understand color *in* the cinema, we must explore the myriad ways of *thinking about* and *speaking about* what we are seeing within a cognitive, social, and cultural context. Color is given significance and quality in the act of being seen from a place at a time. A light meter does not define what is being seen. Announcing that one perceives “blueness” in an object is already to have formed a mental abstraction about its significance seized from our memories and from a vast, patterned environment—an environment that continuously embeds our mental acts, making us speak and think about what we see, value, and expect. The mind does not seize a color spot and go no further. Seeing the spot is already to have gone further.

Allow me to briefly elaborate. When one recognizes a specific blue hue, the fact of being bluish also constitutes an abstraction because many different things in the world are seen, classified, and said to be “blue.” The most recent bluish material – known as YInMn – promises to bring together many new things in new ways. Once one thinks about color in its categorical aspect, a discrete hue acquires mobility and expansiveness (see nos. 6, 9, and 10 in Figure 3.1). The power of color resides in the fact that an object and its parts need *not* be thought to possess merely a single, unique set of qualities, but rather to share its colorfulness more widely among groups of objects.

Language provides the ground for a color spot to move and become significant in consciousness. Michael Gorra writes about the genesis of a book by William Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry*:

In the beginning was the word [blue] not the color, not the shade that the spectrum places alongside green, but rather the sound and all that clumps around it, the fuzz balls of meaning that it’s picked up as it has rolled on through time. . . . All words are figurative; no blue is ever just blue.²

Put otherwise: what may be said of a color always lies within networks of words. The bare percept of a hue has nothing left in it of life—it says nothing, is blank. In fact, a hue is always of a thing—whether tangible or vaporous or colored as fiction—that connects to other things in a perceiver’s thought, being, and life.

COLOR CONSCIOUSNESS

The central premise of my argument about film is that color should be evaluated as a *temporal pattern* that may build from shot to shot and from moment to moment

according to the actions of a perceiver's *phonological rehearsal loop* in working memory. I will argue that the process is one of mental "tracking" as opposed to a perceiver's summoning of semiotic codes from long-term semantic and episodic memories. Semiotics makes use of a priori signs and codes that employ knowledge already "standing" in place. I derive the notion of tracking from P.F. Strawson's work on the mental activity of "reidentification."

I will usually analyze the theoretical framework that a critic has selected, whether explicitly or implicitly, rather than evaluate the adequacy of particular claims made about an artwork. This book will not analyze entire films or paintings. Instead, I will analyze particular moments from nine films, four paintings, and two photographs. I've kept color illustrations to a minimum, relying on the internet to fill gaps. Illustrations may even obscure the point of my commentary. Again, the goal is to demonstrate *general* principles of color analysis along with the competing theoretical schemata employed to justify a specific principle of criticism along with its supporting concepts and rhetoric.

My intention is to examine the nature and sources of a viewer's consciousness of color in the visual arts. Ludwig Wittgenstein's unfinished manuscript, *Remarks on Colour*, is a major point of reference. I also draw on film theory, cognitive science, and philosophy of language, though not exclusively. These disciplines have much to contribute to traditional issues studied in art history. The latter's sophisticated approaches to color, line, depth, implied motion, and pattern may be productively supplemented by considering a perceiver's construction of flow when encountering mobility in film, painting, literature, and, for that matter, when fabricating a coherent *line* through his or her ordinary day. Whether an art object is pictorial or literary, our response to a feeling of movement will be linguistic. Motion and change, like a wandering line in a painting, acts to shape and refine our expectations about meaningful patterns and patterns-to-come. As we shall see, color itself need hardly be static, but can move from shot to shot, word to word, and from one mental state to another to generate a stream of ideas and expectations.

This is not a history text. This book is not a history of color theorizing or a history of color in film or a history of worthy color films or a history of color technology. The book does not historicize the impact of commercially successful industrial practices. This is also not the usual art historical aesthetics book. I do make the requisite gestures to conventional color exposition, but my argument forges new, even startling, pathways, especially concerning color design and film theories. The book aspires to be a roadmap toward acquiring a set of concepts for investigating color in all of its forms and properties. My aim is to provide an overview of our many shortcomings when we try to assess color philosophically. I will also point toward a reconceptualization of film theory, narrative theory, and the role of sensory qualities in film.

FOUR ELEMENTS OF COLOR LANGUAGES

The creation of expectations through text-spectator interaction is a crucial premise of many arguments in this book. Wittgenstein asserts that an expectation, though about the future, is a discursive aspect of how we are *presently using language* to memorialize (know) the present! For Wittgenstein, expectation is defined by, and exists within, practices of language drawn from memory. This is an important point. To state it differently, for Wittgenstein, our sense of the future (expectation) emerges out of a present working language, which has developed out of experience. A person's memory—drawing upon, for example, schemata and cognitive metaphor—is thus not confined to, not locked into, a past “past,” but drives a future-oriented present. To analyze what one expects of color, one needs to analyze the kinds of languages that are rooted in culture and bring it about.³ The labyrinthine and paradoxical cultural stereotypes of specific hues—such as fertile green/sickly green, deathly black/sophisticated black—need to be relocated from what color “must mean” to *one of the ways* color may mean.

The book weaves together four thematic strands concerning language and our consciousness of color in an effort to uncover ways that color may mean:

1. *Color conventions and norms*, including cultural, commercial, institutional, and aesthetic practices (techniques, technologies);
2. *Socially anchored linguistic systems* that are available for expressing our felt consciousness of color, including the manifestation of color through physiology, psychology, and emotion, especially in those situations where color comes to embody important narrative concreta and abstracta;
3. *Mental processes for memorializing and reidentifying color patterns* that may be collectively termed the realm of “memory chromatics,” such as the use of root metaphors and folk theories for identifying a resonance of color, which realm is much broader than textual inferences, signs, or cues from a screen or canvas, i.e., broader than adherence to explicit instructions and instead sensitive to activities focused on the implicit, the suppressed, the background, and the interpretive; and,
4. *Narrative interfaces between sensation and thought*, spectacle and rationality, in the life of the mind. What are the functions of sensation in art? Is color only sensation, spectacle merely excess?

Art seems in some way always a spectacle that solicits the emotions and thus subject to the accusation that it is a retreat from rationality, the ordinary, and language. Philosophers have wrestled with a series of dualities whereby sensuous qualities like color have been opposed to cognition. For example, one finds in philosophy

such binaries as emotion vs. reason; sensation vs. import (importance); materiality vs. abstraction; body vs. mind; and flesh vs. spirit. I will propose, however, that these binaries are at best merely provisional points along a sliding scale. I will argue that pressure from top-down, language-like processes continuously operates to recast sensation. Language mediates between sensation and sense, infusing perception with familiar descriptions and goals, problems and projects. Language exists to select, represent, and connect facets of a world with our routines and community activities. Language is firmly grounded in mental schemata, descriptions, narrations, discourses, and interpretations, and hence works to bring together sense and sensation. It makes no sense to say that sensation stands alone. Sensation is what we make of it.

The preceding four strands of color languages sketch a theory of experience in media that is dependent on ordinary verbal discourses about kinesthetic and gestalt sensations as filtered through community norms. Equally relevant are nonconscious, taken-for-granted descriptions of bodily existence as well as beliefs conditioned by the use of social intelligence, folk knowledge, and cognitive schemata, all of which are subject to the perplexing inertia of fixed mental images, e.g., stereotypes and prototypes.⁴ The centrality of ordinary language also means that there is no pure sort of “fiction” removed from all daily concerns. Interpretation and discourse bring fictional texts back to earth, so to speak.

I imagine a world of “cities of words.” Within each city, there are separately colored structures surrounded by descriptive networks pertaining to each hue. The networks shade off into more generally descriptive semantic fields anchored to culture. This book seeks to chart some of these systems of words—informal, ordinary-language communities that evolve and devolve as they come and go⁵—that key our color consciousness when traveling to cities of our choice.

WHERE COLOR VANISHES

Percy Lubbock explains where words vanish:

To grasp the shadowy and fantasmal form of a book, to hold it fast, to turn it over and survey it at leisure—that is the effort of a critic of books, and it is perpetually defeated. Nothing, no power, will keep a book steady and motionless before us, so that we may have time to examine its shape and design. As quickly as we read, it melts and shifts in the memory; even at the moment when the last page is turned, a great part of the book, its finer detail, is already vague and doubtful. A little later, after a few days or months, how much is really left of it? A cluster of impressions, some clear points emerging from a mist of uncertainty, this is all we can hope to

possess, generally speaking, in the name of a book. The experience of reading it has left something behind, and these relics we call by the book's name; but how can they be considered to give us the material for judging and appraising the book?⁶

Lubbock argues that the fleeting quality of streams of words in a book produces “shadowy” forms out of light. I argue that this applies equally to a spectator's experience of fleeting images in a film. In particular, most colors experienced in a film are quickly forgotten, as if never seen. A very few may be condensed, shifted, melted into new form, replaced, revised, or re-crystallized in memory and feeling. How might color be more sharply perceived and acknowledged?

Two main obstacles impede the full recognition of color. The first is that hues are typically seen as merely isolated sensuous spots that slip away rather than as components of emerging patterns across time. A color moves, develops, even changes hue. The second is that hues are usually seen as static symbols or vague bits of atmosphere rather than as dynamic memory elements interacting with complex narrative and thematic designs.

The present book seeks to overcome these obstacles by emphasizing the multiple possibilities of patterns and interactions. No blue is ever just blue. My aim is to bring to attention the contribution that color makes to our enchantment with film and other artworks. To accomplish this aim, one must consider more broadly what color *can do* and this, in turn, requires careful attention to our actions and talk about color.

NOTES

1. Justin Broackes, “Colors” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Supplement*, ed. by Donald M. Borchert (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996), p. 83.
2. Michael Gorra, “Introduction” in *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry*, William H. Gass (New York: New York Review Books, 2014), p. x.
3. On the nature of expectation, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 4th ed. 2009), §§ 435–465, 572–586. What we *expect* of color is influenced by a series of judgments that are caught within grammatical fluctuations among criteria and symptoms. Cf. §§ 352–356 and see below Figure 3.1. Chapters 7 and 8 below discuss expectation and types of memory in the guise of the “nearly true” and possible (future) “reidentification.” Consider also the predispositions, i.e., expectations, intrinsic to many judgment heuristics as well as the implementation of a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” i.e., an expectation fulfilled as if by itself out of the present.
4. More exactly, this book will rely on theories of embodied cognition, situation models, and conceptual metaphor in situating our consciousness of color and our actions in response to it. On embodied cognition generally, see Chapter 7 below, note 24. A bibliography and outline of the importance of situation models may be found in Maarten Coëgnarts, Miklós Kiss, Peter Kravanja,

and Steven Willemsen, “Seeing Yourself in the Past: The Role of Situational (Dis)continuity and Conceptual Metaphor in the Understanding of Complex Cases of Character Perception,” *Projections* 10, 1 (Summer 2016), pp. 114–138. They stress, as do I, the importance of *working memory* in a spectator’s comprehension of film.

My approach to color might be placed within the method of Coëgnarts et al. by adding a “box” for color in their Figure 1 (p. 122) underneath their “box” for “container,” which represents the image schema through which a visual field is conceptualized by a viewer in terms of an inside, a boundary, and an outside, i.e., outside of view. The problem for a theorist is then to identify which specific metaphors and metonymies of embodied perception will function on a local or micro-level of perception to stage a viewer’s conceptual inferences about color inside a visual field as well as hypotheses about color lying outside the field. I undertake this task in the present book; see, e.g., Figure 3.1; Chapter 4, section 5; and Chapter 5, section 4.

In Figure 7 (p. 129), Coëgnarts et al. identify five image schemas as the sensory-motor ground-
ing of character perception and time in film. Three of the schemas relate to a character’s/spectator’s construction of three-dimensional space (front-back, left-right, up-down as related to a person’s body); the two others relate to movement or time (source-path-goal) and shape (specific embedded “containers”). To these five, one might add others, including an image schema—call it “radiant mass”—specifically for color (incorporating black and white) in which embodied color perception would amount to a preliminary sketch of the appearance of a bare *materiality* extended in space. Color becomes an enigmatic sign of the *flesh* of an object, hence also a tie to the emotions. In this way, the conventional associations with a given hue are recast as the emotions associated with a specific subset of objects linked to the hue. Thus a hue moving through an artwork may assemble a novel group of objects to which our feelings are drawn and shaped. On color as a sign of materiality, see Chapter 10, section 3, and Appendix, section 2.

5. I owe this phrase to Philipp Schmerheim (private correspondence). On his approach to Stanley Cavell’s philosophy and Cavell’s *Cities of Words* (p. 298) as well as the resultant implications for media theory, see Philipp Schmerheim, *Skepticism Films: Knowing and Doubting the World in Contemporary Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016). I have, of course, appropriated the title of Cavell’s book in the text above.
6. Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), pp. 1–2.



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This book was written sporadically over a period of eleven years. It derives from teaching one graduate seminar and five undergraduate classes on the philosophy and aesthetics of film color during quarters from Spring 2003 to Spring 2012. It derives also from students teaching me. The course arose from two of my articles: “The Articulation of Color in a Filmic System: *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle*” (1977, reprinted and expanded, 2006) and “Color and Cinema: Problems in the Writing of History” (1979, reprinted and revised, 1985, 1986) (see Works Cited, B2, B5). John Kurten was my invaluable teaching assistant. He contributed regular lectures from a deep and extensive knowledge of color, especially from his original research concerning the technology, business plans, and aesthetic strategies of the Technicolor Motion Picture Corporation. Figure 0.1 is a witty portrayal and summary of the course by a student, Jess Riegel.

Themes from my previous books—involving character subjectivity, point of view, narration, narrative, fiction, camera, language, memory, and film theory—continue to be developed in the present book. These themes were outlined in the final two pages of the preface to my last book, *Projecting a Camera: Language Games in Film Theory*, and in a recent essay, “If-Then-Else: Memory and the Path Not Taken” (Works Cited, B4). Extending the argument of *Projecting a Camera*, it will be found that I treat the sensation of filmic color (like the sensation of a camera’s presence) as a visual experience both presenting a sensory quality and *representing* an object as having specific qualities due to a spectator’s *projecting* representations from memory onto the object (see no. 9, Figure 3.1). Such mental representations stem from bodily schemata and social interactions that map onto a film image attributing to it and its depicted objects the possession of certain physical and nonphysical properties. Sensed color qualities are thus fictive with respect to actual objects, light sources, and other sensory objects like a screened film since the qualities of a sensation are distinct from the inferred categories and ostensible properties of an object causing the sensation. Thus, despite the visceral qualities of film, the nature of fictiveness makes fiction film especially conceptual and abstract. Clearly, in the following chapters, I will need to elaborate more precisely the nature and function of visual “fictiveness” and its connection to ordinary things.

Mark Johnson states a working assumption of my book succinctly in *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (175, Johnson’s emphasis; Works Cited, D1):

As William James claimed more than a century ago, the music of meaning-making is both thought *and* feeling at once, and its notes are the rhythms and tone qualities of our bodily processes.

Acknowledgments

The word “tone,” of course, may also be thought in terms of color; and “rhythms,” then, in terms of color patterns moving as music. Thus, for this approach, thought and feeling emerge “at once,” in the *same moment* that color becomes conscious as sensation.

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The reference in the dedication is to a type of joint memory known as "trans-active," which I shared with Melinda Szaloky and our son, Nicholas Branigan. Melinda offered a series of crucial comments on several sections of chapters. The parts that Melinda tackled, line by line, immeasurably improved the book's arguments and prose. The book would surely have been better had she been able to read more of it.

Thinking over the foregoing acknowledgments as well as previous book acknowledgments that have been written to highlight persons and fortunate events, I am reminded of Stanley Cavell's wise advice in *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (443; Works Cited, E3):

I have found that there is no more choice over the way one writes than over what makes one happy. If that is true then what you need to know is what makes you happy and what you need to do is to write enough to find this state and keep up with its haunts.

Edward Branigan
Bellingham, Washington
June 2017



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Chapter 1 Introduction and Overview through *Two Paintings: Dagwood*

ABSTRACT

A Lichtenstein painting offers a preview of the method of color analysis presented in this book. Close analysis shows that the painting is better seen as a triptych rather than the diptych indicated by its title. Furthermore, the “hidden” middle part of the painting is analogous to a crucial third and mediating part of the argument of the present book. The first two, explicit parts of Lichtenstein’s painting may be visually analogized to the “theory” (left side) and “practice” (right) of color aesthetics. The third part that facilitates an interaction between theory and practice in the painting and in the present book is a zone of *remembered languages* and general schemata (forms) that a perceiver summons to assemble and comprehend aesthetic displays of color.

How might one analyze the mediation of “remembered languages”? Chapter 2 will explore four strands of these languages: (1) norms of color usage; (2) language systems (semantic fields) that speak a felt consciousness of color; (3) mental processes that memorialize and reidentify (track) color, which area of study I refer to as “memory-chromatics”; and, finally, (4) the place of sensation and its supposed excess—spectacle—in the life of the mind. Which color language and associated set of metaphors is a person *most comfortable with*?

There is more to color than its sheen and conventional symbolism. What we choose to see in color is not strictly a personal decision but is shaped by culture, our plans and projects in society, and the way we become comfortable in *talking about* ourselves and our world. It is perhaps strange to think that language shapes a sensation like color, what we think we have seen, i.e., in thinking we see. Color is not so much about the exact sensation at a point in space, but rather about discovering and feeling *patterns* in space. Recognizing one or another pattern is not exclusively objective nor certain, but abstract and contingent; that is, one can point out the elements of a possible pattern, but the *whole* is not there—it comes together in memory.

Man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his own life as if he were telling a story. . . . Nothing happens while you live. The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. There are no beginnings. . . . That's living. But everything changes when you tell about life.¹

—Jean-Paul Sartre

PROCESS INTO PATTERN

Think of a diptych: two parts connected, each telling a story out of which may emerge a third story. That's the structure of the present book. What are these parts and the relationship between them that produces a third story? To preview the organization of this book, I will explore an analogy with Roy Lichtenstein's *Two Paintings: Dagwood* (see Figure 1.1). Interestingly, the painting is slyly enigmatic, for in addition to the title's invitation to view it as staging two scenes of interpretation, it may also be seen as a triptych, which suggests that within its placid surface is a third part which, I will argue, acts to blend the "two paintings" into a larger story about the nature of a viewer's confrontation with the expressive. This book, too, will contain a third part that mediates between the theory and practice of color aesthetics.

Though suggestively fluid, the connections among Lichtenstein's panels remain elusive. The left portion of the diptych appears at first to be disorganized while the center portion coalesces into mysterious designs. Do these two sections amount to merely chance, noise, or inert decoration; or else, a depiction of chance, noise, and inert decoration? Not quite. Not when one considers the overall linkages among the dispersed hues and lines. Lichtenstein's process evolves into a pattern. What brings forth an interpretation of this painting is an event that will be prominent throughout this book: the coming into view of *patterns* that map our comprehension.²

Dagwood is situated within a severely flattened space where only a shoe suggests his second leg. (Are his feet off the floor or not? Do we see movement or not?) Dagwood is seemingly confined to his own frame, though his yellow belt and the yellow wall behind seem to flow toward a broad enclosing yellow band in the middle section and then toward five scattered yellow streaks and blotches at the left that paradoxically are both blocked by, and visible through, a white wash. One marvels as fresh colors emerge through additive and subtractive combinations at left. Experiments with green at left are apparently transformed into an orderly floor at right. One savors the subtle and minute, steady flow of lightness from the top toward a darker bottom at left and right.

Other connections and patterns among the parts can be found. For example, the diagonal lines of Dagwood's shoes match the diagonals in the middle section. Certain curves of Dagwood's body and clothes mirror curves in the middle and left

sections. Seven slightly curved horizontal lines in the middle may repeat the lines of his hair! This raises a key question: when comparing the various lines of the middle section to the figure of Dagwood, must a viewer decide whether the middle is, or is not, a highly abstracted and fragmented version of Dagwood? That is, might the middle be seen instead as something *in between* decoration and figurative metaphor—as a sort of joint “shadow” cast by literal paint (left) and figurative design (right), something more than literal but less than a metaphor or symbol, something that foreshadows a figure but refuses to rise to the level of ambiguity or hybridity? If so, then this middle portion may exemplify an inchoate or nascent idea *in the process* of being formed into a new pattern at right.

I would like to suggest that this in-between potential of color and line in the middle section is an important stage in our thinking about film (and significance in general), i.e., one must be sensitive to what is *incipient*, to movements that are neither exclusively sensation (left) nor yet idea (right) but that prefigure what may come to be. Sensory data that is located in a middle, unrealized zone and only “nearly true” as figuration (as in Lichtenstein’s middle panel) is an important effect in many artworks. It is evidence that color can be seen as more than sensation or figuration, whether insipid or vivid.

Furthermore, I believe that this in-between effect can be revealed by attending closely to certain arrangements in film that escape both decoration and static symbol. Like the activity of a spectator’s memory, a film may entertain moods in the process of becoming something other than the indicative or assertive. To watch a film is to struggle within a film’s dense, artificial memory where only fragments become visible and audible. At certain times, impressions will be less precise and more tentative, amorphous, multiple, and in process.³

THEORY: DRAWING LINES, TAKING SHAPE

Dagwood seems to be emerging from, or else falling back into, paint itself; or rather, the painted, pixelated Dagwood—the pixels are benday dots—is moving from/into the splashed paint at left. (Has he perhaps escaped the black frame line at the far right?) The painted brushstrokes, smears, smudges, spatters, and drips at left—which are represented as having been painted with different kinds of brushes—are painted to suggest the ground (or better, *a* ground) for the startled figure of Dagwood who is reacting to something not seen further off right, something that could have been rendered in a still different form(ing) of paint. Dynamism of color possibilities at left and middle featuring an intense yellow are juxtaposed to dynamism of quite another sort at right as the yellow becomes muted and a new color—red—emerges to characterize Dagwood’s energy. It is as if the yellow has transformed into red, or else can be seen as a prior form of the red. The hot red

also offers a stark contrast with the cold blues of the left two-thirds of the painting. The red makes for an unusual contrast with a grayish yellow and two pinks (at left lower right) and with an incipient brown, which deep-down is a very strange color, or more accurately, an amalgam of colors, including red.⁴ Thus chance, noise, and decoration in all three panels become relative to a new context once a viewer begins to seek significance and discover sets of relationships, i.e., patterns, among lines and patches of paint.

A developing pattern of relations is much more than—and quite separate from—its discrete elements. A pattern is more than a linear relation among micro-constituents just as temperature, magnetism, and states of matter like solidity emerge from atomic particles or consciousness emerges from brain matter.⁵ Additionally, the temperature of a gas emerges from a collection of atoms that do not themselves have a temperature. Most striking is the fact that time and three-dimensional space are not themselves fundamental, but are an illusory effect emerging out of something remarkably different on the order of quantum entanglement of bits of *information*.

A pattern requires new concepts and theories to explain its potential for interactions. It interacts in novel ways with other such patterns at a meta-level because it represents a specific selection among the properties of elements existing on a lower level. A subset of these lower-level elements is being collected in the pattern in ways that are not dependent on simple, linear adjacency. What makes for “emergence”—i.e., new and significant properties appearing at a higher level—results from a reconfiguration of the causal possibilities of constituent parts on a sub-level. That is, a temporal or spatial mosaic is created at a new, higher scale that allows one to perceive new sorts of relationships, combinations, and interactions.⁶

Is it possible that elements can exist entirely isolated and void of all relationships, defying all attempts at being (re-)framed and (re-)related? Chance may play a role in the making of an artwork, but once folded into object-hood for a beholder, randomness disappears into higher-level crisscrossing patterns, however inconsistent, obscure, or partly realized. Most importantly, patterns have a history in one’s perception.

In this light, Lichtenstein’s painting moves from incipient theory and possibility at left and middle to a concrete realization of a scene at right. An important theme addressed by Lichtenstein’s diptych-as-triptych concerns the general conditions—both material and conceptual—that make for being, for the emergence through process of a figurative pattern. This is also a central issue for the present book whose focal point is the use of color in movements of narrative and figurative cinema. How should salient patterns be constructed and analyzed when looking? How will patterned color *necessarily* emerge out of a background seemingly composed of chance elements, noise, and decoration? Which backgrounds are relevant in producing specific patterns?

To have taken shape, a color patch must have a shape, must be delineated by a border separating it from whatever is adjacent and different. That is, a line will appear, no matter how blurry, implicit, or arbitrary, to frame the presence of color on a surface. This power of line is highlighted in the middle portion of Lichtenstein's painting. For example, one can trace the mutation of diagonal lines from Dagwood's clothes, hair, and background into the middle section and then into the curved white lines appearing within paint splotches at left, as if these curves were attempting to straighten themselves into diagonals. Compare also the three white curves within a black splotch (left panel middle) to Dagwood's curved body in white shirt and black pants. The diptych thus becomes a triptych by representing in the middle section the disciplinary regime of *line* in the transition from color patches and the lines within brush strokes (at left) to figuration (right). Or, equally, it might be seen as the reverse trajectory: the existence of areas of color has created a strong sense of line (at middle) as one moves from predominant figuration (right) to seemingly disordered color patches (left).

A line defines and confines a spot of color. But a line must have a color to be seen and a spot of color has a mass that defines the line that borders. We will encounter theoretical accounts in this book that debate the priority to be accorded to either color or line with attendant consequences for aesthetic appreciation. Notice that the power of figurative *line* extends to the representation of invisible realities since the lines around Dagwood's shoulder and head depict his feelings of startled alarm. I will argue that color, too, may make visible the invisible, e.g., a feeling or tone. Moreover, we will encounter theoretical and practical situations in which color itself vanishes from the screen into a spectator's mental image of color that is the trace of thought (Chapters 5 and 6). This is analogous to the way that a *theory* appears to disappear into—gives way to—a person's experience of an object when experience acquires concrete *significance*.

Like color and line on canvas, philosophy (theory) works to elucidate aspects of our world that are visible and invisible. Philosophy investigates the conditions under which something comes to exist, the possibilities of its forms, and how one marks varieties when form transforms into new form.⁷ To accomplish its goals, philosophy must draw lines to mark out and name various areas of phenomena by employing "concepts."⁸ Like color and line, one may debate which comes first in thinking philosophically: the presence of a distinction—a line, a felt difference—or a general concept about finding and locating areas of such differences. Distinctions and concepts work to give shape to philosophical claims while networks of concepts provide philosophy with large-scale structures and patterns for its "picture" of the world. For the most part, I see no need to decide which comes first—distinctions or concepts, lines or colors—and will instead concentrate on outlining the myriad phenomena of cinema's color as a diptych: a philosophy of color together with the experience of color as an aesthetic.

TRIPTYCH: COLOR, CINEMA, REMEMBERED LANGUAGES

This book is a diptych where theory and practice, principles of color design and figurative cinema, absorb each other. Is there a hidden part in the book analogous to Lichtenstein's disciplinary "line" (in the painting's middle section) that acts as a catalyst between theory and practice, color and cinema? The mediating process that, in effect, makes this book a triptych will be the activity of "language," especially the *remembered* languages and insistent mental images a perceiver utilizes to draw lines and frame his or her viewing of screened color. The book will treat both philosophy and aesthetics as rooted in the many different ways we *choose to talk about*—and recount stories about—the features of a world that pique our interest and remain in mind. Such talk is not random but organized into procedures that are used to map and navigate a world by bringing forth relevant patterns. Narrative discourse is one of these fundamental procedures we use to create patterns in order to understand a world (as noted by Sartre in the epigraph). I will argue that color sensations do not emerge from a vacuum to become sensuous spots, but come already imbued with diverse sets of expectations, which, in turn, are tied to what might be called language-games and perception-games. In cinema, and in life as well, these games and routines intermingle with the stories we wish to recount about the actions we wish to pursue, the patterns we desire to find.

Thus I will claim that not all instances of color are solely sensation(al) or tied to emotions. Color may function cognitively or, if you wish, provoke the feelings of ideas that are tied to habitual ways of talking about being in a world. I believe that one can hear in color the languages used to express how we are cognitively situated in an environment. In this way color may become a medium for thought. I will argue that to picture color as merely sensation, spectacle, or symbol is reductive; doing so ignores important cognitive processes that act to mediate and bring forth patterns (as in Lichtenstein's middle section). I believe there are numerous ways for color to acquire the mobility of consciousness and adopt the fluidity of cinema. Color, mind, and cinema may be synchronized to become an integrated stream of acoustic, diagrammatic patterns that are intermittently moving and interrupted, permeated with decision and thought.

I will propose a theory of color that relies on a flow or "tracking" of a perceiver's working memory as opposed to a semiotic or "standing" theory of color based on symbols/signs retrieved from long-term memory. I will emphasize the *event* of color, not merely the fact of patches of screened color. This theory will be anchored in research from cognitive science and philosophy of language. The theory will benefit from the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who near the end of his life began to chart some of the language-games that give color movement.

Just as Lichtenstein's painting is divided into an abstract or theoretical part (on the left) coupled with a figurative part portraying a character's action within colored

space and within a pop cultural discourse (on the right), so this book includes a theoretical examination of the nature of color coupled with a proposed set of terms for analyzing colored patterns that emerge as concrete figuration. As indicated above, there is a third part lying within both philosophies of film color and vocabularies for analyzing specific color patterns that acts to meld philosophy and aesthetics, film theory and cinema's color. The third part brings to the fore the background languages of mind—our remembered languages—that constitute the expressive potential realized in a community's sense of both theory and color aesthetics.

GREY GRAY

Color, colour, colur, colore, cooler, culler are some of the names. A person is certain, though, that he or she knows what color is despite the spelling. Or, is there doubt? Is it only a matter of properly distinguishing, say, a more silvery shade of grey from a darker gray?⁹ When attending to patches, do we simply acquire a saturated feeling about the degree of gray or greenish stuff or redness, and that's it, all of it? My point of departure in this book will instead be that our sense of colour is dependent on general patterns and schemes of colurs interacting with other kinds of configurations in film, such as the rise and fall of narrative actions, intermittent tensions among characters, dialogue, music, camera movements, rhythm, and changing backgrounds due to character movement. Colore is both sensitive to, and impinges upon, contexts. A viewer's consciousness of cooler springs not just from a patch on the screen, but from networks of developing culler patterns superimposed upon other aesthetic patterns.

As we shall see, color designs may operate to guide a spectator toward themes, emotions, beliefs, and insights not directly visible in film just as many things are not visible inside and outside of Lichtenstein's Dagwood painting. Aesthetic disputes, however, have arisen over how color works as well as the appropriate manner in which it ought to work. In weighing these arguments, we will need to examine a third part within theory and practice, namely, the concealed languages, rhetoric, and assumptions from which theory and aesthetic claims emerge. Claims about color arise from diverse and competing stories earnestly being told by critics. Extending Sartre's assertion in the epigraph, one might say that color comes alive when its story is being told. Accordingly, our task will be to analyze some of these stories.

NOTES

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. by Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Books, 2007), p. 39.
2. For something along the lines of *Two Paintings: Dagwood* (1983), but more complex, see Lichtenstein's painting, *Reflections on "Interior with Girl Drawing"* (1990).