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## **Color Range Design**

### **To combine, harmonize and name colors.**

#### *The construction of a thought behind an image*

Céline Caumon, PR Arts & Design, Symposium «Ethno-poïetics of colors From the experience of the tint to the poetics of the shade», JSPS France-Japon, Université de Toulouse, Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, Musée Paul Labit, Toulouse, 2016

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This presentation will explore how the expression color design range includes and allows us to understand the structural characteristics (how a range is created), the cultural characteristics (how to identify the thinking behind the range) and the rhetorical (the given intention of the range). The range is also presented here as the model that will allow us to create the image, that is to say either to create an object or to create an advertisement or painting.

### **The material/matter things and range**

We know that color perception is closely related to cultural perceptions. These perceptions are determined by the social, economic and historical context in which the color develops. But the notion of color also has to do with *material/matter things*. The material things are the attributes or qualities that are given to color. They may differ depending on cultures but they have in common spectral sensitivity or, as Paul Valéry said, *l'infini esthétique*.

Thus, the attributes of perception and the attributes affecting the perception such as the material, the gloss, the softness or the lightness, participate in the characterization of objects around us, insofar as these objects interact with each other. Ludwig Wittgenstein points out that when we talk about the color of gold, "what is meant by that is not yellow: The color "gold" is the characteristic of a surface that shines or glows." We can say that the color "gold" shines even before it has a color. We can say that the color "gold" has a value before it has a color.

*The intrinsic qualities have nothing to do with the flatness of the paper and allows us to qualify an object, compare it to others and to give it a value.*

The word *value* comes from the Latin word "*valor*", derived from "*valere*" meaning (and means) "to be strong, powerful, energetic." If the material things are and represent power, I'm not sure that an image on glossy paper has the same impact. However, in modern French, the word *value* has other meanings.

(1) The value corresponds to the assessment of something according to its social utility, and the amount of work necessary to produce it (source TLFi).

(2) It also corresponds to the price, that is to say the measurability of an object based on its ability to be traded or sold, for example estimating the material properties (TLFi).

There are many other definitions. But if we stop at these two proposals, the idea of *range* (color design range) comes into the picture. Indeed, color design range has to do with material aspects of things. Under the status of a tool, it makes the narrative possible, like a recipe, a book or music and provides an escape from the reality of the image.

When putting together a collection of data to create a range, we discover that this range identifies (a) a "*product range*" that is to say, a set of products or productions, brands or references. It also defines (b) luxury goods, the "*high end*" where we find the financial value illustrated on the previous slide. We also have (c) the concept of "*production range*" which corresponds to the structural and temporal description of the required operations to manufacture an object. Finally, (d) in the field of printing, the "*control range*" is the verification and quality phase of the work. So, to produce a range, it's necessary to consider the "time value" in production (the working time spent making an object) and the "qualitative value," that is to say, the aesthetic sensitivity that emerges from the subject produced or the from the range created. But if the range has different "values", it can also be defined as a *measurement*.

*So, how do we measure the range? and What does it measure?*

Range is a measurement, that is to say it has a length, it evokes a rhythm or a musical score. In the field of music, (e) "*the musical range*" (*musical scale*) is a result of continuing notes in a sequence, either ascending or descending. But "scale" also means the level, that is to say, the position where the notes are located on the staff. In music, we talk about a sequence of two tones, semitones, three tones, etc. This definition is also found in the field of color: dyeing is an example, painting is another example ("intensify the range," or "go upmarket"). In this sense, the French expression "*faire ses gammes*" ("practice to perfection" allows both to practice by giving a direction to the nuances but also categorizing and characterizing the color or the notes according to their positions. It's kind of like a collector who thinks and classifies. There are many ways to measure the value of the note and the value of material things or the color value, depending on its position and its use / disposal / availability. To go further, in music, we talk about "accords or chords", we also say "tighten the notes", that is to say in the sense of a scale, which positions the notes on a vertical axis.

*So, material things have a medium, a logic, but material things also have a degree or a length.*

Indeed, the French term "*outré mesure*" (beyond measure), that is to say beyond the dimension considered desirable (7 degrees in music, 6 shades in color design), the value of the range is also measured by the quality of the created scale. For example, if I refer to the color model by Albert Henry Munsell, the term "value" corresponds to the measurement scale situated between black and white; this is the "height of (my) range". The Munsell value range is similar to that in music as it reads from top to bottom or bottom to top, from left to right or right to left. In addition, the scale of value indicates the lightness of a color, that is to say the reference tone from which I will create my range. In the field of music, as in color design, we note that to "create a musical scale", we associate a given "tone" and a "tonic" around different notes to create a "tonal system" or "modal system", or mode. And mode, which means "model", also includes the term "*la mode*" which means measurement. From "*la mode*" we have "muid<sup>2</sup>", which is a measurement that applies to a mould and still refers to how dry solids, grain or liquid is measured and put up for sale.

*So then, how do we measure, mix and name colors and build a mode? How do we create an image? Further, how do we build a coloristic history? How to adapt it to a market?*

## **Range and theory: function and posture**

*"Theory is when you know everything but nothing works. Practice is when everything works but no one knows why".*  
Albert Einstein

In our design and color research laboratory, theory and practice are combined: One could say that nothing works and nobody knows why. But not knowing is not a problem (in itself). On the contrary, it becomes a motor for research, an epistemological obstacle (Gaston Bachelard, 1938) or a chaotic jolt to overcome (René Thom, 1984). If we really needed to know, research would not exist. There is no solution. To start with, there are just *functions* and *postures* to be highlighted, and then to be questioned. This is called action research in color design.

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<sup>2</sup> The "muid", from Latin *modius* "measure" - capacity for dry measures, roughly equivalent to a peck refers to how dry solids, grain or liquid is measured and put up for sale.

## A. Range and Fonction(s) in the consumer world

Regarding the range, we can now say that it represents a kind of mold, that is to say, a model (based on production and consumption). This model can be measured in its form but also in its function.

Thus, the range can be used to measure color:

- In its "time value" or "qualitative value," that is to say in production (See "cours de poétique" / 'poetics class' by Paul Valéry), compared to "doing" and the "know-how" of using raw materials; but also,
- In its "exchange value" (Karl Marx), that is to say the financial aspect linked to consumption (See "cours de poétique" / 'poetics class' by Paul Valéry), compared to the use that we will make of it,
- The range will also be used to color something, so it has a sensitivity and a further poetic expression,

In the consumer and fashion world, range is used for particular functions:

- to evaluate product ranges, objects in a collection that will be developed when the range is placed on the market,
- It will be a model to color a moment in time, creating a "fad" (to be in vogue / the spirit of the times) and visible via the product but also via the image that it will communicate.
- It will be used to create a trend, that is to say, it will stimulate through color and the materials used, what will be fashionable in future years. The colors are selected based on their potential to become *multiple*.
- *Multiple*, because the range will be used to reproduce and to industrialize the effects of surfaces and products and to prepare the model for the masses. This range should not be too extensive so as to keep the costs of production to a minimum.
- *Multiple*, because the range should evoke feelings and representation in the collective mind. To do this, naming the color of a range is an ingenious blend of imagination and sensitivity, but also strategy and sociability.
- *Multiple*, because the range must enable an image and from it, harmonies or combinations will be created.
- Finally, the range will also be used to highlight a medium, to match a set of products or materials within the range, thus giving it a posture.

## B. Range and posture(s)

Through dialog with the brand, the Colorist, who conceives and designs the range, anticipates and plans the conditions for accessing information, knowledge and fiction, and that of its reception and appropriation. Then arises the question of what is the political function of the color range and its design? What I mean by political is the transformative power for the viewer that any action or any production method mixing color, name and image, potentially holds.

The range certainly has functions but it also has posture, that is to say a speech and attitude. The word posture has two Latin roots: "*postura*" and "*positura*". The "*postura*" in relation to the range, is the rhythm we give the colors when they are combined. As the musical scale, posture applies to a vertical, curved or horizontal body, that is to say reading of the body curves or ultimately the colors, leads us to a meaning. The meaning can be reading, understanding or a way of seeing (the world). This is where we begin to create the image, or the representation. (We pass from the collection and management of information to the intention; we will build something and create a representation or project). The meaning and extent of the range (vertical or horizontal) are just as important. They allow us to interpret and refer to symbols and cultural references. Here we can clearly see the origin of the author or creator of the range. In contrast, the "*positura*" derived from "*positus*" meaning "situated", is the state of mind, disposition, arrangement or meaning that one puts together with words in a sentence, punctuation for example, or ultimately how it effects the range. The author is motivated by a specific determination and his thought is reflected in the range. The image created is with intention and purpose. But to talk about images, especially in the wake of *storytelling* and *color story boards*, is yet another 'story'.

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To understand the image as a whole, we must break it down to rebuild it. The color-design seeks to find the depth of things. It attempts to find uses, their production aspects, their consumption, their positions and postures. Trained to add value to the material or matter used in the process (from the physical qualities of the object to the product), the designer uses a coherent selection of these to understand the uncertainty that surrounds the process. By understanding a range of colors, the designer understands the intentions and cultural perceptions of a given time and a given writer.

But, because a range is now linked to the technique behind it, we find a kind of *imposture*. What I mean is that the range leaves us constantly in doubt because it has a potential by itself (technical and digital). It seems to evolve through the seasons, communicating by pixels, atlases, and alphanumeric

coding systems. It tends to erase the words to focus on numbers ... well, it loses, just like the image, a part of its authenticity.

If the potential become a model of thought in the Western world, the Pantone® brand, with its latest smartphone application (*Pantone Studio* automatically creates color ranges), understands that the person to eliminate is perhaps the color-designer, who is overflowing with sensitivity.

But the proposal from the Pantone® brand, automating the creation of the range, can never pretend to render the matter and medium alive. Maybe this is a way to naturalize the image by putting it to the status of an icon. An icon as a reflection of an era, of the ephemeral, over-consumption of signs and colors.

In short, our color design lab is on a new path, exploring new objects in color research and the current understanding of the world.

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