

**Other colours: communicating with colour  
in a multicultural society,  
a studio investigation**

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## SUMMARY

In multicultural Australia, the designer's role to communicate is made more complex by the variations of different cultural colour connotations. The symbolic meanings of colours can be determined by ethnicity, religion and history, and reinforced by families and societal groups. As time progresses, the determinants change. The significance associated with colour can differ greatly from one person to another, as aspects of one culture merge or become incorporated by another. The propensity of designers to ignore the importance of colour connections for some cultural groups, not only invites the risk of misinterpretation of their design work, but also devalues the individual exploration of colour. As cross-cultural business associations become increasingly common, the urgency of an understanding of cultural differences becomes apparent.

These differences are not readily outlined in reference books about colour or culture in the local context. However, there is a wealth of non-textual information that derives from family, location and religious sources. When these are explored, what emerges is a rich tapestry of intricate colour associations that exist, but which the designer chooses mostly to push aside. As design itself and publication generally tend to address a mainstream and arguably standardises diversity, the aspiration of designers to comply with what is fashionable is the norm. But embracing the differences and reinforcing them may empower the designer to incorporate the individual palette that derives from a given heritage.

The benefits of gaining community knowledge to inform colour choice, would ideally be a greater creative use of colour and an inspirational use of communication, with the added profit of social interaction between cultures.

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## THE WORKS

### **MULTIMEDIA**

*Film & Television in Melbourne Victoria* for the Melbourne Film Office  
*Faculty of Art and Design* for Monash University, Melbourne

### **PRINT**

*Reunion* Documentary proposal cover  
*Reunion* Documentary poster

### **TELEVISION**

*Australian Contemporary Art Fair 1998*, television commercial  
*Melbourne Art Fair 2000*, television commercial  
*The View* television titles for The View Magazine

### **VIDEO**

*ABC Outside Broadcast Van* for the National Museum of Australia, Canberra  
*Camouflage* for Efbee Hair Design

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## INTRODUCTION CULTURES TOGETHER, WORLDS APART

My research investigates cultural colour in regard to the apparently chaotic processes of colour choices in screen and print-based media. My key access to information and creative experiment in the field derives from my role as a graphic designer for CD-ROM, corporate video, television commercials, Internet and print. I work within a production team and my responsibility lies with the art direction. The commercial world of digital media has a fast turnaround, is fuelled by the market place and is girdled with the specific constraints of the brief. However, it all subscribes to the social framework of visual language.

What I submit for examination is a body of work produced concurrently with the research. The examinable content in the CD-ROMs is all that is visual<sup>1</sup>, which is a key vehicle that steers the communication.<sup>2</sup> The design role is of paramount importance in productions such as these, to identify and target the selective audience, and manage the pandemonium of multimedia visually, using design theories and symbolic colour information. In a time when we are bombarded with a plethora of imagery, visual communication is crucial and there needs to be a comprehension of the visual culture of the end user, and recognition of perception in a cultural sense. The thread that I attempt to add to the fabric of cultural knowledge is an embracing of cultural differences and attitude to colour, the opportunity to explore and expand on symbolism, and the power to implement personal colour decisions in the face of a global directive. In my constant journey of analysing what is being read in the designs that I produce, with the conviction to incorporate a multicultural viewpoint, I attempt to make the visual communication legible.

In Australia, where people of varied backgrounds share a country, there are bound to be differences of an aesthetic as well as ethical nature. In custom and language certainly, in food and dress obviously, in decorative traditions, and also in the interpretation of colour symbolism. The symbolic meanings of colours can often be determined by the cultural authority of the group, its religion, and substance of its history. Consequently, over time, the significance associated with colour can differ greatly from one person to another.

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1 Excluding the frame, perspective and space of the camera-work and client-supplied still images.

2 See the diagram in David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: inference and rhetoric in the interpretation of cinema*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. and London, 1989 (reprint 1996), p. 121. Under the heading 'Hierarchies', Bordwell portrays an implicit rank of merit from oral to written (language-based) and photographic to filmic (image-based). In our field, of course, these distinctions are even more arbitrary than in film, as all four modes are used simultaneously and with maximum interconnection.

Acting as a visual translator, the graphic designer communicates between many sectors of a multicultural society. In developing effective visual communication, designers will often use colour with some reference to symbolism, but can be faced with the possibility that the message delivered may not be the message implied. It is never possible to be armed with all the colour meanings of all the cultures of all the people in a multicultural context, but without a cross-cultural reference or research, design can be misinterpreted, overlooked or even cause offence. Therefore, effective graphic design wavers, if not completely fails, in its attempt to communicate ideas to inclusive audiences.

When colour is misread from the original intention, it has the potential to reverse the desired effect and be disrespectful. Superstition and luck are primary reasons this offence can occur. The predominance of the Anglo-Celtic culture in Australia has maintained a white dominated attitude to the importance of luck and superstition in diverse cultures and this influence on the use of colour in design means that colour decisions are made without consideration to their acceptance by other cultural groups. Many companies now working on a global scale, or at least throughout the Asian Pacific rim, have had to realise very quickly that business relationships rely heavily on mutual respect for another's culture. The urgency of cross-cultural communication is apparent in this situation, otherwise successful business transactions are endangered. No longer is communication within one's own tribe, but within the global village. So too, the designer's role has become increasingly important to assist in this negotiation. Already costly mistakes have been made in the choice of colours for projects within the corporate world. For example, black courtesy buses to take people to the newly opened Star Casino in Sydney, were shunned by the Chinese community because they looked like hearses. The importance of the association of black with bad luck was overlooked in this case, through an insensitive selection of colour. What seems an obvious blunder with hindsight, prompts the question: how does one acquire that information?

Colour may be analysed and discussed through a variety of topics: e.g. psychology, therapy, physics, vision, printing. There is scientific literature in abundance in all these areas. However, these disciplines offer little in the discourse specific to the cultural factors of colour choices. For instance, a Swedish paper written by Taft and Sivik *Cross-national comparisons of colour meaning*<sup>3</sup> ventures into calculating cultural colour preference without addressing the reasons for their choice. Taft and Sivik take a scientific approach and present isolated colours to their subjects to invoke a response. Findings are based on age and nationality, but the complex variables of the situation of the colour are not examined, nor is the symbolism pertaining to cultural roots within

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3 Taft, C. and Sivik, L. *Cross-national comparisons of color meaning* (Göteborg, Sweden: University of Göteborg, Göteborg Psychological Reports vol. 22. N 3) 1992.



those nationalities. These are the intricacies that are the source of inspiration to design method. As promising as Taft and Sivik's inquiry may be in the long term of psychology, the scientific approach does not recommend itself to the methodology of design, which so strongly rests on cultural factors.

Information at a low level can be found in the many pocket-sized editions of books on colour and on tips for business travellers, like not photocopying your report on blue paper in some Asian countries. Colour symbolism is discussed frequently in art history volumes, but with little cultural information. The wealth of colour theory writing does not advance into areas of cross-cultural symbolism in the modern sense, but rather focuses on heraldry and symbolism of an archaic nature. In the context of the exigencies of studio work, it appeared that an empirical approach to this writing is inappropriate. It leaves no space for contingencies. A method is called for that acknowledges the subtleties and the shifts in cultural complexity, and the experience that will provide an alternative method to discovery. For there are vast amounts of information to be derived from anecdotal and personal experience and it seems artistically neglectful not to embrace it.<sup>4</sup>

As more youth and more ethnicities accept the Nike tick (or McDonald's M or whatever) as a plausible statement of belonging, there is a consequent lack of self-determination in people to derive their own symbolism, achieve their own identity, realize their own culture through identification with the visual traditions in the local community. The autonomy of local cultures is under threat and may find it harder, year by year, to resist global homogenization. This research, at the outermost reach of its intentions, would help recognize the individual's rights to have a tradition, to feel the dignity of localized kinships and to empower people with confidence in their difference.

Hence the rationale behind examining non-textual material using non-scientific but discursive methods. To some extent, this research acts against the idea of universal principles in design, at least as far as colour is concerned.

It could be argued that design for any corporation is inherently standardizing. It seeks to influence people in conformity to a plan: how to win over the greatest possible spread of lands on the globe. The highest aspiration of most designers would be to achieve global uniformity of outlook,

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4 The material based on personal experience and that derived from historical literature have indicated two separate academic methodologies, perhaps explaining why some areas are more clearly referenced (within the normal conventions of scholarship) while other areas have been handled in a discursive vein, reporting observational material which does not lend itself to standard academic footnotes.

so that everyone recognizes and wants the image, colours and association of Ford or Erikson or whatever. To work as a designer against this inclination means recognizing the non-commercial autonomy of symbols.

The research undertaken in Broome will provide examples throughout the document. As an isolated community, with an extensive multicultural history, it offers an appropriate case study in this colour discourse. Colour associations are generally handed down within families, tribes and religious groups, sometimes with the original source or reason for the colour association lost. When cultural groups begin to mix, there is sometimes a blending of colour values, or one takes over another's symbolism. Adding to that the popular cultural diversions of connotation, it is difficult to trace a specific cultural colour map. But that is precisely what I find so interesting about this study; the constantly shifting symbolic colour world.

I attempt in my studio research to discover some of the complexities of cultural colour meaning, how they come about and what influences the societal change. The chapters will focus on the areas where colour, communication and culture meet. Colour will be discussed in the areas of history, art, religion and tribe; colour changes through chemistry and their influence on colour worth; and the branding of product with specific colour to create an association. The notion of communication will also be explored in regard to colour used in language in comparison with visual colour denotation. Multiculturalism and how people mark themselves with colour to represent their tribe will form the basis to many for these discussions.

As a practising graphic designer, and knowingly from the perspective of an Anglo Australian, I will explore my personal use of colour in the areas of print, multimedia and video within the commercial world. I am one of many visual communicators who make colour decisions every day, constantly conveying messages to a specific audience. We know who the audience is, but we do not always address how colour perception will occur. Whether we deliberately brand a product with a hopefully memorable colour, or choose colour because it is fashionable, it has an effect. It exists within a sea of visual imagery that is viewed with pre-determined colour associations.

## CHAPTER ONE YOU'RE AUSTRALIAN NOW

What happens when cultures merge? In just over 200 years, Australia has grown from a totally indigenous population to a multicultural population. To coexist there has to be some adapting to ways of life, some reshuffling of values and lifestyle. Some communities will take on parts of another's culture just by associating, working and living together. There is certainly not an equal understanding of each other's traditions, in fact sometimes it is a struggle to retain a cultural identity against the pressure to homogenize. In the course of this discussion about culture and colour, it is necessary to revisit the time in Australia's history when there was a deliberate attempt to obliterate indigenous culture and replace it with that of the Anglo-Celtic. It is also necessary, therefore, to observe the ways that the indigenous people continued to impart their traditional knowledge, sometimes secretly, to maintain cultural education. This avalanche of enforced Anglocentricism would continue post WWII, when thousands of European immigrants were told to leave their backgrounds at the doorstep on the way in, because 'you are an Australian now.' In reaction, these very diverse groups of people organised ways of continuing their language, festivals and cultural identity. And among the many ways that people tribalise themselves, is by representing themselves with colour. Beyond the most obvious colour difference, that of the skin, is the symbolic meaning of colour that is used in the name of tradition, religion and ethnicity.

### **Black and White**

*When we first came here we thought we had found the only people in the world without a religion. Now we have learnt that they are among the most religious people in the world.<sup>5</sup>*

There is evidence to suggest that the Aboriginal people have been here for more than 50,000 years. In 1788 when the first Europeans arrived in Australia it is estimated that there were about 500 different tribes, totalling 300,000 people.<sup>6</sup> The tribes differed, not only in name, but language, land and in cultural ways. However, because the Aborigines have no written language, the information about how they reacted and adapted to the newcomers, has mostly been written from a European perspective. It is little wonder then that Aborigines were recognised as one

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5 Broome, Richard. *Aboriginal Australians*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney. 1982, p. 119.

6 *Ibid.* p. 11.

people, the intricacies of tribal difference being overlooked, let alone recorded or celebrated. Adherence to Aboriginal culture was denounced and sometimes punished, eventuating in the loss of some languages, tribal groups and their discrete customs. When the Europeans first met the Aborigines, with no common language with which to communicate, there must have been many visual misunderstandings. There was at first, an assumption that the Europeans were spirits of the dead, because their pale skin was similar to the colour Aboriginal people faded to in death.<sup>7</sup> Some Aboriginal tribes paint their faces white for funerals, to appear dead themselves in order to confuse the spirits into not taking them (see appendix p. 66). Their understanding was that the white people were actually spirits of their own forefathers and were confused when they had returned from the dead not remembering the tribal ways. The white man's sex was also in dispute, after all their hair was long and they had no beards, until trousers were lowered to reveal their gender.

*Governor Phillip saw the self-inflicted wounds of grief on the women's thighs and forehead and mistakenly thought they were evidence of beatings from cruel husbands who enslaved their wives. The Gamaraigal observed that Phillip had a front tooth missing just as they did, and no doubt believed for a while that the Europeans initiated men in similar ways to themselves.<sup>8</sup>*

The European view of black Africans as wild savages influenced their opinion of the Aborigines, from the basic perception that black is evil and white is pure (see appendix pp. 68). They regarded them as pagan and set about to Christianise them, telling them they were behaving badly if they acted in their usual family ways. Some missionaries viewed Aboriginal culture as a thing of the devil and their ways as 'futile works of darkness.'<sup>9</sup> Most were against initiation, which involved periods of time enduring pain, fear and 'intensive religious instruction'<sup>10</sup>, and here a valuable continuation of traditional knowledge was at risk of being lost. The belief that the indigenous people were a blank slate with no religion or civility, enabled the Europeans to feel justified in their attempt at acculturation. Their sacred objects were trivialised, and within a generally paternalistic environment, the adults were treated as children and referred to as boys and girls.<sup>11</sup>

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7 *ibid.* p. 23.

8 *ibid.* pp. 23-24.

9 *ibid.* pp. 109.

10 author unknown. *The Teaching Stones of the Outcast Tribes*. Australian Aboriginal Culture Abroad, Wembley W.A. 1988, p. not recorded.

11 Grimshaw, P., Lake, M., McGrath, A. and Quartly, M. *Creating a Nation*. McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, Victoria. 1994, pp. 279-281.

*When shown Biblical pictures, the Aborigines saw only a white God, a white Jesus, white angels and a black Devil and were naturally alienated by this European colour symbolism of white as good and black as evil.<sup>12</sup>*

*The Njil Njil elders who valued fertility were unimpressed by the Virgin Mary ...<sup>13</sup>*

The quest to make Aborigines civilised Christians was basically a failure. Of the Bathurst Island Mission in 1954, Bishop Gell wrote 'even after thirty years of work we could not claim one single adult convert.' The missionaries knew that traditions such as mourning rites, religious notions and sorcery survived.<sup>14</sup> There were still those who followed the Christian faith, and there were those who found themselves caught between the two cultures, effecting an adoption of some Christian principles or symbols into the Aboriginal spiritual beliefs.

*...among the Pitjantjatjara people at Ernabella mission, ... it was often possible to reconcile traditional spiritual concepts with Christianity because the latter was accepted as 'whitefella Dreaming', ... 'God must have made the Spirit Ancestors because He made everything'.<sup>15</sup>*

This merging of cultures was also enhanced by intermarriage and Christian marriage became obligatory, sometimes just to be able receive mission food. Assistance was often conditional on leaving behind tribal ways.<sup>16</sup> There was an assumption that the older full-bloods and half-castes that were looked after on the stations would eventually die out and that there would be a gradual whitening of the race as they mingled with the Europeans. In short, there was an expectation that the race would vanish. In the late nineteenth century 'survival of the fittest' and 'white superiority' were common phrases. And in 1939 in Queensland it was even suggested that the females be sterilised. However, this strict situation of enforced culture, only made some more determined to teach the young the traditional ways and reinforce them with each other. But with the dramatic loss of numbers, the culture fell from a rich high culture that had included religious rites to a lower culture consisting of only some ceremonies, land and kinship. The families of indigenous communities met at the fences of the camps, relearning their Aboriginal skin names, breaking

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<sup>12</sup> Broome, *op. cit.* p. 113.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 112.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> Voigt, A. and Drury, N. *Wisdom from the Earth: the living legacy of the Aboriginal dreamtime*. Simon & Schuster Australia, Roseville, NSW. 1997, p. not recorded.

<sup>16</sup> Grimshaw, *op. cit.* p. 280.

away temporarily from the dormitory style accommodation that was supposed to enforce white ways.<sup>17</sup> The older ones taught the younger ones about hunting, sorcery and the dreamtime.

*School may have been a place of learning but for me, walkabout was a source of wisdom.*<sup>18</sup>

But as new technology and literature infiltrated the camps, some of the young became less interested in the old traditions. Because they knew that they were being ridiculed, some became ashamed of their cultural habits. Consequently, many Aboriginal languages and sacred sites are lost. However, indigenous culture and languages are now being recorded and continue to be taught and maintained by community groups and educational institutions.

*We've been taught to be white, ... to act white, think white ... 'cause we've grown up in a system that teaches you, from a pre-school kid, snow white, witches dressed in black, snow is perfect and pure, black is evil and dirty, cold, night, dark, black cat, bad luck. You start learnin' that from a kid, surely that's gotta ... have an affect on your mentality ... as you grow up you associate black things with evil, you associate white things with pure. The whole education system from there has to be overhauled.*<sup>19</sup>

Some aspects of indigenous culture are filtering through to the broader community, in particular music, dance and art. Aboriginal art, of course, is acclaimed worldwide and extremely highly valued. The wider community is beginning to be more aware of connections to the land, of some community's use or non-use of names and images of people after death, of sacred sites. But within indigenous communities there is much tribal information that continues to be secret or guarded for specific reasons or events. Some of that cultural information is available only to those specifically involved, within a specific gender or a hierarchy, and I have found that symbolic colour references, particularly in corroborees, can form part of that information.

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p. 291.

<sup>18</sup> McDonald, Connie Nungulla & Finnane, Jill. *When You Grow Up*. Magabala Books, Broome W.A. 1996, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Murrandoo Yanner, *Away!* ABC Radio National, Friday 31st May 2002

### **The Yellow Peril**

*... a fear of the 'yellow peril' went with the myth of white superiority.<sup>20</sup>*

From Canton to the goldfields of Victoria, came 40,000 Chinese to pan for gold in the 1850's. The Chinese became the fourth largest immigrant group after the British, Irish and Germans.<sup>21</sup> The fierce aspiration for the precious metal, and the vast cultural differences resulted in much trouble on the goldfields. To curb the numbers of Chinese arriving in Victoria, a ten pound poll tax was imposed on every Chinese arriving at ports in Victoria. Vessels then diverted to New South Wales and South Australia from where the arrivals began their long journey on foot.<sup>22</sup> Although the poor treatment of the Chinese in the goldfields (and the Kanaks in the canefields) cannot be compared to the suffering of the indigenous people, their plight received little attention.<sup>23</sup> In the *Boomerang* newspaper for the first time, the term White Australia appeared (see figure 9). The White Australia Policy was introduced at the turn of the century and the phrase 'The Yellow Peril' became synonymous with the Chinese (see appendix p. 73). Political cartoons of the day represented the Chinese as a steady evil stream invading Australia (see figures 10a, 10b). There is little documentation on the early Chinese settlers' lives, so it is difficult to know if there was a deliberate attempt to dissuade them from their traditions. But it seems, unlike the Aborigines who were treated as biologically inferior, the Chinese were regarded as Eastern aliens to be feared, stemming from the strength of their cultural history against the West.<sup>24</sup>

*a Queensland Aborigine meeting a Chinese man for the first time in the middle of the nineteenth century is said to have exclaimed, 'They are not white fellow or black fellow. They must be ghosts — or lyrebirds.'<sup>25</sup>*

Chinese families in Australia now for four or five generations, have laid a rich foundation and maintained the strength of Chinese cultural inheritance in festivals, religion, dress and food. The Chinese celebrations surrounding their adherence to the lunar calendar, are noisy colourful

20 author unknown. *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, vol. 7. Australian Geographic, Terrey Hills, New South Wales. 1996, p. 2535.

21 Immigration Museum website. Discovery and Research. <http://www.mov.vic.gov.au/immigration/time1860.htm>

22 Migration Museum. *From many places: the history and cultural traditions of South Australian people*. Wakefield Press, S.A. 1995, pp. 86 - 87.

23 Henderson, Gerard. *The Age*, Tuesday 6 January, 1998.

24 Giese, D. *Astronauts, lost souls and dragons: conversations with Chinese Australains*. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia. 1997. p. 38.

25 *Ibid.* p. 39.

occasions. They are cultural festivals rather than religion-based, as Chinese may be Buddhist, Christian, Confucist, Muslim or Taoist. Chinese New Year particularly, is a sea of red firecrackers and lanterns of red and gold, the traditional New Year colours, to ensure good fortune for the coming year.

### ***Don't show your true colours***

From a pamphlet distributed by the government of *Hints and help on knowing your new homeland*: '... try to avoid using your hands when speaking because if you do this you will be conspicuous.' And '... Australian men never wear hairnets. They regard men who do so as effeminate (*weiblich*).' These are some of the curiously specific instructions given to immigrants to assist in their assimilation into Australia.<sup>26</sup> After World War II, there was a large wave of immigrants from Europe. Italians, Greeks and Germans were the largest non-English speaking groups.<sup>27</sup> It was a huge cultural shift for Australians, and though bodies such as the 'Good Neighbour Movement'<sup>28</sup> were set up to assist and welcome the newcomers, there was pressure to subscribe to the Anglo-Celtic ideal.

*Australians were asked not to call European immigrants 'Displaced Persons' or 'DPs, but to call them 'New Australians', 'newcomers' or 'new settlers'.<sup>29</sup>*

A high percentage of the new Australians were Catholic, and this impacted on religion, causing the Irish domination of the Catholic Church in Australia to be weakened.<sup>30</sup> Over time, the immigrants maintained their ethnic identification by forming groups that focused on language, history, locality and religion. Many of these are region-based, like the Italian *paese* groups of Veneto, Friuli and Abruzzi. Similarly, Greek cultural traditions are maintained according to the specific island or area, but in particular the Greek Orthodox Church, which combines both religious and cultural practices.<sup>31</sup>

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26 Dugan, M. and Szwarc, J. *'There goes the neighbourhood!'* The Macmillan Company, South Melbourne, 1984. p. 169.

27 Bambrick, S. (ed.) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Australia*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. p. 225.

28 Dugan and Szwarc, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

29 Trepa, H. *Post-War Europeans (1940-1975)* Australian National Maritime Museum, 2000. p. 41.

30 Bambrick, *op. cit.*, p. not recorded.

31 Migration Museum, *op. cit.* pp. 197-198



### **Colour & Harmony?**

*... the prejudice against a man's color is about the silliest emotion ... There is more sense in religious bigotry than in colorphobia. For, to a certain extent, at least, a man is responsible for his religion; seeing that, if he chooses he can change it.*<sup>32</sup>

In describing something as multicultural, there is an assumption that a sort of unification has taken place. The word does not describe the variables or conflicts that exist between cultures, rather it points to an overlap, or a merging to become one melting pot; even the word itself is a simplification towards a unit. There is inference also that these cultures, neatly bound together by this word, live side by side in constant harmony, which as we have seen, is not the case. Still, the concept of multiculturalism, the goal of former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, has an idealistic quality about it; a harmony to be achieved.

One town in Australia claims to be a successful multicultural society: Broome in Western Australia. The mayor, Kevin Fong proudly proclaims that the people of Broome have been coexisting happily for ages. But on closer inspection, race barriers have been very firmly in place separating the whites from the rest. What makes Broome a unique example is that it was the only place in mainland Australia that was exempt from the White Australia Policy. At Federation the majority of the people in the Broome pearling industry were Asian and the pearling industry was able to lobby the federal government for exemption, for without the Asian labour the booming pearl industry would not survive. Because almost all of the Asians were young single men, they integrated with the Aboriginal community, which resulted in a genetic mix of people including Japanese, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian, Filipino, Ceylonese and West Indian. Referred to as the Broome mix by locals, the people are a combination of those races both visually and in terms of religion (although predominantly Catholic). All these cultures had their own cultural festivals: Aboriginal ceremonial corroborees, the Malay *Merdeka*, the Japanese *Obon* Festival, and the Chinese *Hung Ting*, but in 1970 it was agreed to hold an annual festival that incorporated them all. The Shinju Matsuri Festival, which means the Festival of the Pearl, is now a celebration of the cultural differences in that town, and colour plays a large part in the differentiation of the cultures.

*In many former colonial countries ... the concept and practice of multiculturalism is often a means of perpetuating earlier ethnic divisions. ... in reality intermarriage blurs group boundaries ...*<sup>33</sup>

32 Gizen-no-Teki (Edward William Foxall), *Colorphobia: An exposure of the "White Australia" fallacy*. RT Kelly, Sydney, 1903. p. not recorded.

33 Rogers, Dr. A. (ed.) *The Guinness Guide to Peoples and Cultures*. Guinness Publishing, Middlesex, 1992. p. 33.

## CHAPTER TWO THE LUCKY COUNTRY

Donald Horne's phrase *The Lucky Country*<sup>34</sup> described Australia to the European immigrants post WWII as a land of opportunity, also hinting at the luck one would acquire by joining a nation of gamblers. However, though gambling may be a national pastime, Anglo-Australians have very few symbols of good luck and do not place much importance on bad luck. The Chinese however, have a very serious attitude to luck, and many of their customs and traditions reflect this. Other cultures within Australia, such as Italian, Vietnamese and indigenous communities have a significant place for luck and superstition, and a decided aversion to creating bad luck. Underestimation of the importance of colour association with luck for some cultures can cause genuine offence.

### ***You Lucky Bastard***

It would seem that the predominant Anglo-Celtic traditions strenuously upheld in this country, underestimate the strength of feelings toward luck, and this is one of the major causes of cultural misunderstanding. The attitude of the Anglo-Celtic Australian is that luck is something that happens to someone else. It is an elusive thing that pops up every now and again and there is nothing that can be done to alter it. They adhere to their lucky numbers for weekly lotto draws, and in casinos people can get quite particular about lucky machines, but the Anglo-Celtic Australians have only lukewarm talismans of luck themselves. The idea of the seriousness of bad luck affecting business, prosperity and perhaps future generations is scoffed at. Consequently, the notion that there are certain colours that might affect luck is taken very lightly. As noted in the introduction, in 1997 the Star City Casino complex opened its doors to the waiting gamblers of Sydney Australia. As a gesture of goodwill, and to get as many patrons in the doors as possible, the organisation supplied courtesy buses to ferry them. However, the buses were painted black. The Chinese community reeled back in horror, refused to ride in them and labelled the vehicles hearses. Even though this was a European mourning colour (see appendix p. 68), the Chinese respect for the power of bad luck, no matter what culture, was clear. When it is evident that gambling is extremely popular within the Chinese community, why does this obvious lack of communication occur? Surely the whole industry revolves around luck? An opportunity was missed to research lucky talismans and symbols. It may very well be that the choice of colour for

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34 Horne, D. *The lucky country: Australia in the sixties*. Angus & Robertson, London. 1968.

the courtesy buses was due to a different meaning for black cars: that of style and respect (see appendix p. 70).

### **Strike Me Lucky**

Perhaps there is one bad luck omen that is highly respected or even feared, and that would be the power of the pointing the bone (*Tjurunga*)<sup>35</sup> in Aboriginal culture. Because it is so rarely spoken about, because it is so seldom used because it requires special permission, the pointing of the bone is to be feared. There have been recent occasions where there was a threat of a spear being pointed, for example at John Elliot after alleged racist comments. John Kelly, an Aboriginal man from Darwin warned:

*The deadliest is to point the bone and I am still considering doing that ... the curse will make John Elliot get lost ... I hope it hurts him and his AFL football side ... Collingwood was never the same after I put a curse on it.*<sup>36</sup>

It is inexplicable to most white Australians, and underlines to them one of the indigenous stereotypes; that of the bush mystic medicine-man. But generally, bad luck omens are scoffed at and belittled. Some cultural rituals, including references to symbolic colour, remain secret within parts of indigenous communities and the mystery that surrounds these practices somewhat enhances their power to the outsider.

In Broome, at the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council Incorporated Health Promotions Unit, I spoke to the artistic director of Desert Acrobats, Owen Maher, who says the colour blue is lucky in his mob:

*... a blue light is more like a good omen for us. That's gonna be like a safety type of thing. When we used to do a lot of travelling ... Dad used to always tell us that if we get to see light that is either red, that is bad. If we see the blue light then we know we're going to have easy travelling.*<sup>37</sup>

Where Owen grew up, when teaching dancing, he was not allowed to wear the red *nuggas* (loincloths) that most traditional dancers would wear because it is a bad omen. However, in any of the performances that he does, if the youths are able to use it from their own tribe, he allows it; but usually he will not choreograph a red *nugga*. This is a tribal law. Kylie Cook, who is a

35 Hinnells, John R. *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions*. Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1987. P. 332-333

36 *Herald-Sun*, Thursday 11 March, 1999.

37 Personal Communication.

trainee graphic designer, says that people of Japanese heritage in Broome assign bad luck to black pearls, because the Japanese pearl divers of the past had to dive to extreme depths to find them and many died in the perilous process. This aversion to black pearls still exists as bad luck omen arising from respect for the death of Japanese pearl divers. She also says that red is a colour she avoids due to superstition within her own indigenous community:

*We get in trouble for using red. Yeah 'cause there's a thing about red: Red Devil, Red Dressed Woman.*<sup>38</sup>

### ***The luck of the Irish***

Australians in general are more than happy to be at one with the luck of the Irish once a year on St. Patrick's Day. Hotels flow with Green Beer, people wear green clothes or dye their hair green. It is all in the name of fun, with no prerequisite understanding of the history involved in the custom. The original St. Patrick was probably Magnus Sucatus Patricus, but it seems the legends point to more than one Patrick, and they have become woven. There is also uncertainty regarding March 17 as the commemoration St. Patrick's birth or death.<sup>39</sup> However generally, he is known for driving the snakes out of Ireland. The Irish are often referred to as being lucky, and this luck is generally aligned with talismans such as green shamrocks and leprechauns. These symbols are used frequently to symbolise luck across a broader audience (see appendix p.76). When prominent Chinese businessman Wellington Lee, enjoyed the Irish festivities by wearing dyed green shamrocks in his greying hair, there was a wonderful sense of cross-cultural merging, symbolised with colour. Although he later admitted 'his wife would call him an idiot'.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Lucky Red Envelopes***

Luck is of paramount importance in the Chinese community. Feng Shui advisors help with placement and also colour in their homes and especially businesses. Colour has great symbolic significance to the Chinese. The three main luck colours are red, gold and green. Little envelopes containing money and given as gifts are always red for luck and happiness. Brides in China wear red as a symbol of good luck and fertility. Huge bouquets of flowers, draped in red ribbons are commonly delivered to new Chinese-owned businesses to wish them luck. For the same reason,

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38 Personal communication. Kylie Cook, trainee designer, Aboriginal Health Unit, Broome.

39 Harper, Howard V. *Days and Customs of All Faiths*. Fleet Publishing Corporation, New York. 1990. p. 79.

40 *The Age*. Saturday 18 March 2000.

red or pink should be used as gift-wrapping, as opposed to blue and white which are the colours of sadness and death. This information is critical in the realm of business gift giving.

*Tiger (Woods) ... wears red for luck when he plays ... out of a superstition handed down from his Thai mother.<sup>41</sup>*

Gold symbolises good fortune and wealth (see appendix p. 79), and green is often used in business establishments and restaurants to promote prosperity (see appendix p. 76). In an amusing episode of *Ballykissangel* an Irish television series, the town opportunist opened a Chinese restaurant where everything was blue! The wit in this is that blue is a Chinese colour of mourning and would be perceived as being very bad luck for their business.

The Vietnamese colours of good luck are red and yellow. Gold means money, royal and hopeful, and is a lucky talisman that maybe someone in your family will become royal. This stems from a legend from 1,000 years ago when the Vietnamese were influenced by a Chinese academic competition to win the hand of a princess.<sup>42</sup> Many Vietnamese people are superstitious and annually consult fortune-tellers where they are advised, according to their star sign, not to wear certain colours for the year to ensure good luck. During the first three days of the New Year, it is bad luck for Vietnamese to sew or fix clothing because it means someone in your family will die, and they are not allowed to wear the mourning colours of white or black especially at this time. During the New Year celebrations there are yellow flowers everywhere, symbolising a bright & cheerful celebration. These flowers bring luck for the year. *Mai* means luck and *hoa mai* means lucky flower. Schoolchildren all contribute to buy the best yellow flowers they can for the teacher. The intensity of the colour is bright and the sentiment is the hope of marriage, or the acquisition of a good job.

### ***As luck would have it***

There are numerous travel guides for business travellers on the market that point to some of these things. Most of these guides are American, and they are designed to assist the traveller as smoothly as possible to clinch the deal. For example, one would not present a proposal photocopied on blue paper in Chinese cultures. The association of blue with death is so important that there are even photocopying services available to the unwary business traveller, so that this mistake is not made. There are other blue associations in business dealings that the negotiator

41 *Herald Sun* Tuesday 25 July 2000.

42 Personal communication with Khue Nguyen from his discussion with a Vietnamese monk.

should avoid, such as gifts that are blue, blue wrapping paper; once again wrapping services are available. None of these things really promote an understanding or celebration of our differences, just a fast-track to an end that is driven by capital. Designing specifically with another culture in mind should require serious thought. One cannot really communicate visually if the significance of bad luck and colour is not addressed, particularly with Asian cultures. With more design studios working for the Asian market, or with studios based overseas, the need for understanding is greater than it has ever been before. Where does the designer pick up this information? In some cases, the information may come with the brief: do or do not use this colour for this particular reason. Designer Mimmo Cozzolino from Cozzolino Ellet Design D'vision says that he personally has been aware of the significance of colour in this regard for quite some time, but some of his staff were amused when a fax arrived from Asia with a list of colours not to use.<sup>43</sup> The directive of a forbidden or precise colour palette surely is an area that needs to be questioned, researched and explored. With a closer investigation into the reasons for the colour instructions it may be possible to negotiate a more complex visual message.

Some of the colour choices I made for the *Reunion* video cover and promotional material had to do with luck. Red and gold are there for luck, used minimally, but with an intensity of colour. When I designed the proposal for Lisa Wang's documentary about her family, though it was already titled *Reunion*, I focussed on her late father. David Wang had been a prominent businessman in Melbourne, and at this early time in the project there were many pictures of him and it seemed that that was what her story was about. So the use of colour is vague, grey and white, quietly spiritual (see appendix pp. 66, 79). There is a little red, but it is not dominant (see figure 1a). After the documentary was completed, it was clear that the heart of the narrative was Lisa and her cultural struggle. So the design for the final product was that of female strength and clear Chinese identity within Australia (see figure 1b). I knew that the use of purple, being opposite to the royal colour of yellow was confronting to older Chinese, having traditional connotations with barbarians. But that is precisely why I used it; to represent the need for Lisa to be seen to challenge folklore with her own values and her own ways. A woman of Lisa's generation would recognise the feminist connection straight away (see appendix p. 78), and the blatant use spiritual colours with this image would not be lost on the young Chinese. After all, her story contains many ghosts, both living and dead.

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43 Personal Communication.

### CHAPTER THREE **A BIG BROWN LAND**

Australia does not have clearly identifiable national colours. Depending on the situation, we are represented by at least four different combinations, all arriving from a different perspective: the red, white and blue of the official flag; green and gold of Olympic uniforms; black, yellow and red of the Aboriginal flag; blue and orange of sky and earth. What this does, I believe, is dilute a sense of nationhood, and demonstrates that our cultural diversity is not comfortable under the one colourful umbrella. What are the colours that stir patriotic feeling for this country?

#### ***Red, white and blue***

The Australian flag colours are shared by many other nations and are dominated by Britain and The USA; the latter very strongly in language as well. After the events of September 11, 2001, the red, white & blue was everywhere in America, as the world divided momentarily into an us and them situation. Fuelled by patriotism surely, but also to allay doubts of sympathies to the side, taxi drivers on the streets of New York bore red, white and blue so as not to be aligned with any other group in their multicultural society. Our flag has Britain's Union Jack in the corner, our link as a commonwealth country, and a further ground of the same blue bearing the white stars of the Southern Cross. If we deconstruct the elements of the flag in this way and remove the British colours, is it this white and blue of the Southern Cross that is representative of Australia? This would remind us surely of the Eureka flag that stood for a rebellious faction.

#### ***Green and gold***

During the Olympic Games, Australia is generally represented by the colours of the wattle: the yellow of the flower, green of the leaf. However it seems to be a difficult combination for the uniform designers. The colours of Australia's Olympic Games costumes have changed quite considerably from games to games. The combination of green and gold, it seems, is perplexing to work with, as it is not necessarily an aesthetic pair. So we have seen the yellow lightened off to a pale banana colour in combination with an almost black bottle green, and the weird combination at the Atlanta Olympic's of turquoise green and a yellow that was really a fluorescent lime, teamed with black. At the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, added to the green and gold in the uniforms was a pindan red; just when the whole world was focused on us, we put forward yet

another colour combination. And so the struggle goes on, fashion designer Liz Davenport<sup>44</sup> discussed it again in relation to the 2002 Commonwealth Games. The fluctuation of these combinations does nothing to reinforce national colours, but gradually adulterates the idea of the importance of a sense of belonging, and weakens it within the multicultural context. Richard Cashman, Director of the Centre for Olympic Studies at the University of NSW says it:

*... probably is confusing to people from other countries that see athletes running around in green and gold, and then if they win a Gold Medal up goes the red, white and blue flag ... sort of demonstrates that in a way that we've got, to use an Australian expression, two bob each way.*

My personal aversion to the green and gold combination stems directly from my own school uniform colours. Mandatory colours during adolescence can be a strong influence. I have recently forced myself to use them in the Melbourne Film Office CD-ROM. The CD set heralds our film and television industry to the world, so I used it in the assumption that post the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, the green and gold is beginning to sink in as our national colours. The problems faced by Olympic Uniform designers to arrive at an acceptable colour duo, I found also. My approach was to make it filmic and I searched for that ethereal blue/green seen sometimes in negative film teamed with an Academy Award gold. Not a gum and wattle, nor fresh new spring leaf green, but a magical quality I hoped would echo behind specific examples of Australian work (see figure 2).

### **Black, yellow and red**

H.M. the Queen's visit to Melbourne's Immigration Museum in 1999 was the inspiration for one of the museum's employees to show her true national colours. She told me she had rushed down to the Koorie Heritage Trust to purchase a pin bearing three vertical ribbons of red, yellow and black to show her pride in the indigenous heritage of Australia. But the royal entourage assumed she was German. Whether it is the vertical colour combination of the ribbons that caused the confusion is hard to say, but it does seem that there is a need for us to be represented and understood as a nation with a colour symbol. In a similar way athlete Kathy Freeman proudly ran draped with the flag of her indigenous heritage at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, as a colour representation for the nation. The Aboriginal flag: the black of the people, the red of the earth and the yellow of the sun; a descriptive and powerful symbol of the indigenous cultures.

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44 ABC radio June 18 2002



Australians are familiar with the flag, but the rest of the world may have been somewhat confused.

### **Blue and Gold**

Often the perception of the colours of Australia, are the colours of the sea and sand; blue and gold/orange. These colours have become synonymous with Australia within the tourism market, are exalted in photographs of beaches, sun, sand, surf, good times and warm holidays. And it is fitting to represent us in this way, because mostly our population is settled in the coastal areas. But the strong blue of the sky in combination with the orange-red earth is also used to reinforce the outback ideal of Australia. These colours of desert and sky, therefore, are a literal representation of what is seen, which is why I made it the constant background for the opening titles of *The View*. In this magazine about Australian art, heritage and science, I wanted an underlying colour connection that said Australia all the time, even though the images were constantly changing. So I developed images within the three sections that were employing this colour combination. For example a desert scene dissolves into an antique medallion on a blue velvet ground, then a painting, then a cell under a microscope (see figures 4a-4c). In the foreground are lots of images and floating text, but the Australian landscape is solidly there.

I use it again in the Efbie video presentation for South Africa. Although the imagery used is hinting at African themes, I attempt to underline the notion that this is an Australian company with the colours of sand, desert and sky. The orange of the kangaroo and paddock incorporated with the Irish heritage of red hair explores the indigenous with the first settlers in a way that is peculiarly Australian (see figure 5a). Bright red plaits with a peasant-ish use of primary colour explore the traditions of the European migrant (see figure 5b), and childlike connotations which are discussed in the following chapter. There is also a very literal use of colour throughout, camouflaging clay pindan and earth colours, grey furs and animal skins with human hair treatments (see figure 5c). In the three vertical pictures of sand (see figure 5d) I have used the colours that Susan Kurosawa sees as the indubitable Broome flag:

*The red-orange pindan soil, the white sand washed by big tides, the impossible green-blue of the water ...*<sup>45</sup>

We seem to be more comfortable marketing Australia with the warmer association of beach and outback life than the cooler green and gold combination which continues to waver in its

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45 Kurosawa, S. *RoyalAuto* (Australia) March 2000, p 21.

complexity of hues. The colours used to represent the indigenous peoples (red, gold and black of the Aboriginal flag, and the turquoise and white of the Torres Strait Islands) though more appropriate in their visual description of the land, add to the confusion of the national identity. An evolving sense of nationhood may progress to the eventual branding of Australia with a colour identity that embraces the variety of peoples that we are.

## CHAPTER FOUR WHEN I'M OLD I SHALL WEAR PURPLE

What choice is there really in what colour one wears? The colours that we wear are such a prominent means of communication, why does it feel that we have no choice? Sartorial rules are handed down from the moment we are born. The colours for gender are quite specific and the colours for young and old are just as firmly directed. Throughout school, students are shuffled from one colour-coded group to another and in business, the guidelines for dress are designed for placement within the corporate structure, allowing little room for originality and personality. When it comes to fashion, the choice is limited to marketability, and fashion directives arrive from a global decree without concession for any cultural differences or changes in direction emanating from local popular culture. All these influence the designer, underlining their symbolic colour palette and reinforcing a reactive rather than pro-active colour choice. The creative role of the designer is thus cornered into paranoiac conformity. And as more people are influenced by the predominant logos of the few global fashion empires and move further away from their religious roots and further away from the historical and religious colour associations, the meanings may become less and less important, unfortunately diminishing the rich intricacies of cultural diversity.

### ***Pink for girls and blue for boys***

The division of pink for girls and blue for boys did not eventuate until the around the time of World War I, according to the New York Times newspaper.<sup>46</sup> Before this time, the specific colours for marking a baby male or female was exactly the other way around. Pink was deemed a masculine colour, 'stronger, more decided colour' and blue, in line with Damarhar's philosophy of being associated with the feminine principle was understood to be delicate and dainty. Pastel pink and pastel blue have been so embedded in the Australian culture, that even disposable nappies are colour-coded in this way. Hospitals mark babies immediately with plastic identification wristbands that are either pink or blue. Some prospective parents choose to discover the sex of their unborn in advance specifically to determine the colour to decorate their offspring's room.

However, there seems to be a trend of switching the traditional colours for babies, perhaps to equalise the sexes with the connotations of those colours. This inversion was noted by Polixeni Papapetrou as she amassed her exhibition *Olympia's Clothes*<sup>47</sup>, a pictorial history of the clothes

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46 Garber, M. *Vested Interests: cross-dressing & cultural anxiety*. Penguin Books, London, 1992. p 1.

47 Stripp Gallery, Melbourne. 1999.

worn by her daughter in the first twelve months of her life. Papepetrou discovered that all the clothes that were blue in Olympia's wardrobe were given as gifts after she was born. Could this be an inverted colour symbolism? Of course, one could adopt a colour that would be politically correct for both sexes, a colour neither one nor the other. This shade is usually yellow, or lemon, which is seen to be the safe choice in terms of gift giving or setting up the nursery. White, of course, is another; the colour of purity. White is the colour traditionally used in the Christian ceremony of baptism (see appendix p. 66), representing innocence. Whit or White Sunday refers to baptismal clothes worn on Pentecost.<sup>48</sup> Dressing babies in black has been the most forbidden. Black, with its history of evil and death and Satan, was thought to be the most terrible colour to have near a baby, for fear of bringing bad luck or death so early in life (see appendix p. 68). Australians were absolutely horrified by the black dress previously worn by missing baby Azaria Chamberlain in 1980. The significance of the colour solidified peoples' assumptions of foul play, amid the rumours of witchcraft and sacrifice. The black lace dress (see figure 11) is now part of the exhibition *Eternity*<sup>49</sup> at the National Museum in Canberra. But even though 20 years have passed, public reaction to the colour of this dress is alarming. This is surprising, for things have changed in the baby world in the name of fashion, and stronger colours, the ones usually associated with older children, are more widely available. Bright colours such as red, green, purple and orange are to be found even in singlets and terry towelling nappies. And the most wicked of colours, the sombre black, is there as well. But this time, in this context, the black is no longer associated with death. The black is the cool, fashionable black. The child has become a fashion consumer, an accessory to match the predominantly black wardrobe of the parents, as will be discussed later in this chapter. In the name of fashion, black then becomes a popular colour choice as the opposite of what babies should wear, another carefully marketed fashion statement.

The bright colours assigned to childhood are the three primary colours of red, blue and yellow, used to decorate toys, utensils, rooms and clothing. There is a specific code that these colours, along with the secondary colours, are appropriate only for children and in any other context maintain their childlike connotation. Bright colours for children and more subdued colours for adults seem to permeate most cultures in this country, to the point that the association of bright colours with adults renders them childlike also. There is an Italian saying, according to fashion designer Maria Barbaro *sa misu i couzi russi mo*<sup>50</sup> and it translates as 'he/she has put on red pants now.' It gives an eccentricity to that person, this flashy dresser, who is not wearing the clothes

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48 Harper, *op. cit.* p. 162.

49 Stell, M. *Eternity : stories from the emotional heart of Australia*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2001. p. 15.

50 *Cantanzares se dialect in Calabria*. Personal Communication.

that are acceptable to his generation. This saying derides the older person for wearing bright colours, trying to be something he is not, something somewhat younger. Vietnamese-born graphic designer Khue Nguyen knows of a similar saying in Vietnamese. The young people sometimes quite rudely call an older person a *yamaha*, but it really has nothing to do with the brand name of motorcycles or musical instruments, they are just borrowing a word from their popular culture. The word *yamaha* sounds similar to the Vietnamese words *gia ma ham*; *gia* meaning old, *ma* meaning but, *ham* meaning doesn't behave in your age group. But the meaning of the phrase is similar to the Italian phrase: the person who wears the colours of childhood is trying too hard to be younger than he or she is; like the English mutton dressed as lamb. Within these cultures there is contempt and ridicule, mostly unspoken, for the person who is not adhering to the colour rules set down by the community. Their childlike dress sense points to a reflection of their intelligence. In the following poem, Jenny Joseph acknowledges the connection of restrained colour with sensibility, and intends not only to defy the colour constraint in the future, but also financial responsibility:

*When I am an old woman I shall wear purple  
With a red hat which doesn't go and doesn't suit me.  
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves  
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.<sup>51</sup>*

Australian comedian Barry Humphries, in the role of Edna Everage, pointed to the way Australians viewed the European immigrants as childlike simple peasants because of their use of bright colours to paint and decorate their houses. Edna would wave a brightly coloured scarf at an ethnic-looking person in the audience as a means of communication. She insinuated that that was all the amusement the new Australian would need, or even be mentally capable of, until they had grasped the English language; much the same as a small child. The character Edna Everage maintained the connection to Mother England, in the manner of a fond Aunt; respectful of the Crown, but a little wiser. She made a pretence of accepting the new Australians, it being the Christian thing to do, but saw them as little people with little ways; funny, exotic and quaint. All their habits belittled, and just tolerated until they have had time to find their feet and adopt a more civilized manner. It was important that white Australians be associated with subdued and serious colours, toned down colours so as not to be taken as childish, not serious or silly, and above all ethnic. In the *Efbee* video, I used the association of the bright colours, in this case red and blue, with an ethnic connotation in the sequence of the weaving design of plaited hair. Both

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<sup>51</sup> Jenny Joseph, *Warning*, Minchinhampton, England, 1961.

these things are reminiscent of the traditional skills of the immigrants in Australia. The floating head, reminiscent of Princess Diana, peeping through the plaits is a reminder of the association with childish innocence (see figure 5b).

*As early as 1817 the English scholar Sir William Gell had been able to assert of the Greeks that 'no nation ever exhibited a greater passion for gaudy colours'<sup>52</sup>*

Colour helped to maintain the difference between us and them. For example, the Greek and Italian women, dressed from head to toe in their mourning black. There was very little verbal communication, but the black, that powerful and most solemn symbol was stating a clear cultural difference. There is news footage of Mabel and David Wang greeting guests at the opening of their huge store in Bourke Street. It shows the then Premier of Melbourne, Arthur Caldwell's wife and other guests in their brown, beige, fawn hats and coats alongside Mabel in a striking red satin outfit. Clearly marking their cultural differences, this red no doubt held all sorts of other connotations to white Australians.

### ***The old school tie***

Most schools in Australia have a school uniform, bearing the school colours. Wearing the colours of your school aligns you with the culture and reputation of that school. This can endure long after the student has graduated and moved on. *The old school tie* is a phrase that is quite common in Australian business circles. Employment and business opportunities are enhanced for the businessman (as this is usually a male tradition), by the association with the coloured symbolism of the school tie. Schools are chosen for their education excellence, of course, but also most definitely for the ongoing association from grandparent, parent to child with an elite sub-culture that can provide a pathway through working life and society.

Although students may be proud of their school and what it stands for, the wearing of the school uniform, the same colour day in and day out, is tedious with no room for individuality. Students from neighbouring schools will often taunt each other with names describing the colour of their uniforms. For example, in Melbourne, the dark green and brown-stockinged Vaucluse College Girls were called tram conductors. (This was before Melbourne lost their conductors in 1997.) The boys at St. Kevin's have green and red stripes that decorate their lapels, so they are called Christmas trees. Smurfs, the blue-skinned cartoon characters, describe the blue-clad Melbourne

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52 Gage, J. *Colour and Culture: practice and meaning from antiquity to abstraction*. Thames and Hudson, London. 1993. p. 11.

Girls' Grammar uniforms; and the girls from Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School have their brown and yellow uniform referred to as shit and piss.

Within the framework of the school colours is the further division of the school house colours. House colours are usually divided into four: red, yellow, blue and green, and siblings at the same school are automatically put into the same house. Mainly used for intra-school sports and debating events, houses maintain their own hierarchy and are usually led by house captains. House captains are marked by the colour of their tribe in a similar way to school prefects or school captains. Inter-school sport teams naturally wear the colours of their school, as do minor and major league teams. In Australian Rules football, it has long been a tradition to differentiate between the home side and the away side by the wearing of black and white shorts. Black is the colour that is worn when the team is playing at home and white is worn when the team is visiting the opposition's oval. It is not clear what the symbolism is regarding this black and white, although one can assume that the white has a similar meaning to the Sunday Best clothing. White shorts obviously require a more particular laundering process, as they mark more easily, and so become more precious as an article of clothing, the sort that is only worn on special occasions. Football teams and their supporters drape themselves in their team colours. Mass merchandising assists the supporters in their tribal markings: face-paint, scarves, jumpers, hats, bags and umbrellas. Visual identification is very important to the football culture, and similar to school house colours, members of the same family are often initiated into supporting the same team by the giving of ribbons, tiny football jumpers and club membership, to the newborn. Interestingly up until now, green has never been used as a team colour for any Australian Rules club (see appendix p. 76). There was recently speculation of the colour being introduced as part of the new uniform for one of the newly merged teams, but no reason was given as to why it has never been used before. It might derive from the strong symbolic representation of the Irish Catholic.

When designing the website for Trinity Grammar School (see figure 6a), I was faced with the task of utilising their school colours. My aspiration when designing a school site is to communicate three important qualities: what sort of school, size of school, and its speciality. Trinity is a boys' school, is large, and using specialist subjects, aims to produce a sensitive, caring boy. The main school colour was an olive green, but I chose not use it for the major background colour. There are many strong associations with the colour green, but the most important connotation I wanted to avoid this time was with the military. That, I felt, would influence the overall perception of the school before anything else. I used the green in the crest and headings relating to the main sections of the school. My choice for the black background had to be one of respect, association with the Church, and the Melbourne tradition. Other colours used in the site are strong hues,

similar to house colours, but with definite symbolic meaning (see figure 6b). Gold, being another school colour, was used for excellence and bright ideas; purple for its meanings in art and religion; orange for humility and fortune (see appendix p. 77).

### ***Marry in white, you've chosen right***

*Something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue and some money in her shoe*<sup>53</sup>

Australian weddings mostly follow the Christian style of dress: White gown and veil for the bride, and black for the groom. In Vietnamese weddings, the brides wear red dresses with gold patterns: either red on gold or gold on red. The red is for a successful marriage, to expand the family and relationship with other people, connecting with the community, with good people, developing a generation. The wedding car is never white or black as it is in most Australian weddings, but a colourful car, with lots of bright, colourful flowers. Weddings have to use red candles, funerals use white candles. A Vietnamese-born designer married recently and a Chinese woman who was invited to the wedding asked if it was okay if she wore black, because most of her formal wear was black. He said although he personally would not mind, if a lot of people wore black it would not be good. So, seeing as she had asked, he requested that she not do so. Better to wear something colourful and bright for happiness. The Travellers' and Business Guide to Asia and Australia advises not to wear white at Chinese weddings<sup>54</sup> because of the association with white and death (see appendix p. 66).

In the Roman Catholic Church, girls dress in white as miniature brides, complete with veils, as a symbol of purity for the ritual of confirmation. Author Connie McDonald writes that when she was among sixteen girls being confirmed at the Aboriginal mission, there no white material, so the dresses were made from pink.

*As Aboriginal people love colour, it didn't matter to us girls that we weren't dressed in white, as long as we were confirmed.*<sup>55</sup>

Black is worn as a mark of respect in many cultures, and the garments are sometimes known as *widow's weeds*.<sup>56</sup> Although this is common in funerals in Australia, it is seldom frowned upon not

53 Harper, *op. cit.* p. 383.

54 Devine, E and Braganti, N. *The Travellers' and Business Guide to Asia and Australia*. Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1987. p. 48.

55 McDonald, *op. cit.* pp. 27-28.

56 Brusatin, M. *A History of Colors*. Translated by Robert H. Hopcke and Paul Schwartz. Shambhala Publications, Boston. 1991. p. 130.



to wear black, especially with younger people. But in the tradition of society life there is an expectation that the custom will be observed (see appendix p. 68). Following the death of the Queen Mother in 2002, viewers bombarded the BBC with complaints about newsreader Peter Sissons' failure to wear a black tie in announcing her demise. HRH Prince Charles however, wore a black tie for his solemn address to the nation. In both Greek and Italian cultures, widows wear black as a sign of mourning for the remainder of their lives. Vietnamese hearses are black, but white is also for funerals. Depending on the level of the relationship to the deceased, people wear white, like a coat or a dress over their clothes. This garment is made especially for the event, usually out of thin cotton and is thrown away after the occasion. A black piece of cloth is worn on the clothing every day for a year after the death. This is linked with the superstition of not being allowed to sew or fix clothing in the first three days of the New Year because it means someone in your family will die. In Broome, Owen Maher recalls that 'most people up here when they go to funerals wear black pants or skirts and white shirts.' He thinks it derives from the Catholic influence, but it is interesting nonetheless that here is a distinct joining of cultural colour association with mourning; white in Aboriginal culture, black in Anglo-Celtic. The designers at the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services produced a pamphlet about grieving using illustrations of people dressed this way (see figure 12). The background image of the texture of rock is symbolic also, as rocks are used to hit the forehead during the grieving process.

### ***You are what you wear***

The colours of dress often signify our role in society. In the movies the bad guys wear black hats, the good guys wear white, and the men in the white coats come to take us away to a sanatorium. A coward is described as having a yellow streak down his back. Office-workers are white-collared workers, while labourers are blue-collared. The Chinese had Red Guards, Mussolini's men were known as black-shirts, and the suffragettes wore purple (see appendix p. 78). Whether by royal or political decree, requirements of the business organization, or self-proclaimed, these colour signals exist to influence the marking of place or profession.

*An Australian immigration officer denied a Somali microbiologist entry to New Zealand because he believed the man's sky blue suit and yellow socks were not the clothes of a real scientist.<sup>57</sup>*

Guides for business people stress the wearing of conservative, muted colours for both men and women. Australian companies have their own sartorial codes, and they may be even stricter in Asian countries. In Malaysia and Singapore, for instance, it would cause huge offence to wear yellow; it is their colour for royalty (see appendix p. 72).

*Avoid loud and flashy styles. To the Japanese, they show a lack of both breeding and seriousness.*<sup>58</sup>

Sartorial rules have been around for a long time. The Medieval and Renaissance sumptuary laws were organized to define societal rank and gender. But it was throughout the reign of Elizabeth I that the most royal orders regarding dress were proclaimed; more than any other time in British history. The rules were specific for Knights and Knight's wives, Earls, countesses, and Gentlemen earning beyond a certain salary, to name a few. The colours symbolising their rank was specific and there were heavy penalties for those dressed out of code.<sup>59</sup>

*none shall wear ... cloth of gold, sylver tissued, silke of purple color ... except earls and above that rank and Knights of the Garter in their purple mantles.*<sup>60</sup>

The colour purple specifically, and its connotation with high esteem, was first introduced in Roman times (see appendix p. 77). The conchylian dye was extremely expensive and robes or even stripes using that colour were specific to royal or senator level. 'For anyone else to wear purple was tantamount to their plotting against the state.'<sup>61</sup> But by the fifth century, there was a rampant black market trade in cloth of that hue. Purple was competing with gold in monetary value.<sup>62</sup>

In Christian orders, brown garments representing humility, and a closeness to the earth (see appendix p. 78), were worn by monks.<sup>63</sup> Buddhist monks wear the colour saffron yellow (see appendix p. 72), for the same symbolic reason.<sup>64</sup> The Heraldic colours were used not only to mark the tribe of the wearer, but also the moral values. The poem *Ordene de Chevalerie*, from mid 13th century states:

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58 Devine and Braganti, *op. cit.* p. 120-121.

59 Garber, M, *op. cit.* p. 26.

60 *ibid.* p. 26.

61 Gage, *op. cit.* p. 25.

62 Brusatin, *op. cit.* p. 33-34.

63 Tresidder, J. *The Hutchinson Dictionary of Symbols*. Helicon, Oxford, 1997. p. 31.

64 Walch, M. and Hope, A. *Living Colors: the definitive guide to color palettes through the ages*. Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1995. p. 150.

*A knight would first be dressed in a white robe to show his cleanliness of body, then in a scarlet cloak to remind him of his duty to shed blood in the defence of the Church ... brown stockings to remind him of the earth in which he must finally lie ... a white girdle to signify chastity.*<sup>65</sup>

Sometimes the symbolic value of colours arises purely from availability. The origin of the wearing of tartan relates directly to the clans in Scotland, and the colours derive from dyestuffs that were available locally. Over time the colours, rather than the designs in tartans have changed. In Victorian times there was a preference for the darker tones in tartans, but in more recent times the brighter colours have been popular.<sup>66</sup>

The marking of Jews with colour dates back to the 1300s, requiring an 'O of red cloth' to be worn in Pisa; in Rome, red overshirts; and later in Venice, yellow cord circles. This continued throughout Italy during the Renaissance.<sup>67</sup> This stigmatizing was prevalent in Europe during WWII. In Hitler's concentration camps there was an attempt to use colour to create a social hierarchy. Prisoners were branded with coloured triangles according to the reason for their incarceration. Two yellow triangles overlapping to form a Star of David was the symbol for a Jew; pink inverted triangles were for homosexuals (see appendix p. 78); a black triangle branded subversive females, (lesbian, prostitute, anti-social, refusal to bear children); a yellow Star of David underneath a pink triangle was for what was regarded as the lowest of all prisoners: the gay Jew. In recent times the black and pink triangles have been reclaimed and pointed upwards as a symbol of gay pride.

In 1947 after the strict war rationing of colours and fabrics, Christian Dior's *New Look*<sup>68</sup> was a symbol of affluence. Firstly, for the vast amount of fabric in each garment, and secondly for the soft, pastel colours; after all, not many homes had washing machines. Such high maintenance in clothes was also evident in the early pearling days of Broome, when Pearl Masters wore white suede shoes and white suits every day to distinguish themselves as the elite in the community, even though the rich red dust permeates everything. The following is an extract from a handmade book found in the Broome Museum. The paragraph is typewritten, not dated and there is no mention of the author:

*And Mission trained Aboriginal Servants catered for the comfort of the Master Pearlmen in their resplendent homes. In addition seven Japanese laundries helped to*

65 Gage, *op. cit.* p. 84.

66 Walch and Hope, *op. cit.* p. 76.

67 Garber, *op. cit.* p. 224.

68 Walch and Hope, *op. cit.* p. 107.

*maintain fresh supplies of tailored made whites. High necked suits of the Master Pearlars – in the red of Broome they often changed their white suede shoes seven or eight times a day in an effort to maintain their aura of sartorial elegance and prestige. (H. Hunter, a well-known pioneer pearling master owned seventeen pairs of shoes which his Malay servant bleached each night.) (The cost of laundering a dozen tropical white suits was ten shillings a week.)*<sup>69</sup>

It is hard to imagine the difficulty in the laundering process of white suede shoes, but nonetheless ironic that this colour difference had to be maintained by the Aboriginal, Japanese and Malay people of the district.

### **Only prostitutes wear red shoes**

'Women who wear red shoes are prostitutes' was the warning many young girls growing up in Australia received from their mothers. The reason for the connection of red footwear and sex workers is not clear, but possibly the red of the scarlet woman (see p. 71). The colour is often used in regard to sex. Desmond Morris<sup>70</sup> would have us believe that it is because it is the colour of aroused lips and genitals. Perhaps that is the connotation. But the sartorial meaning is adulterous and flamboyantly, joyfully sexual, and usually concerning women only. The visible wearing of a scarlet flannel petticoat was a sure sign in Scotland that the woman was to take advantage of leap year traditions to do the proposing. The red alerted the men to give them enough time to get away.<sup>71</sup> The colour red is also used by Filipino women as part of a colour-coded message to their husbands, indicating the state of their menstrual cycles. This hugely successful method of birth control includes brown, green and white clothing to represent the different stages of the cycle. Women who work in the corporate world are advised against wearing red because it is too sexual.

Lindsay Haji Ali an artist from the Catholic Education Office in Broome told me of the connotation of women dressing in red in his community, which is more mysterious:

*I think that red represents like scary, meaning when they say 'red dressed woman' it means there's a scary lady like a devil woman. And to represent someone scary or they've seen something scary they always say 'big red eye' you know? If you said*

<sup>69</sup> Personally transcribed at the Broome Museum.

<sup>70</sup> Morris, D. *The Human Animal*. BBC Books, London, 1994. p. not recorded.

<sup>71</sup> Harper, op. cit. p. 60.

*something like you'd seen a blue dressed woman, they'd just laugh at you. But a red dressed woman is something really scary*<sup>72</sup>

A red tie used to have great significance to represent homosexuality, according to The Chicago Vice Commission report in 1909.<sup>73</sup> To wear a red tie was a signal to the like-minded. However, nowadays, red ties are more likely to be found on television anchormen and politicians. The colour pink also has sexual connotations, but not the pastel pink. In 1936, a new colour Shocking Pink was developed and quickly became the signature hue of fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli. This 'iridescent cyclamen colour',<sup>74</sup> was later referred to as Hot Pink. Assigned as a sort of neon sex colour, it has since been adopted wholeheartedly by Mattel for their Barbie dolls, for her clothes, houses, vehicles, etc. The use of this vibrant pink on everything reinforces the physical sexual ideal of Barbie, and the symbolic meaning is not lost on Naomi Wolf, who suggests that Barbie's 'profession was open to speculation':

*How did we think Barbie paid for her wardrobe, her candy-apple-pink convertible and the ranch-style bachelor-girl house with the plastic rock-garden? ... I think we intuited that Barbie was something like a call-girl.*<sup>75</sup>

### **Designer black**

It is curious that when leaders emerge in the fashion and design arenas, breaking ground with creatively used colours in fabric and texture, they personally wear black. Black with all its funereal, evil and conservative association, also is assigned to style (see appendix p. 68). A conference of architects, industrial designers, graphic designers, fashion designers, curators, will mostly be a sea of black, as monotonous in its expanse as a roomful of stockbrokers. And yet these people do not represent conservatism; they are the colour learned, the ones making the colour decisions for all. They are most certainly well schooled in colour theory and they know they can put combine colours to create visual poetry. The reason these people predominantly wear black is that it is a trademark of their profession; the belonging to the tribe. This is commonly known as *designer black*. Designer black has been a fairly rigid uniform of designers since the 1980s, being very heavily influenced by the Japanese designers Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo who reintroduced black and white as couture colours. Black, however, had been an important fashion colour since

<sup>72</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>73</sup> Garber, *op. cit.* p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Walch and Hope, *op. cit.* p. 105.

<sup>75</sup> Wolf, N. *Promiscuities: A Secret History of Female Desire*. Chatto & Windus, London, 1997. p. 29

the 1500s.<sup>76</sup> This is clearly seen in paintings such as Hans Holbein's Georg Gisze (1532), Franz Hals's Man with a Cane (1633), Harmensz van Rijn's Syndics of the Cloth Guild (1662), and George Romney's Lady Isabella Hamilton (1777), for example.

*So general was the taste for black clothes among all the wealthy classes in the seventeenth century that a portrait-painter such as Franz Hals in Holland or Nicholas de Largillière in France was obliged to develop a subtle eye and a refined technique for rendering what van Gogh noticed in Hals as 'no less than twenty-seven blacks.' Largillière's procedure for painting black silk, satin and velvet was of such a carefully structured complexity that he called it 'la couleur géométrale.'*<sup>77</sup>

Designer Khue Nguyen says that when he lived in Vietnam, he never wore black or pure white for traditional reasons, but also his personality incorporates a liking for colour. When he came to Australia and only mixed with western people, he became more western and black became easier to wear. Khue once commented that after all it was easier to match your clothes when everything is black. So Khue's personal colour usage altered because there was no family around to influence him. This tribalistic sense of belonging to the cool, artistically-aware group seems so overpowering that the connotation of cool far outweighs the designers' personal expression. An interview with a number of fashion editors in SHE magazine<sup>78</sup> revealed the contents of these women's wardrobe. It was black. From their numerous shopping trips around the globe, the must-have, up-to-the-minute fashion items they bought were all black. All the shoes they own are black, the accessories are black, the pants the skirts, everything is black. Make-up designer Tracey Benussi says her friend was disallowed entry to a fashionable nightclub because his clothes were 'not black or gay-looking.'<sup>79</sup>

*Goodness is another quality that always goes with blackness. Very good people indeed, you will notice, dress altogether in black, even to gloves and neckties, and they will probably take to black shirts before long. Medium goods indulge in light trousers on weekdays, and some of them even go so far as to wear fancy waistcoats. On the other hand, people who care nothing for a future state go about in light suits; and there have been known wretches so abandoned as to wear a white hat. Such*

<sup>76</sup> Gage, *op. cit.* p. 155-156.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.* p. 155-156.

<sup>78</sup> SHE Magazine (Australia) February 1998 pp18 - 21

<sup>79</sup> Personal Communication.

*people, however, are never spoken of in genteel society, and perhaps I ought not to have referred to them here.*<sup>80</sup>

For what seemed a moment or two in 1997, the designer blacks turned to brown. Brown was hailed as the new black, not referred to as merely brown, rather it was known as bitter chocolate. But it did not last, and by the beginning of 1998 the old black was back in its rightful position on the throne. It is curious that in a time when it is chemically possible to imitate or create almost any colour, our fashion choices are so limited. The Vogue Australia headline for May 2000 was: 'It's Official. Black is the new black.' What followed was a photographic shoot of reinvented black clothes, with no official explanation. Perhaps we just assume that black is fashionable again; a funereal colour that is constantly being brought back to life (see figure 13). In the world of fashion, first brown is the new black; then grey is the new black. What does this mean? That brown or grey is set to take over the importance of the fashionable colour black? Black stands for far more than fashion. It stands for style, simplicity, authority and respect, and on the other hand solemnity, death and evil. These connotations are steeped in historic, religious and cultural beliefs that cannot be overshadowed or forgotten on the whim of the new season's colours. If grey, or one should say charcoal, is the new black, it will be momentary. Because when one examines the symbolism of the grey and brown, one finds they have their own list of associations (see appendix pp. 78-79). Just by the statement, grey is the new black, one knows that the aspiration to reach the heights of black's symbolic pinnacle, will be unachievable. Grey, neither white nor black, the grey area of the non-committal, the wishy-washy, the ghost-like transparency of colour; where does that sit with authority, respect and excellence? It is mystical, invisible, not tangible, but variable. The Herald-Sun newspaper asked the question of two fashion gurus: Is grey the new black? Such an important fashion question, needs absolute clarification for the unwary fashion victims. And fashion designer Liz Davenport answers 'Yes ... Grey is a change ... every type of grey: platinum, dove, elephant, charcoal.' While director of The Fashion Team Lucy Kiraly states 'Absolutely not ... Everything goes with black, its stylish, transeasonal, it never dates and always looks clean. It is the uniform of Melbourne.' There is a definite sartorial connection with black and Melbourne. It appears the further you go up the eastern coast, the lighter and brighter the colours become. This may have something to do with the warmer weather closer to the equator, yet even in the midst of summer, Victorians wear black. At the Melbourne premiere of Moulin Rouge the fashion colour choice was reported as 'No rouge, just the usual black.'<sup>81</sup> Perhaps we

<sup>80</sup> Jerome K. Jerome. *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*. A. L. Burt, Publisher, New York, 1886. p. not recorded.

<sup>81</sup> *The Age*. Thursday May 24 2001.

designers are actually taking a break from our work in colour decision by wearing it. As Rei Kawakubo says, she never uses colour in her collection because 'She sees enough color in life.'<sup>82</sup>

As a Melbourne-born designer, I too have been very heavily influenced by designer black, both in dress and my work. It is the primary reason for using so much of it in the Monash Faculty of Art & Design CD-ROM (see figure 7). As a neutral background to enable student work to shine from the page, the black was my first and only choice. I am certain that designer black influenced me to the extent that I disregarded other colours perceived as neutral; like beige, grey, or even white. But the choice of black, in my opinion, in underlining the arts, works so well. Standing for design simplicity or dark subversion and possibly questioning authority! The Monash University Faculty of Art & Design CD-ROM interface as well as the video also incorporates the use of colours of existing logos in a symbolic manner. In the video opening: 'who' is the yellow of bright ideas, a lightbulb in the question, the connotation is that this is the place for bright sparks. In trying to predict the outcome of Asian understanding, my assumption is that the connection with royalty and wealth would be advantageous associations too (see appendix p. 72). The word 'changing' introduces green for growth and for prosperity (see appendix p. 76). 'Degree' is in aqua, which is the old Monash colour, but also hints at truth, legality and trust (see appendix p. 74). However, 'art & design' is the main focus, so the use of the colour red heralds importance, passion, luck emotion and stop (see appendix p. 70). On the CD-ROM menu page, I used the Faculty of Art & Design colours in respect to the status of the interviewee: blue/purple for the Monash professors, the royal or first colour; yellow/gold for the industry people, achievement and enlightenment; green for the fresh graduates, new shoots and growth (see appendix p. 77). Throughout the video there is running text that is a fast moving texture, which is not intended to be read literally, but hopefully read in the symbolic sense. The colours add weight to the spoken word, for example 'I heard a lot of good things about Monash' is spoken by an overseas student and the colours of yellow & aqua represent thoughts of Australia, but also the Monash colour as well.

For every interview, there is a name super and each has a title bar that is a neutral charcoal grey with pale blue outline to identify Monash. However, the other colours used for the name supers are quite specific to the interviewee or the content of their quote. The same combination of colours is used for the Dean John Redmond, a head of department Arthur de Bono and sessional lecturer Kristin Headlam, blue and gold. These are the executive colours, like the sartorial code of the corporate shirt and tie, and signify the business end of the faculty. Blue of trust, teamed with the gold of wealth. The gold takes the edge off the funereal blue for the purpose of the Asian

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82 Walch and Hope, *op. cit.* p. 114.



audience. Glass artist Kristin McFarlane, is represented by dark red and pale green. Here I combined the historic colour of blood red (see appendix p. 70) that is very expensive and symbolic colour in glass, and the pale green of coke bottle glass of popular culture. Ben Wundersitz, graphic designer and former student, has a red/orange bar with vibrant green outline. The green is that of a fresh new spring leaf, but bent to an almost fluorescent. It is prosperous with a dance club edge. Teamed with the red of luck in business, yet starting to move towards orange, a colour shift towards new ideas, but reflecting an earthy tone. With former student, Caz Guiney, I took the liberty of incorporating the colours of feminism, turquoise green and mauve, representing women in business. I adjusted the colours to illustrate the translucence and anodisation in her jewellery work. Troy Innocent is portrayed as a bright blue bar with dull purple outline. The blue is like that rich colour through stained glass, also the luminous qualities of the computer screen, so lending itself to a curious religious quality that gives us a window into another world in the future. The purple heads towards a brown, like old dried blood, and like Troy's rune symbols, remind us of an ancient world in the past. Brad Shrimpton's colours are inspired by what he is saying in this context 'I want no less than to be a multimedia professional.' Royal gold for wealth, orange pindan earth colour for a feet on the ground feeling. Overseas student of multimedia, Genevieve Gilbert, is branded with a blatant use of the Australian colours of green and gold. What she is saying very pointedly is that she intends to take 'the heartbeat of a culture' with her when she returns to her homeland. Bernard Hoffert has the gold outline of the other lecturers, however as he speaks of international travel for students, the inside of the bar is the brown of the roots of history and religion. There was a deliberate reversal in the colour combination for Japanese visitors, Professor Takashi Nagata and Peter Lee. This enabled less emphasis on the blue because of Asian connotation of that colour. The use of the two pinks with the visiting artist Kathy Temin, is a direct link with the work in the pictured Kylie exhibition. Although conscious of the use of traditionally feminine colours I feel it does not soften her authority to use these Barbie colours because of the strength of what she is saying (her achievements so far) and her monumental sculptural surroundings.

The two television commercials submitted were created for the biennial Melbourne Art Fair. The comparison is interesting in that the use of black for Melbourne is in both, but in 1998 (see figure 8a) it was the only colour supporting the artworks. As my research in colour progressed, and dare I say, my confidence to work with colour alongside such extraordinary artworks, the Melbourne black in 2000 (see figure 8b) became more of a consolidation with the word Melbourne to stress the end frame graphic. Mostly, the other colours used derive specifically from

the artworks, but there is also colour used for travelling text which links directly to what is being said as well as harmonising in the same tonal range to work as a banner to separate the artwork from its detail. For example, when the text reads 'all different media', the use of mauve is for experimentation and comes from the exhibition buildings being the showcase for new ideas as well as the influence of old chemists; 'countries exhibiting apart from Australia, which are mostly Asian, is green for the prosperity of investors; pink continues the Sydney party 'straight after Olympic games' with reference to the Gay Mardi Gras.

The *ABC Outside Broadcast Van* video for the National Museum in Canberra (see figure 3), was a project where the brief required the use of colour to tie together a montage of early television's black and white footage. I avoided the use of colour treatments, as it did no justice to the video and would have appeared apologetic. Instead, I designed the interface as frames with fine borders of colour to accentuate symbolically what was being shown or said, with the intent of elevating the integrity of the black and white media.

## CHAPTER FIVE **BLUE AND GREEN SHOULD NEVER BE SEEN**

Designers, although schooled in colour theory and armed with their own sense of colour vision and instinct, are also influenced by the colour rules of society. From the beginning they develop colour associations from the influence of family, religion, heritage or local colour understanding. As education continues, the designer is alerted to the aspects of colour in the psychological sense, through the historic associations of colour symbolism, and influence of popular culture, but their early colour associations are never far away and can continue to impact on their work. The graphic designer, assimilating knowledge about colour either through formal education or self-discovery, may overlook the colour associations and colour rules being handed down in families, by mothers in particular. If designers acknowledge and explore their own cultural environment, they are more likely to be sympathetic to other colour meanings when designing within a cross-cultural context.

### ***Remember what mother said***

Colour rules set down by generations of mothers, because the mother is generally the main educator in families, have influenced the way society views colour choice. The female usually chooses the colours of gifts for new babies, pink or blue or the gender non-specific or safe colours of white and yellow. The mother of the family usually picks the colours of her partner's socks, underwear and ties, thus becoming an expression of what colour group she feels she would like him to belong, rather than aligning him with the group of his choice. Of course, her rules are not the only ones at play here, he may be dressed according to his work's sartorial agenda. Before the influence of popular culture takes over, the children's clothes are likely to be chosen by their mother. Even though most three-year-olds will go through a pronounced pink phase, it will be discouraged by the mother in the case of young boys and vehemently supported in the girls. The other really significant colour choices made by the female of the household are for the cars and the decoration of the family home. House paint colours, both exterior and interior, are almost always chosen by the female.

What makes her the family colour consultant? What training has she been given? Is she making these decisions because she understands colour more than anyone else in the family, or has she instinctively the better taste in colour? There has indeed been much evidence supporting the fact that women have a wider colour vocabulary than men. This is thought to be because they indulge in many more hobbies involving colour decisions than men do. Swinburne University Professor

Allan Whitfield's research into colour found that colour selection in the household is usually the domain of women.<sup>83</sup> Hobbies such as knitting, painting, photography and model making are named in a study of sex and age related differences in colour vocabulary completed in 1991, as the hobbies most pursued by women. Men, on the other hand, had fewer colour-related pastimes. The female parent is generally understood to be the most competent educator in the family and this is one of the areas of her expertise. It would seem that this is an issue rarely discussed, but a role assumed female, and strongly upheld by men inasmuch as it increases their fear in the colour decision making, thereby relinquishing their right to aesthetic appreciation.

*A Scottish shopkeeper will only sell paint to husbands if they bring a signed note from their wives, saying he's fed up with men changing paint because their wives hate the colour.*<sup>84</sup>

Primary and secondary school did not equip the mother with much inkling of colour theory. In primary schools throughout Australia colour theory is not high on the agenda, and the use of colour limited to the availability of materials in the classroom. In secondary schools, one would only touch on colour theory in an art class or discussing light in science. Primary and secondary school teachers have very limited education themselves in colour theory and so, with continued uncertainty, the fear of teaching colour goes on. The education of a design professional will most certainly involve lectures on colour theory and this is supposed to equip one with the tools to make colour decisions throughout a professional career. However, the influences of family, fashion and popular culture will influence that training enormously. So, mother plays the safe colour consultant, armed with few sayings from the previous generations to back up her decisions. She may reinforce blue and green should never be seen without a colour in between; veto dressing babies in black; insist on blue for boys and pink for girls; and counsel that the wearing of red shoes will mark you as a prostitute. In general, she will stick to the paler, staid colours so as not to draw attention to her lack of preparation in this role.

Keeping aside colour preference, there is what is referred to as colour sense. To be classified as having colour sense means that through some gift present from birth, or artistic education, a person has a knack or instinct for using colour, matching colours and decorating with colour. It is quite possible that this instinct is more pronounced in females and that therefore this colour-choosing role is handed down from generation to generation.

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83 The Australian Wednesday 8 November 2000

84 The Age ODD SPOT Saturday 2 March 1998

*'Alright we got to teachem this lot now ... From granny from mother from aunty from grandmother sister from mother-in-law, sister-in-law. We not loseem, nothing. We look after-em properly. Still we painting, dancing, singing. I not chuck it away ... everyone I teachem.'*<sup>85</sup>

When Australian mothers told their children that 'blue and green should never be seen, without a colour in between' they were in fact, imparting some sound colour theory knowledge. At that time, the dyes that were used to make blue and green were not a compatible combination, they clashed. The colour in between was to break up an unsavoury duo.

*... Alberti had specified: 'If red stands between blue and green it somehow enhances their beauty as well as its own ...'*<sup>86</sup>

But the arrival of synthetic dyes, combined with the colourful onslaught of the psychedelic 1960s, brought a whole range of bright, varying hues. Combinations of blues and greens that were closer on the colour wheel were used together in a more harmonious combination. Designer Emilio Pucci was instrumental in this change, taking his inspiration from underwater dives in the Mediterranean. He captured images with his camera and worked with dyers and chemists to achieve new, vibrant colours.<sup>87</sup> Apart from technical advances in the chemical make-up of dyes, there were other contributing factors to the new marriage of blue and greens. The psychedelic era enabled challenges in colour perception and taste to what had previously been acceptable. Fashion made a statement with colour discord, deliberately choosing colours to encourage fluctuation and optical illusion. Although a considerable time has passed, the phrase about blue and green is still repeated often.

### ***Cultural influence on designers***

Re-learning colour symbolism forces the professional designer to put aside the things that come naturally. Fashion designer Maria Barbaro convinced herself to use and even embrace the colour turquoise, even though it went against her tribal difference to do so. Her Italian-born mother had often cautioned 'don't choose turquoise, it's a Greek colour.' Gradually as she absorbed other fashion influences, she made a deliberate attempt to incorporate it into her work, although always aware of the family colour rule. Similarly, Lisa Wang, when working as a fashion designer, forced

<sup>85</sup> Napanangka, Tjama Freda. *Yarrtji: six women's stories from the Great Sandy Desert*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997. p. 189.

<sup>86</sup> Gage, *op. cit.* p. 119.

<sup>87</sup> Walch and Hope, *op. cit.* p. 111.

herself to use white in a bridal range, making a concession to her Chinese upbringing where white is used as the colour of death. She found a way to make the wedding garments personally more palatable by adding threads of gold to enhance the luck. Khue Nguyen, since he arrived from Vietnam, has changed his design palette, but only in the corporate sense. He used to use bright colours, but they were not corporate enough for his clients, so he has toned them down considerably. He now tends to use deeper, maturer colours. However, in his personal work as a painter, his palette retains the bright colours that reflect his personality and cultural background. There must be many more examples such as these where a colour connection exists, the designer may be aware of it, maybe it does not sit well with them, irks them, or a familiar cultural cringe emerges. But those that acknowledge the influences and incorporate them into their work, surely will advance their artistic journey to another level.

*Global culture, from Disneyland to Coca-Cola, from baseball to the World Wide Web, influences us, distracts us from the world of our senses and from our local conditions.<sup>88</sup>*

Many of the designers I spoke to, however, were heavily influenced only by fashionable colour, and had pushed familial influences way back in their palette of colour choices. Aversion to using specific colours often came from a colour connection that was seen as *daggy* or uncool and prescribed by a previous fashion trend. For example, Melbourne graphic designer Paul Smith tries to avoid aqua, ultramarine and turquoise colours because they ‘remind me of the eighties and the ugly jewellery my mum used to have.’ This reaction to once fashionable colours is common and perpetuates, yet again, a slavish adherence by designers to a global colour directive that seems to crush individual and instinctive use of colour. Creative use of colour therefore, seems to be arrested in the design arena, awaiting further instructions.

### ***Designing Across Cultures***

What constitutes a culture? A way of living, a set of guidelines delivered by the elders, maintained by the tribe. What do graphic designers know about different cultures, especially their closest, least understood indigenous culture? The use of appropriated images in design is rampant, assisted mainly by the accessibility the internet allows, which cajoles us into believing that we design for a world stage. However, cultural differences continue to be a vital issue when designing within a

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88 Hawthorne, S. *Wild Politics*. Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2002. p. 25.

cross-cultural context. An appreciation of the intricacies of different countries is necessary to ensure that efficient communication is made.

*Business is global. People are different. Communication means survival...*<sup>89</sup>

When designers are faced with the task of designing across cultures, they often delve into their own familiar perceptions of that culture, and perpetuate a stereotype; they copy that cultural style without understanding the meaning or history. In *Cross-Cultural Design*, Steiner and Haas tell us that there are three stages in the cross-cultural design process: Quotation, using foreign images to be exotic; Mimicry, trying to re-create the same style; and Transformation, assimilating the influence and making it personal.

The propensity to mimic, particularly in regard to Aboriginal symbols, motifs and designs continues to be used without understanding, consultation, permission, or contextual placement. Designers have plagiarised indigenous symbols for commercial use for years, and throughout the time that Aboriginal children were being stolen, the image of the bush piccaninny was in constant use on ashtrays, curtains and other household ephemera. Often an Aboriginal style, usually the dot painting of the Pitjantjatjara in ochre colours, is used to represent Australia as an entity. Comparably, to represent Asian cultures, Japanese and Chinese calligraphic characters are employed in Western designs, while odd English words or phrases decorate T-shirts and the like in Asian countries; neither seems to be concerned for meaning or their implication.

Some designers, however, deal with the intricacies of appropriation on a day-to-day basis. Samantha Cook, graphic designer for Magabala Books in Broome:

*It's something that you have to be aware of when you're dealing with different communities. So that for example, if you're doing a book from a specific area, you're not using someone else's designs; and that gets checked by the communities ... like the colours of nuggas and stuff.*<sup>90</sup>

Samantha gave an example of working on a women's book from the Warmun community, and they had originally sent in some rough drawings in pencil. When she had called out to the community to see what medium the women were currently using, they were using ochres, but could not get the same imagery because they cannot paint contemporary images in ochres; earth colours are for traditional painting.

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89 Steiner, H. and Haas, K. *Cross-Cultural Design: communicating in the global marketplace*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1995. p. viii.

90 Personal communication.

*I suspect that there would be unwritten guidelines that wouldn't be heard of or promoted, especially to do with death and the like, like that. So you wouldn't generally hear about it ... there's even certain colours which indicate different stages of different processes that I really can't talk about which is very distinct if you know what that colour symbolises in that part of that ceremony. But they are very earth colours..<sup>91</sup>*

At the Designex conference in Sydney 1998, Designer Virginia Lee spoke of the difficulty she had professionally with the combination of shape and colour. Designing for a huge shopping complex in Malaysia, the colour green she had chosen was unacceptable in combination with the cross shape she had designed due to a religious connotation. This caused a great deal of embarrassment, delayed the process and invited the perception of a lack of cultural education.

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91 Personal communication.



## CONCLUSION **ALL ARE ONE?**

In the initial stages of this investigation, I thought it would be possible to codify cultural colour, to create a reference of the specific meanings of each colour within each cultural group. But through this studio research I have discovered that it is not possible; indeed it would only serve to promote a formulaic structure, which would in turn inhibit individuality. Would we not then all brand a culture with a colour in a corporate sense like Coke or Kodak? Surely it is up to us to discover and celebrate the complexities of difference and utilise them sensitively to create? When designers aspire to the global uniformity that aligns them with a product and its specific image, communication becomes no longer inspirational, but prescriptive.

There is a huge prospective area of research within the area of cultural colour. It is surprising how few graphic designers are aware of its significance. The inherent standardisation in design that results from being financially directed to achieve the broadest possible reach is not only limiting, but potentially demoralising. It encourages a global uniformity where awareness of colour communication in regard to ethnicity is devalued and we are herded into the slavish use of fashionable colour. To achieve creative empowerment, the designer has to embrace the complexities of their own heritage, celebrate the differences of others and finally use this information to inform their own work. Colour theory education at tertiary level can certainly improve our understanding of each other, making use of colour, image, design in a more poetic manner.

*It is argued that one of the consequences of globalisation will be the end of cultural diversity, and the triumph of a uni-polar culture serving the needs of transnational corporations. Hence the world drinks Coca-Cola, watches American movies and eats American junk food.<sup>92</sup>*

How creative and intricate the communication is when one plays around with colour, image and text in context within a culture one knows well. When a designer dabbles into another culture's symbolism and history for a design solution, surely (given tight time restraints) the design will be at kindergarten level; just beginning to learn the visual language. It is not possible to produce work that is sophisticated, unless there is an understanding of that culture.

*You must know your audience if you wish to surprise them<sup>93</sup>*

<sup>92</sup> [www.globalisationguide.org](http://www.globalisationguide.org) Quote from The Australian APEC Study Centre, a unit of Monash University in Melbourne.

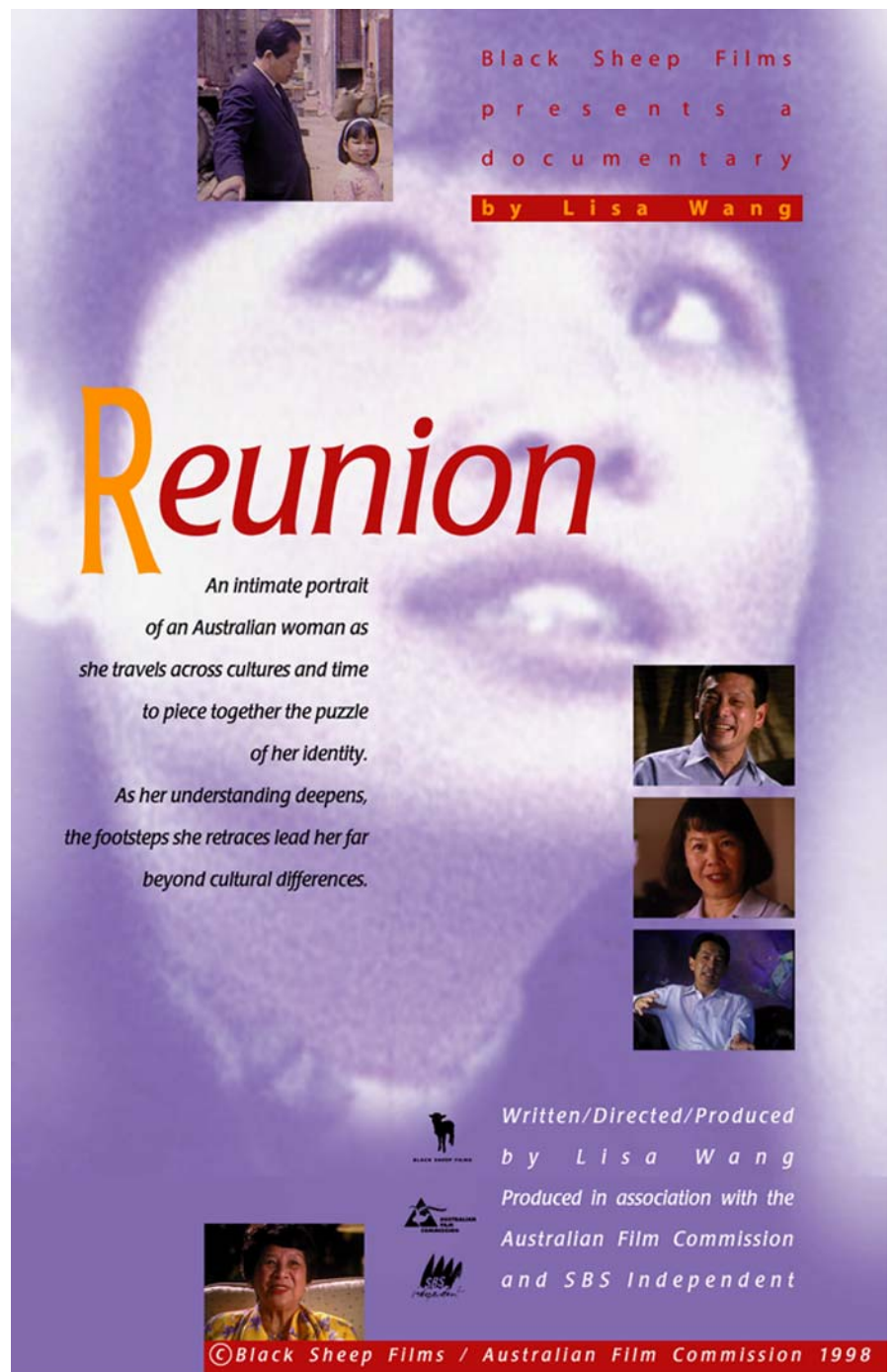
<sup>93</sup> Steiner, H. and Haas, K. 1995. *Cross-Cultural Design: communicating in the global marketplace*. Thames and Hudson, London.

Comprehension can give rise to very sophisticated and witty design work. The understanding of symbolic colour significance can be played like a very subtle musical instrument. So often the use of colour to represent or attract specific cultural groups is repetitive and imitative. If the audience has the benefit of the understanding of both cultures then they are a step ahead of the designer who is trying to reach, communicate, delight or surprise them. The visual seduction that is video and multimedia, allows a creative freedom to persuade and inform the viewer and within this framework, with cultural sensitivity, the art director can shift perceptions and ferry the viewer to a specific destination. Informed colour choice assists in the journey, but finding artistic expression in the differences benefits not only communication, but social interaction. It allows us to open up and explore our individual cultural palette, with the authority of creativity.

FIGURE 1a

*Reunion* proposal cover

FIGURE 1b



Reunion video cover

FIGURE 2



Melbourne Film Office CD-ROM disc2

FIGURE 3



*ABC Outside Broadcast Van Video, National Museum of Australia*

FIGURE 4a

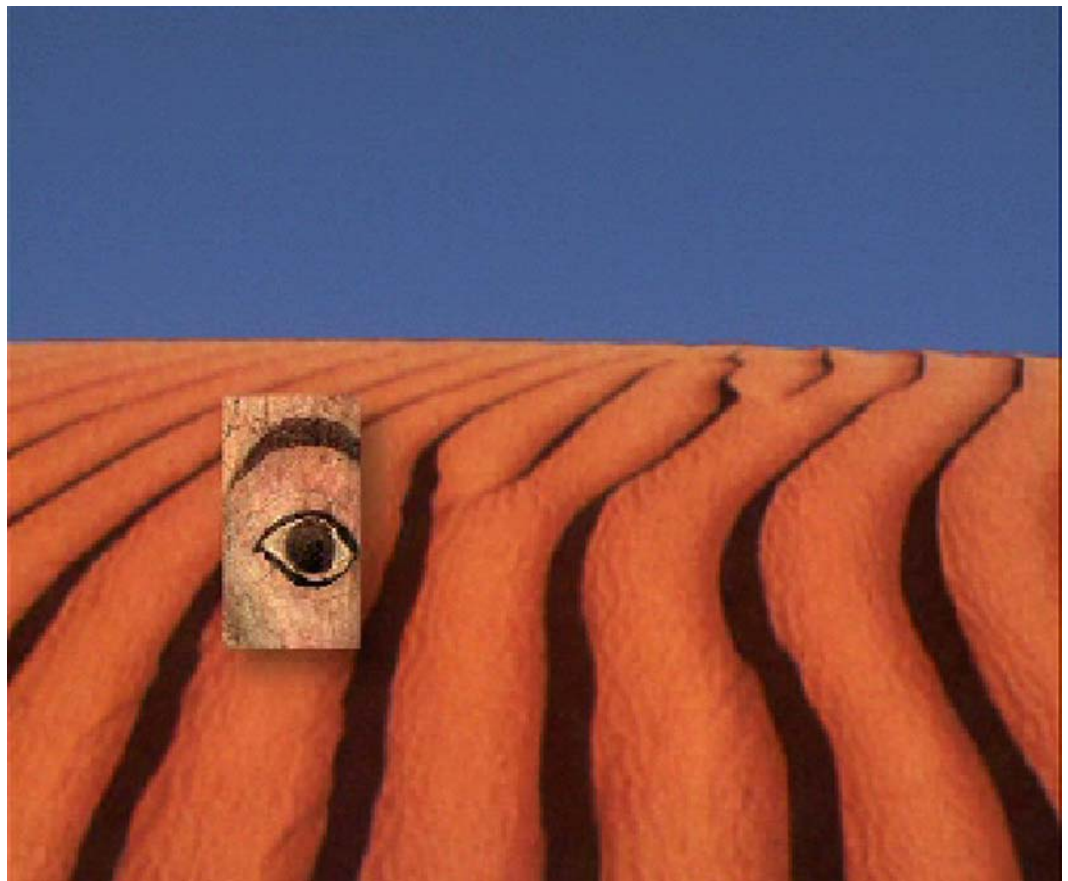
*The View* television opening title sequence



FIGURE 4b

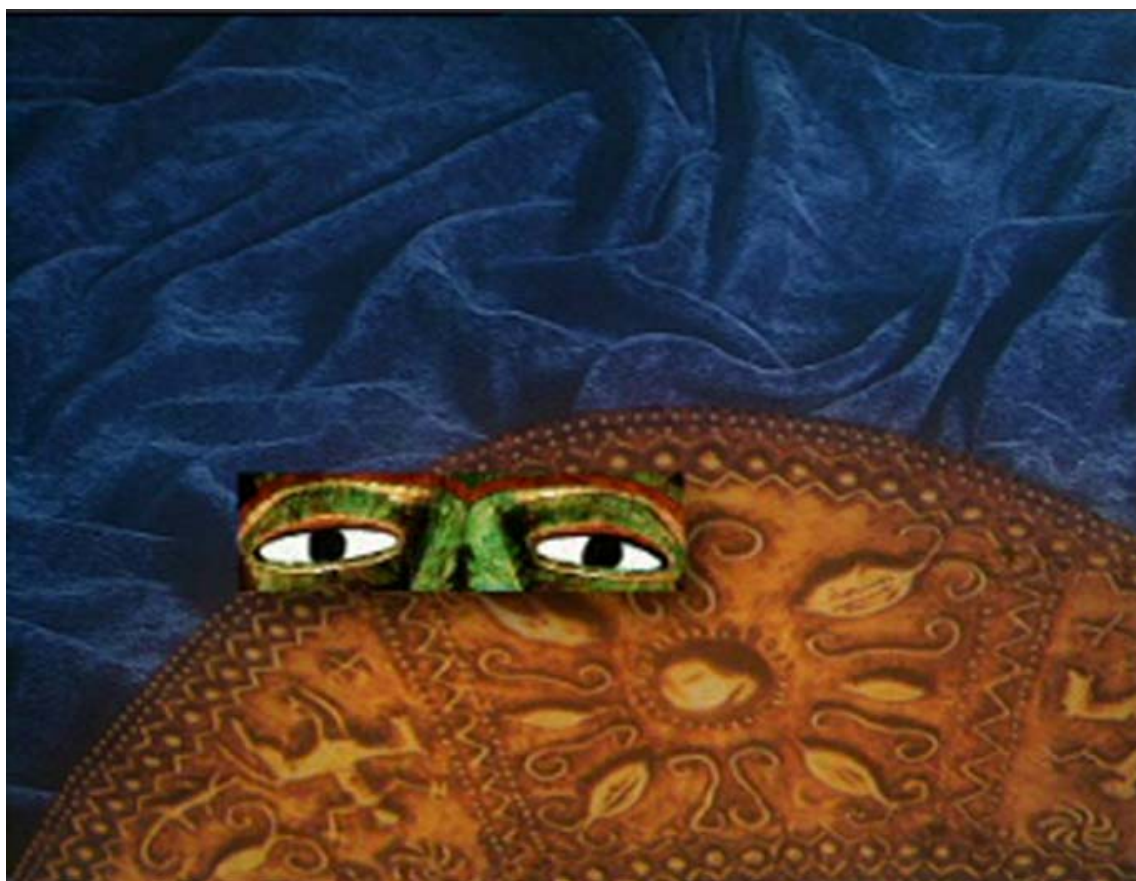
*The View television opening title sequence*



FIGURE 4c

*The View* television opening title sequence

FIGURE 5a



*Efbee* video presentation

FIGURE 5b

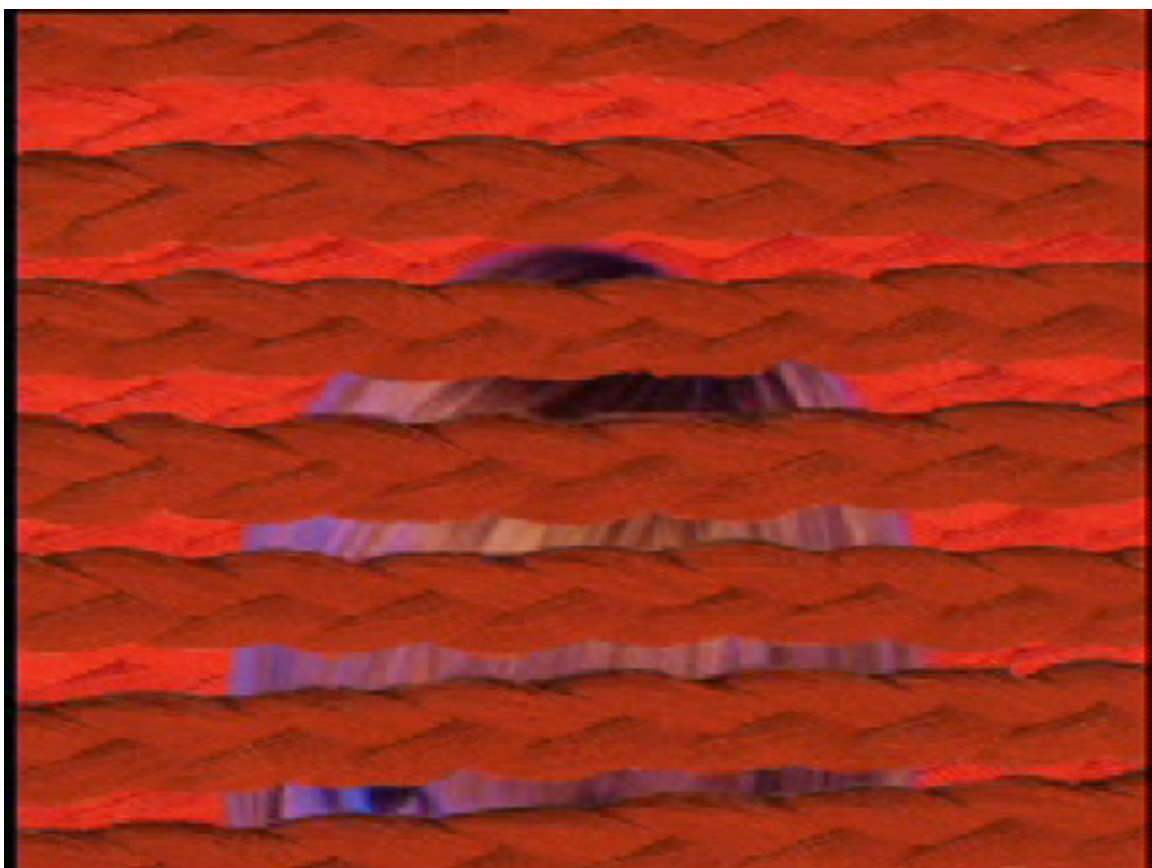
*Efbee* video presentation

FIGURE 5c



*Efbee* video presentation

FIGURE 5d



*Efbee* video presentation

FIGURE 6a

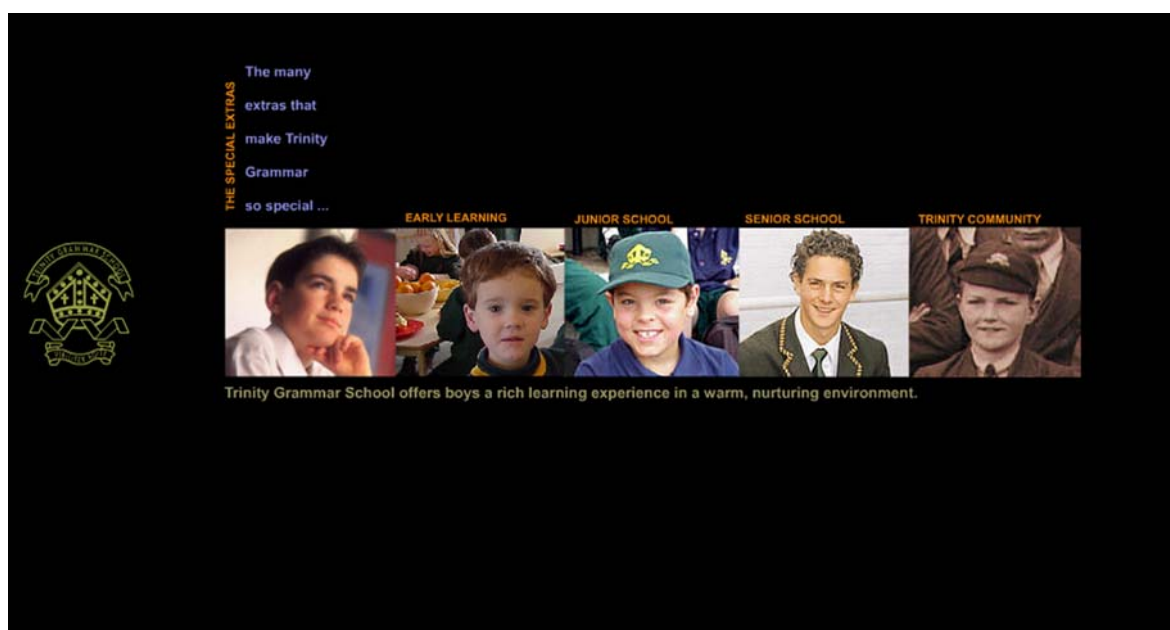
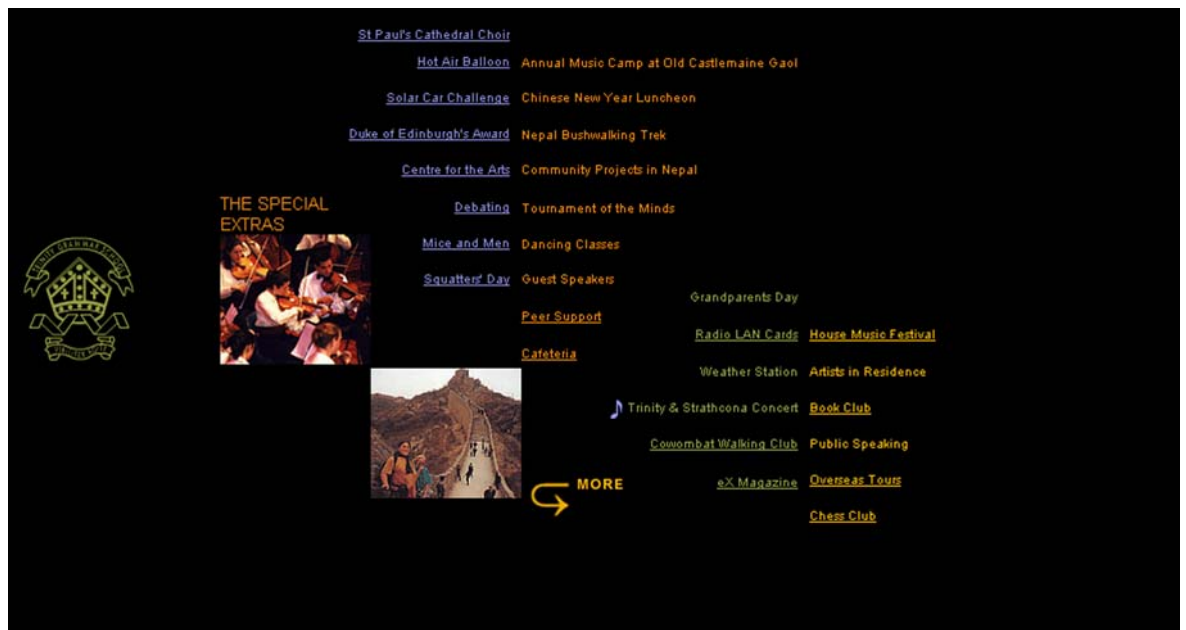
*Trinity Grammar School website*



FIGURE 6b



Trinity Grammar School website

FIGURE 7



Monash University Faculty of Art &amp; Design CD-ROM



FIGURE 8a

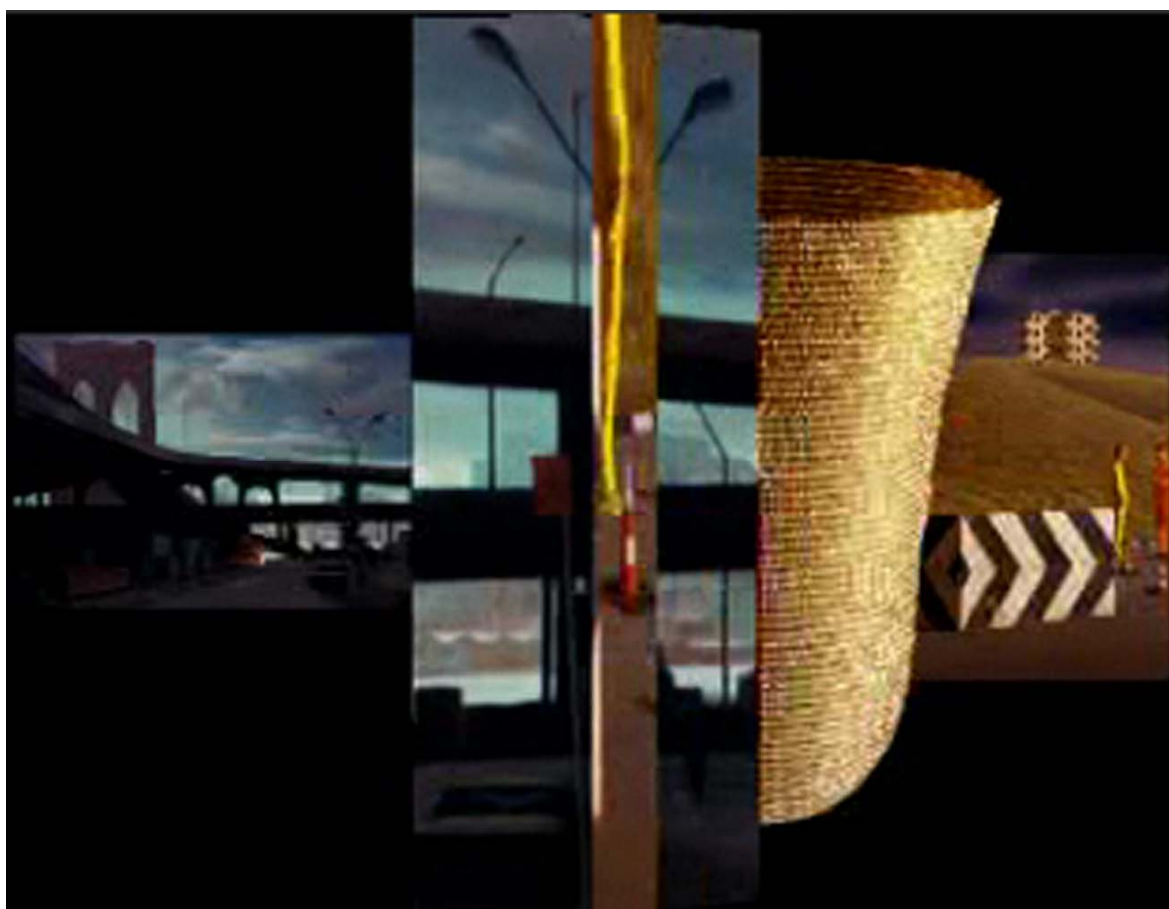
*Australian Contemporary Art Fair 1998 television commercial*

FIGURE 8b

*Melbourne Art Fair 2000 television commercial*

FIGURE 9



Cartoon by Neil, originally published in the Melbourne newspaper *The Sun*.  
Reproduced from *There goes the Neighbourhood*, M. Dugan & J Szwarc.

FIGURE 10a



Published *The Bulletin*, 21 August 1886.

FIGURE 10b



Published *Boomerang*, 14 July 1888

FIGURE | |



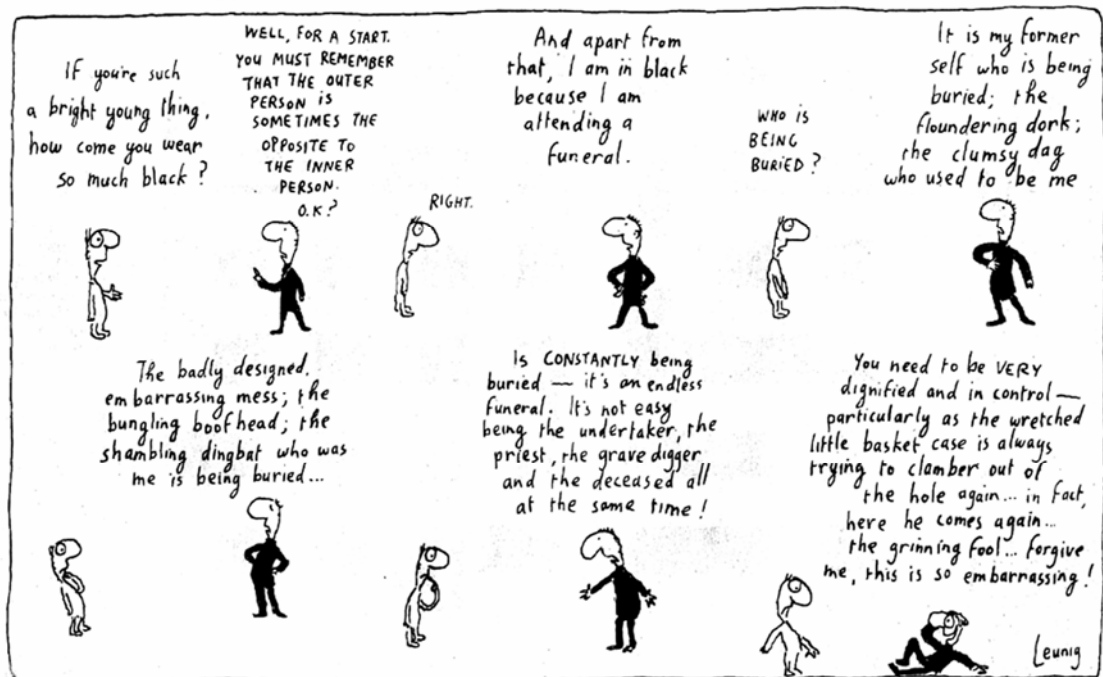
*Eternity* exhibition. National Museum of Australia.

FIGURE 12



Brochure produced by The Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council Incorporated  
Health Promotions Unit

FIGURE 13

Michael Leunig cartoon. *The Age Saturday Extra* 8 August 1998.

## APPENDIX COLOURFUL LANGUAGE

Throughout history there has been much significance placed on the meaning of colours. Until the advent of language, colour helped distinguish between what was safe to eat and poisonous, who was the enemy and who was a friend. Colour was not recognised as a separate entity, but taken as part of the object.<sup>94</sup> In the past, colour symbolism derived from religion, status and availability, and these have had great influence. What follows is an exploration the symbolic history, and some Australian colloquial usage of each colour in isolation. Starting with the three original three sacred colours signifying the trinity of the Goddess as Virgin (white), Mother (red), and Crone (black), which continued as symbols later in Christianity when veils of these colours were laid on the Christmas altars and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Handbook of Christian Symbolism declared that:

*... white is 'the first of the canonical colors' representing purity, innocence, virginity, faith, life, and light; red is the color of 'suffering and martyrdom for the faith, and the supreme sacrifice of Christ'; and black is 'also a canonical color, emblem of death and mourning', to be used in the church on Good Friday.*<sup>95</sup>

### White Spirit

White is almost universal in its symbolism of peace. After all, the raising of a white flag in the absence of shared language will communicate peace in times of conflict. White also stands for purity and sacredness, particularly in the Christian church, hence its use in baptisms, weddings and the priesthood. Animals used as a sacrifice are often white. Against evil forces or black magic, white magic is used for healing purposes. The 'Madonna Lily' (*lilium candidum*) is a symbol of purity and of the Virgin Mary, and a white rose symbolises virginity. A spiritual colour, white is mostly associated with sacredness and devotion:

*Jesus, on a visit to a dyeworks, throws seventy-two colours into the vat and brings them all out white.*<sup>96</sup>

94 Kuehni, R. *Color: Essence and Logic*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1983. p.122

95 Walker, *op. cit.* p. 89.

96 Gage, *op. cit.* p. 64.



### **White Death**

Combined with red, it may signify death; even today there is a superstition among some nursing staff that red and white flowers brought onto the ward is bad luck, red being symbolic of blood, and white of the shroud. Ghosts thought to be white because it is the colour that conceals nothing. It is the colour of mourning for most of Asia.<sup>97</sup>

*In the South Seas, islanders wore white and black stripes as an expression of how hope and sorrow, light and darkness, life and death, are never far apart.*<sup>98</sup>

White is an ancient mourning colour of Rome, and the English king Henry VIII reputedly wore it after he had his second wife, Anne Boleyn, beheaded in 1536. (She had worn yellow, allegedly for elation, in mourning for her predecessor, Catherine of Aragon.)<sup>99</sup>

### **White Elephants**

My mother was horrified when my brother brought home a large china white elephant from a school fair. We had to get rid of it because she said it was bad luck. Some fairs still have 'white elephant stalls', where unwanted and useless goods are sold. The phrase is from Asia, where the rare white elephants are regarded as sacred. The king of Siam is alleged to have given a white elephant to an unwanted courtier, but the exorbitant cost of maintaining the animal, in the manner due to its sacred status, ruined the courtier.<sup>100</sup>

### **White Feathers**

During wartime in Australia, men not seen actively involved in the war, were often sent or given a white feather. Left anonymously in a letterbox or elsewhere, the feather always symbolised cowardice. It stems from the colour white, being without colour, as a coward's liver which in ancient times was believed to be bloodless; hence the expression lily-livered. In cock-fighting, the feathers of the purebred gamecocks, were red and black. Yet a single white feather in a cock's tail meant impurity, and the likelihood that the bird would lack courage.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 209

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 208

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p. 209

### **Black Evil**

In Hollywood westerns, the heroes wear white hats and the villains wear the black. Television characters such as Zorro in his swirling cape, and Morticia Addams in her snakelike sheath, and the ninjas of *The Samurai*, all wore black, but somehow extended the notion even further with dangerous and mystical powers. Vampires wear black, robbers wear black; in the world of good guys and bad guys the sartorial stage is set. As black as night, as black as coal, as black as the ace of spades are all descriptive terms that ask one to recollect the article to determine the specific colour. However, black magic, black Friday, black Monday all involve a memory of a past event, which transforms the personality of the name.

### **Black Cats**

Superstitions surrounding black cats come from the belief that witches could transform into cats and that their choice of colour was black. So the bad luck is associated with a witch crossing your path. Regarded as lucky in Japan, a black cat is also considered an omen for a good voyage and therefore lucky for sailors.<sup>102</sup> There are good luck associations with cats on stage in theatre, but not backstage.<sup>103</sup>

### **Black Mourning**

Jewellery made of Jet, a semi-precious stone commonly used by those in mourning in Victorian times. Queen Victoria in perpetual mourning after her husband's death, thought that displaying bright jewellery showed a lack of respect for the deceased and this led to a fashion in jet jewellery. In late 19th century jet became symbol of love for lost friend associated with death and mourning.<sup>104</sup> The custom of wearing a black band around the left sleeve as a sign of mourning in some English-speaking countries comes from medieval times, when a knight's lady would tie a scarf around his arm to bind him symbolically to serve her. Thus the scarf became a symbol of loyalty to the departed, even to the grave. One of the five colours prescribed in 1200 by the 176th pope, Innocent III (1198 - 1216), for the Christian calendar, it was used for Good Friday and funerals. It was recently discontinued, as the Church accepts a wider cultural congregation

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<sup>102</sup> Harris, B. *The Good Luck Book. An A-Z guide to charms and symbols*. Ottenheimer, Maryland, 1996. p. 25.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 153.

<sup>104</sup> Bruce-Mitford, M. *The Illustrated Book of Signs & Symbols*. RD Press, Surry Hills, 1996. p. not recorded.

(e.g. black means joy in Japan). Black is often used as the colour of death, such as the black pirate flag the Jolly Roger, or the square of black material that is the Judgement cap, formerly worn by a English judges pronouncing the death sentence. The bubonic plague, is commonly known as the Black Death because the disease literally turned the body black. Black magic, or the black arts are names for what is allegedly practised by witches and wizards. The superstition of wearing black clothing or black veils for mourning and funerals was originally a disguise so that the spirit of the dead might not recognise, take or haunt them.<sup>105</sup>

### **Black War**

The name is given to the fighting between 1824 and 1831 between the settlers of Tasmania (then Van Diemen's Land) and Aboriginal people. In May 1804 some Aboriginal men, women and children, some of the first to be seen by white men in Tasmania, were hunting kangaroos. They were attacked by a group of men, under the orders of a Lieutenant Moore, resulting in a number of deaths. The incident marked the beginning of the Black War.<sup>106</sup>

### **Black Stump**

The Australian colloquialisms *Beyond the black stump* and *this side of the black stump*, are described by S.J. Baker in *The Australian Language* as meaning the outward limit of mythical distance.<sup>107</sup> The connotation of black in this context is remoteness, but is sometimes is even aligned with backwardness.

### **Black Thursday**

One of Victoria's most devastating bushfires climaxed on Thursday, 6 February 1851 and was thereafter referred to as Black Thursday.<sup>108</sup> Years later, a bleak imitation of the name appeared when the Berry Ministry in Victoria dismissed a large number of public officials. January 9, 1878 then became known as Black Wednesday.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Foley, *op.cit.* p. 203.

<sup>106</sup> author unknown. *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, vol. 2. Australian Geographic, Terrey Hills, New South Wales, 1996. p. 476.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* p. 474.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.* p. 475.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.* p. 477.

### ***Black Prestige***

Henry Ford originally 'grew' his Model T cars in black only, and the first owners of the cars were those of officials of state or royalty. Even when other colours gradually were introduced, the official cars were still black. Thus the black car became linked with importance. Black cars and limousines continue to symbolise seriousness, distinction and authority.<sup>110</sup>

### ***Red Conflict***

As the symbol of bloodshed, aggression, war, danger and revolution, red has been used for military purposes for centuries. In the British Navy, the red flag of defiance was in used as a signal to engage the enemy. According to the English vexillologist William Crampton<sup>111</sup>, the hoisting of the original Red Flag during the French revolution announced the declaration of martial law. It was adopted by the Communists in Russia and in other countries where communism found support; hence the term *Reds*. The red flag is the symbol of international socialism, and left-wing politics in general. As a symbol of danger, and stop signs worldwide, it is almost universal. A red alert is an instruction to be prepared for an emergency. In English football, showing a player a red card indicates dismissal from the field for misconduct. To see red is a common English expression that means to get angry.

### ***Red Passion***

The concept of red as the colour of love, and even virility as in *red-blooded*, derives from fire, which suggests heat and passion. In alchemy red indicated the philosopher's stone that transformed metals into gold and the end of the process of purification and spiritual elevation of the alchemist.<sup>112</sup> Curiously the passionate colour is relevant for both good and evil. As a symbol of Christ's Passion, a Christian priest wears a red chasuble. The Romans often painted the faces of their gods with red to signify divinity. An Asian red beauty spot is spiritually protective, and in Chinese theatre, red paint on the actor's face marks them as holy.<sup>113</sup> But since medieval times, Satan or the Devil has been depicted with red clothes or skin. As the colour of hellfire and damnation, unbridled passion and lust, red's association of red with virility, danger and sexual

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<sup>110</sup> Vive Magazine, Spring 1998.

<sup>111</sup> Foley. *op. cit.* p. 207.

<sup>112</sup> [http://www.damanhur.it/medicine/html/the\\_meaning\\_of\\_colours.htm](http://www.damanhur.it/medicine/html/the_meaning_of_colours.htm)

<sup>113</sup> Tresidder. *op. cit.* p. 169.

excitement makes it one of the most popular colours for flashy sports cars, a masculine success symbol.<sup>114</sup> The heart symbols on playing cards, Valentine cards and on slogans such as *I (heart) NY*, are always red. (A variation of which has been adopted by environmental organisations, for instance *I (heart) Lead-free*, with the heart coloured green).<sup>115</sup> Because red signifies energy, red was worn by Gypsies at funerals to symbolise physical life and energy. Red ochre was used in early burials to 'paint life' into the dead. The red of energy is used worldwide by the Coca-Cola for youthful vitality. The Irish poet W. B. Yeats noted that 'Red is the colour of magic in almost every country. The caps of fairies are well-nigh always red'.<sup>116</sup> We often see this colour used for mythical beings and magical things, such as Dorothy's red shoes in the *Wizard of Oz*.

### **Red Letters**

A red letter day, now a memorable or especially happy day, derives from the former custom of marking saints' or other important holy days in church calendars and almanacs in red ink. Ancient Egyptians wrote important events with red ink and red ink was also used in banks to record overdrawn accounts prompting the expression *in the red*. Red tape, synonymous with bureaucracy, alludes to the red ribbon used since the 17th century to tie together official legal or government documents. In ancient times, it was thought that to write a talisman in red would give it double the power.<sup>117</sup>

### **Scarlet Women**

Red sometimes stands for shame and disgrace. In Puritan New England in the 17th and 18th centuries, women accused of committing adultery were marked with the scarlet letter 'A'.

... a scarlet woman is a prostitute, a distant allusion to St. John's vision<sup>118</sup> of a woman in scarlet 'upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy ... drunken with the blood of the martyrs'; upon her forehead was written 'The Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth'.

The area in towns where brothels are centred is commonly known as the red light district, from the red light sometimes displayed outside.

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<sup>114</sup> *Vive Magazine*, Spring 1998.

<sup>115</sup> Foley. *op. cit.* p. 207.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.* p. 207.

<sup>117</sup> Harris. *op. cit.* p. 46.

<sup>118</sup> Revelation 17:16

### **Red Aids Ribbon**

A fine red ribbon folded into the shape of an A, to symbolise the fight against Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), was devised in 1991 by a group the New York *Visual AIDS*. The combination of the symbol and colour did indeed increase awareness. Many famous people wore the ribbon to public events and it became so widely recognised that it started the ball rolling for other causes to develop their own ribbons. All of a sudden there were blue ribbons of all colours popping up in the same shape. Rather than clearly symbolising their cause, these coloured ribbons have caused confusion in that there is not often a connection with the letter A. Now, it has become just a nifty way to fold a ribbon. An internet site for ribbon campaigns<sup>119</sup> shows 198 different protest ribbons including an on-line colour-changing ribbon for 'protesting everything'.

### **Yellow Divinity**

Buddhist monks wear saffron robes as an act of humility, since yellow is the color of the earth and worn by prisoners. Indian brides are sprinkled with with yellow tumeric, a bright hue, far removed from the earth tones, as a symbol of a civilized culture.<sup>120</sup> Yellow has solar associations and often symbolizes glory and divine power because it is the colour closest to gold. In Greek mythology, yellow is an attribute of Apollo, the sun god, and the sacred colour of Zeus, the ruler of Heaven and Earth. In China, it signifies imperial dignity and during the Ch'ing Dynasty, the last ruling dynasty of China (1644-1911) only the emperor was permitted to wear it.

### **Yellow Betrayal**

Yellow can be the colour of cowardice, jealousy, treachery and deceit. In some parts of medieval Europe, until the 16th century, yellow was daubed on the doors of felons and traitors. Cain and Judas Iscariot are commonly depicted with yellow beards in art. For example, in the painting *Betrayal of Christ* by Giotto, Judas envelops Christ in his yellow cloak.<sup>121</sup> In some Christian countries, Jews were made to dress in yellow because they betrayed Jesus, heretics condemned by the Spanish Inquisition to be burned at the stake were dressed in yellow. Cowards are said to have a yellow streak, or are yellow-bellied or yellow-livered.<sup>122</sup> While golden yellow in Islam

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.gargaro.com/ribbons.html>

<sup>120</sup> Walch and Hope. *op.cit.* p.150 .

<sup>121</sup> Bruce-Mitford. *op.cit.* p. not recorded.

<sup>122</sup> Foley. *op.cit.* p. 209.

represents wisdom and good advice, pale yellow represents deceit and betrayal. In Egypt yellow is the colour of envy and disgrace.

### **Yellow Caution**

A yellow flag or 'Yellow Jack', once a signal of capital punishment, later meant infectious disease aboard or quarantine. It is the international safety colour, and is commonly used on signage, rescue helicopters, and in some countries fire engines which were formerly red, are now yellow. Yellow implies caution in traffic signals, and international football, players are 'cautioned' with a yellow card.

### **The Yellow Peril**

Late 19th century newspapers, particularly *The Bulletin*, alarmed their readers with talk of *the Yellow Peril*, the presumed threat to Australia through Chinese immigration. The connotation of yellow as evil or bad extended to the controversy of the sculpture *Vault* by Ron Robertson-Swann in Melbourne's City Square in 1980. The sculpture was branded a 'ghastly disaster' and thereafter was nicknamed *The Yellow Peril*. Colour branding is so powerful, that once the phrase was coined in reference to the sculpture, it stuck. The piece is now commonly referred to as *The Yellow Peril*, even though the sculptor has always thought the title was 'bloody racist'.<sup>123</sup>

### **Kodak Yellow**

One of the first chromotypes was the corporate colour used for the photographic company Kodak. The logo colour was deliberately chosen as 'oranged yellow to represent a sense of light and fun supposedly derived from their cameras and film.'<sup>124</sup>

### **Blue Tranquillity**

Blue is the colour of the sea and the sky, symbol of the infinite. Blue is the colour of silence, of calm and tranquillity. It is linked to contemplation and spirituality. It is associated to the geometric form of the circle, symbol of the eternal motion of the spirit, together with quiet and dynamism.

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<sup>123</sup> *The Age*. Monday 9 August, 1999.

<sup>124</sup> Walch and Hope. *op.cit.* p. 130.

In Damanhur's philosophy, blue is associated to the Feminine Principle and to the Divine forces linked to it. For the Chinese, blue is the colour of immortality.

### **Blue Truth**

It became a convention in icon painting to portray the Virgin Mary in blue robes, thought to mean heaven and truth, and to be a continuation of the pagan belief that blue stones and glass could drive away demons. The same tradition survives today with the dressing of male infants in blue while their sisters are dressed in pink, symbolically the colour of the earth, and appropriately, of fertility.<sup>125</sup> In the verse 'something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue', traditionally associated with weddings, blue refers to fidelity and the protection of Mary.<sup>126</sup> Christ, as well as The Virgin Mary, is often shown wearing blue. As is Indra, Vishnu, and his blue-skinned incarnation, Krishna. Rama an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu and also Krishna is depicted with blue skin, representing the enormity of the heavens.<sup>127</sup> Woad, a blue dye obtained from the mustard family, was used by the ancient Britons of the first century, as war paint to stain their skin blue.<sup>128</sup>

### **Blue Protection**

The protective qualities of blue, as in the 'something blue' of weddings, are evident in some parts of Europe, where nursing mothers wear neckbands in the colour to prevent their babies from developing fevers.<sup>129</sup>

### **Bluey**

According to Henry Lawson, the most popular colour for the blanket or roll of blankets carried by a swagman was blue, because it did not show the dirt. Bluey was the traditional name for part, or the whole, of a swag.<sup>130</sup> Blue, in Australian colloquial terms, also means fight, risque or ribald, sad or down. A Bluey is also a mate, especially a mate with red hair.

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<sup>125</sup> Walch and Hope. *op. cit.* p. viii.

<sup>126</sup> Foley. *op. cit.* p. 205.

<sup>127</sup> Bruce-Mitford. *op. cit.* p. not recorded.

<sup>128</sup> Walch and Hope. *op. cit.* p. xiv.

<sup>129</sup> Harris. *op. cit.* p. 45.

<sup>130</sup> *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, *op. cit.* p. 490.



### **Blue Ribbon**

Blue means merit, supremacy and first prize. The highest order of knighthood bestowed by the British Crown, the Order of the Garter, is a broad dark blue ribbon, established by Edward III in 1348. Since then, blue ribbon has come to mean outstanding achievements in other spheres. The English Derby has the 'the blue ribbon of the turf' The Queen Mary holds the Blue Ribbon of the Atlantic for the fastest crossing of a passenger liner both ways across. Similarly, 'cordon-bleu' (literally blue ribbon) now synonymous with the best chefs and cuisine, was once the emblem of the highest order of knighthood in France, the ancient order of St. Esprit (Holy Ghost).<sup>131</sup> Blue is associated with royalty (royal blue) and nobility; the term blue blood, for those of high or noble birth derives from the belief that the veins of the pure-blooded Spanish aristocracy were more blue than those of mixed ancestry. Similarly, true blue implies exceptional integrity and fidelity, probably from the idea of such qualities being characteristic of blue blood. The name for a female intellectual, blue stocking, dates back to the early 15th century, when a society of learned men and women in Venice distinguished themselves by their blue stockings.<sup>132</sup>

### **Blue Depression**

Such expressions as 'to feel blue', or the older 'have the blue devils', are linked with indigo dyers who were especially susceptible to melancholy either through the dyeing process or the effect of the colour itself. Blues is the name of the melancholic music originating from the American South in the late 19th century. *The Jelly Roll Blues*, by pianist Jelly Roll Morton, was the earliest published blues in 1905.<sup>133</sup> *Blue Notes* is the name of a series of American blues records, which are known not only for their colour, but their distinctive cover designs. In the UK, blue is the traditional colour of the Conservative Party, though why exactly is not known. Certainly it was the favourite of the former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; as a parliamentary colleague once remarked: 'When she wears blue, the nation is in for a good thrashing'.<sup>134</sup> Blue movies, another name for cinematic pornography, may come from dimmed showings of explicit movies.<sup>135</sup> Blue spotlights were used in burlesque shows or striptease theatres.

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<sup>131</sup> Foley. *op. cit.* p. 204.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.* pp. 204-205.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* p. 205.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.* p. 205.

<sup>135</sup> Tresidder. *op. cit.* p. 27.

### **Green Politics**

Green is the colour commonly used on national flags as a symbol of agriculture and forests. Because of its association with healthy plant life, it is the perfect colour for ecological parties and organisations. These parties are now referred to as Green, their members Greens or Greenies, and they hold the *green vote*.<sup>136</sup> The word is now commonly used for anything to do with environment and conservation.

### **Green Superstition**

Green is the colour of mould and decay, and also of sickness. One is referred to as looking a little green when one is sick. Perhaps for this reason, there have been some unlucky omens associated with the colour. Green cars used to have a lower resale value because of bad luck connotations, but the newer turquoise, teal and metallic greens have overcome this and are now popular. Hyundai's general manager of marketing, Nilkki King, says:

*It is ... a fashion thing. In 1995 we couldn't get enough of our 'teal green'.<sup>137</sup>*

Green is the colour that is the most unlucky for brides and their attendants.<sup>138</sup>

### **Green Prosperity**

Many nations have had green currency. The colour green signifies abundance, prosperity and stability. In 1862 during the Civil War, the paper money first issued by the USA was called greenback because the back was printed green. But the colour can also signify a lack of money. In some European countries, if you were bankrupt, you had to wear a green bonnet.<sup>139</sup>

### **Green Envy**

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Iago describes jealousy as 'the green-eyed monster'.<sup>140</sup> Sometimes green is associated also to a negative symbology. It is the colour of anger and

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<sup>136</sup> Foley, p. 206.

<sup>137</sup> Vive Magazine, Spring 1998

<sup>138</sup> Harris. *op. cit.* p. 168.

<sup>139</sup> Foley. *op. cit.* p. 205.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.* p. 206.

putrefaction, of poison and envy, hence the phrase *green with jealousy*. In the human body green is an indicator of serious illness and death.<sup>141</sup>

### **Green Fertility**

The colour of nature, vegetation, and of life itself, green is the colour of spring renewal. Green is associated to Venus, goddess of love and fertility. Greek widows who remarried would wear a green veil to symbolise their still active fertility, and in England until 1700 it was very fashionable for brides to wear green. In Egyptian mythology green is associated to Osiris, and the nature cycle of life, death and rebirth.

### **Orange Happiness**

In China, orange is equated with love and happiness.<sup>142</sup> In art, the Christ Child sometimes holds an orange as a redemption symbol because the orange was thought by some to be the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Oranges are eaten as emblems of good fortune on the second day of the Chinese New Year.<sup>143</sup>

### **Purple Royalty**

In ancient Greece, the purple dye, which was extracted from molluscs, was a luxury only the rich could afford. Purple robes were worn only by emperors, kings, high priests and military commanders. Thus the colour now symbolizes wealth, authority, dignity, glory, honour, majesty, royalty and power. The expression *born to the purple*, derives from the Byzantine tradition that the children of emperors be born in a room decorated with royal purple. A Roman Catholic priest becoming a cardinal, is said to be 'raised to the purple' (even though his hat and robes are red).<sup>144</sup> In the Christian church, purple symbolises absolution, repentance, mourning and sorrow.<sup>145</sup>

*In How Did It begin? Brasch cites an example of cultural difference in some parts of China, where the mourning colour was purple. 'When one US manufacturer of chewing gum changed its wrappers from green to purple, its export sales to China*

141 [http://www.damanhur.it/medicine/html/the\\_meaning\\_of\\_colours.htm](http://www.damanhur.it/medicine/html/the_meaning_of_colours.htm)

142 Bruce-Mitford, p. not recorded.

143 Tresidder. *op. cit.* p. 149.

144 Foley. *op. cit.* p. 206.

145 *ibid.* p. 206.

*dropped alarmingly. It was subsequently discovered that the Chinese believed that the gum was meant to be chewed at funerals only!*<sup>146</sup>

Purple now has a strong association with chocolate, which stems from the development of a purple chocolate box for a Royal Command performance. Ever since, the colour purple has adorned chocolate boxes and bars.

### **Purple Feminism**

In colour symbolism, purple is linked with temperance, moderation, spirituality and repentance, or a transition from active to passive, male to female, life to death. It was the colour adopted by the suffragettes and continued to be used later, by the feminist movement.

### **Pink Triangle**

The history of the pink triangle precedes WWII, when a German law prohibiting homosexual relations was revised by Hitler in 1935 to include kissing, embracing, and gay fantasies as well as sexual acts. Between 1937 to 1939 an estimated 25,000 convicted offenders were sent to prison and later to concentration camps. Their sentence was to be sterilisation, or even death. In Hitler's concentration camps, the social hierarchy enforced the wearing of coloured triangles (for homosexual males, pink). In the 1970's, gay liberation groups resurrected the pink triangle, inverted, as a popular symbol for the gay rights movement. The colour pink is now synonymous with the gay movement. The perception that the gay community has an expendable income for luxuries and holidays means that marketing is carefully directed towards the gay community with the hope of attracting what is known as the *pink dollar*.

### **Brown Humility**

Brown symbolizes the earth, and of clay soil and therefore humility and degradation. It was the colour of mourning in the Middle Ages, and to signify retreat from the world, several Christian orders adopted it for their robes. Thus the colour of monks robes are mostly depicted as brown.<sup>147</sup> However, brown was also the colour of the magnificent Sung dynasty in China.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *ibid.* p. 204.

<sup>147</sup> Bruce-Mitford, p. not recorded.

### **Grey Wisdom**

Grey. Abnegation, humility, melancholia, indifference and, in modern terminology, a simile for dull sobriety — possibly because in spite of its subtle beauties it is the hue that is most often thought of as colourless. Only in Hebrew tradition does it appear to be linked with the wisdom of age. This could explain the old, wise, wizard character Gandalf the Grey in *The Lord of the Rings*. As the colour of ash, it was sometimes associated with death, mourning and the soul. In Christian religious communities it symbolizes renunciation.<sup>149</sup>

### **Gold Aspiration**

Gold is the symbol of all that has the highest value or is the most difficult to attain. The ultimate prize-winners are the gold-medallists, perfect times are known as *golden eras* and treasures items are 'worth their weight in gold'.<sup>150</sup>

### **Rainbow Flag**

The rainbow flag first appeared in 1978 in the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade. The original flags had eight stripes: hot pink for sex, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nature, turquoise for art, indigo for harmony, and violet for spirit. However, production constraints (for example, hot pink was not commercially available) pink and turquoise and royal blue replaced indigo. This current six colour version is now officially recognised by the International Congress of Flag Makers. The *Victory Over AIDS* Flag modifies the rainbow flag by adding a black stripe at the bottom. It is proposed that when a cure is eventually found for AIDS, the black stripes should be removed from all the flags and ceremoniously burned.<sup>151</sup> Rainbow-coloured ribbons in central Asia, were a shamanistic aid to sky travel.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Tresidder. *op. cit.* p. not recorded.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.* p. 95.

<sup>150</sup> Bruce-Mitford. *op. cit.* p. not recorded.

<sup>151</sup> <http://cygnus.uwa.edu.au/~zeddicus/pridecol.html>

<sup>152</sup> Tresidder, J. *The Hutchinson Dictionary of Symbols*. Helicon, Oxford, 1997.

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