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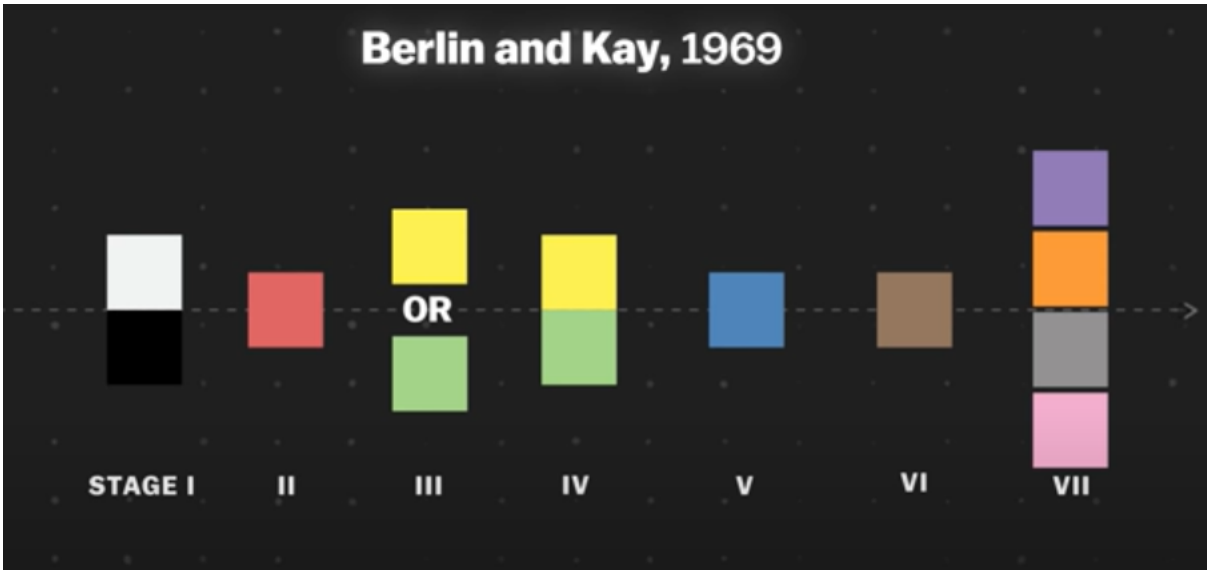
Design Theory 2
Professor Zaidi
11 December 2020

Green

(skip to page three to avoid monotony)

As much as we think of colours as categories, the more unnoticed reality is that colours are a spectrum. It is honestly not obvious why we have names for whatever specific few colours that we do, at all. In 1969, two Berkeley researchers, Paul Kay and Brent Berlin published a book challenging the prior assumption of cultures around the globe choosing colours at random to give names to (in the past a lot of western scholars also wrongly speculated that majority of earlier societies and cultures were colorblind an explanation which ran parallelly and almost contradictorily with the assumption that early humans created language for colours around the environment they were in). They asked 20 people who spoke different languages to look at 330 color chips and categorize them as their basic colour term. They found a hint of universal colour pattern.



If the language had six basic colour words, they were always for black (or dark), white (or light), red, green, yellow and blue. If it has four terms, they were for black, white, red and then either green or yellow. If it had only three, they were always for black, white and red. It suggested that as languages develop, they create color names in a certain order. A study I won't go into the depths of. Referring again to the assumption of how language for colours was inspired from the surrounding environment, for many places and cultures globally, green should have technically come first.

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Green, as a colour for art, textiles and everything else which required colour, like every other colour too was derived from nature. Green pigments are sourced from numerous minerals: viridian, emerald and malachite just to name a few. Greens come in cool and warm hues that are often named after places and things in the natural world. From forest green to pine to mint, teal and chartreuse, greens can push into brown and blue territories, have pastel moments and can be so rich and verdant that they look almost radioactive.

Funnily enough, in 1898, Marie and Pierre Curie discovered Radium. Claimed to have restorative properties, radium was added to toothpaste, medicine, water and food. A glowing, luminous green, it was also used in beauty products and jewelry. It wasn't until the mid-20 century that it was realized that radium's harmful effect as a radioactive element outweighed its visual benefits.

In 1814, a company in Schweinfurt, Germany, called the Wilhelm Dye and White Lead Company developed a new green dye. Two synthetic greens called Scheele's green and Paris green were first introduced in the 18 century. Because of how vibrant and flashy they were it didn't take them long to take over the otherwise traditional greens which derived from nature. This made them a popular choice for paint, textile dyes, wallpaper, soaps, cake decorations, toys, candy and what not. Flashy green took the white people world by a storm. The arsenic in these colours, on exposure to humans damage the way cells communicate and function. High level of arsenic have directly been connected to Cancer and heart disease. Workers working in fabric factories in the 18 century were often poisoned and women in green dresses reportedly collapsed due to the exposure to arsenic to their skin. Green as a colour for women's clothes had superstitiously become an omen. Bed bugs were rumored not to live in green rooms. It has also been speculated that Napoleon died from slow arsenic poisoning because of his room's green wallpaper. The widespread intensity the damage by greens like these, stayed unnoticed until 1822. Synthetic green was probably the most dangerous colour in widespread use. How was is it that at such a stage of direct association of green to damage, disease and decay, green stuck to a narrative of trees and tranquility.

Regardless, the positive marks for green definitely add up. There is global agreement from the United States to Europe to Asia and Islamic countries that it stands for the natural world and specifically springtime, youth, life, hope and renewal. On the visible spectrum, green sits between blue and yellow. In color theory, it is a secondary color, made by mixing blue and yellow. The color green holds true to its symbolism and stereotypes considerably in fine art. It can be glitzy and glamorous, lush and lively, and sometimes sickly and threatening.

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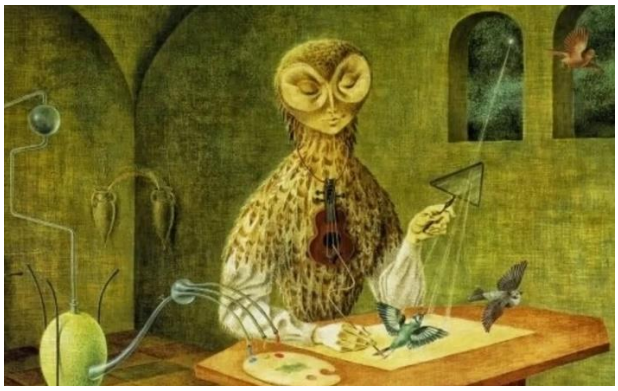
After writing a plethora of disconnected and almost plagiarized garbage which hopefully passes for fake fancy, I would like to delve into the depths of what green is to me. If looked at without thinking about at all, green is a bridge between all the binaries it stands for. Unlike other colours, the association of green with emotions or other materialistic symbolism is rather fluid.

When green is used for literal greenery, the well known and accepted feelings of serenity and beauty fit well with the color's widely known narrative. Claude Monet's 'The Waterlily Pond' and Van Gogh's Green 'Wheat Fields' are apt examples.

But would you still associate with the same narrative if I put forward Leonora Carrington's 'Friday the 13th' or Remedios Varo's 'Another New Crush – Surreal Friends'?



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Is it still beautiful and serene with portraits made by Picasso, with skin which looks like its decaying and composition so depressing?

Maybe Picasso is an example too extreme. Despite being perfectly apt in my argument, Picasso does have the tendency to make any colour look terrifying. Moving on to other artists, tying green and people, up next, ‘Symphony in Green and Gold’ by Thomas Wilmer Dewing and Salman Toor’s ‘Bar boy’.

While Dewing makes one woman look depressed and lonely, Noor manages to do that with a whole bar of people.

Black is normally and understandably associated with darkness and death, but to reach that darkness and death there is a journey. A journey of disease. A journey of decay. A Journey, I associate with green.

Do you really believe that Disney didn't think through before making Mike Wazowski or Kaa green? Zombies in cartoons before CGI improved were also green. Do you never think about how every dystopic sci-fi movie has a scene of a deadly virus under the microscope, which is, always green? Even the germs in handwash adds are green. Before this example, I would just like to clarify that Medusa is misunderstood highly because of patriarchy and Athena, but her hair snakes were also green. I don't mean to only mention all the green examples, but this is justification for catalyzing my association of green with horrors.

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I don't know, if all the unexpressive melancholy inside me has personified itself into a green because of the associations I found in the materialistic world or if it was the other way round. Where I only found connection of green to horrible because something in my head highlighted it for me.

An abandoned building grows moss, turns green, hollows itself to eventually break and disintegrates at the hands of time. A decomposing carcass goes through a process of green decay before becoming one with nature and its serenity. A cycle of life perhaps. Do you really only think trees and grass when you see green?

I hope not.