# COLOUR IS DOING THINGS BEHIND YOUR BACK

## AN UNOFFICIAL FIELD GUIDE TO CHROMATIC MANIPULATION

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# PREFACE

My relationship with colour started the way many questionable adventures begin: with a homework assignment. During an English course, I had to write a short essay about colour — a topic I thought would take me, at most, an hour and a decent cup of tea.

I was wrong.
That tiny essay opened a Pandora's box the size of a small universe. Suddenly red, blue, yellow and their friends were no longer harmless decorative swatches, but mysterious characters with their own histories, neuroses, scandals and grudges. Once you start noticing how strange colours really are, you can't unsee it.

Naturally, I reacted in the only way a sensible person wouldn't: I wrote a thesis about it.
Then, together with a colleague, I conducted research on how colour is actually used in Italian primary-school teaching materials — a journey that confirmed two things: teachers are wildly creative, and theorists have no idea how chaotic crayons become in the hands of children.

From there, things escalated quickly.
I began receiving invitations for seminars — at schools, libraries, cultural associations, community halls, even a few organisations whose mission statements had absolutely nothing to do with colour but who nevertheless decided they needed a chromatic lecture in their lives. I said yes, every time. Who wouldn't want to discuss medieval pigments at 8:30 a.m. in front of thirty adults who still aren't sure why they're there?

Then, recently, I came across my old slides again: pixelated clipart, questionable fonts, and that unmistakable 2000s aesthetic we all pretend we've forgotten. I opened the files expecting mild embarrassment, but instead I had a realisation: buried under all that retro design was a story.

Not a thesis, not a handbook, not a pedagogical framework — a story.

And stories, unlike slides, age surprisingly well.

So, I began rewriting everything. Not to educate anyone — I'm not an expert, and I don't want to cosplay as one. I'm just someone who has read too much, wandered through too many colour manuals, and accumulated a collection of facts that made me laugh, raise an eyebrow, or momentarily reconsider the entire arc of human civilisation.

This book is simply me sharing those curiosities with you — the charming ones, the bizarre ones, the ones that make you whisper "no way" at your screen.

If you're looking for a comprehensive treatise on colour theory, this isn't it.
If you're in the mood for a journey through the eccentric, messy, brilliant world of colour... well, buckle up.

Colours may look innocent,
but they've been causing trouble for millennia.

# FOLLOW YOUR CURIOSITY, READ IN ANY ORDER

## Festive Colours & Other Collective Hallucinations ..0

# 01 FESTIVE COLOURS & OTHER COLLECTIVE HALLUCINATIONS

# WINTER COLOURS AND THE HUMAN REFUSAL TO ACCEPT DARKNESS

Winter demands colour the way a bland dish demands salt. It arrives with its dramatic sunsets, sure, but emotionally it leans toward the chromatic range of "wet cardboard". Humanity, which has never tolerated bleakness without putting up a fight, reacted in the only logical way: by declaring December the official season of aesthetic overcompensation.
If winter insists on grey, humans answer with light shows, rituals, ribbons, and above all, colour—the psychological equivalent of turning up the volume to drown out the wind.

## Christmas Red: A Capitalist Miracle In Pantone 185c

Christmas red is one of those colours that feels eternal, as if it had been chosen by the universe in a moment of creative inspiration: "December? Definitely red."

But the truth is far messier — and far more interesting — than a simple festive palette.

Long before Christmas existed, red was already a winter colour.

In Europe's pre-Christian rituals, evergreen plants like holly and mistletoe were used to ward off darkness during the solstice. Their bright red berries became symbols of resistance: little sparks of colour refusing to die in the cold. Red meant life, survival, warmth — exactly the things people craved in the darkest weeks of the year.

When Christianity arrived, it didn't throw these traditions away; it absorbed them.

Red slid seamlessly into the Christmas vocabulary:

- the red of holly berries became a symbol of Christ's blood
- the red of candle flames symbolised light overcoming darkness
- bishops wore red vestments for liturgical celebrations
- Saint Nicholas — the root of modern Santa — often appeared in red robes (because bishops did)

So, Christmas and red were already a thing centuries before Coca-Cola entered the chat.

But then Coca-Cola did enter the chat.

And here's where myth gets comfortable and refuses to leave.

Many people believe Coca-Cola "invented" Santa's red suit. They didn't — the red-robed Santa existed in illustrations long before the company was founded. But Coca-Cola did something equally powerful: they standardised Santa.

In the 1930s, illustrator Haddon Sundblom created a series of Coca-Cola Christmas ads featuring a jolly, plump Santa with rosy cheeks, twinkling eyes, and a bright, unmistakable Coca-Cola red suit. Before that, Santa's appearance varied wildly — sometimes green, sometimes brown, sometimes vaguely elf-like.

Coca-Cola didn't invent red Santa.

They canonised him.

Marketing did what theology hadn't fully managed: it made one version of Santa so iconic, so globally recognisable, that all others faded into vintage curiosity.

And Christmas red — already symbolically rich, already culturally embedded — suddenly acquired a new layer: commercial warmth, the soft glow of nostalgia and advertising charm.

From then on, Christmas red became more than a colour.

It became a brand of festivity, a mood, a promise that winter's darkness can be softened with light, joy, and moderately excessive shopping.

Today, from Scandinavian markets to American department stores, from Italian nativity scenes to Japanese Christmas cakes, red dominates December not just because tradition demands it, but because red carries the emotional weight of centuries: life, warmth, holiness, celebration — and, yes, a little Coca-Cola sparkle.

Christmas without red would feel like December without lights: technically possible, but psychologically unacceptable.

# Christmas Green: The Introvert That Keeps Us Alive

If red is the extrovert of December, green is its contemplative companion—the one who brings soup when you're sick and checks that you're still breathing beneath the emotional snowdrift of the year.

Green entered the December palette long before Nativity scenes, primarily because evergreens were the only living things that looked remotely cheerful in winter. Pine, fir, holly: these plants became metaphors for resilience long before they became symbols of Christmas.

The Romans hung evergreen boughs during Saturnalia, their raucous mid-winter festival. The Celts brought holly and ivy indoors to shelter woodland spirits from the cold. In medieval Germany, Paradise Trees—fir trees decorated with apples—were paraded through towns on December 24th to commemorate Adam and Eve. These weren't Christmas trees yet, but they were practicing.

The evergreen's symbolism ran deeper than decoration. In a world where winter could kill you, a plant that refused to die was theological evidence. It suggested that life—and by extension, hope—was stronger than the season that tried to bury it. Early Christians absorbed this symbolism wholesale, rebranding the evergreen as a symbol of eternal life through Christ.

Holly deserves special mention for being simultaneously festive and violent. Those cheerful red berries? Mildly toxic. Those glossy leaves? Armed with spikes. Medieval Christians saw the crown of thorns in holly's leaves and Christ's blood in its berries, which is either profound symbolism or proof that medieval people could make anything about suffering.

In the pre-central-heating era, when winter meant survival rather than aesthetic discomfort, the evergreen was a small act of green defiance. Eventually, this quiet refusal to die became the emotional backbone of Christmas décor.

The modern Christmas tree—arguably green's greatest PR achievement—didn't become a widespread tradition until the 19th century. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, photographed with their decorated first tree in 1848, essentially launched evergreen influencer culture.

Within decades, the Christmas tree had colonized parlors across Europe and America.

Red blazes. Green endures. Together they form the chromatic couple's therapy of the season.

# The Myths and Marketing Magic of Christmas Advertising — A Colourful Fairy Tale

If you think Christmas colours are all about ancient tradition, sacred symbolism, and dusty theology, pause right there. Take a breath. Look again. A surprisingly large chunk of what we now call "classic Christmas aesthetics" was born not in churches, but in marketing departments with deadlines and mood boards.

Christmas is, after all, one of the longest-running advertising campaigns in human history. And colour is its most loyal accomplice — silent, persuasive, and brutally effective.

Let's start with the obvious boss fight: **the Coca-Cola effect**.
No, Coca-Cola didn't invent Santa's red suit. What it did was arguably more impressive: it turned it into the default setting. Before the 1930s, Santa showed up in green, brown, blue, red — depending on geography, illustrator, and general cultural chaos. After Coca-Cola? Red coat, white fur, cheerful face. Standardised. Globalised. Done.

It was a chromatic unification previously achieved only by empires and religious councils. Respect.

Then comes **gold**, sliding into Christmas like a deity made of tinsel. Its résumé is solid: the Star of Bethlehem, medieval depictions of divine light, Victorian ornament overload, and that universal human instinct that says *if it shines, it matters.*
Gold becomes the colour of prosperity, promise, and seasonal optimism — Fortuna, but make it festive.

**White** is where the fantasy really kicks in. The dream of a "white Christmas" wasn't popularised by weather patterns, but by Bing Crosby, Hollywood soundstages, and industrial quantities of fake snow. In snowless countries, Christmas white is a fully imported aesthetic: atmospheric rather than meteorological. And yet, emotionally flawless.

By the mid-20th century, **blue and silver** enter the scene as the palette of "modern Christmas." Cool tones signal electricity, technology, winter glamour. Think postwar department stores trying very hard to look futuristic. Christmas, but make it sleek.

**Green** is the survivor. It outlived every rebrand because nothing says "we made it through another winter cycle" like an evergreen. The symbolism was just too perfect to replace.

And then there's **red**, the drama queen of the palette.
Red stays because it hits fast, dominates visually, looks incredible on packaging, and screams urgency. And December runs entirely on

urgency: last-minute gifts, limited editions, final chances to prove you care.

So Christmas colours are, in essence, a hybrid creature:
half ancient ritual,
half Victorian aesthetics,
half modern marketing strategy.
(Christmas has never been great at math.)

And yet it works. Not because colours are fixed, but because they're flexible — adaptable enough to let every culture, every generation, every advertiser reshape December into a space where warmth briefly wins over darkness. Even if we know, deep down, that it's all a beautifully orchestrated illusion.

## Grinch Green — The Shade Of Festive Sabotage

Every holiday colour has its archetype. Red is the extroverted optimist. Gold is the glamorous show-off. Blue is the contemplative cousin who gets philosophical after dessert. And then there is Grinch green — the official colour of festive resistance.

Born from Dr. Seuss's imagination and later genetically enhanced by Hollywood saturation levels, Grinch green is that almost-radioactive shade of lime that looks like envy mixed with a mild electrical malfunction. It's not forest green or pine green or emerald green. It's the colour you get when someone tries to turn misanthropy into entertainment.

The Grinch, famously allergic to Christmas joy, crystallised an entire emotional spectrum in one pigment. It is the green of "do not disturb," of "I refuse to participate in forced cheerfulness," of "I'm staying home with a book and I've already taken off my shoes." And yet, ironically, the Grinch has become a beloved part of Christmas culture, proving that even the colour of bitterness can find a way into the holiday aesthetic — provided it's witty enough.

Grinch green reminds us that not everyone experiences December with the same level of sparkle. It's the chromatic permission slip for anyone who needs a break from merriment. And the moment the Grinch's heart grows three sizes, the shade transforms too, becoming a quieter, warmer green — proof that even the grumpiest colours have redemption arcs.

## Two Christmases, One Palette

Winter holidays split themselves neatly into two worlds.
Inside churches, the palette whispers: purple, rose, white, gold.
Outside, the palette hollers: red, green, sparkle, glitter, possibly tinsel if no one stops you.

These two Christmases coexist peacefully, like neighbours who will never be best friends but have agreed to maintain polite silence in the hallway.

One offers transcendence, the other offers retail discounts and an impressive number of fairy lights.

Both, however, fight the same enemy: the monotony of winter.

## Epiphany: Gold, Soot, and the Last Spark of the Season

Epiphany arrives quietly after the chaos of Christmas, slipping in on January 6th with the composure of someone who knows they don't need fireworks to make an entrance.

Where Christmas is saturated with red and green, Epiphany prefers a more refined palette — gold, white, and twilight blue.

Gold dominates because Epiphany is the festival of revelation, wisdom, and gifts brought from faraway places. The Magi aren't just characters in a story; they are colour-bringers. Their gifts — gold, frankincense, myrrh — behave like pigments: luminous, aromatic, precious. Gold, especially, becomes the chromatic symbol of knowledge and worldly understanding. It also pairs well with incense smoke and candlelight, which is a bonus.

Italy, naturally, complicates the palette with *la Befana*, the folkloric witch who travels with a broomstick, not a sleigh, and prefers a muted palette: soot black, slate grey, and patched fabrics: a chromatic reminder that sometimes magic comes dressed more like a chimney sweep than an influencer. She is the final guardian of the winter festivities, closing the season with a broom and a shrug. Her arrival marks the end of the holiday cycle, carrying a gentle lesson: not all magic comes dressed in red—some arrives wrapped in ashes.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*I suspect my affection for Christmas colours began long before I knew what symbolism was.*

*When my daughter was three, she decorated the corridor wall with a full family portrait using a shade of purple that did not exist in nature. My granddaughter, years later, expanded this tradition by claiming every marker, crayon, pencil, and lipstick in a reachable radius as a personal weapon of artistic expression.*

*So, when people talk about the "subtle palettes of winter", I can't help but laugh.*
*My winters have always been aggressively, unapologetically colourful — sometimes without my permission.*

*Perhaps that's why I take such pleasure in the reds, greens, golds, and theatrical excess of December. Compared to what toddlers can do to a corridor, Christmas décor feels almost minimalist.*

# GLITTER: BECAUSE HOPE NEEDS ACCESSORIES

New Year's Eve is humanity's favourite ritual of collective amnesia. Every 31 December, millions of people gather in front of clocks, screens, fireworks, and glasses of something bubbly, preparing to forgive themselves for everything they failed to achieve in the past twelve months. And, because humans are visual optimists, they do it by choosing colours—on tables, in clothes, in decorations—as if pigments could negotiate with destiny on their behalf.

New Year's is not merely a moment; it's a palette audition.

## Gold: Sponsored Hope

Gold is the undisputed monarch of New Year's symbolism. It sparkles, it flatters, it makes everyone look like they've achieved more than they actually did. Gold is the universal metaphor for "things will improve," even if they probably won't in quite the way we imagine.

There is something about gold that reassures us: even if the year was heavy, we can still pretend the next one will be luminous. The fireworks help. Humanity loves explosions, but it especially loves colourful explosions that reflect off glittering surfaces and make resolutions sound less improbable.

Gold is also the colour of "I'm trying my best", and perhaps that's all a new year really asks of us.

## Red: Visual Andrenaline

While the West leans heavily on gold for New Year celebrations, much of Asia hands the keys to red. Chinese culture treats red as a survival algorithm: joy, prosperity, vitality, the energetic push that tells misfortune to try its luck elsewhere.

During Lunar New Year, entire cities are draped in red lanterns, red envelopes, red ribbons, and red decorations. Red becomes a protective colour field, almost a forcefield, claiming that the coming year will be strong and abundant. It is not the gentle red of Christmas berries; it is the red that means business.

There is nothing shy about this red. It is chromatic confidence in pure form.

## White: reset, repeat

Travel east to Japan and the New Year unfolds in white.
White rice cakes, white decorations, white clothing in some regions. It is not the cold clinical white of modern interiors; it is a ceremonial white, the kind that invites renewal and self-reflection.

White offers the fantasy of a clean slate, even though life rarely gives us one. It is the colour of "try again", the colour of new notebooks, blank pages, and moments when the world pauses just long enough for you to imagine becoming a better version of yourself.

Latin America picks up on this idea but infuses it with regional flair. Wearing white on New Year's Eve promises peace. Choosing other colours for underwear promises... slightly more specific wishes. Cultural psychology is many things, but never boring.

## Sunburnt Christmas Colours

Celebrating New Year's in the Southern Hemisphere is an entirely different sensory experience. While Europe freezes and North America negotiates with ice storms, Australia spends New Year's Eve roasting. Barbecues replace fireplaces. The traditional European winter palette looks absurd under a 35°C sun.

Australians, wisely, replace the European New Year's colours with those of beaches, sunsets, and the kind of bright tones that only make sense when your holiday outfit doesn't include socks.

In the Southern Hemisphere, gold becomes sunlight rather than symbolism. White becomes sunscreen. And red becomes the colour you turn if you forget the sunscreen.

## Fireworks: Humanity's Therapy Session

For one night each year, the sky becomes a temporary colour laboratory. Fireworks exist for many cultural reasons, but globally they serve a single emotional purpose: they let us believe, for ten minutes, that chaos is beautiful.

There is something primal in watching controlled explosions blossom into colour overhead. It feels like a ritualised negotiation between humans and the universe:

"Give us one moment of dazzling light," we ask, "and we promise to try again tomorrow."

Sometimes the universe replies. Sometimes the fireworks misfire. Either way, the ritual continues.

## New Year's Resolutions: A Chromatic Illusion

New Year's colours create the impression that the next chapter of our lives will begin with a burst of chromatic clarity. But the truth is more human: we dress up our intentions in gold, red, or white because it helps us tolerate the awkward fact that change is slow and motivation inconsistent.

We need colour to believe our own hope.

Perhaps that's why every culture, in its own palette, performs the same ritual: choosing a colour for the future and stepping into the unknown as if pigment equalled agency.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*It doesn't matter where I spend New Year's Eve.*

*At home with a dangerously unstable panettone, in a Chinese restaurant singing karaoke with people I met forty minutes earlier, or at the trendiest party of the year surrounded by sequins, resolutions, and mild social panic — the rule is always the same.*

*I must sparkle.*

*Not metaphorically. Literally.*

*For reasons I've never fully examined but happily embrace, New Year's Eve activates a deep, primal need in me to become "sbrilluccicosa" — a word that, in Italian, means "so shiny you might cause minor distractions in traffic".*

*My dress and shoes must reflect light the way a disco ball would if it had a personal growth arc and decided to be elegant. Silver, metallic, iridescent, sequinned, anything that catches the light and tosses it back into the room with enthusiasm. I'm not dressing up as a person; I'm dressing up as refraction.*

*Being sparkly on New Year's Eve feels like becoming a tiny prism.*

*You gather all the colours, all the fragments of the year — the attempts, the chaos, the mild catastrophes, the unexpected joys — and you compress them into a single point. Then, for one night, you reflect them outward as a small, determined beam of light.*

*Maybe that's what New Year's Eve is really about.*

*Not reinvention. Not resolutions.*

*Just the brief, glorious illusion that if you reflect enough light, the future might feel a little brighter too.*

# THE DAY EVERYONE TURNS GREEN (AND NOT FROM SHAME)

## St. Patrick's Day & The Global Meme-ification of Ireland

There are holidays that develop their colour palette organically over centuries, shaped by ritual and climate and slow cultural osmosis. And then there is St. Patrick's Day, which behaves as if someone asked, "What would happen if an entire country turned into a chromatic meme?"

Green dominates so completely that the holiday borders on monochromatic extremism. On March 17th, the world doesn't simply celebrate Ireland; it dresses up as a fluorescent caricature of it. People who couldn't name two Irish counties suddenly become ambassadors of emerald fabric. Rivers turn green. Bagels turn green. Beer turns green, for reasons no biologist has ever been able to condone.

Yet the funniest piece of this giant green puzzle is the simplest: Ireland was not originally "the green country".

Sure, it's lush, but no more so than Scotland or parts of France. The famous nickname, *The Emerald Isle*, is a 19th-century literary invention. The iconic St. Patrick's green? A product of symbolism, diaspora imagination, and enthusiastic American marketing.

Like many national narratives, the green of St. Patrick's Day is less botany and more branding.

## The Shamrock, The Snakes, And the Problem with Legends

The shamrock, that cheerful three-leaf logo, is often credited to St. Patrick himself, who supposedly used it to explain the Holy Trinity. This is the story most people know. Fewer people know that this charming tale appears in writing a thousand years after Patrick's lifetime, which is the folkloric equivalent of receiving a message long after the sender has left the planet.

The other famous legend claims St. Patrick chased all the snakes out of Ireland. Considering Ireland never had snakes to begin with—climate, geography, minor details—this makes St. Patrick the only saint in history

credited with removing a problem that didn't exist. An admirable achievement in symbolic problem-solving, if not herpetology.

And yet these legends, stitched together over centuries, helped solidify green as the spiritual "colour of Ireland"—even though St. Patrick himself was historically associated with a completely different colour: blue. A soft, regal blue still used in certain Irish heraldic traditions.

Yes. Blue. Imagine telling that to a crowd in a green hat and face paint.

## How Green Took Over (Spoiler: America Helped)

The globalised St. Patrick's Day we know today is largely an American creation. Irish immigrants, confronted with prejudice and discrimination, used the holiday to celebrate identity, resilience, and community. Green came to symbolise their presence, their pride, and their determination to be seen.

The parades, the green attire, the theatrical flair—almost all of it was developed in cities like Boston, Chicago, and New York. Ireland later imported this exuberance back home, a cultural boomerang returning with glitter.

And then came the rivers turning green, a spectacle Chicago perfected with such confidence that other cities didn't even try to compete. A city that once reversed the direction of its river apparently felt no guilt about changing its colour.

The green beer followed. No one asked for it; no one needed it; yet it became a St. Patrick's Day staple, proving once again that humans cannot resist the temptation to dye beverages strange colours when given a holiday.

## The Psychology of Wearing Green

Wearing green on St. Patrick's Day comes with an odd social rule: if you forget, someone may pinch you. This custom emerged in American schoolyards, where children demonstrated affection and cultural commitment in the least diplomatic way possible.

Green became not just a symbol but a protective charm. The idea—again, loosely folkloric—is that wearing green makes you invisible to mischief-making fairies and leprechauns. Whether this works on tax authorities is still untested.

Green, in this context, is both costume and shield. And the shield works mainly because everyone agrees to pretend it does.

## Ireland Imagined Vs. Ireland Lived

The colour of St. Patrick's Day represents not so much the Ireland that exists but the Ireland the world desperately wants to believe in: mystical, verdant, whimsical, slightly tipsy. A country of rolling hills and cheerful mischief.

Real Ireland, like any real place, is more complicated. The green hills are indeed green—but the weather deserves half the credit. The pubs are warm—but the humour comes from people, not pigment. The identity is rich, layered, defiant, and proud—but its chromatic icon is a cultural fiction that became a global truth through repetition.

Colour doesn't need accuracy to become real.
It just needs a good story.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*The first time I experienced St. Patrick's Day "properly" was in London, where the city turned green with such conviction that even the pigeons seemed to consider participating. The second time was in Boston, which approaches St. Patrick's Day with the enthusiasm of a place convinced it is spiritually, chromatically, and genealogically entitled to be the capital of Ireland for exactly 24 hours.*

*Both celebrations were lively, friendly, and beautifully chaotic — a kind of joyful green tidal wave sweeping through the streets.*

*But there is one tradition I cannot, even after years of cultural goodwill, accept: green beer.*

*I mean... honestly.*
*Why?*
*What havehop and barley ever done to deserve this?*

*You can wrap yourself in green flags, paint shamrocks on your cheeks, parade with leprechauns, dye rivers, and I will smile politely and take pictures.*
*But the moment someone hands me a pint the colour of antifreeze, my entire soul whispers, "Cris, absolutely not."*

*Some boundaries must remain sacred.*

# ORANGE IS THE NEW FEAR

## Orange & Black: A Scream and a Whisper

Halloween is one of those traditions that behaves like a travelling circus: it packs up its colours, its monsters, its questionable dietary habits, and sets up camp wherever the global imagination allows it. Today, the world treats Halloween as if it were a universal ritual carved onto the cosmic calendar. But the truth is far stranger: Halloween is a cultural stowaway that managed to sneak into our global psyche disguised as a pumpkin.

Its palette is unmistakable.
Orange and black: the chromatic equivalent of a scream and a whisper.

Orange is the last warm breath of autumn, the colour of sunset before the world tilts into early darkness.
Black is the quiet shadow waiting behind it, the colour of what we cannot see and therefore promptly fear.
Together, they form the perfect duet for a holiday obsessed with crossing the line between living and dead, real and imagined, natural and supernatural.

## The Strange Life of Orange and Black

Orange is not a subtle colour. It doesn't try to blend into anything. It shouts. It glows. It behaves like a warm lamp in a cold house. And for most of history, it wasn't even called "orange"—in Europe, it was simply "yellow-red", the hybrid child of two better-behaved pigments. The fruit came first, the colour word came later, proving that sometimes linguistics takes the scenic route.

Black, on the other hand, has always been culturally multitasking. It carries authority, elegance, mourning, mystery, and existential dread with equal competence. Black is the colour that enters a room silently and makes everyone slightly uncomfortable — which is perfect for a holiday meant to unsettle.

By the time medieval folklore, Christian calendars, Celtic rituals, and American commercial enthusiasm collided, orange and black emerged as the patron saints of Halloween. The colour of harvest meets the colour of darkness. A final tribute to warm light before winter steals it.

## Pumpkins, Or How an Immigrant Vegetable Conquered the World

The pumpkin was not originally part of Halloween. Early Celtic traditions used turnips — which, aesthetically speaking, carve about as well as a concrete block. When the holiday crossed the Atlantic, American immigrants discovered that pumpkins, being large, fleshy, and wonderfully hollowable, were the Beyoncé of gourds: bigger, brighter, more charismatic, and undeniably photogenic.

Pumpkins transformed Halloween from a modest seasonal ritual into a theatrical spectacle. Suddenly the holiday had a mascot, and better yet, a mascot with a built-in lantern socket.

The jack-o'-lantern became a global export.
The pumpkin spice latte soon followed, although historians are still debating whether that was progress or a cry for help.

# THE GLOBALISATION OF RITUAL

Halloween's spread across the world is a case study in cultural osmosis. A holiday once confined to Celtic lands now appears in Italian supermarkets, Brazilian shopping malls, Japanese cafés, and Spanish schoolyards. Children don't analyse symbolism; they simply recognise an opportunity to dress up and collect food that dentists fear.

And adults, whether they admit it or not, enjoy the performance. Halloween gives everyone the freedom to flirt with darkness without commitment.
It's safe fear, theatrical fear — fear with good lighting and decorative gourds.

## Masks, Fear, And the Joy of Being Unrecognisable

One of Halloween's great emotional tricks is the invitation to become someone else for one night. Not someone better — just someone categorically different. A witch, a vampire, a cat, an existential crisis with glitter. It doesn't matter. The point is to step temporarily outside the ordinary self and try on a new identity, like a costume for the soul.

Anthropologists love this, of course. They see Halloween as a liminal ritual, a moment when social order relaxes, and chaos gets a hall pass. Children roam the streets demanding sugar with the confidence of union leaders. Adults embrace theatricality normally reserved for

weddings and tax season. It is society improvising for twenty-four hours, protected by the unspoken agreement that Halloween permits a level of absurdity no other holiday would tolerate.

## Hollywood, The Great Colour Distributor

If America exported Halloween through immigrants, Hollywood cemented it through cinema.
Orange porch lights, blowing leaves, masked figures, an owl hooting ominously, and always a house where the electricity mysteriously fails at the worst moment — visual cues so powerful they became a global vocabulary.

Halloween today feels familiar even in countries where it has no historical roots, because cinema has already taught everyone how it works.
A pumpkin on the doorstep is no longer a vegetable. It's a symbol.
A shadow behind a curtain is no longer physics. It's a plot twist waiting to happen.

The colour palette, simple as it is, acts like a worldwide password: orange equals harvest, black equals risk. Together they open a door to a shared seasonal imagination.

## Orange And Criminality: When a Colour Becomes a Warning Label

It's impossible to talk about the cultural life of orange without stumbling, sooner or later, into *Orange Is the New Black*. But long before the TV *series* gave the colour emotional depth and narrative dignity, the United States had already turned orange into a visual synonym for criminality. Not intentionally — colour symbolism rarely is — but through a slow, practical evolution in uniform design. Orange is bright, highly visible, and extremely difficult to camouflage in a crowd. It's the chromatic equivalent of shouting, "I am here," whether one wishes to be seen or not.

Prison jumpsuits, roadside inmate crews, detention vests, even the plastic cones used in police training share the same shade. It is a colour engineered for surveillance: impossible to ignore, impossible to neutralise, impossible to mistake for anything else. Once a tone becomes that heavily coded, it stops behaving like a pigment and starts behaving like a label.

This is why orange in American culture carries a faint electric tension, even outside penitentiaries. It's not inherently sinister — it radiates warmth, safety, visibility — but it has absorbed a narrative of control.

A person in bright orange might be a construction worker, a jogger trying not to get hit, or someone on a prison transport bus. The colour forces you to interpret the context before the person.

Halloween revels in this ambiguity. Pumpkins glow with cheerful innocence, yet somewhere in the background lurks the cultural echo of uniforms and mugshots. The holiday's official hue carries a dual citizenship: half harvest celebration, half institutional warning sign. It is this tension — sweet and sharp at once — that gives Halloween's colour scheme its distinctive bite.

Orange wants to be festive.
History insists it is functional.
Halloween, as always, chooses both.

## The Netherlands, But in Orange

The Dutch don't wear orange as a fashion statement. Orange *is* the statement, full stop, no further questions, and if you're asking why, you've already missed the point.

The official answer involves the House of Orange-Nassau—monarchy, heritage, several centuries of reasonably dignified lineage. All very proper. All very historical. But on King's Day, history takes a polite seat in the corner while the entire country loses its collective mind in the most organized way possible.

April 27th doesn't creep up on anyone. It arrives like a friendly invasion you've been warned about for months. Someone wakes up and thinks, "I'll just wear an orange T-shirt for a bit, keep it casual." By mid-morning, they've added a hat. By ten o'clock, a child has been issued an orange wig that will become a permanent fixture of their identity. By noon, resistance has left the building entirely.

The streets don't fill with people—they transform into rivers of orange, flowing with alarming confidence toward no particular destination. The canals stop being waterways and become floating parties where the concept of personal space has been suspended by national decree. Every surface, everybody, every object that can hold colour suddenly wears a shade of orange that doesn't exist in nature but feels weirdly, unsettlingly right in this context. It's as if the Netherlands decided to rebrand itself as a limited-edition Pantone sample, available one day only, while supplies last, no refunds.

What's truly remarkable isn't the sheer volume of orange. It's the complete absence of irony about the orange. No one's embarrassed. No one's doing "ironic orange" or "orange but make it fashion." Everyone is sincerely, enthusiastically, sometimes aggressively orange, and they're fine with it. Orange trousers are worn with the confidence of someone who's never doubted a clothing choice in their life. Orange sunglasses that should not work somehow do. Orange dogs trot past—unclear if they consented to this, but they're citizens now, so it hardly matters.

For exactly twenty-four hours, orange becomes the great equalizer. Class evaporates. Profession becomes irrelevant. Age, social status, that awkwardness you felt at the party last week—all flattened into a single, unifying chromatic identity. You're not a consultant or a student or a confused tourist trying to find the train station. You're orange. You're also slightly sunburnt. That's the deal.

There's no instruction manual for this. No awareness campaign. No government-issued guidelines on acceptable levels of orange. Orange doesn't explain itself to the world. It assumes the world will keep up, and if the world can't, well, that's the world's problem.

It's patriotic without being solemn. Excessive without being reckless. Even the chaos here seems to respect bike lanes, because this is still the Netherlands and there are limits. Most countries wave flags and sing anthems. The Dutch just wear their colour—not as a symbol, not as a metaphor, but as a lifestyle choice made collectively, confidently, and without a single apology.

On King's Day, the Netherlands doesn't celebrate a monarch. It celebrates the simple, radical, slightly unhinged joy of looking exactly like itself. In orange. Obviously.

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*Postscript: This chapter exists because I have a Dutch son-in-law. The orange came with the family.*

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*Halloween, I must confess, is not a tradition I grew up with.*

*When I was little, Italian households had just begun hosting televisions, and those televisions had exactly one channel. If anything, folkloric happened on the other side of the ocean — pumpkins, witches, candy — the national news certainly didn't mention it. We were informed about popes, presidents, and agricultural irregularities, not children disguised as skeletons demanding chocolate.*

*Then globalisation arrived, and suddenly we were all carving pumpkins like Renaissance apprentices, sending children into the foggy Po Valley armed with plastic spiders and chilling determination. They ring doorbells, shout "trick or treat" with an accent that would scare any self-respecting ghost, and expect sugary tribute.*

*And there I am, the unofficial neighbourhood Halloween Grinch. Already in pyjamas by eight, ready to watch something calm, when the doorbell rings and small costumed figures appear. They are adorable, of course — tiny emissaries of chaos — but I refuse to hand out candy.*

*Not out of cruelty. Out of principles.*
*I refuse to be complicit in the rise of future obese and diabetic adults recalling fondly "that kind lady who gave us marshmallows".*

*Everyone contributes to society in their own way.*
*Mine is defending the glycaemic stability of the next generation.*

# 02 DRESSING HUMANITY IN COLOUR

# HUMANITY'S CHROMATIC DRESS CODE

Humans have an extraordinary talent for surrounding every major transition of life with colour. We dress our beginnings, our promises, and our farewells in precise shades, as if pigment could hold our emotions steady while the world shifts under our feet.

Where animals rely on instinct, humans rely on symbolism.
Where nature uses colour to warn, attract, or camouflage, we use it to narrate who we are and what we believe.
Birth, marriage, and death—three moments that require no explanation biologically—are instead draped in cultural palettes that transform them into rituals.

## Birth: Pink, Blue, And the Strange Story of Baby Colours

The idea that pink belongs to girls and blue to boys feels ancient only because marketers have repeated it often enough for it to fossilise in the collective imagination. But the chromatic division is surprisingly recent. A century ago, many Western societies preferred the opposite: pink was bold, decisive, "a little red"—a colour suitable for boys. Blue was delicate, spiritual, associated with the Virgin Mary, and therefore ideal for girls.

It wasn't biology that changed, but advertising.
By the mid-20th century, campaigns repositioned pink as soft, tender, and feminine, while blue became the uniform of baby boys. The code stuck, reinforced by clothing, toys, nursery décor, and decades of gendered marketing.

Eventually people forgot it was invented and started behaving as if it had come directly from nature.

Yet the global palette is not universal.
In India, newborns may be wrapped in saffron or yellow, colours of blessing. In China, red for babies is auspicious. In some African regions, white cloth protects both mother and child from misfortune. Across the

world, humanity greets new life not with logic but with a colour chosen to represent hope.

Even so, societies rarely agree on what hope should look like.

## Marriage: White Dresses, Red Saris, Political Love

Few colours carry as much symbolic baggage as the ones we wear on our wedding day. In the West, white has become so entangled with the idea of purity that it's hard to imagine a bride dressed in anything else. But this tradition is neither ancient nor universal. It was Queen Victoria, in 1840, who popularised the white wedding dress, and Western fashion eventually turned her personal choice into an international rulebook.

Before that moment, brides wore their best dress, whatever the colour. Sometimes black, sometimes green, sometimes blue.
The colour of love was practical, not theological.

Outside Europe, the palette changes completely.
In India, red is the queen of wedding colours—auspicious, bold, tied to prosperity and fertility. Chinese brides often wear red as well, sometimes covered in gold embroidery that transforms the ceremony into a living tapestry. In Japan, brides wear white to symbolise a new beginning, then change into red or colourful kimonos to signal joy. In many African ceremonies, vibrant patterns, beadwork, and layered colours create an explosion of visual storytelling.

A wedding is not just a union; it's a declaration of identity, wrapped in its society's chromatic rules.

## Death: Black, White, And the Colours of Goodbye

If birth is wrapped in colour and marriage draped in symbolism, death is marked by the palette of farewell. For Europeans and Americans, black became the colour of mourning—a visual silence, a way to mark absence without speaking. But even here, history complicates the story: black was once too expensive for the poor, so people mourned in dark browns or greys. Mourning attire was less "eternal rule" and more "available textiles".

Elsewhere, white reigns.
In China, Korea, and Japan, white is the colour of death, purity, and the spirit world; mourners wear white garments, and funerals revolve around the absence of colour rather than its weight. In parts of Africa, red

signals mourning, particularly when death is linked to conflict. In Brazil, purple marks grief and religious ceremonies. In South Africa, red and black together hold ancestral meaning.

Death, more than any other transition, shows how opposites collide. White and black, purity and silence, illumination and shadow — it is the moment when societies reveal what they truly fear and what they hope awaits on the other side.

Birth, marriage, and death are only checkpoints. In between, colour follows us everywhere: in rituals of passage, in uniforms, in celebrations of adulthood, in the objects we cherish and the ones we avoid. Human life is surprisingly chromatic, even in its quietest moments.

We may think we choose colours, but more often colours choose us. They shape how we interpret moments too immense for words.

## Power Wears Black: Authority, Obedience, and Occult Chic

If birth is pastel, marriage ceremonial, and death solemn, adulthood arrives dressed in a colour that refuses to whisper: black.
Black is the formal handshake of society. It's the colour that means business, literally and metaphorically. Before humans invented office politics, they invented black clothing to signal that something serious was happening.

The association runs deep.
In the ancient world, black appears at the beginning of creation myths: the fertile mud of the Nile, the cosmic darkness before the first light, the womb-like void before the universe expands.
Black has always been the colour of origins — and of endings.
It frames the opening and closing credits of existence.

Yet as societies grew more complex, black took on a second life. It became the colour of authority. Roman magistrates wore black in funerals to embody dignity; medieval judges wrapped themselves in dark robes to project incorruptibility; monastic orders adopted black as a uniform of humility and obedience. Centuries later, graduates still wear black gowns, as if knowledge itself required a sombre colour to be taken seriously.

And then there is clerical black. Priests, monks, ministers, imams, rabbis: countless religious traditions cloak their leaders in shades of black, signalling surrender to a higher power. Black here is not mourning but devotion. It is a colour that absorbs all other colours — a symbolic

gesture of offering oneself entirely. It speaks of discipline, spiritual austerity, and the unsettling idea that truth sometimes hides in shadow.

But black is never only one thing at a time.
For every robe of humility, there is a robe of fear.
For every priest, a witch.
For every sermon, a spell.

Black has always lived a double life, one foot in the cathedral, the other in the forest. It is the colour of cassocks and cauldrons, of confession and conjuring. Medieval Europe believed the night itself was populated by black-winged creatures and invisible dangers. Caves, abysses, the unknown — black was their banner. Witches were painted in black because night was their jurisdiction. Demons were imagined in black because fear prefers a shade that swallows light.

Even sacred figures danced with the colour: black Madonnas, black goddesses, black relics. The same pigment that haunted nightmares became the sign of mystery, depth, and divine transformation.

This tension — obedience vs rebellion, sacred vs profane — is exactly what made black the perfect colour for modern institutions. Banks, courts, parliaments, orchestras, universities: all adopted black because it commands respect even when the person wearing it does not. A conductor in lime green would ruin Mahler. A judge in yellow would get no confession. Black gives us structure, gravity, and the illusion that someone, somewhere, is in control.

But black also became the chosen colour of defiance.
Youth subcultures — Gothic, punk, emo, metal — embraced it as a uniform of resistance.
Black eyeliner, black nails, black jackets: the palette of "I reject your expectations."
And strangely, societies accept this. Black can symbolise conformity or rebellion depending on how much leather is involved.

Even sports psychology has weighed in: teams wearing black are statistically perceived as more aggressive, more dominant, sometimes even more villainous. The colour doesn't change behaviour — it changes the audience.

Black has learned to navigate all these contradictions with grace. It can be funereal or fashionable, oppressive or liberating, holy or unholy. It can belong to priests, judges, rebels, capitalists, professors, assassins, or teenagers who insist dramatic music speaks to them on a spiritual level.

Black is the only colour that refuses to stay in a single category.
It behaves like the night sky: infinite, contradictory, and impossible to ignore.

# When Autism Was Blue

Autism Awareness Day began in blue.

The colour wasn't chosen by chance, nor by the people it was meant to represent.
In 2007, the United Nations selected blue for the World Autism Awareness Day on April 2nd — a colour meant to evoke calm, safety, and knowledge. Reassuring. Orderly. Legible.

Blue was supposed to make autism understandable.

Its visibility exploded with the campaign *Light It Up Blue*, promoted by the American organisation Autism Speaks, which encouraged cities around the world to illuminate monuments in blue. The message was simple, spectacular, and easy to photograph.

Awareness, drenched in blue light.

But over time, many autistic people began to push back — not against visibility, but against the story the colour was telling. For a significant part of the autistic community, blue came to represent an institutional gaze: well-intentioned, perhaps, but external. A colour chosen *about* autism, not *by* autistic people.

The critique went deeper than aesthetics.

In English, *feeling blue* is a common idiom for depression, sadness, isolation — exactly the emotional framing many autistic people reject. Autism is not melancholy. Not absence. Not a muted emotional state waiting to be corrected.

Blue, instead, came to echo narratives of coldness, distance, and lack — a chromatic language that framed autism as something missing rather than something different.

It also carried an old bias: the idea that autism is mostly male, quietly reinforced by a colour long coded as masculine.
Rejecting blue became a way to reject that simplification too.

So, the palette changed.

Gradually, visibly, deliberately, blue gave way to something less controllable.

The rainbow.

Not as decoration, but as declaration.
Not one colour, but many — because autism is not a single condition, but a spectrum of experiences, abilities, sensitivities, and ways of being.

The rainbow speaks the language of neurodiversity: the idea that autism is a natural variation of the human brain, not a missing piece or a defect to repair.
It replaces the old puzzle-piece symbol — widely criticised for implying incompleteness or mystery — with the infinity symbol, often rendered in rainbow colours. Infinite variation. Infinite dignity.

This wasn't a rebrand. It was a reclamation.

Blue said: *we are explaining autism to you.*
The rainbow says: *we define ourselves.*

Autism Awareness became, for many, Autism Acceptance — and colour stopped being a label and started being a voice.

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*AUTHOR'S NOTE*

*In this book, I use the term autistic people rather than people with autism. This is a deliberate choice. As someone who lives on the spectrum, I don't experience autism as something added to me, like an accessory or a condition I carry around. It is part of how I exist in the world — how I think, perceive, process, and relate to others. For me, autism is not something I have. It is something I am.*

## Red: Love, Sin, and the Colour That Never Learned Moderation

Red is the most dramatic colour we ever agreed to normalize.
It doesn't suggest. It declares.

From the very beginning, red binds love to blood, desire to danger, attraction to exposure. The heart is red not because it looks that way — anatomically, it doesn't — but because blood became the metaphor we needed. Love that pumps. Love that risks. Love that hurts if mishandled.

Romantic red is never gentle. It's passion, urgency, heat. Roses bleed colour. Lips promise trouble. Red dresses don't whisper affection — they announce availability, confidence, sometimes defiance. In visual culture, red doesn't say "I love you." It says "I dare you."

But red has always had a double life.

Where love becomes illicit, red follows. Red-light districts. Red rooms. Red curtains. Red neon. When desire steps outside social approval, it doesn't change colour — it intensifies it. Prostitution, across centuries and cultures, has been coded in red precisely because red is visible, unavoidable, impossible to ignore. It marks bodies and spaces that society wants both to consume and to condemn.

The association isn't accidental, nor modern.

## The Whore of Babylon: When Red Became a Theological Accusation

If you want to see red used as a moral weapon, the Bible already did the branding for us.

The "Whore of Babylon" comes straight from *Revelation* (chapter 17), where John describes a vision so visually specific it almost feels like stage direction. A woman appears dressed in purple and scarlet, seated on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns, surrounded by "names of blasphemy." She's not subtle. She's the kind of figure you spot from the back row of history.

She's described as adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls, holding a golden cup "full of abominations." On her forehead is written a name like a title card in a horror film: "Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth." And the detail that makes the whole thing go cold is this: she is drunk on the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus.

That imagery matters because it didn't stay locked inside scripture. During the Reformation, it became political ammunition.

In the sixteenth century and beyond, many Protestant theologians identified this woman with the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy. It was an interpretation shaped by conflict, fear, and the need to name an enemy in colour. The logic was "symbolic," but it also had a very practical visual hook: scarlet made a convenient target.

The red and scarlet garments were read as echoes of cardinal vestments. The "city on seven hills" mentioned in the text was linked to Rome. The wealth and ornamentation fed Protestant critiques of a Church seen as too comfortable with power, money, and spectacle. The violence implied by the woman's drunkenness was interpreted through the lens of persecution — and in that context, Protestants often cast themselves as the "true believers" being targeted.

The result was simple, and brutally effective: red became the colour of corrupted authority.

This reading was especially strong among major reformers (Luther, Calvin, Knox) and later in Puritan, Baptist, and other evangelical traditions, where it fit neatly into a broader narrative of "apostasy" — the idea that the Church had strayed from early Christianity and turned faith into empire.

Today, the temperature has changed. Many mainstream Protestant denominations have moved away from that polemical identification, while some conservative evangelical circles still keep it. Biblical

scholars often interpret the figure more historically — as an allusion to imperial Rome of the first century, or more broadly as a symbol of corrupt power that seduces, consumes, and destroys. Ecumenical dialogue has also softened what used to be a full-contact sport.

But the chromatic legacy remains: this is one of the moments in Western culture where red isn't just the colour of sex, or passion, or sin in the vague sense. It becomes something sharper: a colour used to accuse.

And once a colour learns how to accuse, it never fully unlearns it.

## When Red Shoes Stop Dancing

And then there are the shoes.

Red shoes began as seduction. High heels, lacquered soles, flashes of red under walking bodies — a visual trick designed to pull the eye, slow the gaze, suggest confidence, power, control. Red shoes said: I choose visibility. I own my presence.
For decades, they belonged to cinema, fashion, fantasy. They were playful. Dangerous, maybe — but in the cinematic sense. Until they stopped being metaphor.

In recent years, red shoes have been reclaimed as symbols of femicide. Empty pairs placed in public squares. No bodies, just absence. Red no longer as desire, but as blood that should not have been shed. The same colour that once signalled erotic agency now marks loss, violence, systemic failure.

Nothing about the shoes changed.
Culture did.

That shift is one of the clearest examples of how colour is not fixed — it migrates with meaning. Red did not become darker. It became more honest.

Today, red still carries love, passion, celebration. But it also carries warning, memory, grief. It refuses to stay decorative. It insists on being read.

Red is the colour that exposes contradictions. We use it to sell romance and to protest death. To dress lovers and to commemorate victims. To glorify bodies and to mourn them.

And perhaps that is why red endures. Because no other colour is willing to hold so much at once — desire and danger, pleasure and prohibition, seduction and accusation — without ever apologising.

Red doesn't ask what it should mean. Red shows up. And waits for us to decide what we're willing to see.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*When my daughter was born, I was determined—absolutely determined—to dress her in pink. Not because I wanted the world to decode her gender through a colour chart, but because I genuinely liked the shade. Soft, warm, a little whimsical. The kind of pink that makes baby clothes look irresistibly sweet in shop windows.*

*There was only one problem: she looked terrible in pink.*

*Not mildly mismatched. Not aesthetically challenged.*
*Disastrous.*

*That adorable little pink dress I had bought with such enthusiasm transformed her into something between a misplaced orphan in a Victorian novel and a tiny refugee from a pastel-tinted tragedy. I had to face the painful truth: my child and pink were never meant to be.*

*She grew up maintaining a polite but firm distance from the entire colour family.*
*And then life, with its sense of humour, handed me a granddaughter who loves pink with religious devotion.*

*So now, finally, I get my revenge.*
*I dress her in pink from head to toe—bows, dresses, socks, the full synesthetic experience—and she shines in it.*
*Some dreams take a generation to come true.*

# PAINTING AROUND THE PROBLEM

## How To Lie Politely Using Colour

I've always loved the way colours let us cheat at communication. Euphemisms are the linguistic equivalent of putting a soft-focus filter on an awkward truth: reality stays the same but looks a little more polite. And nothing reveals this better than how we speak about colour — *especially* white, which behaves like a diplomat hiding behind immaculate laundry.

Take Western cultures. On paper, white is purity, brides, angels, and toothpaste commercials. But spend five minutes listening to how we actually use it, and you'll stumble into an entire euphemistic universe. We wave a *white flag* to surrender — politely, of course. We talk about *white trash* to insult whole communities while pretending we're discussing refuse. We recall the dead wrapped in *white funeral sheets,* and then spend the rest of our time pretending ghosts really do float around in bedsheets because it feels less frightening than whatever an incorporeal entity actually looks like.

And then there's the everyday idiom parade: White Christmas, white knight, white lie, blank cheque, blank page, white whale, white as a corpse. Italian adds its own chromatic seasoning: *mosca bianca* (the rare exception), *mangiare in bianco* (dietary purgatory), *notte in bianco* (no sleep at all), and *andare in bianco* (romantic failure — very politely stated).

Just when white seems to have settled into its Western persona — purity with a side of neurosis — you cross the cultural threshold and step into a very different palette.

In China and Japan, white signals death, mourning, and misfortune. Brides wear white in Japanese Shinto weddings to symbolise that they are metaphorically "dead" to their family of origin — a sentence that sounds harsh until you remember that marriage has historically involved several deaths, mostly of personal freedom. In China, white is considered unlucky or distasteful, wrapped in layers of superstition. Funerals are white. Ghosts are white. Misfortune is pale.

In India, widows traditionally wear white — the only colour permitted after the husband's death, as though brightness itself must be extinguished.

Then the colour flips again when you reach the Arab world, where white returns to its role as moral halo. A *white heart* (*abyad al-qalb*) is the highest praise: honest, pure, kind. A *white hand* is a philanthropist. A

*white note* marks impeccable reputation. Even gratitude is brightened with the blessing "May God whiten your face," which only becomes non-terrifying once you remember that *white eyes* in Arabic idiom mean blindness, so naturally the eyes must remain excluded from divine whitening operations.

Yet white, being incapable of consistency, also carries darker undertones in Arabic-speaking cultures. In Jordan, *white eyes* can refer to a stubborn or difficult woman. *White land* is barren, infertile. The *white plague* describes epidemics and cancers that drain the colour from the sick.

And still, the global euphemistic dance continues. Across the world, a *white lie* is harmless, a *white dove* is peace, *white weapons* are knives (because apparently if we avoid mentioning blood, they seem friendlier), and becoming *white with fear* is universal panic rendered in pastel.

What fascinates me most is how white can't go five minutes without contradicting itself — and somehow that only increases our affection for it. It behaves like a linguistic shapeshifter, slipping between meanings with the agility of a diplomat who knows exactly when to smile, when to apologise, and when to disappear into metaphor. Whenever reality feels too sharp, white is the colour we reach for to blur the edges.

But that's really the secret power of colour euphemisms: no matter where we live or what we fear, we keep painting the world in gentler shades. We smooth the truth with colour, dress it up, disguise it, or give it just enough poetry to make it survivable. We're not just communicating — we're styling our emotions.

And beneath all this chromatic choreography lies a beautifully human habit: our reluctance to stare things down directly. So, we bleach disasters white, tint anxiety blue, and give poverty a pleasant shade of green. We soften death, heartbreak, fear, and unemployment with the simple magic trick of shifting the palette.

Maybe it's cowardice.
Maybe it's creativity.
Or maybe it's just our way of ensuring that life wounds us in a colour scheme we can tolerate.

Either way, colour euphemisms reveal one truth: we don't merely talk *about* colour — we talk *through* it.

## When Words Create Colours That Don't Exist

Language sometimes behaves like a slightly eccentric designer: it invents colours that the natural world never bothered to produce. Entire shades are born not from minerals, plants, or pigments, but from marketing departments, cultural obsessions, or the unmistakable ability of humans to baptise anything with a poetic name and then pretend it has always existed.

This is how we end up with Venetian red, a colour that belongs more to the story of a city than to chemistry. Or Mitterrand beige, which exists solely because a president had a fondness for a very specific tone of political modesty. Industrial progress brought brick red, anthracite grey, and petrol green — all children of factories rather than flowers.

And then there is Tiffany Blue, perhaps the most successful linguistic colour invention of the last century. Nature offers turquoise, aqua, teal, and mint, but Tiffany Blue occupies a space none of these can claim. It is a registered trademark, a coded message, a chromatic promise that whatever lies inside the box must be precious. It is not a hue; it is a cultural event.

The magic is that the colour doesn't exist outside the story. Without the brand, the packaging, the cinematic sparkle of Audrey Hepburn holding a pastry outside a Manhattan window, Tiffany Blue would be just another variation of greenish-blue. Instead, it became shorthand for elegance, luxury, and just the right amount of dreaminess. Language didn't describe the colour — it made the colour.

## Hey Boomer, Here Comes the Millennial Pink

And just when we thought colour invention had reached its peak, the Internet — that giant machine that transforms trends into dogma in under twelve hours — gave us Millennial Pink.

Millennial Pink is the colour of a generation that grew up with dial-up internet, survived low-rise jeans, and learned to be ironic as a coping mechanism. It's not a single shade but a whole emotional spectrum: somewhere between blush, salmon, grapefruit flesh, and the kind of dusty rose you'd find on a 1970s telephone. The ambiguity is the point. Millennial Pink doesn't commit — which makes it deeply millennial.

The colour exploded around 2014, even though it had existed for decades. Suddenly it was everywhere: on bakery walls, coffee cups, cosmetics, start-up logos, tote bags preaching mindfulness, Scandinavian furniture with names that sound like existential crises. It became the chromatic anthem of soft minimalism, gentle rebellion, and a generation trying very hard not to appear like it's trying too hard.

The genius of Millennial Pink is that it detached pink from gender.
For the first time in centuries, pink was no longer trapped behind the "girls only" sign.
It became androgynous, aesthetic, slightly ironic — the colour equivalent of someone shrugging while making a point.

Millennial Pink is what happens when a shade becomes a worldview. Not feminine, not masculine, not childish, not romantic — just pleasantly non-threatening. A colour that looks good on walls, cafés, packaging, Instagram feeds, and even politically awkward discussions. It's the emotional support animal of the design world.

And like Tiffany Blue, it proves the same rule:
a colour doesn't need to exist in pigment to exist in culture.
Give it a name, a mood, a cultural moment — and suddenly the world adjusts its eyes to see it.

## Gen Z Yellow: Optimism With Wi-Fi

Just when the world finished debating whether Millennial Pink was a colour or a personality trait, Gen Z arrived — with the confident swagger of people born after Wi-Fi — and said: "Alright boomers, move."
And thus Gen Z Yellow was born.

It's not sunflower yellow.
It's not that slightly sickly school-hallway yellow we all endured in the '90s.
It's a soft, bright, optimistic kind of yellow — a little creamy, a little neon, a little like midday sunlight filtered through an aggressively curated Instagram aesthetic.

It's the colour for people who want to be seen without screaming, who want brightness without toxicity, joy without childishness. A yellow that basically whispers: "Life is complicated, but look at this glow."

Gen Z Yellow came from ad campaigns, filters, minimalist wardrobes, and the generational urge to have *one* thing that wasn't defined by millennials.
It's the opposite of warning-yellow.
It's the yellow that lets you exhale.
The yellow of hope — with solid Wi-Fi.

## Digital Lavender: Calm, But Make it Algorithmic

Then came Digital Lavender, a name that sounds like it was invented by someone who does guided meditation on a subscription app.
It's a soft, barely-there lilac born from collective anxiety, wellness culture, and that "pastel-but-futuristic" aesthetic ruling every moodboard of the decade.

Digital Lavender is the colour of *comfort-tech*.

You see it in soothing UI designs, on websites trying to feel therapeutic, in products claiming to rescue you from burnout. It's the shade of "I'm fine... I think... let me check my smartwatch."

There's something digital in how it reflects light, but something deeply human in how it seems to whisper: "Breathe, babe."

If Tiffany Blue is an invitation to luxury,
and Millennial Pink is an invitation to irony,
Digital Lavender is an invitation to do emotional stretching without judging yourself.

It's the colour of a future we desperately hope will be kinder than the present.

# THE QUIET POWER OF COLOUR

Colour doesn't just describe the world.
It tells us how to feel about it.

Before we consciously decide whether something is safe, fresh, serious, or desirable, colour has already made the first move. A blue pill feels calming before it works. A blue bank logo whispers stability before we read a single word. Yellow on a warning sign triggers alarm faster than language ever could. Red doesn't negotiate — it stops us on instinct.

We like to think these reactions are rational, but they're mostly learned. Even rituals that feel ancient turn out to be design decisions that stuck. Traffic lights didn't emerge from human psychology; they emerged from engineering plus symbolism. We stop at red because culture taught us danger should be red. We go on green because someone decided green feels like permission. Repetition did the rest.

This is how colour becomes a quiet social grammar.

We read seriousness in dark suits, optimism in bright posters, modernity in daring palettes. We call these choices "aesthetic," but most of the time they're obedient. Certain colours belong to mourning, others to

celebration, others to bureaucracy. We don't question this grammar until we meet someone from another culture who uses a different palette — and suddenly "white wedding" or "black tie" sound less universal and more geographically specific.

Politics understands this better than anyone. Red becomes revolution. Black becomes authority or rebellion, depending on the century. White signals surrender, peace, or moral purity. Blue plays ideological musical chairs, conservative in one country, progressive in another. Colour works here because it bypasses argument and goes straight to emotion. Revolutions want to be felt. Regimes want to intimidate. Colour does the heavy lifting.

In the end, colour isn't just something we use to describe reality.
It's one of the systems that teaches us how to interpret it — what to trust, what to fear, and when to stop.

We may think we're reading the world.
More often, the world is colour-coding us.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*Colour coding sounds trivial until you realise your entire ecological dignity depends on it.*

*Where I live, recycling follows a chromatic dogma so strict it might as well be in the Constitution: white bin for paper, green for organic waste, yellow for plastic and glass. And the thing is—it works for me. The associations are cognitive. White feels like paper. Green feels like things that used to be alive. Yellow feels synthetic and loud, exactly like plastic. My brain agrees, so I comply without resistance.*

*I've lived here long enough to accept this arrangement the way one accepts gravity—not because it's universally logical, but because here it makes sense. The colours align. The rules disappear.*

*The comedy begins the moment I travel.*
*Take me to the seaside, and suddenly the colour map collapses. There, the yellow bin is for paper, white for plastic, green for "dry waste," and blue — blue! — is for glass. Somehow, coastal communities have decided it should be dressed in deep Mediterranean blue. I respect it, even if it makes me feel like I'm throwing beer bottles into the ocean.*

*What truly confuses me isn't the inconsistency — it's how deeply my mind refuses to adapt. Paper must go into a white bin because paper is white. Not "symbolically" white. Ontologically white. Even cardboard seems like paper that lost a fight with sunlight. So, when I face foreign bins, there's a moment of existential dread: am I betraying nature by throwing paper somewhere non-white? One wrong choice and I might personally trigger climate change.*

*Because of this, every time I stand near unfamiliar bins, I experience a small, silent crisis, like a chromatic existential riddle:*
*Should my yogurt pot be yellow, white, or blue today?*
*One mistake and I'm morally responsible for microplastics in the Pacific.*

*Naturally, my city recently upgraded the bins. "A modern palette for a modern waste system," they said. The plastic bin is now pink, which I adore. Pink plastic? Fabulous. I feel like I'm sending my trash to Barbie's recycling spa. But paper... paper is now blue. Blue! A colour I can only associate with oceans, Facebook notifications, and credit cards. Every time I throw a newspaper into the blue bin, I feel like I'm drowning journalism.*

*I'm not exaggerating when I say chromatic logic is crucial to civilization. Recycling bins prove it. If we can't agree on what colour bin paper is, how on earth do we expect to agree on politics, ethics, or whether pineapple belongs on pizza?*

*Colour isn't just aesthetic — it's infrastructure, navigation, collective agreement, and the very foundation of domestic peace.*
*Trust me: once you've lived through the rainbow of recycling confusion, you'll never underestimate a colour label again.*

# 03 THE POLITICS OF LOOKING "NORMAL"

## The Crayon That Invented "Normal"

Before colour became a political problem, it was a practical one.
It lived quietly inside a pencil box.

For decades, children all over the world grew up with a crayon called "flesh colour." A small pastel stick, pale and pinkish, that quietly claimed to represent the entire human species. Millions of children learned, without a single word being spoken, that there was one default skin tone. If yours didn't match, you could improvise — brown, orange, maybe a creative mix — but none of those were labelled *normal*.

Even toys played along. Barbie reigned as the universal female archetype, glowing in pastel perfection. Anyone darker entered the toy kingdom through side doors: late editions, special collections, awkward variations marketed as "diverse." Representation existed, but never as the starting point.

Things have changed. Crayon boxes diversified. Makeup brands discovered that humans come in more than four shades. Dolls slowly drifted toward realism.
But colour education leaves residue. A culture takes a very long time to unlearn a default.

Once a colour becomes "normal" in a pencil box, it doesn't stay there.
It follows you into language.

## When Pigment Learned How To File Humans

Talking about colour is simple — until it lands on human skin. Pigment on a canvas behaves beautifully; pigment on a person becomes history, politics, and biography all at once.

Scientifically, the truth is almost disappointingly elegant. Human skin exists on a wide spectrum of browns, shaped by melanin, sunlight, and ancestry. No sharp borders. No primary colours. Just gradients.

Culturally, we ignored that elegance completely.

For centuries, humans insisted on squeezing that spectrum into a handful of labels chosen not for accuracy, but for convenience.

It started innocently enough. Explorers and missionaries and assorted men in boots and ambition travelled the world and, needing a quick vocabulary for classifying humanity, borrowed the names they already knew: white, black, red, yellow. Never mind that none of these colours existed on actual skin. Europeans weren't white unless you count their wigs. Africans weren't black unless you interpret charcoal very generously. Native Americans were labelled red for reasons no

dermatologist could defend. East Asians were called yellow, a shade found more readily in tropical fruit than in human complexion.

These labels were not scientific; they were administrative poetry gone rogue. Yet once they appeared, they stayed — and they shaped entire centuries of perception.

And once colours become labels, language turns dangerous.

## Same Colour, Different Words

A colour term that sounds harmless in one language can land like a small explosion in another.

In Italian, *pellerossa*—literally "red skin"—belongs to old adventure novels, spaghetti westerns, and childhood films that never stopped to ask permission. Translate it into English, and you step straight into a minefield of racial violence and historical erasure.

*Pelle nera*—"black skin"—in Italian is usually descriptive, sometimes clumsy, but rarely loaded with identity politics.
*Black*, in English, is something else entirely. It carries struggle, pride, resistance, and a long history of being reclaimed on its own terms. Similarly, *people of colour* is an inclusive, politically conscious expression in English. Reverse the word order to *coloured people*, and the meaning flips—suddenly echoing segregation, hierarchy, and exclusion.

The colour hasn't changed. The history has.

Mandarin adds yet another layer of complexity. The term 黑人 (*hēirén*) literally means "black person" (*hēi* = black, *rén* = person). On paper, it is descriptive. In practice, it is delicate. Depending on tone, context, and who is speaking, *hēirén* can sound neutral, blunt, awkward, or deeply uncomfortable. For this reason, speakers often avoid it in favour of more indirect or context-sensitive expressions. Precision, here, is not politeness.

Arabic offers yet another reminder. Calling someone "white" is not primarily about skin tone, but about character: honesty, moral clarity, purity of intention. The compliment lives in the ethical register, not the visual one.

This is the trap of colour words.
They look universal.
They never are.

Colour is history condensed into a syllable — power disguised as description, and the shadow cast by everything that came before.

# Same Colour, Different Layers

In Chinese, skin colour is never just skin colour. It is biography, social class, health report, emotional state — and occasionally, a moral judgment.

The preference for light skin did not begin as an aesthetic whim. Historically, darker skin meant working outdoors under the sun. Lighter skin meant staying inside, protected by wealth. Pallor was not just beautiful; it was proof that you did not have to work for a living.

The language remembers this with remarkable clarity.

There is a saying so famous it barely needs explaining:
一白遮三丑 (*yī bái zhē sān chǒu*). Literally: *one white covers three uglinesses*. Translation: if your skin is pale enough, everything else becomes negotiable.

Other expressions elevate the ideal into poetry.
肤如凝脂 (*fū rú níng zhī*) describes skin "like congealed fat" — alarming in English, but in Chinese evocative of smoothness, purity, a milky, jade-like glow.
冰肌玉肤 (*bīng jī yù fū*), "ice muscles and jade skin," lifts the body into something almost celestial: cool, untouchable, flawless.
雪白 (*xuě bái*), snow-white, is simple, absolute, and still aspirational.

White, here, is not just a colour.
It is an achievement.

And yet, things get complicated.

Under Western influence, darker or warmer skin tones have started acquiring a different meaning. Not classically beautiful, perhaps — but healthy, active, modern.
小麦色 (*xiǎo mài sè*), "wheat-coloured," describes a sun-kissed, athletic complexion.
古铜色 (*gǔ tóng sè*), "ancient bronze," is often reserved for muscular bodies, bodies that signal strength rather than refinement.

Then comes the social minefield.

Some terms are technically accurate and socially disastrous. 黑人 (*hēirén*, "black person") or 黄人 (*huáng rén*, "yellow person") exist in the language, but using them casually can sound blunt, insensitive, or outright offensive. When describing their own complexion, speakers often retreat into safer territory: 肤色偏黄 (*fūsè piān huáng*), "my skin tone tends toward yellow."
Less precise. Much safer.

Because in colour language, accuracy is easy.
Neutrality is not.

Arabic offers another reminder. Calling someone "white" is not primarily about skin tone, but about character: honesty, purity of intention, moral clarity. The compliment lives in the ethical register, not the visual one.

This is the trap of colour words. They look universal. They are anything but.

Colour is never just colour.
It is history condensed into a syllable, power disguised as description, and the shadow cast by everything that came before.

## Same Colour, Different Offence

We like to think that colour mistakes are linguistic — a bad translation, an outdated term, an unfortunate choice of words.
Most of the time, they're not.

They're the result of a very early art lesson.

We learned what "normal" looked like from a crayon.
We learned which colours came pre-approved, which were optional, and which required creative excuses.

So when we reach for the wrong word, it's rarely because we're reckless. It's because we trusted the box.

The problem is that once you realise how much history, hierarchy, and potential offence can fit inside a single shade, colouring stops being relaxing.

Suddenly, every choice feels loaded.
Every pastel looks suspicious.
And the idea of "just colouring people" starts to feel like a high-risk activity.

At that point, the blank page no longer looks empty.
It looks... prudent.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*As for my own skin, I've never fit comfortably into the box marked "white." I'm technically Caucasian, yes, but my complexion behaves like an indecisive weather forecast. Depending on the season, the lighting, and whether I remembered sunscreen, I drift somewhere between pale ivory, cautious beige, "rosa prosciutto" (pink ham), bright tomato, and — in the proudest days of summer — "marocchina".*

*Now, "marocchina" is one of those deeply Italian expressions that requires a footnote and possibly a support group. It doesn't literally mean "Moroccan woman," nor does it refer to nationality in any precise sense. It's simply our very colourful (and slightly chaotic) way of saying someone has tanned so intensely that they now share the deep bronze typical of people living under far sunnier skies than ours. It's shorthand for "your melanin has gone on a solo adventure and left you with the kind of tan no dermatologist approves of."*

*It's not scientific, it's not elegant, and it absolutely reveals more about Italian idioms than about anyone's skin tone — but like many expressions born in Mediterranean kitchens and beaches, it survived purely because it was vivid, fast, and a little bit dramatic.*

*And I, with years of golf, outdoor life, and an allergy to indoor hobbies, have earned my place in the "marocchina" category more times than my sunscreen would like to admit.*

# WHEN PIXELS BECOME RACISTS

## Why Cameras Think You'd Look Better Bleached

If language tells us how societies once saw the world, technology reveals how they still see it — sometimes flatteringly, sometimes carelessly, sometimes with the precision of a malfunctioning spotlight.

We like to imagine technology as neutral, a cool, stainless-steel observer that treats every shade equally. In truth, technology behaves more like a distracted painter: confident, inconsistent, and heavily influenced by whichever colours it has seen the most.

The first clue came from cameras. Early digital sensors adored pale skin. They caressed it with light, embraced it in correct exposure, and lavished it with flattering detail. Darker skin, meanwhile, was treated as a puzzling aberration — routinely underexposed, flattened, or quietly erased. It wasn't intentional discrimination; it was simply that the machine had been trained on images of people who resembled its designers. Technology, like humans, assumes its own experience is universal.

## Stereotypes, Now Available in HDR

Cinema added its own layer of chromatic theatre. Filmmakers fell in love with colour grading and began turning entire countries into visual stereotypes. Mexico acquired a permanent orange glow, as though the sun there were in a perpetual state of melodrama.
Northern Europe appeared shrouded in cool grey, like a mood inherited from Scandinavian furniture. Africa radiated amber, even in scenes that logically should have been cold.
East Asia became a palette of soft pinks or jade green, depending on whether the director preferred romance or mystique. These filters weren't mere decoration — they constructed emotional instructions. Before a character spoke, the colour had already told you what to feel.

## The Tyranny of Polite Beige

Makeup wasn't much better. For decades, beauty counters offered foundations that all seemed to come in variations of beige with names suggesting a philosophical lack of imagination: "Natural Beige," "Warm Beige," "Slightly Less Warm Beige," each one promising universality while

ignoring most of humanity. If your skin tone didn't fit the limited palette, the beauty industry essentially shrugged. Only recently did brands expand their ranges, acknowledging that melanin is not an inconvenience but a spectrum worth respecting. A makeup aisle can be a political document — it shows who is being seen.

Advertising followed a similar script. Light skin was placed at the centre of glossy campaigns, while darker skin appeared only strategically, like a footnote added to give the illusion of modernity. Representation existed, yes, but often at reduced opacity, careful not to disturb the established visual hierarchy.

A society's dreams are revealed not by who appears, but by who appears prominently.

Then came the digital avatars — our chance to create entirely new versions of ourselves, stripped of bias. Or so we hoped. In practice, many early avatars possessed a default shade best described as "polite beige." Designers, often unconsciously, used themselves as starting templates. Users logged in and discovered they had to adjust their digital selves before expressing their identity. Even in imaginary worlds, we had inherited the old palette.

Emoji introduced another twist. At first every little cartoon hand was fluorescent yellow — a "neutral" chosen by designers terrified of international controversy. But as soon as skin-tone modifiers arrived, the world was forced into tiny acts of chromatic self-definition. Some people selected their shade proudly, others avoided choosing altogether, and some revealed internalised biases they never knew they possessed. An emoji, barely bigger than a breadcrumb, became a cultural confession.

## Ai Portraits and the Whitening Reflex

And then there was AI-generated portraiture — the ultimate test of technological objectivity. Upload a photo and receive a digital version of yourself, polished and enhanced. What no one expected was the machine's enthusiasm for whitening. Faces came back lighter, noses slimmer, eyes brighter, jawlines sculpted by an overzealous geometry engine. The models weren't trying to insult anyone; they were simply trained on databases overflowing with pale, airbrushed influencers and stock photography. Machines learn what they are shown, and they were shown a world where beauty leaned suspiciously toward paleness.

The result was a quiet, pixel-level flattening of diversity. People found that AI didn't mirror them — it *corrected* them, nudging everyone toward the same aesthetic ideal. A filter is harmless until it begins to erase the features that carry identity.

Developers have since then improved datasets, adjusted algorithms, and introduced calibration tools. Technology is learning — slowly, imperfectly — that the world contains more than beige. But the glitch left a lesson behind: neutrality in technology often reflects the comfort zone of its creators.

The deeper truth is that digital representation has become the new frontier of visibility. Every filter, every setting, every facial-recognition model colours the world with assumptions. And unless we notice them, we risk handing over our stories to machines that haven't yet learned to see us as we are.

In the end, technology does what humans have always done: it paints the world according to the palette it inherited. The question now is whether we are ready to revise that palette — and whether we can teach our machines to love the full spectrum, not just the convenient parts.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*I almost never wear makeup.*
*Not because I have anything against it — I simply never mastered the art.*
*When I got married, I didn't even consider hiring a makeup artist.*
*My entire bridal look consisted of radiant happiness and one absolutely necessary detail: lipstick.*

*I may ignore makeup, but I never ignore lipstick.*
*Never.*
*I own shades ranging from electric pink to coral red, fiery orange, and even a warm brick tone that makes me feel vaguely Parisian.*

*If someone opened my bathroom drawer without warning, they'd think I was secretly curating a Pantone catalogue dedicated entirely to lips.*
*Each shade tells a mood, a season, a version of me.*
*It's ironic: I don't participate in the grand performance of makeup, yet I cling to colour like a signature.*

*Maybe that's the lesson of this chapter.*
*Representation isn't only about being seen — it's about choosing the shade of yourself you want the world to meet.*

# 04 COLOUR STRIKES AGAIN

# THE WEEL IN TECHNICOLOUR

Humans have always used colour to tell stories — but in recent years we've taken the idea a step further and started colouring the calendar itself.
Time, which should be neutral and indifferent, has become a moodboard of blue Mondays, black Fridays, red Tuesdays, green Mondays, and golden hours.
Each colour carries a collective emotion, a ritual, a superstition, or a cultural inside joke.
It's as if the calendar finally gave up and decided to speak our language.

## Blue Monday: The Most Marketed Sadness of the Year

Blue Monday wasn't born from ancient wisdom or meteorology.
It was created in 2005 by a travel company trying to sell winter vacations — proof that even sadness can be monetised if you attach a colour to it.

A university lecturer was hired to produce an "equation" explaining why the third Monday of January is the most depressing day of the year.
The variables included weather, debt, failed resolutions, and "motivation levels," which is essentially the scientific equivalent of shrugging.

The world, inexplicably, embraced it.

And the colour?
Blue was the obvious choice — the universal shorthand for melancholy, jazz ballads, rainy windows, and whatever emotion makes you eat pasta straight from the pot.

Blue Monday is manufactured moodiness, yes, but it spread because people looked outside, saw the grey sky and their neglected gym card, and thought,

*Fine. Blue it is.*
Marketing won again, wrapped in the soft, damp glow of collective existential fatigue.

## Black Friday: a Little Chaos, a Little Capitalism, and a Lot of Black Ink

Black Friday didn't begin as a shopping festival; it began as a sigh. Philadelphia police officers in the 1950s were drowning in traffic, crowds, frenzied shoppers, and the annual Army–Navy game that attracted half the East Coast. They started calling the day "black" simply because working it felt like punishment from the gods of retail.

Merchants hated the name.
They tried to rename it "Big Friday," a rebrand so flimsy it collapsed before lunch.

But black stayed.
It captured the mood too well — the exhaustion, the chaos, the sense that the city had been swallowed by its own enthusiasm.

Then, in the 1980s, marketers performed a linguistic miracle. They took this gloomy nickname and spun it into a success story: "black," they declared, was the moment retailers' ledgers finally shifted from red ink to black ink. *Profit, not despair!*

And with that narrative flip, a new ritual was born: a day soaked in desire, excess, adrenaline, and very well-coordinated shopping carts. Black became the colour of retail salvation — capitalism's favourite shade, polished and ready for mass consumption.

## Red Tuesday: The Colour of Heartbreak Wearing Cupid's Shoes

Red Tuesday sits quietly on the calendar — the second Tuesday of February, awkwardly close to Valentine's Day, has a reputation for being a month when relationships are put to the test. No one knows exactly why.
Maybe people panic, buy roses and realise the relationship doesn't justify the investment.
Maybe Cupid misfires that week.
Maybe February is simply not a stable month for human emotion.

But the colour fits like a drama queen.
Red, usually the ambassador of passion, becomes the emblem of romantic implosion.
It's the colour of bouquets tossed in recycling bins, candlelit dinners cancelled, and text messages beginning with "we need to talk."

If Valentine's Day is the promise, Red Tuesday is the plot twist.

## Cyber Monday: A Blue-Tinted Celebration of Our Digital Ambitions

Cyber Monday isn't historical; it's fully engineered, a marketing invention from 2005 when retailers realised people enjoy online shopping most when they're supposed to be working.

Its colour isn't official, but everyone feels it: that neon, electric blue glow of screens, LED signs, and discount banners that blink like overeager fireflies.
It's the chromatic sibling of Black Friday, but sleeker, quieter, and absolutely convinced it's the future.

Cyber Monday was built for the inbox era — a temple to discount codes, shipping estimates, and checkout buttons that promise "arrives tomorrow" but mean "eventually."

Blue became its natural aura: the colour of screens, optimism, and the slightly chilly excitement of buying things you'll forget you ordered.

## Green Monday: The Retail Panic Attack Wrapped in a Cheerful Name

Green Monday didn't fall from tradition or ancient ritual; it was coined by eBay in 2007 after the company noticed that one of their highest-volume shopping days happened to be the second Monday of December.

Someone in a meeting said, "We need a name."
Someone else said, "Green means money."
And voilà: Green Monday was born.

Other retailers joined instantly — fear of missing out is the true engine of modern holidays.

The colour is a funny accident.
"Green" hints at cash, yes, but also at hope and last-minute redemption.
It's the shade of people who suddenly remember they haven't bought anything for anyone and the shipping deadline is looming like a moral judgment.

Green Monday is not majestic like Black Friday or clever like Cyber Monday.
It's the middle child of retail — earnest, rushed, and ever so slightly panicked.

## Purple Thursday: A Day Invented by Activists, not Marketers

Purple Thursday grew out of domestic-violence awareness campaigns in the U.S. and several European countries.
The chosen colour — purple — carries a long symbolic lineage: dignity, resilience, mourning, and the right to be heard.

Unlike retail colour-days, Purple Thursday wasn't created to sell anything.
It was made to remind society that visibility saves lives.

People wear purple to signal solidarity, to honour survivors, and to break silence in a world that often prefers discomfort neatly hidden.
The colour is soft, but its message is not.

Purple Thursday is a chromatic vigil — proof that colour can be a shield, not just an aesthetic.

## Grey Thursday: The Unofficial Holiday of Procrastinators Everywhere

Grey Thursday isn't a formal day.
It emerged quietly, almost apologetically, from office culture — the Thursday before a big deadline, when everyone collectively gives up on productivity.

The colour grey was assigned ironically:
not dark like despair, not bright like hope, just... suspended.
Like the sky before a storm that never quite arrives.

Grey Thursday is the colour of unfinished work, lukewarm coffee, and the moment you decide the project can absolutely wait until Monday.
It has no history, no founder, no marketing plan — just the universal human instinct to delay.

And somehow, that makes it the most honest colour-day of all.

## Pink Wednesday: When Mean Girls Became Anthropologists

Pink Wednesday was not invented by marketers or psychologists.
It was invented by Tina Fey.

In the movie *Mean Girls*, the Plastics declared, "On Wednesdays we wear pink."

A joke, a throwaway line, a moment of teenage dictatorship — and suddenly the world had a new tradition.

Why did pink stick?
Because pink is culturally flexible: innocence, sweetness, femininity, rebellion, Barbie, bubblegum, political protest, millennial nostalgia.
A colour that reinvented itself so many times it gained tenure.

On Pink Wednesday, people don pink outfits not to honour the Plastics, but to honour the idea that one colour can unite people through irony, shared references, and a longing for simpler, sillier rules.

Pink Wednesday is proof of how pop culture quietly infiltrates the calendar.

## Silver Saturday: The Quiet Glow of Engagement Season

Silver Saturday is another unofficial day, but its existence is undeniable. The Saturday before Christmas is, at least anecdotally, one of the most popular days for marriage proposals.

The colour silver became attached through jewellery marketing, yes, but also because silver sits emotionally between glamour and tenderness — a reflective metal with a hopeful glow.

On Silver Saturday, Instagram becomes a glittering battlefield of ring boxes, manicures, and bokeh lights.

It's soft capitalism, but at least it sparkles.

## Coral Saturday: The Day Instagram Invented

Coral Saturday is not a holiday so much as a seasonal phenomenon: the first warm weekend of spring when everyone floods parks, cafés, beaches, and rooftops wearing shades of coral that photograph beautifully against sunlight.

No one admits this day is orchestrated by social media, but the evidence is there: new sunglasses, suspiciously coordinated outfits, and the sudden appearance of "spontaneous brunch photos" that required 12 takes.

Coral was chosen because it flatters nearly everyone — even people who refuse to wear colour.
It's the hue of soft optimism, brunch prosecco, and the belief that the world is bearable again.

## Rainbow Week: A Celebration Invented by Love, Claimed by Activism

Rainbow Week was never voted on.
It grew naturally from Pride celebrations around the world — a seven-day explosion of colour, identity, protest, glitter, resistance, and the unmistakable sound of someone hot-gluing sequins to a serious political message.

The rainbow was chosen because it contains everyone — all hues, all stories, all bodies, all levels of dance ability.

It is the opposite of exclusivity: a chromatic democracy.

Rainbow Week is what happens when visibility becomes a festival, and when colour says, "We're here, we're fabulous, and we have receipts."

## When Colour Takes Over Time

These chromatic days aren't just labels you slap onto a calendar to make Mondays more bearable or Fridays more dramatic. They're emotional shortcuts—feelings in disguise, neatly packaged as dates.

Somewhere along the way, we stopped using the calendar to track time and started using it to organise moods. Blue Mondays, Black Fridays, Green Days, Pink Weeks: a full emotional horoscope, only less mystical and far better sponsored.

The calendar is no longer a neutral grid. It's a shared mood board, colour-coded for collective consumption. Each day arrives pre-loaded with instructions on how to feel, what to fear, what to buy, or what to care about—no imagination required.

And maybe that's the trick.

We like to think we're colouring the days, personalising time with meaning and intention.
But it's probably the other way around. The days are already coloured.
And, quietly, they're colouring us.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*And as if colour-coding the calendar weren't enough, society insists on colour-coding the important days of our private lives too. I've always found this particularly bewildering. Weddings demand white sugared almonds. Baby announcements require pink or blue. Graduations must be celebrated with red. Fine — I can survive that much chromatic bureaucracy.*

*But then come the wedding anniversaries.*
*The endless, escalating, absolutely unmanageable wedding anniversaries.*

*Silver, pearl, coral, ruby, gold, platinum — a geological survey disguised as romance.*
*Every year has a mineral, every mineral has a meaning, and every meaning apparently requires its own colour-coordinated confetti.*

*Which is precisely why, to spare myself confusion and possible public embarrassment, I simply skipped them.*
*No confetti for the 25th.*
*None for the 30th.*
*None for the 40th.*

*I told myself it was an aesthetic choice, but really it was self-defence.*

*Perhaps I'll make an exception for the 50th — assuming I survive to see it — though even I'm not sure whether all that gold might be a bit too much.*
*There is, after all, only so much chromatic enthusiasm one woman can handle.*

# OUR WALLETS IN RGB MODE

If colours have always carried meaning, modern marketing has turned them into full-time myth-making machines. Commerce didn't just borrow colours; it weaponised them, polished them, globalised them, and fed them back to us until we forgot where the meaning originally came from. What used to be symbolism is now strategy. What used to be culture is now branding. And nowhere is this clearer than in the strange, shimmering places where colour becomes economic ideology.

## The Blue Banking Wars: Financial Trust, Painted in RGB

Banks adore blue the way house cats adore boxes: obsessively, irrationally, and with total existential dependence. Somewhere in the late 20th century, the financial world collectively decided that if money had a colour, it should be the same shade as a calm Mediterranean sky — stable, endless, and emotionally numbing.

Blue whispers, "Relax. Nothing bad will happen. We would never gamble your mortgage on questionable derivatives."
A lie? Perhaps. But a **s**oothing lie. And that's half the business model.

Psychologists claim blue inspires trust because it's associated with honesty, competence, and order. It has no aggressive connotations, unlike red (too urgent), yellow (too naive), or green (too eco-hipster for Wall Street). Historically, blue was expensive to produce, reserved for royalty and sacred icons, which may explain why modern banks still treat it like holy pigment. Swap gold-leaf saints for investment bankers and you get the same aesthetic: solemn faces, deep blue backgrounds, and the invisible promise that salvation comes with a low fixed interest rate.

Once this logic caught on, the corporate world launched an unspoken arms race in Pantone form.
Banks tripped over themselves to claim their own slice of trust-coloured spectrum:

- Navy Blue, as dark as financial doom but somehow reassuring.
- Steel Blue, perfect for when your loans feel industrially heavy.
- Ice Blue, a colour so calm it could anesthetize an audit.
- Royal Blue, subtly suggesting that bankers are the modern aristocracy (minus the crowns, plus the bonuses).

What emerged was a global aesthetic monopoly.
Walking through a business district feels like wandering into a wedding where every guest got the same memo: *dress like a responsible uncle who gives boring speeches about bonds.* The street becomes a parade of blue suits, blue credit cards, blue logos, and blue bank apps promising the same thing:

"Give us your savings. We're definitely not collapsing."

Blue has become the chromatic placebo of capitalism.
It doesn't solve crises — it merely paints over panic with a cool gradient and a serif font.

And we fall for it every time, because in a chaotic world, we crave one colour that insists everything is under control... even when the economy is held together with duct tape and optimistic spreadsheets.

## Greenwashing And the Cult of Faux Ecology

Green once belonged to forests, spring meadows, and well-behaved salads. Then marketers discovered it could also make shampoo look ethical and hamburgers feel vegan-adjacent, and suddenly the colour of nature became the colour of *corporate innocence.*

If a product pollutes, just paint it green.
If packaging chokes turtles, add a leaf icon.
If a company burns through the rainforest, slap a recycled logo on the wrapper and whisper "eco" in lowercase letters.

Nowhere is this chromatic hypocrisy more fascinating than in the fast-food arena, where grease meets virtue signalling. Consider McDonald's, the undisputed monarch of processed calories, who decided in 2009 that Europe needed... a greener "M." Literally. The iconic red backdrop quietly turned green across European franchises, as if the brand had been spiritually awakened by a compostable straw.

According to corporate messaging, the new green logo symbolised sustainability: renewable energy, reduced plastics, recycling initiatives. It was a visual promise of ecological harmony, a sort of Big Mac meets Mother Earth. The shift wasn't random — it was psychological. Europeans care deeply about environmental impact and healthy living, so McDonald's applied a fresh coat of chlorophyll-coloured reassurance to convince us that fries and carbon footprints can coexist thoughtfully.

The irony?
The food didn't change colour.
Just the branding.

Brands eventually realised that green doesn't just look ecological — it feels trustworthy. One splash of chlorophyll-coloured branding and suddenly a product becomes healthier, safer, more ethical... even when its sustainability claims evaporate faster than biodegradable glitter in the rain.

Green does the seduction, and consumers complete the fantasy.
It's the gentlest scam in the marketplace: a soothing, leafy caress with a profit motive tucked underneath.

This is marketing alchemy at its finest. Change the background colour and a global fast-food empire can transform into a wellness sanctuary. Nothing about the menu changes — same burgers, same fries, same industrial agriculture — and yet, under a green halo, it all feels like responsible grazing. Pasture-to-paper wrapper, as if cows were massaging each other under organic moonlight before becoming "ethical nuggets."

Greenwashing succeeds because it allows us to outsource our conscience.
We don't have to change our habits — just our expectations.
We can eat, drive, buy, scroll and still feel virtuous, as long as the packaging smiles at us in chlorophyll tones. We don't need real sustainability. We just need the right shade of it.

In the end, we're not paying for ethical behaviour.
We're paying for a colour that lets us believe we already have it.

## The Yellow Discount: Sales, Seduction, And Betrayal on Aisle 3

Walk into a discount supermarket and your retinas will immediately be assaulted by one specific shade: Discount Yellow™. It screams at you from price tags, flyers, banners, and bulk-sized packages of toilet paper. Yellow is the chromatic equivalent of a megaphone shouting *"IT'S CHEAP! YOU WANT THIS! YOU CAN'T RESIST ME!"*

Marketers adore yellow because it grabs attention faster than a celebrity scandal and pairs beautifully with red, the colour of appetite, urgency, and mild panic. Together they hypnotise shoppers into grabbing giant bags of chips they didn't plan to buy, as if honouring some sacred fast-food prophecy.

But here's the delicious irony: yellow has a long, scandalous history as the colour of betrayal.

In medieval Europe, yellow was the chromatic badge of the untrustworthy. Traitors wore yellow in paintings and manuscripts; Judas

himself was consistently dressed in yellow, just in case anyone missed the narrative cue. Fake knights and dishonest characters in medieval literature also strutted around in yellow, as though the colour itself whispered, "I will absolutely backstab you during Act Three."

The infamy persisted for centuries. In the 19th century, caricatures portrayed cheated husbands with yellow ties, broadcast to the world like tragic canaries of romantic humiliation. One medieval text even recounts a counterfeit money maker whose house was painted yellow and who was forced to wear yellow clothes as he was led to the stake. Nothing says "justice system" like turning someone into a human traffic signal before executing them.

And as if history weren't dramatic enough, the Nazis immortalised this symbolism with horrifying efficiency: the yellow star, imposed on Jewish citizens, weaponised colour as a tool of exclusion and dehumanisation. Yellow became stigma — the colour of those condemned by society.

With all this in mind, there's something poetically fitting about yellow being the colour of hard discounts. You think that €1.99 family-sized mayonnaise is a blessing... but deep down, yellow is plotting something. It knows you will abandon your grocery list, betray your financial discipline, and sneak home with a kilo of cookies "because they were on sale." The discount aisle becomes a place where your wallet goes to be seduced, and your budget goes to die.

Yellow doesn't represent savings. Yellow tempts you into spending more. It lures you into bulk betrayal.
It whispers, *"Trust me... I'm cheap."*

And Judas smiles.

# The Pink Tax: Where Femininity Comes with a Surcharge

Pink looks innocent. Soft. Sweet. The colour of marshmallows, cherry blossoms, and marketing departments plotting price inflation.

Enter the *pink tax*: the mysterious economic phenomenon where anything designed "for women" costs more — even when it's exactly the same product, only dipped in bubble-gum branding. Razors? Same metal, different shade. Pens? Same ink, more glitter trauma. Shampoo? Same formula, now fragranced like "dreamy orchid sunrise" instead of "man deodorant mountain."

In 2015, the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs published a study with a title so poetic it almost sounded like a coming-of-age novel: *From Cradle to Cane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer in New York City*. It examined hundreds of paired products — men's vs. women's, same function, same quantity — and found price differences worthy of a horror movie.

Women paid 48% more for shampoo and conditioner, simply because the bottles looked like they had attended finishing school. Deodorants and lotions followed the same logic: identical ingredients, identical packaging, identical purpose... except the "female" version came with floral marketing and a built-in financial penalty. Apparently, femininity has a surcharge, and the price tag is coded in Pantone 1905 C.

The absurdity of it all lies not in the products, but in the story the colour tells. Pink whispers *special, delicate, worthy of luxury* — even when what's inside is perfectly ordinary. The pigment becomes a business strategy, leveraging gender expectations with the subtlety of a neon sign.

Women aren't just buying shampoo; they're buying identity, softness, societal expectations, and the quiet suggestion that they should smell like hibiscus tea instead of "sports gel."

The great marketing trick isn't changing the product. It's changing what the colour promises. Pink becomes profit.

The pink tax is not a mistake. It's a palette.

And until society stops assigning value to femininity through colour, someone will keep adding three euros to everything that looks like a melted strawberry.

# The Art of Selling Through Colour

Marketers didn't invent colour symbolism. They simply did what humans always do with inherited ideas: they industrialized it, monetized it, and processed it into something shelf-ready. Colour became a silent salesman — a chromatic negotiator whispering promises we didn't even realise we were agreeing to.

We don't buy products.
We buy palettes that tell stories faster than language can.

A few numbers are enough to reveal how deep this relationship runs. Colour dominates 67% of the buying process, before we've even read a label. Sixty-two percent of people associate a product with its brand colour within just three minutes of seeing an ad. If a company uses colour to express key messages, attention rises by 82% and brand recognition jumps by around 80%. In the US, a striking 83% of business professionals believe a brand's colour influences commercial success.

In other words, colour doesn't just decorate a product — it pre-loads it with credibility.
We transfer our feelings about a logo straight onto what it represents: when the logo looks well-designed, we assume the product must be high quality, too. Psychology calls it "emotional transfer." Marketing calls it "the ideal scenario."

Researchers like Henderson & Cote showed that brand colour anchors memory. Name, fonts, and symbols all matter, but colour is the mnemonic hook. It determines whether we even notice the logo to begin with. It's why Coca-Cola is fundamentally red, IBM is eternally blue, Caterpillar is black-yellow industry, and Cadbury guards its purple like a national treasure.

Pick the wrong colour, however, and everything falls apart. A construction company with a purple and orange logo may look modern — but it communicates the exact opposite of the warm, earthy reliability people expect from builders. Consumers may never articulate this mismatch, but their wallets will.

Colour also becomes a linguistic shortcut when words fail, especially in global markets. If your brand name is hard to pronounce in Taiwan, or numerologically "unlucky" in China, or just culturally odd in Italy, colour can do the diplomatic work. In regions with lower literacy, strong symbolic traditions, or heavy visual communication, colour becomes the message itself. The more global a product is, the more its palette becomes its passport.

And we haven't even entered the digital jungle. Online stores have no smiling salespeople, no polished floors, no perfume samples. All they

have is their interface. Research shows that even on websites, users base credibility on appearance first — and abandon a page within seconds if it "feels wrong." Colours act as emotional bouncers: cool hues signal trust, especially blue, which dominates banking sites, e-commerce platforms, and anything that wants your credit card number. Change the palette, and spending habits change with it.

This is why marketers love colour: it's persuasive without being explicit. It bypasses logic, slithers under awareness, and answers questions before we ask them.

Red triggers appetite and urgency.
Blue negotiates trust.
Green sells ethics.
Yellow sells bargains (and sometimes betrayal).
Pink sells a tax.

Colour is not a detail of branding.
It *is* branding.
It's the salesman we never see, the voice we never hear, and the handshake we don't remember giving.

In the end, we like to think we're rational consumers, weighing price and performance. But let's be honest: before we buy anything, we buy its colours.
Products only matter afterward — once the palette has already closed the deal.

# AT THIS POINT, IT'S PERSONAL
## (PROCEED WITH CAUTION)

*One day, I marched into the supermarket and bought razors from the men's aisle — dark blue, heavy, aggressively aerodynamic, as if designed for shaving surfboards. The cashier looked at me the way people look at someone buying dog food without owning a dog. I paid without blinking, feeling like a secret agent dismantling capitalism with a five-pack of steel blades.*

*Since then, I've become a quiet rebel. I sniff shampoos in the men's section, evaluating prices the way art critics evaluate canvases. I choose shower gel bottles shaped like car parts. I own deodorant that smells like lime — and it's chemically identical to the "for her" version — except the female one costs more and smells like a citrus fruit that's tired of being misunderstood.*

*And every time I walk past a pastel-pink razor priced like haute couture, I feel the kind of satisfaction normally reserved for movie villains. It's the thrill of knowing that somewhere, a marketing executive's gender-based pricing strategy just lost a battle to a woman who prefers discounts over hibiscus-vanilla fragrance.*

*Call it financial pragmatism. Call it anti-pink activism.*
*Or simply call it what it is: a tiny victory, shaved clean.*

# 05 EPILOGUE

## WE COPE CHROMATICALLY

I've always been fascinated by our talent for hiding the truth behind a palette, as if honesty were a little too naked and needed something to wear. Colour becomes the polite disguise for things we'd rather not say outright. Language, embarrassed by its own brutal clarity, whispers: *"Let me just add a tint here — no one will notice."* And we all nod along, relieved.

Take *white lies*. They're still lies, just washed and ironed. A white lie is basically deception in a lab coat. We tell ourselves, *"I didn't lie... I simply bleached reality."* Apparently, morality comes with a Pantone pipeline.

Or *blue humour,* which pretends to be about chromatic aesthetics but is really our way of saying, *"This is inappropriate, but let's blame the colour."* The blue manages the scandal; we keep our innocence. What a useful scapegoat.

Then there's the *black mood,* the grey area, and people who feel a bit *off-colour* because admitting your emotions directly would just be... vulgar. We even fire people with *pink slips,* as if unemployment should arrive dressed for a baby shower. Honestly, if I'm losing my job, I'd prefer gothic calligraphy, storm clouds, maybe a bolt of thunder. Don't pastel my downfall.

And of course, there's money. Or rather, the lack of it. In Italian, *essere al verde*—literally "to be at the green"—means being broke, bankrupt, financially evaporated, all disguised as a cheerful botanical moment. No panic, no drama. Just you, your empty bank account, and a soothing hint of chlorophyll. Poverty, but make it fresh.

Colour euphemisms are linguistic escape hatches — little chromatic emergency exits for when life feels too sharp or too blunt. They soften blows, add theatrical distance, and sometimes let us laugh at what we're not ready to face head-on. We tint anxiety blue, soften death with clean linen white, romanticise anger as "seeing red," and call someone "green" not because they resemble spinach, but because it's easier than admitting they're naive.

These shades don't fix reality. They accessorise it.

And maybe that's the point. We are a species terrified of conflict and addicted to elegance. We would rather repaint a problem than confront it. We're convinced that life might hurt a bit less if we apply the right filter — Valencia for heartbreak, Clarendon for ambition, sepia for nostalgia, emerald green for guilt-free consumerism.

It never truly works.
But it does make the world more interesting.

Because in the end, we don't just use colour.
We think in it. We hide behind it. We dream through it.

We don't merely talk *about* colour — we talk *through* colour, hoping it will say what we can't.

We paint ourselves daily, sometimes literally, sometimes metaphorically, hoping that a shade of lipstick, a flag, a logo, a filter, or a tiny cartoon emoji hand will whisper: *This is who I am. Please understand me correctly.*

We are fragile organisms armed with pigments.

We cope chromatically.

If the world insists on bruising us, at least we'll bruise in style. And that, I think, is the final truth: colour is not just how we see the world — it's how we survive it.

# 06 BOOKS THAT RUINED MY INNOCENCE ABOUT COLOUR

This book was written with books, articles, lectures, classrooms, advertising campaigns, supermarket aisles, toy stores, badly designed websites, and an unreasonable amount of time spent noticing colours where no one asked me to. It draws not from a tidy stack of sources open on my desk, but from years of reading, studying, teaching, observing, and mentally hoarding ideas until they insisted on becoming a story. Still, it feels only fair to acknowledge the works that shaped my thinking and gave me the knowledge I've reworked here — sometimes in new contexts, and always with an ironic twist that's unmistakably mine. I hope my sources won't mind the remix.


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## AUTHORS' NOTE

*This book was written by a human being with strong opinions about colour and a questionable relationship with the English language.*

*I'm grateful to ChatGPT for helping me translate large portions of the text, untangle sentences that had travelled too far inside my head, and—most visibly—for suggesting several chapter titles. Some of them were smart. A few were suspiciously good. All of them were discussed, argued with, rewritten, or ignored, as any respectable collaboration requires*

*To be clear: no thoughts were delegated, no arguments were generated, and no responsibility was shared.*
*The machine helped polish the language. The human made the mess.*

*No ideas were outsourced. No opinions were automated.*

*And any remaining flaws, inconsistencies, or questionable metaphors are entirely mine.*

Consider this a small acknowledgement to a very patient machine that helped me polish the words—while I remained fully responsible for the colours.

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**Cristina Rigutto** is a science communication trainer, university lecturer, and Coordinator of the Master's Programme in Science Communication at the University of Trento. She works where science meets language, and where expertise collides with real people, real beliefs, and real misunderstandings.

Her work moves across public speaking, visual communication, research branding, and public engagement, driven by a simple obsession: how scientific knowledge survives the journey from the lab to the public sphere. Over the years, she has built a practice that bridges two worlds that rarely speak the same language—the strategic clarity of professional communication and the rigor, ethics, and slower tempos of academic research.

In her teaching and training, she designs spaces where complexity is not diluted but translated, and where disagreement, friction, and difference are treated as signals rather than failures. Her current interests focus on the ethics of science communication, and on one of its most uncomfortable frontiers: how to communicate with science deniers without surrendering either accuracy or empathy.