

plaining the criteria that informed the selection of audiovisual materials. Other essays reconstruct the cultural context in which the film was made. The contributions that analyze American Orientalism from a historical and anthropological point of view are particularly interesting. The attraction of the East was a mix of fascination and repulsion, based on stereotypes that form part of a long anti-Chinese literary tradition which was present in Western culture, while the allure expressed itself in the appreciation of exotic set designs and oriental costumes. The book tries to analyze how these subjects were accepted by the public and evaluate how Chinese culture was portrayed. Among the most important topics addressed in the book are the role of Oriental women between the 19th and 20th centuries, the foot-binding tradition, inter-racial sex and the offspring that resulted from such unions, and the social and historical implications behind the Boxer Rebellion. The analysis reveals the intention of contextu-

Joshua Yumibe,

Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism,

Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J. 2012, pp. xvii + 192

Federico Pierotti,

La seduzione dello spettro. Storia e cultura del colore nel cinema,

Le Mani, Genova 2012, pp. 296

Colour was a neglected topic in film studies until recently.¹ Yet, since the second half of the 2000s, the academic research on cinematic colour has burgeoned and so have the publications pertaining to colour and cinema.² Some scholars adopt a *textual* perspective, isolating a noteworthy canon, while others choose a *contextual* paradigm, enlarging the viewpoint to the modes of production and consumption of colour movies. Richard Misek, for instance, joins the latter approach in *Chromatic Cinema. A History of Screen Color* (2010), where he traces an unorthodox history of cinema from the beginning up to the present time through the various colour tech-

alizing the film, one could say making it “speak,” through paying attention both to the culture that produced it and the audience to whom the film is addressed. This methodological choice allows us to see the publication as contributing to the field of visual anthropology.

Finally, equally important is the book’s rich iconographic display. In addition to promotional stills and screenshots from the film, the authors have as a result of thorough research been able to use photographs, posters, magazine pages, and postcards from public and private collections to illustrate the book. In this respect, the iconographic and historic reconstruction of the promotional campaign that anticipated and prepared the cinematic release of the film appears particularly accurate.

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nologies that have been practiced (“film color,” “surface color,” “absent color,” “optical color” and “digital color,” as stated by the five chapter headings).

In 2012 two new books promoted further reflections on chromatic cinema from a contextual standpoint: *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* by Joshua Yumibe and *La seduzione dello spettro. Storia e cultura del colore nel cinema* by Federico Pierotti.³

As the subtitle suggests, Yumibe’s study focuses on the three decades of silent cinema, broadening the account of the four most common colour processes in early film (hand colouring, stenciling, tinting and toning) to the wider horizon of mass culture and modernism between 19th and 20th century.

Yumibe starts from a *physiological* definition of colour: cinematic color is thought about primarily as a sensory experience. To make his point he refers to two of the most authoritative theories of the past. Indeed, while Newton described colour as an objective and measurable feature (different hues correspond to different wavelengths of a dismantled beam of light), Goethe in his *Farbenlehre* (1810) claims the subjective and perceptual character of colour: colour

perception is filtered by the human body (not only by sight, but also by the other senses, just like in synaesthesia), which is *not* an inert “receiver.” Rather, the viewer’s body is an operating interface between the inside and the outside, and plays a vital role in the deciphering and understanding of reality. This concern toward embodied colour perception is part of the 19th century physiological turn described by Jonathan Crary (1990). Within this conceptual framework, that Yumibe depicts in the first chapter, motion perception and colour perception are closely interrelated.

Besides theory, the other three chapters provide accurate descriptions of the applied colour techniques, relying both on some of the most grounded works about early cinema (like Tom Gunning’s and André Gaudreault’s), and on primary sources and original materials like ads and reviews in the trade press, catalogues and handbooks, private exchange letters and, above all, a heterogeneous selection of films and frames (the book includes 32 color plates, as well as 29 black and white figures). Specifically, many examples come from Davide Turconi’s Frame Collection at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York. As Paolo Cherchi Usai points out in the foreword, it is exactly thanks to archives like Turconi’s – and its meticulous scrutiny by Yumibe – that detailed information about early colour has been made available to scholars. Archivists and restorers, as a matter of fact, customarily privileged *black and white* prints’ preservation, because coloured ones were more expensive and less enduring (aniline dyes fade in a short time), therefore it seems as if silent movies were for the most part colourless, greyish and dull. On the contrary, *Moving Color* greatly contributes to a better understanding of silent cinema as – *for the most part* – a colourful experience.

Furthermore, looking deep into early colour design, the scholar decidedly denies any form of technological determinism, for applied colouring is not just “a primitive attempt to simulate reality before technology evolved enough to reproduce the indexical hues of reality.” By wondering where cinematic colour styles derive from, Yumibe rather pays attention to the modernist *intermedial* context (even though without giving a clear definition of “intermediality”). Thus, the ways of using cinematic colour

technologies in early 20th century were to a large extent influenced by the diverse artistic and industrial colour practices of 19th-century visual culture. From this perspective, hand painting reveals the legacy of serpentine dance spectacles and magic lantern shows; stenciling turns out to inherit wallpaper illustrations and postcards colour designs, while tinting and toning convey the changes in stage lighting made feasible by the development of artificial light (Schivelbusch 1995). Moreover, these mutual influences changed alongside with the transition from the cinema of attractions to forms of unobtrusive narration and naturalistic or non-fiction genres such as travelogues, industrial and abstract films. In fact, after 1910, in order not to distract viewers from the plot and overwhelm their senses, a shift toward pastel and subdued hues occurred, following the patterns of impressionist painting.

While Yumibe’s survey stops at the threshold of the coming of sound, Pierotti’s *La seduzione dello spettro* is a cultural history of chromatic cinema from the 1890s to the 1960s. Throughout its eight chapters, the book draws the chronological development of the different “chromatic types” of cinematic images: from the polychromy of hand painting and stenciling (or *pochoir*) in the pre-nickelodeon era to the monochromy of tinting and toning in the second period of silent cinema; from the achromatic quality of black and white films in the 1920s and 1930s to the so-called “natural colour” that pretends to rule over the thirty-year season from the 1930s to the 1960s. Pierotti is particularly concerned with the *cultural* impact of technological innovation in each of these transitions. Within a theoretical framework that goes from Goethe’s *Theory of Colors* to Chevreul’s principles of chromatic harmony and Michel Pastoureau’s historical work, the author defines colour first and foremost as a *cultural* factor. In the western world the main cultural significance ascribed to colour is seduction, which in turn can have the positive connotation of *attraction* or the negative connotation of *distraction*. This polarization crosses the entire history of cinema and, in wider terms, of modern popular media and arts. In order to support this thesis, Pierotti examines not only colour practices but also discourses about colour, with particular reference to the cinema. For instance, the sixth chapter is devoted

to the European theoretical debate which in different ages involved, among others, Arnheim, Kracauer, Bazin, Antonioni, Balázs, Dreyer and Ejšenštein.

With regards to the choice of the case studies, the volume – unfortunately without pictures – encompasses both cult and minor movies, with a special care for the Italian highbrow and lowbrow production (“diva film,” comedy, musical melodrama). With its anti-deterministic intersection of technology, industry and aesthetic theory, this historical inquiry on cinematic colour style undermines the leadership of “masters” and “masterpieces” allowing, instead, a reappraisal of the collective and nameless contributions to chromatic practices. Colour was actually often designed and processed by laboratory technicians, who supported a codified and convenient array of aesthetic options untied from the director’s will (this happened, for example, with the coloured copies of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1920, which we were used to think exclusively in black and white).

Aaron Delwiche, Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (eds.), *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, Routledge, London-New York 2012, pp. 313.

In recent years the term participation has become the watchword for a broad range of studies on media and communication processes in the digital realm. Its fortune is essentially linked to the need to mark the distance from the interpretative models developed between the end of the nineties and the beginning of the new millennium, with their store of categories and labels. In particular the concept of participation has progressively replaced the concept of interactivity, to illustrate – as Nico Carpentier effectively set out in an essay from a few years ago⁴ – a more complex experience, which is not limited to changing the interface or the single media environment, but extends its range of action to the entire system and consequently society. In simple terms we can say that participation is part of the debate around web 3.0, as interactivity was part of the debate on web 2.0. The importance of the concept of participation in the current reflection on the media has triggered a wealth of contributions. The book edited by Aaron Delwiche

Ultimately, one of the brightest goals of this volume – as well as Yumibe’s – is the emergence of a historical paradigm based on continuity: social processes and cultural values change very slowly and, beyond crisis and turning points, the transformations – both theoretical and practical – flow gradually and without sudden breaks. According to Yumibe and Pierotti, the history of chromatic cinema itself did not start in 1895, but well before that year, thanks to pre-existing techniques and psychological attitudes toward colour images. Therefore new colour technologies do not merely replace old ones in a one-directional and irreversible way, but they keep on coexisting and circulating, though in a minor mode. Significantly, this idea of continuity is still valid and useful to approach the current techniques of digital colouring, which enable to recreate all the previous colour styles and looks, from hand painting onwards, in a genealogy that is more and more complex and multilayered.

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and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, *The Participatory Cultures Handbook* is therefore not remarkable in terms of the originality of the topic. But it differs from the numerous reflections on participation in at least three ways. The first is the structure of the work: the book is a collection of twenty eight essays, divided in eight sections, that cover the main aspects of the debate on participation: fan cultures, co-creative processes, building cultures of knowledge, civic cultures, activism, education and media literacy, as well as the introduction and conclusion that provide an interesting definition of the issue. It is therefore an extremely versatile text, providing both a global view of the issue as well as examining its individual aspects in depth. The strength of Delwiche and Henderson’s book lies in the selection of the authors, which includes media theoreticians, communication professionals and young researchers. The multiplication of the points of view and the debate – literally in the question and answer essay between Suzanne Scott and Henry Jenkins – between different ways of intending and criticising participation allows for a rich and detailed reconstruction of the phenomenon. Last, but not least, *The Participatory Cultures*