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Emotional visualization in *Remembrance*

ABSTRACT

This article argues that the film's contrasting lighting techniques and its accompanying bold colour scheme are effectively used not only to set the narrative tone but also to capture and visualize Alfred's synaesthetic sensory experiences.

Translating a synaesthetic experience into the silver screen, when the experience itself is simulated, presents a unique challenge to an entire film crew, be it the actor portraying the experience, the filmmaker directing it or the cinematographer, set decorator and sound designer, as each is responsible for creating a unique element of the overall cinematic experience. Lighting techniques in film, particularly in genres such as suspense and drama, are often utilized to express a state of emotional intensity. Similar to sound, light can be manipulated to elicit a set of emotions within the audience, ranging from joy to fear. The lighting and colour patterns in *Remembrance* flip the script as the focus is on communicating the sensory experiences of its protagonist to the audience so that the latter may attempt to understand, at least visually, the unique feeling in possessing synaesthetic abilities.

For example, contrast lighting in many narrative films, such as *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972), is often used to portray an outward emotion to set the tone of the scene or to speak to the nature of a character (e.g. the juxtaposition of light and dark as a representation of good and evil); however,

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traditional lighting techniques are not commonly used with the specific intent to directly convey the inwardly sensory and emotional experiences of its characters. A notable exception may be the feature film, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry, 2004), which consists of a non-linear narrative plotline relying heavily on visualized storytelling to illustrate the emotional process associated with navigating and erasing human memories.

While Morgenstern's cinematographic intent may not have been explicitly focused on illustrating Alfred's synaesthesia via the film's lighting techniques and colour scheme, I argue that it successfully does just that. The film utilizes various lighting and colour patterns that serve to communicate emotion not only in setting the tone of the scene and its characters but also as a tool for the emotional visualization of Alfred's jumbled sensory experiences. From the opening shots of Alfred bathed in a bright light streaming from the approaching train to the closing shots of his shadowy figure slipping away through the thick fog, the viewer is provided an ongoing visual narrative that strengthens both character and plot development.

The scene in which Alfred mentions the woman in the loud dress (Shot 96) exemplifies the intersection between lighting, colour and narrative. To the non-synaesthete viewer, a 'loud dress' refers to a flamboyant fabric or style, while linguistically, the term implies a blend of a visual and aural experience, and in Alfred's case, such an experience becomes embodied. This moment in the film is key to understanding the fusion of senses and how it can be conveyed on- and off-screen. Since most of us can only imagine tasting words and hearing visuals, the analogy of a loud dress serves as a conduit to understanding synaesthesia and the challenge of representing it in film. I stress this point as it is a significant moment in the film that most explicitly acknowledges Alfred's unique abilities and does so utilizing both visual and narrative cues.

The film's rich lighting and colourful juxtapositions directly support its narrative structure. To note, the colour scheme mentioned herein refers specifically to the lighting techniques, rather than the colour of the costumes and set design, which would require a separate analysis. To remain within the scope of this short article, a few crucial moments were chosen to analyse and discuss. First, in contextualizing the film as a whole, the lighting shifts between bright light to a more subdued darkness about 25 times; a few examples include Shots 5–6, 17–18 and 151e–152a. Second, the colour scheme offers a bold contrast of red and gold seen most prominently in the bar setting, which consists of 109 shots, from Shot 44a through 134.

To begin, as we move through Shots 1, 3, 5 and 7, which are interwoven with Alfred's memory of Aurora, we see a clear progression in his emotional intensity. The contrasting light sources through these beginning shots are the backlight from the train station window and the increasingly bright, white light from the oncoming train. The brighter the light, the deeper the emotion. As we arrive at Shot 7, Alfred's feelings can be visually understood as deep and serene. Cutting from the train station's intense light, we move to the auditorium, where a blue/yellow spot light strikes Alfred's face, with his back remaining in darkness (Shot 8a). While Alfred is the focal point of the auditorium scene, since he is the performer, his key light is a bright blueish hue, in contrast to the soft, warm lighting of the others in the scene, including his assistant Charlotte Greeves, who stands just a short distance away.

Only towards the film's end (Shots 135a–153b) do we once again meet the contrasting light patterns featured in the auditorium (Shots 8a–28), and in the beginning (Shots 1–7). This recurring lighting and colour theme implies two ideas: first, the range of emotion demonstrated throughout the film, which in the case of the bright, blue light versus the shadowy darkness, can be seen as a tool to illustrate Alfred's eidetic memory. Second, it serves to highlight the repetitive, nonlinear elements featured within the narrative, such as the flash-backs occurring in the beginning, and the end.

Of particular significance to plot and character development, specifically as it relates to the emotional visualization of Alfred's synaesthesia, is the lighting colour scheme featured in Shots 44a–134. From Shot 43 to 44a, we cut to a drastically different lighting situation set in a loud, busy bar. The quicker paced editing style of these subsequent shots also works to illustrate Alfred's sensory overload. The bar setting offers a bold fusion of red and gold and while both colours are warm, they are emotionally juxtaposed with one another. Red is raw and powerful. Gold is warm and inviting. There are a few distinct colours in the bar scene, such as the green clutch purse of a peripheral character (Shot 87) and the singer's luminous brown dress (Shot 129a); however, red and gold are prominently featured.

The dressing room (Shots 29–43) is the only segment in the film where the lighting remains balanced, bathing the characters in a warm glow, although the lighting casts a slight shadow over Alfred's face (e.g. Shot 43), while remaining more evenly lit over Aurora's (e.g. Shot 42). Throughout the entire film, however, contrast lighting shadows Aurora's face far more often than Alfred's (e.g. Shots 52 and 53, 117 and 118, 129b, 136a). One interpretation is how Aurora is two-faced since she holds a secret that Alfred does not find out until after they have shared an intimate moment together. Another interpretation, as we understand later on (via Shots 138–144, 146–148, 151a–151c), is that her actions may be genuine but twofold: for love and business. On the flip side of this, Alfred is transparent in his intentions and behaviour, as he has no secrets; thus, he remains (mostly) out of the shadows.

Another visually significant moment and one that could not be captured specifically in the shot-by-shot breakdown is the snow fall occurring in the train station featured in the opening and ending shots. The speckled white of the falling snowflakes alters the scene's visuals, albeit slightly, by directly contrasting an otherwise cold, dark train station with a momentary, peaceful pause. Moving through that sombre scene in the end, we are left to ponder what Aurora's name tastes like (Shot 152c), although we might guess it is something pleasant due to Alfred's decision to turn around and miss his 12:20 train.

As argued above, the lighting techniques and the accompanying colour scheme used in *Remembrance* serve both the narrative plot and the character development. The contrasting lighting patterns, along with the bold colours, are effective in not only establishing the overall mood and tone for specific scenes, but also to illustrate synaesthesia's multi-faceted complexity. Consequently, such an emotional visualization provides for a dynamic cinematic experience, in which the audience is given direct contextual and visual cues in attempts to understand, albeit vicariously, what it may feel like to taste words, hear visuals, see sounds and otherwise empathize with Alfred's unique sensory experiences and his inability to forget.

REFERENCES

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