

Aesthetics of Color, Mood and Light

Affective Response

Color

Color is key in creating the proper mood for your film and can articulate details and nuance to your audience that cannot be explained in words.

The use of analogous or complementary color tones creates contrast between elements in the frame and communicate emotional ideas to the audience.



Color

Color can also communicate emotional information. Certain cinematic conventions have developed which help with this, for example warm lighting to convey safety and cool lighting to suggest danger are about as standard as shadows to convey mystery and brightness to signify security. Some directors, like James Cameron, stick to these conventions religiously, but others are willing to shake things up. (Se7en, In the Mood for Love)



Effects of Color

Color has the power to affect your audience in many profound ways. *Affective Response* is used as a general term for the feeling and emotional qualities of an experience (pleasant/unpleasant beautiful/ugly). Depending on the colors you use or omit in your photographs/moving images, you can convey any number of thoughts, feelings and emotions that can influence how your audience interprets your work. Understanding how color can affect people is the area of *color aesthetics*.

Effects of Color

For several centuries, artists, designers and creative people of all types have understood that certain colors can provoke specific emotional and physiological reactions. Within a certain culture, you can be almost certain that most of the audience will react predictably to certain colors.

Red is a bright color and creates feelings of excitement and intensity. It is also used to warn of danger and can symbolize anger, or passion.

Blue is the most common favorite color and can create calmness, cleanliness and serenity, although darker and navy blues are associated with sadness. It is also symbolic of **masculinity** and, interestingly, also **femininity** depending on the shade.

Green is frequently used to symbolize nature and tranquility. It's also associated jealousy and illness

Yellow is cheery and warm. However, it can cause feelings of frustration and anger when it is the predominant color or is extremely bright.

Purple is the color of royalty, wealth, and wisdom. It is often associated with **the spiritual** or exotic or foreign .

Brown gives a feeling of strength and dependability. It makes us feel warmth, security, and comfort. It can also represent filth.

Orange is, like yellow and red, an exciting color. It easily draws attention and conveys a feeling of sweetness, warmth and enthusiasm.

Pink is associated with romance, love, and the **feminine**. Pink also has a calming effect.

Black is a color (or rather, not-color) of menace or evil. It can also be associated with death and, sometimes, rebirth.

White symbolizes purity or innocence. It can also make an area seem bland, sterile, or cold. In some Eastern cultures, white is a symbol of death.

Grey is used for mourning, humility and repentance. It can also represent depression, plainness, and lack of life or joy.

Gold symbolizes wealth, justice, and balance. It also is associated with wisdom and heroism.

Silver symbolizes the moon and femininity. It is also often magical in nature.

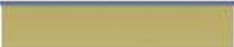



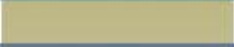
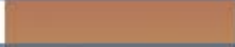
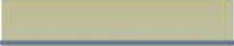
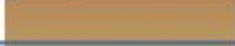

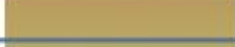

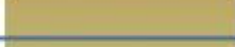
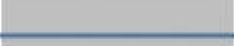
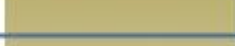
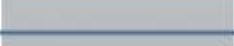

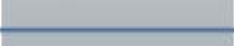










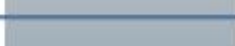




These are simply conventions used in most Western cultures. However filmmakers are constantly breaking the rules, pushing the limits and redefining the use and meaning of color .

Who Controls Color?

It is custom for the director to work closely with a director of photography (cinematographer, DP), production designer, costume designer(s), and editors to create a **color palette** that *fits* the story of the film. The color of the film is controlled on set using light, by the costume designer's choices to the editors use of post production color correction.

On set, Each item placed within the frame, from a lamp, to a rug to the dress a character is wearing to the color of their eyes is highly scrutinized prior to being shot to make sure it fits.

The look of the film will often be based on factors such as, what the story is about, the thematic tone of the film, where the story takes place among a plethora of others. For instance it may depend on the setting and the world within which the story takes place; time period, location of it. Therefore the **color palette** of the film will largely be dictated by these elements.

Degrees Kelvin	Type of Light Source	Indoor (3200k) Color Balance	Outdoor (5500k) Color Balance
1700-1800K	Match Flame		
1850-1930K	Candle Flame		
2000-3000K	Sun: At Sunrise or Sunset		
2500-2900K	Household Tungsten Bulbs		
3000K	Tungsten lamp 500W-1k		
3200-3500K	Quartz Lights		
3200-7500K	Fluorescent Lights		
3275K	Tungsten Lamp 2k		
3380K	Tungsten Lamp 5k, 10k		
5000-5400K	Sun: Direct at Noon		
5500-6500K	Daylight (Sun + Sky)		
5500-6500K	Sun: through clouds/haze		
6000-7500K	Sky: Overcast		
6500K	RGB Monitor (White Pt.)		
7000-8000K	Outdoor Shade Areas		
8000-10000K	Sky: Partly Cloudy		

Based on information from the book [\[digital\] Lighting & Rendering](#)
Chart and colors (c)2003 Jeremy Birn for www.3dRender.com

COLOUR TEMPERATURE CHART

1800K

match flame



1800K

10000K

WWW.DELIGHTNING.COM

1930K

candle flame



3500K

quartz lights



7500K

sky overcast



2900K

sunrise / sunset



5400K

sun direct at noon



8000K

outdoor shaded areas



3000K

Tungsten lamp 500W - 1KW



6500K

sun through clouds



10000K

partly cloudy sky



Historical Reference

A Trip to the Moon, France (1902)

Color film was followed by black and white film only a few decades after the medium's invention. However, before the invention of color negatives and before films like *Gone With the Wind* (1939), filmmakers and artists would hand paint their film frame by frame. A tedious task

A film like *A Trip to The Moon* had a profound effect on filmgoers at the time who never had the opportunity to view films that reflected the colorfulness of real life (or a fantasy world). [VIDEO](#)

Creating Mood using Color

A film's mood is a form of communication. It speaks to how we as the audience 'feel' or react to the film as well as what the filmmaker's intention is or might be. When we watch a scene and notice a heavy use of color, an emphasis on a specific color, or an absence of color we need to ask ourselves, "What is the film/filmmaker trying to communicate?"

While films overall have a **tone** which is the collective feel of the film overall (which also takes into account the filmmakers intention.) However, filmmakers will often use color as a way to signal changes in **mood** throughout the film. In this context, mood refers to the visceral feeling the audience has scene to scene or shot to shot.

[Marie Antoinette #1](#)

[Marie Antoinette #2](#)

[Marie Antoinette #3](#)

Color Repetition: Motif

When a filmmaker uses a specific color repeatedly throughout the film for emphasis or foreshadowing, we call that a motif.



The Sixth Sense, USA (1999)

Color Motif



Color Motif



What about B&W

“Black-and-white focuses you on the *content* and the story, and it really concentrates your attention on what’s in the frame. All too often, color can be a distraction — it’s easier to make color ‘look good’, but harder to make color service the story. Black-and-white imagery is much more about the balance between the light and shade in the frame, and I think it can help convey story points a lot better with fewer distractions.”

- Roger Deakins
Director of Photography

Light

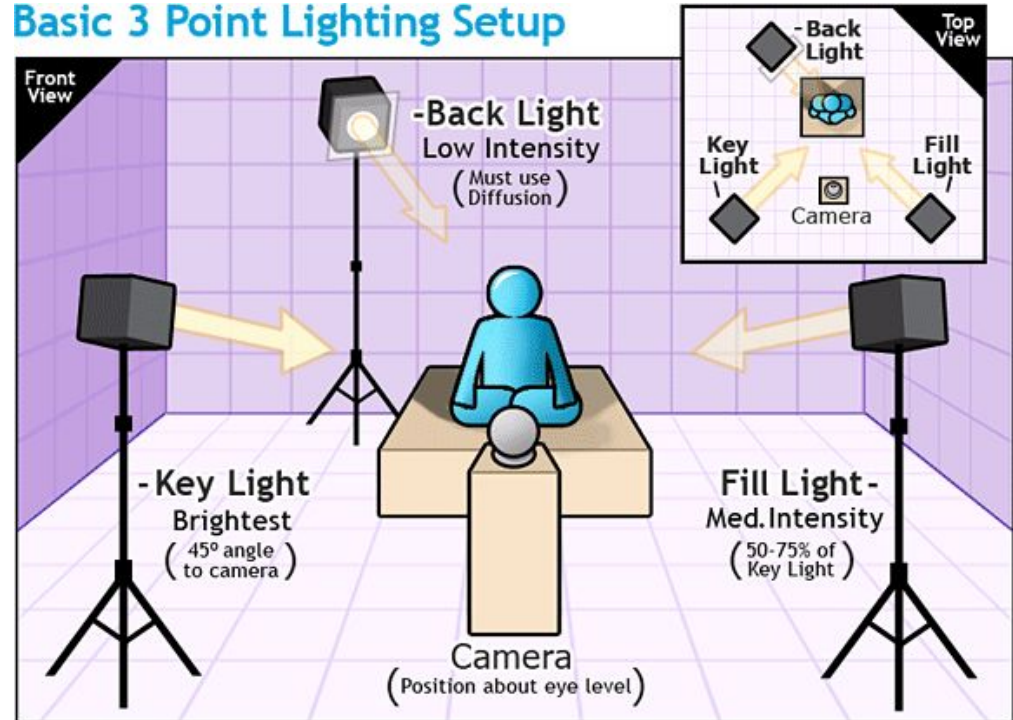
Light and color are two sides of the same coin. They influence and are ultimately dependant on each other. When we light our scenes, whether for photography or film, we need to take into account how light affects the all elements we are trying to capture, including lights effect on color.

3 Point Lighting

3-point lighting is the standard setup for creating well lit scenes with depth, and highlight while almost completely eliminating hard shadows.

3-point lighting is achieved when the filmmaker or photographer places 3 separate lights in 3 separate positions aimed at the subject. These lighting sources are set to different levels of illumination based on the desired effect.

Basic 3 Point Lighting Setup



Top Lighting

The Man From Nowhere, Korea (2010)



Top lighting is achieved when the source of light source is placed high in space and focused down on a character or object below. This style is very dramatic when executed correctly and is therefore most often used in films with darker storylines, such as crime films. 1940's American cinema saw the rise of 'film noir' (a type of Hollywood crime drama) in which this style of lighting was popularized.

Bottom/Under Lighting



Bottom or under lighting refers to the technique of placing the light source low in space and pointing up at your character or object. Much like top lighting, under lighting is used when a dramatic effect is desired. Under light is often achieved using a single light source. [Great Cinematography Using One Light](#)

Practical Lighting

Practical lighting refers to the technique of using only light sources visible within the frame to illuminate a character or object. Contrary to motivated lighting, practical lighting doesn't require or rely on any outside source.

This is a minimalist approach to lighting in which everyday objects such as lamps, headlights, sun light, flashlights, lighters can be used in place of expensive or heavy production lighting kits.

Practical lights tend to be yellow or red in color which gives a warmer more natural feel than can otherwise be achieved with whiter studio/production lights.



Motivated Lighting



Motivated lighting refers to a type of lighting in which the source is visible on screen. However, while the source of light is visible within the frame, it doesn't necessarily mean it is the 'practical' source of lighting.

For example, it would be impossible for the fire in this shot to illuminate this entire frame in such detail. It is clear there is another source of light helping to compensate for the fire, but the audience doesn't see that source and are made to believe the fire is the only source of light.

Soft Lighting

Soft light refers to a style of light that tends to "wrap" around objects, casting diffuse shadows with soft edges. Soft light is when a light source is large relative to the subject. We don't see what is referred to as a 'hotspot' or a harshly lit area on our character or subject.

Soft light can be thought of as 'shadow-less' light or fill lighting as it can be used with out without creating additional shadows.

Soft light also has the added ability to make a subject appear more beautiful or youthful through making wrinkles less visible. Which is why in old films you often see actresses lit with very soft light.

It can also be used to supplement the lighting from practicals. This technique is used to perform "motivated" lighting, where all light in the scene *appears* to come from practical light sources in the scene. Soft light does not cast shadows that would be a giveaway of a supplementary light source.



Hard Lighting

Hard lighting has the opposite effect as soft lighting in that it uses high contrast (the difference/harshness between dark and light) to make shadows more defined and is easily achieved using high wattage studio/production bulbs.

Hard lighting is seen as abrasive and is often used in action or dramatic sequences.



Eye Light

An eye is a very subtle but very important aspect of film lighting as it creates a 'sparkling' effect in a character's eyes which keeps your actors from looking dead. A eye light is generally a very small light placed low in space pointed directly at your actors eyes. The highlight created is important (especially for protagonists or characters we're supposed to care about).

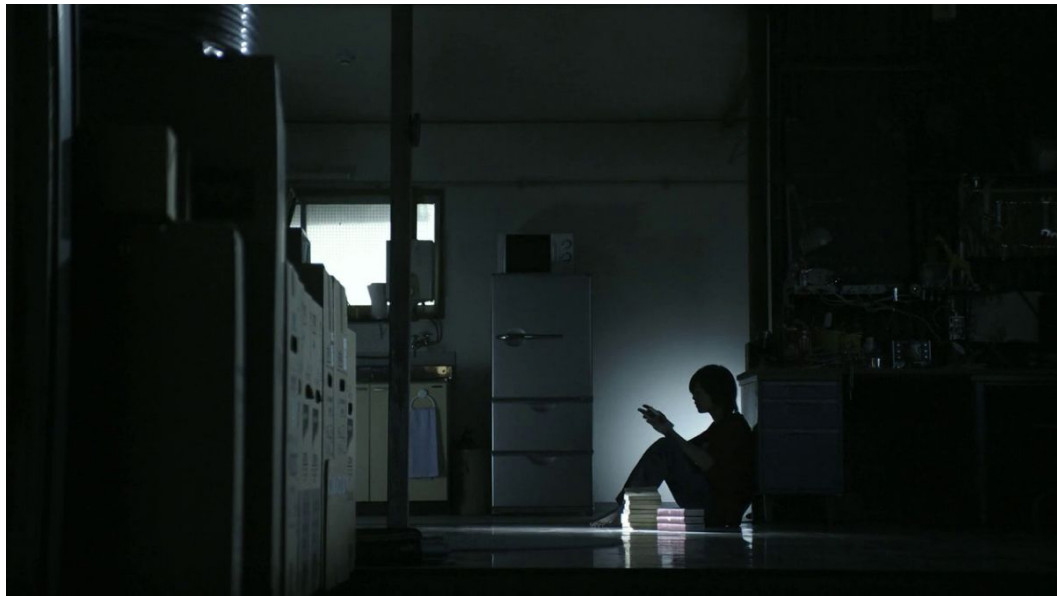


Low Key Lighting

Low-Key lighting is the technique of creating deep shadows around all forms and structures of the subject, throwing it all into sharp relief. It's a moody, often gritty look. Low-Key lighting is also referred to as *Chiaroscuro*.

Chiaroscuro is an Italian artistic term used to describe the dramatic effect of contrasting areas of light and dark in an artwork, particularly paintings. It comes from the combination of the Italian words for "light" and "dark."

Nowadays *chiaroscuro* applies to a far wider array of dramatic lighting effects, particularly in movies — anything dark and moody with great slashes of shadow, is considered *chiaroscuro*.



High Key Lighting

High key lighting refers to when everything within the frame (foreground, middle ground and background) is lit equally. This is achieved most typically through 3 point lighting. It is used most often to suggest an upbeat or cheerful mood. High key lighting almost completely eliminates any type of contrast

High key lighting is also considerably less moody and less dynamic than low or neutral key lighting in which some aspects fall into shadow while others do not.



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Analyzing Aesthetics

[David Kruta \(2014\)](#)

Director of Photography Reel

[Amélie \(2001\)](#)

[Winter's Bone \(2010\)](#)

[Super 8 \(2011\)](#)

[Where the Wild Things Are \(2009\)](#)

[Bug \(2006\)](#)

[Chungking Express \(1994\)](#)