# Unit2-2 Positions through contextualising

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# Colour as an archive of memory: the constructed nature of blue in digital images

explore: colours don't just exist in nature, they're made up, designed, and coded. How does the colour blue influence how we organise the world, memory, and time?

We often think of colours as 'naturally occurring' physical phenomena, but in reality, colours, especially in digital images, are constructed and coded units of visual culture. Blue is not a neutral colour. It is always linked to society, history and emotions.

So...

Can the colour blue be used as a 'visual archive' in modern digital images? Can it show and create our understanding of time, memory and perception?

## 1. Italo Calvino (1974) Invisible Cities

Calvino's Invisible Cities presents fictional cities as subjective spaces constructed by memory, language and perception. These cities aren't real places, but bits of remembered or imagined surroundings. This way of using space reminds me of how I like to use blue in my designs to help people remember things. The book makes me think about how visual design, like storytelling, can create mental maps through things like mood and colour. I see similarities between how blue can be used to represent space and emotion in digital design and how it can be used in more traditional design.

*Calvino, I. (1974). Invisible Cities. London: Vintage.*

## 2. Walter Benjamin （1936） The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Benjamin says that making copies of artworks can destroy their special quality, but it can also make them more accessible and help people to see them in new ways. This insight is key for my project, where I explore how colour – blue – works in digital, reproducible environments. In software like Blender, blue is no longer a fixed colour. It is now an adjustable, code-based value. I want to explore whether using different shades of blue light in this way can create new emotional or memory-like experiences, even when there is no "aura".

*Benjamin, W. (2008). The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1936)*

## 3. Hal Foster （2004） "An Archival Impulse" in October, 110

Foster talks about the "archival impulse" in modern art as a desire to put together, break up and explain visual material without trying to restore the original meaning. I find this useful when I'm thinking about colour, especially blue, as a long-lasting part of digital design. Instead of just using blue for beauty, I think about how its use, changes and layers might create a kind of memory structure in my visual experiments. This way of thinking lets me see colour not as just for decoration, but as something with a lot of meaning and history.

*Foster, H. (2004). An Archival Impulse. October, 110, pp.3–22.*

## 4. Laura Marks （2000） The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses

Marks talks about something called "haptic visuality" — images that appeal not just to sight, but to touch, memory, and bodily sensation. This is very important for understanding how blue might work in the digital world. Blue light doesn't represent anything in particular, it just makes people feel certain ways. Marks' theory makes me think of colour as something you can touch and that will last for a long time. It helps me remember the past by looking at the way it looks, not by looking at real pictures. It shows that the ideas behind design can be used as tools for research.

*Marks, L.U. (2000). The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses. Durham: Duke University Press.*

## 5. Alan Warburton（2020）RGBFAQ

In RGBFAQ, Alan gives his views on how digital images are made, and particularly how the RGB colour model is used. He sees RGB not just as a technical limitation, but as a cultural influence. This is similar to the thing I'm looking into in my project, which is how blue is made, changed, and used in digital spaces. Alan's work shows that colours are not neutral. They reflect particular historical, social and software-based contexts. The way he shows software structures makes me want to use Blender as an "archival engine".

*Warburton, A. (2020). RGBFAQ [video essay]. : https://vimeo.com/438861182 (Accessed: 5 May 2025).*

## 6. James Turrell（installation works）

Turrell uses light and colour to shape space, perception, and emotion. His art often features monochromatic fields — frequently blue — that challenge viewers' sense of direction and time. This supports my interest in how blue can become a tool for creating memories when it is treated not as a colour, but as a material. Turrell's work makes me want to explore how digital light environments, like the ones I make in Blender, can also create experiences that feel like they are happening in time through visual immersion.

*No specific author. (n.d.). James Turrell: Works. : https://jamesturrell.com (Accessed: 5 May 2025).*

## 7. MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) – "Inventing Abstraction: 1910–1925"

This exhibition shows how artists used colour and shapes to represent things like thought, emotion and time that you can't see. Although it is not focused on digital design, it shows how colour has always been used as a symbol and to express ideas. This helps to explain why I use the colour blue in my designs. I use it not to describe things, but to create feelings, memories and marks — combining digital methods with abstract expressionism, a style of painting that began in the 1940s.

*Museum of Modern Art (2012). Inventing Abstraction: 1910–1925. [Exhibition]. MoMA, New York. w: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1270 (Accessed: 5 May 2025).*

**8. Klein, Y. (2007). Overcoming the Problematics of Art: The Writings of Yves Klein. Spring Publications.**
Klein's exploration of the colour blue as a spiritual and emotional medium is similar to your own investigation into blue as a constructed element in digital imagery. His idea of International Klein Blue (IKB) shows how colour can be more than just something you can see – it can also represent memory and feelings.

**9. Drucker, J. (2014). Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production. Harvard University Press.**
Drucker discusses how visual forms, including color, function as carriers of knowledge. Her insights support your theme by framing blue not just as an aesthetic choice but as a component that structures understanding and memory within digital media.

**10. Manovich, L. (2001). The Language of New Media. MIT Press.**
Manovich's analysis of digital media's modular and programmable nature provides a theoretical foundation for considering how blue is systematically constructed and perceived in digital contexts, reinforcing its role in shaping memory and experience.

**11. David Batchelor, Chromophobia Publisher: Reaktion Books, 2000**
Batchelor critiques Western culture's long-standing suspicion of colour, arguing that colour has often been associated with the exotic, the feminine, the superficial, or even the pathological. This "chromophobia" reflects a fear of sensory excess and emotional depth. In this framework, blue's elevated position in Western history — as a rational, calming, disciplined colour — is not innocent. It is the result of cultural sanitisation, a desire to strip colour of chaos and assign it to order. This book gives me a lens to understand how blue has been disciplined through design, especially in institutional and digital systems. It also raises the question: what colours (and emotions) get left out when we rely too much on the "safe blue"?

**12. Nicholas Mirzoeff, How to See the World Publisher: Pelican Books, 2015**
This book proposes a new form of visual literacy that connects everyday seeing with global systems of power. Mirzoeff introduces the concept of "visuality" as something constructed — not neutral — often aligned with control, surveillance, or resistance. In relation to my project, this opens a pathway to read blue as part of "seeing systems" — for example, the default blue of digital platforms like Facebook or Zoom is not simply a design choice, but a code of visual governance. Mirzoeff's book validates my position that colour can serve as archive, power, and memory structure — all embedded in how we design and interpret visual culture.